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Integrating Art Education and Literacy Education: A Curriculum for the Secondary Level

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INTEGRATING ART EDUCATION AND LITERACY EDUCATION:
A CURRICULUM FOR THE SECONDARY LEVEL

by

Erin Moody-Zoet

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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INTEGRATING ART EDUCATION AND LITERACY EDUCATION:
A CURRICULUM FOR THE SECONDARY LEVEL

Erin Moody-Zoet, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2014

The purpose of this paper is to examine, through the design of a new curriculum, how the integration of reading and writing literacy into a visual arts curriculum can strengthen literacy skills as well as foster creative thinking at the middle school level.

There is a growing demand for the integration of literacy in all core, and non-core curricula. By developing a curriculum that integrates literacy strategies in a visual arts program, as well as touches on the disconnect that I see between individuals and their own creative outlets, a curriculum is established that fosters and engages students in creative thinking, literacy, and the visual arts.

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Thank you to my mother and father, who instilled in me a love of art and reading. They allowed me to be creative and be myself. From signing me up at the local art museums for art and pottery classes to trips to the library and book store throughout my youth, they have always been supportive and encouraging of my endeavors.

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Erin Moody-Zoet

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will introduce a curriculum that integrates literacy into a visual arts class, but I will also touch on some important current issues in art education such as: lack of creative opportunities for our students and fear of failure. I have been fortunate that throughout my childhood my parents always supported the arts and literacy just through creating an environment that had creative opportunities. Whether they knew they were doing this at the time or not, my brother, sister, and I were surrounded by books, music, crayons, play dough, and enough free time to be creative, explore, succeed, and fail. More than that my parents talked to us, they asked us questions. They asked us our opinions and thoughts. All through my early years I had time to play, time to read, time to invent and imagine, time to be outside. We built forts, made magic potions, put on plays, made up games called “lava,” and also read books. Still to this day there is nothing better than curling up in a lawn chair in a warm sunny spot and getting lost in another world; for me that world is either in a book or a painting. A visual arts curriculum combining literacy, creative thinking skills, and opportunities for exploration will engage students and ultimately produce stronger and more confident thinkers.

I first started teaching at an art museum in Kalamazoo while I was working on my undergraduate degree. I taught every age range, from pre -school to high school to adult assessable arts. Working with pre-school aged children is eye opening. Young children are innately creative. When given the opportunity to explore and create they will, and they will do it whole heartedly. I know this watching my three-year old son scoop out glue from a glue stick with the tip of a marker and spread the gooey brilliance over a piece of white paper and being so enthralled and proud with the markings (and mess) he

was making. He was exploring; he had no idea that what he was doing would probably ruin the marker; he was simply interested in what the combination of materials would create. I have learned that sometimes you just have to sit back and watch, even if it means a ruined marker. Children are born curious and inquisitive. They engage in the world around them. They are confident in exploring and discovery IF we let them. I have noticed as children get older they lose this confidence. They stop engaging, exploring, and discovering. I find it vitally important to understand and acknowledge how embracing a visual arts curriculum which integrates reading, writing, and speaking literacies can help build stronger and more confident students who are better prepared for the 21st century.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Art education

Research in art education and how it affects the skills of a student, as well as research on how educators teach art has been important. Today, art education is not typically viewed as an important or fundamental part of a school's curriculum. A school would never discontinue their English or math curriculum, yet many districts over the past five years have discontinued their visual arts programs due to lack of funding. Even in the school district that I teach in, we do not have a visual arts class at the elementary level; at a time when kids should be given the opportunity to express their innate creativity and have time to experiment. Lack of funding