



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2014 Volume I: Picture Writing

Words beneath the Image

Curriculum Unit 14.01.04
by Naomi Pettway

Introduction

"How does this table help you better understand the lives of the mill girls?" This was a question I asked my third-grade students after they read an article about factory girls in the nineteenth century. My students read the article and understood the life of factory girls wasn't easy, but when confronted with the task of using the table in the article to respond to my question, they were stumped.

The Common Core standards encourage students to ask and respond to questions to demonstrate their understanding of text. The new standards for learning also encourage the use of text features to locate information and the use of illustrations to demonstrate understanding. According to the Connecticut Common Core, Standard RI.3.7, "Students should be able to use information gained from illustrations (including graphs, maps, charts etc.,) and the words to demonstrate understanding of the text." The New Haven Literacy Curriculum provides a vast amount of resources for teaching text features such as lessons on what text features are and how to use them. However, there aren't many lessons simply focused on using these features in order to respond to open-ended questions or to deepen students' understanding of the text.

As an inner city educator serving at a one-time Tier 4 turnaround school, I feel a sense of urgency that this missing component of the curriculum be explored. Although my inter-district magnet school has made substantial gains and is currently a Tier 2 school, there is a large student population that still struggles academically, specifically with literacy. I often modify assignments and assessments to accommodate students' skill levels and abilities. Differentiation is a common classroom practice because in order to teach each learner, I have to reach each learner. Students desperately need another skill or strategy to help them read and comprehend text across content areas. I hope and anticipate that students after doing this unit will be able to make inferences and connections between words and images.

This curriculum unit consists of lessons that will teach students about the relationship of image and text. Once students have an understanding of the relationship of picture and words they will be able to use images as an aid to comprehending fiction and nonfiction text. This unit will serve as a means to enhance their reading skills, in order to comprehend complex text across content areas.

Students will make sense of what they are seeing, as they read or view graphs, charts and maps. As a result,

students will have a strategy to respond to higher level thinking questions in alignment with Common Core Standards.

Background

As a third-grade teacher at an inter-district magnet school, Brennan Rogers Magnet School of Arts, Communication and Media, in New Haven, Connecticut I am faced with many challenges. It is often difficult for students to successfully complete tasks across content areas because literacy is embedded in nearly all subject areas. Brennan Rogers was at one time a Tier 4 school and was subjected to the turnaround process in accordance to the "No Child Left Behind Act." Over the past several years our school has made significant gains; test scores have consistently increased each year, and parents are more involved. Although we have made great progress, we still have a wide range of (reading/literacy) skill levels and a small population of students who struggle academically. My classroom is a mirror image of the overall learning community at Brennan Rogers: there is a wide range of skill levels and abilities in my classroom. Students' Lexile levels can range between zero and nine hundred fifty. A tremendous amount of funds have been allocated and invested for the betterment of our school. The school has spent a substantial amount of federal funds and the district has spent a great deal of money developing a new literacy curriculum for grades 3-5 and the Plugged in Curriculum as a resource to implement the newly designed curriculum. The New Haven curriculum and the Plugged In program provide a wealth of resources in alignment with the Common Core. Janet Allen's Plugged In Curriculum consist of audio books, organizers, detailed lessons for group and independent reading lessons. Some of these lessons include previewing text features. Needless to say, we have access to an array of lesson plans, organizers and handouts for teachers to utilize in order to provide students with effective instruction concerning text features and the use of illustrations.

Although it seems as if we have a great amount of resources to help teach the Common Core Standards, I found that there was something the curriculum and Plugged-In materials didn't help my students. I realized that my students need more exposure and specific lessons on text features. I realized that students need explicit teaching on using illustrations, photographs with captions, and most importantly, reading the tables, timelines, and charts.

Rationale

I recall asking students questions in readers' workshop or math concerning charts, but students could answer only closed questions such as, "how many more homeruns did Sammy Sosa hit than Babe Ruth?" If students were to respond to higher-level thinking questions according to Common Core standards, they need more exposure and opportunities to respond to open-ended questions using tables or charts. In order for students to truly give value to the images within a text, they must develop awareness of the images and how they support the print. O'Neil explains in her article "Reading Pictures" that students truly need explicit teaching on how to use images to help them read text. If students are exposed to explicit instruction about the use of visual images, they can learn how to depend not solely on the text for answers or information and think about

the topic they're reading about: "Sometimes simply by adding description of characters and setting, and, at times, by challenging the veracity of the text with ironic or additional information, the illustrations in picture books provide essential clues for comprehension. For this reason, novice readers can benefit from explicit instruction in reading pictorial elements." ¹ Students should be taught how to grapple with an image on their own to raise and answer questions by depending solely on the image itself. Students will then be able to draw clues from illustrations to increase their understanding of the text. With this in mind, we should scaffold our teaching styles and traditional strategies in order to help students become visual thinkers.

Students should be made aware and encouraged to use their natural abilities, such as sight, as they learn or enhance their skills to become good readers. The neuro-scientist Donald D. Hoffman states, "You are a creative genius. Your creative genius is so accomplished that appears, to you and others, as effortless." ² Students must first come to the realization that they have a natural born talent, the gift of sight. It is Hoffman's goal to convince readers that the genius of vision is complex and that the human eye is amazing. Hoffman explains that, "what happens when you see isn't a mindless process of stimulus response, but a sophisticated process of construction." ³ Students need to realize that their ability to look at an image is just as important as reading the text and requires a certain amount of visual intelligence. In order for students to understand how to use images as an aid to reading, they first need to come to the realization that looking at images isn't as simple as one perceives. Looking at visuals is just as complex as reading and should be done to help students think about the image and text as a whole. Students need to realize that there's nothing wrong with reading picture books and that they should practice reading using their visual intelligence, their innate ability to see. As children learn to read with their sight, they should be taught to develop meaning from what they see. This will, in turn, help students to become visual thinkers, which is to process what you see. We often encourage students to use their critical thinking skills, while reading complex text, but students should become visual thinkers, who can process what they see. In this respect, students will begin to think critically as they draw meaning from visuals.

Visual Thinkers

Give students the opportunity to practice looking through the use of wordless books. One study conducted by Christiana Silvi and Leslie Degnan-Ross, emergent reading instructors found that many classrooms didn't have a large selection of wordless picture books. Their goal was to give preschool teachers a different perspective about the use of wordless books and how they can be beneficial to beginning readers, primarily preschoolers. Yet this theory can be applied to students across grade levels because it gives children the opportunity to make meaning of what they see. At first, preschool teachers Naomi and Diane, participants of the study conducted by Silvi and Degnan- Ross, were a little skeptical and reluctant, but after utilizing the wordless books, they realized that these picture books do support learning and increase language and writing skills:

Naomi said, "It's often difficult to spend one-on-one time with children in a busy classroom, but it's important to try...especially with the quieter children." She was pleased to see that this wordless book encouraged one of her less talkative children to open up and use her own language to describe the events in this exciting picture story about a girl who tries to fly. The wordless, black-and-white picture panels allowed Becca to freely interpret the actions of the girl

character. The teacher was able to engage in a rare, one-on-one conversation full of thinking, imagining and predicting. ⁴

This preschool teacher realized how well these books evoke a response from children. Students make their own meaning and aren't forced to think critically within the constraint of printed text. While reading printed text, the story happens just as it is written. Wordless books allow children to write their own story, as well as raise and answer higher level thinking questions. Now students are forced to ask or answer questions such as, "why does the character feel this way?" or express what they wonder. Not only did the wordless book help Becca to make meaning; most importantly she began to use oral language skills and have a positive interaction or conversation with her teacher. Utilizing wordless or picture books is appropriate to emergent stages of being a visual thinker. Novice readers are able to process what they see as well as what they read. Students must first realize their innate talent as Hoffman suggest. He states, "You are a visual virtuoso. Perhaps, though, you are unaware of or flatly disbelieve in your innate talent." Many of us don't realize the amount of brainpower we use to simply look at something.

Students should be taught the practice of looking. The science behind looking proves that it is truly a process requiring great intellect and can be used to help them determine meaning. In order for students to realize that, they must practice intentional looking. In the second chapter of *Practices of Looking*, Sturken and Cartwright explain that all images have a meaning, but the meaning of the image isn't necessarily what the producer intended because the audience makes meaning of what they see based on their own experiences and in the context in which they see it. Students should be granted the opportunity to practice looking and drawing meaning from their own perspective as Sturken and Cartwright have clearly stated:

Images generate meanings. Yet, the meanings of a work of art or media image do not, strictly speaking, lie in the work itself where they were placed by the producer waiting for viewers to uncover them. Rather, meanings are produced through a complex social relationship that involves at least two elements besides the image itself and its producer: (1) how viewers interpret or experience the image and (2) the context in which an image is seen. Although images have what we call dominant or shared meanings they can also be interpreted and used in ways that do not conform to these meanings. ⁵

Interpretations will vary, but that doesn't indicate the viewers' meaning is wrong or takes away from the producers' original, intended meaning. Students must be free to determine their own meaning of what they see, and not all their interpretations will be the same. Just as the preschooler Becca in the Silvi and Degnan-Ross study was able to freely interpret the actions of the girl character in one way, her classmate may look at the character's actions from a different perspective. This leads to students being able to determine point of view and even draw conclusions about the character's attitude, personality or emotions. Just as Sturken and Cartwright explain, an image is interpreted by the viewer and based on their experiences. The illustrator of the wordless book, Becca was reading probably had a different point of view concerning the girl character in the text. There is meaning and purpose beneath the image. Images may not always conform to the illustrator's intended purpose or the viewers meaning. However, the goal of intentional looking and visual thinking is, to process what you see and think critically during the process of visualization.

Once students grasp the concept of using pictorial illustrations, they need to learn that images aren't limited

to pictures in picture books: they are the photographs with captions, timelines, charts and tables- all the nonfiction text features that are meant to provide additional information to the text, but are often overlooked. As Susan Sontag explains,

"Photographs are valued because they give information. They tell one what there is; they make an inventory. To spies, meteorologist, coroners, archeologist, and other information professionals, their value is inestimable. But in the situations in which most people use photographs, their value as information is of the same order as fiction." ⁶

Sontag explains that the use of photographs gives people information that can also be found in the text, and they sometimes provide the only source of information without words. Students should practice using images in nonfiction text. Students should be able to determine what or how the photograph helps the reader gather more information than they would be able to get from the text. While Sontag would most likely argue against the validity or necessity of photographs, she does suggest that some people actually gain information from images.

Due to the fact or idea that students have to be able to read and analyze data, lesson objectives and activities here are centered on the use of images to serve as an aid or tool to increase students' understanding of what they read. Sontag explains that photographs can provide information alone, and some feel the photographs are pointless because they show only what is read in the text. Yet there are occasions when pictures and words are both necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the text in relation to the image. "Perhaps the most common type of word/picture combination is the interdependent, where words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone." ⁷ I would consider that most often both the word and image are interdependent. After students practice looking at pictures and text provide students with an opportunity to read images such as tables and graphs. In this manner students will understand how words and images work together. There are some tables and graphs that have to label information for the reader. In this light, students realize that there are times images and texts are interdependent.

Strategies

While teaching this unit, the teacher should differentiate instruction based on students' needs and abilities. At one time during my career as an educator, I struggled with keeping students engaged in learning activities suitable or appropriate for their various learning styles. One strategy that I found to be useful is having students work in cooperative groups. The text *RTI Success: Proven Tools and Strategies for Schools and Classrooms* taught me how to group my students, in order to accommodate their needs. The text explains that grouping students will allow flexibility in my instruction to address unique learning deficits, strengths, interests and learning styles. It also states that, grouping of students should change frequently and form based on regular assessment of students' needs and strengths. This information made me realize that grouping should be purposeful and used as a tool for differentiation.

One grouping strategy for the tier I level is to establish groups through clock grouping. Clock grouping is designed to accommodate students' needs, interests, and ability. The 12:00 groups consist of twelve pairs of students with similar thinking and learning styles. The 3:00 groups consist of four groups of six kids who have similar interest. The 6:00 groups consist of six groups of four students who have the same deficits or

strengths. The 9:00 group is made up of four heterogeneous groups. These grouping arrangements allow students to practice a skill or concept within groups that interest them and accommodate their deficiencies across content areas. Students aren't always placed with peers of the same skill level, but they still receive the small group instruction they need based on their interests and learning styles.

Although flexible grouping is beneficial to provide students with a form of differentiation, there has to be another method that ensures that all students are actively participating in the lesson. *Total Participation Techniques* by Persida Himmele and William Himmele, provides educators with methods to ensure that every student is actively involved during the lesson. This particular text also provides a model for total participation and methods that ensure higher-order thinking. Students shouldn't only be engaged because they are interested or having fun, but their minds should be consumed with making connections, drawing conclusions so that they gain deeper understanding. "The use of higher-order thinking is what takes students beyond simple engagement. Instead it ensures that students are cognitively engaged. Students aren't just engaged and having fun; they are also thinking deeply." ⁸ The ultimate ideal of student engagement is the notion that students aren't only having fun but they are flexing their cognitive muscles in order to think critically about the concept or lesson.

Another tool for total participation is the use of picture notes and pausing to allow students to think about a particular statement or prompt in regards to the topic. The Himmeles explain that picture notes aren't meant to replace written notes but to accompany them. Due to the nature of this unit, it would be beneficial to have students grapple with the concept of using pictures to express what they know. While students are working with peers the teacher serves as a facilitator. The teacher doesn't relinquish all responsibility to the students. The teacher should be walking around observing, making gentle suggestions or recommendations, and providing meaningful feedback. This could also be a means of gauging students understanding of the lesson. According to Moss and Brookhart one element of feedback is the mode: one can give oral, written comments or provide a visual demonstration. Visual demonstrations as a method of feedback would be ideal since the purpose of the activities is to have students become visual thinkers, as they draw information from images.

Picture notes can be used during any topic or lesson. The text recommends that as students draw their notes they can share their thoughts and ideas with peers. This particular activity can be done within students' assigned flexible group. *Total Participation Techniques* provides a template that students can use and reminds the reader that students can use their notebooks for picture notes as well.

Teachers can create their own picture note template that will be beneficial to their students. Students should practice taking picture notes while reading a text and then share their notes with peers to see if they have similar or contrasting ideas about the text.

Activities

The typical workshop lesson involves hooking the students, or grabbing their attention, modeling the lesson and independent practice. At Brennan Rogers Magnet School we use the Expeditionary Learning workshop model, which clearly outlines each step in the lesson and allows the teacher to really think about how the lesson is to be presented and implemented. Each lesson starts with a hook and model lesson. There are three mini lessons below that should help students gain a better sense of the relation between words and images.

These are quick activities that can initiate lessons on various topics of the teacher's choice. The purpose of these activities is to ignite the thinking and learning process of your students. These are not full lessons and shouldn't be used as such.

The first mini lesson will teach students about the importance of captions. This activity will help students realize the importance of reading the captions for more information. This activity supports McCloud's theory that there are in fact times when text and images are interdependent.

Activity One

Objective: I can use captions for a nonfiction text to increase my understanding and create a nonfiction picture book.

Materials : Projector, two images of an elephant's skeleton, one with the image only and the other with a caption giving information about the photograph. The images that you choose should provoke a response from students. The image should look extremely similar to that of a dinosaur fossil. Some students won't be able to tell the difference, which will lead to the discussion of the importance of captions.

Hook: In order to grab students' attention, present the image of the elephant skull without a caption. Ask, "What do you see? Turn and talk with your friend and be prepared to share your ideas." After students have discussed the image, allow them to share their thoughts. Present students with the second image with the caption. Ask, "What's different about this picture and what purpose does the caption serve?"

Model: Display any nonfiction text of your choice and explain how the captions are just as important as the text. We often overlook the captions in a book, but captions sometimes provide the reader with information that may not be in the body of the written section. Identify one picture and explain what you learned from reading the picture and caption.

Independent Practice : Have students work in flexible groups to create pictures and captions to accompany a nonfiction article about an animal of their choice.

Activity Two

Objective: I can use visual thinking and read pictures in order to draw conclusions or make inferences about characters' feelings or actions.

Hook: Present students with the image of MJ and Billy on page twenty-one and thirty-two in *Billy the Bully* or a comparable picture in another book. Ask, what do you notice about MJ? How does he feel? What do you think is happening with MJ and the bully in this picture?"

Activity: Read the text, *Billy the Bully* aloud and have students turn and talk with their friends to discuss MJ's characteristics. Use the picture note-taking template provided by the Himmeles, which will help elicit

responses to the following questions:

Based on the pictures and the text, what can we say about MJ's character? What is the central lesson that the author is trying to teach the reader? Allow students to draw their notes. Allow students to share their notes and respond to the following prompt: Use what you know about the character and your own schema to make an inference about MJ and Billy. What conclusion can we draw about MJ's character and his relationship with Billy?

Independent Practice: After sharing their responses with peers, students will make inferences about MJ's character.

By the end of this activity students should be able to realize that we need the text and our schema to help us draw conclusions. After reading *Billy the Bully*, students will realize that interpretations of an image may vary. They will also learn that sometimes the viewer may not have the same interpretation as the producer.

Activity Three

Objective: I can use visual thinking to draw conclusions or make inferences from an image in a nonfiction text and I can use details from an image to support my response to an open ended question.

Hook: Ask students their favorite ice cream flavor! Create a frequency table or tally chart of their favorite flavors.

Ask students, "What information does the table give me?" "What conclusions can I draw from this table?" This may sound simple but explain to the class that just how we draw information from this table, we can use tables in nonfiction text to help us draw conclusions which will help us to better understand the text.

Explain to students that they will be reading an article and be sure to look at the pictures and tables. The images will give them more understanding of the article.

Activity: Read the *Scholastic* article "Factory Girls," use the following link to be directed to the digital issue if you have a subscription : http://sni.scholastic.com/SN3/03_03_14_SN3 .

Have students use the picture note-taking template to envision what the lives of these girls must have been like.

Ask students to use what they know about life as they live it in comparison to the factory girls. Ask them to use and the new information from the article "Factory Girls" to respond to the following question: How are you better able understand the lives of the mill girls after reading the article and viewing the images?

Upon completion of these activities, students should come to the realization that images are essential to both fiction and nonfiction text. It should become apparent that pictures play a vital role in giving more information to help the reader better understand the text.

Student Reading List

Mysteries of the Komodo Dragon: The Biggest, Deadliest Lizard Gives Up Its Secrets by Marty Krump- This nonfiction text is sure to be a hit with the kids! It can be used to teach text features and will keep students engaged as they view the photographs and learn peculiar facts about the giant meat eating lizard. This text is also an audio book used for Plugged-In, but it can be used without that curriculum.

Saving Manatees by Steven R. Swineburn is another great nonfiction text. As students go on a journey with this giant and gentle sea creature, they also learn about nonfiction text features to identify important information. *Saving Manatees* is an audio book used by Plugged-In. This book is a great way to raise awareness about Manatees and how we should keep them safe, and this may lead to discussions about other endangered species.

Billy the Bully by Naomi Pettway, illustrated by Nicholas Pleasant, is a great fiction text that will capture the attention of third and fourth grade youngsters. As students are drawn into illustrations, they also learn lessons about character. This text helps students learn valuable lessons about friendship while they practice intentional looking.

Pancakes for Breakfast by Tomie DePaola is a classic wordless picture book. The illustrations tell a story, but the real storyteller is the viewer. This book would be great for students to use to help them write their own story about having trouble in the kitchen. It could also be used for students to discuss point of view.

Alvie Eats Soup by Ross Collins is a comic, scene filled text that helps students learn that images aren't always what they appear. Alvie's little sister has quite an appetite unlike Alvie who refuses to eat all of the scrumptious meals his grandmother, a world class chef prepares for his family.

Resources for Classroom Use

The websites listed below are great sources for nonfiction articles.

Pebblego: The Emergent Reader Research Solution www.pebblego.com - This is a kid friendly website and is now available as an app. It's a great source for students with low reading levels. If students want to conduct mini research projects this website provides articles and images that students can search and use independently.

Scholastic www.scholastic.com -This website offers a wealth of resources for classroom teachers and students. You can obtain digital issues of the *Scholastic Weekly Reader* , if you're a subscribed member. The subscription is extremely valuable. This site offers suggested lesson plans and reading list for students.

Britannica School www.school.eb.com - Encyclopedia Britannica provides articles, images and videos on a vast amount of subjects. It has materials for students in all grade levels. Their search engine is separated into elementary, middle and high school levels.

Appendix

The lesson objectives stated in these activities are in alignment with Common Core Standards and are formulated from the essential questions of the New Haven Curriculum Binder for grades 3-5. The activities in this unit should be taught during reading and writing of the first and second marking periods according to New Haven's curriculum. However, using details from an image to support responses to open-ended questions is a skill that students continuously work on during the school year. Students should be given the opportunity to respond to critical thinking questions while reading fiction and nonfiction text.

This unit primarily focuses on the Common Core Standards for Reading Literature and Informational Text for grade three students. The Reading for Literature Standards RL.3.1 through RL.3.10 are the basis for these activities which can be developed or adapted to the needs of students across grade levels. This unit has a primary focus on RL.3.7, which states that students will "explain how specific aspects of text's illustration contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting)." This particular standard corresponds with the use of *Billy the Bully* in the second activity of this unit. Standards RI.3.1-RI.3.7 with the exception of RI.3.5 are standards that are in alignment with the development of lessons and activities based on this unit.

Connecticut Common Core Standards can be found at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/>. The Common Core is also available as an app for tablet and other smart devices.

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- Himmele, Persida, and William Himmele. *Total Participation Techniques: Making Every Student an Active Learner*. Alexandria: ASCD, 2011. This text provides techniques to ensure that all students participate in class activities.
- Hoffman, Donald D. *Visual Intelligence: How We Create What We See* New York: W.W. Norton, 1998. This text provides a scientific approach to how we see.
- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics, the Invisible Art*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993. This comic describes the relation between words and images.
- O'Neil, Kathleen. *Reading Pictures: Developing Visual Literacy for Greater Comprehension* 65.3 (2011): 214. This text helps readers to teach how to explicitly use illustrations while teaching literacy comprehension.
- Ross- Degnan, Leslie M.eds and Christiana Silvi, M.A *Early Childhood News* - This study promotes the use of wordless books and evidence how they can help emergent readers. http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=690

Sontag, Susan. "In Plato's Cave," *On Photography* . New York: Farrar, Staus and Giroux, 1977. Provides argument against photography, but can be used to justify the significance of photography.

Sturken, Marita, and Lisa Cartwright. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* . Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. This text helps readers to consider the viewers' of illustrations and photographs.

Notes

1. Kathleen O'Neil, "Reading Pictures ," 214.
2. Donald D. Hoffman *Visual Intelligence* , 1.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Leslie Ross-Degnan and Christina Silvi " Why Wordless Books ?"
5. Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright *Practices of Looking* , 45
6. Susan Sontag " *In Plato's Cave* ," 19-20.
7. Scott McCloud *Understanding Comics, the Invisible Art* , 155.
8. Persida Himmele and William Himmele, *Total Participation Techniques* , 6 and 85.

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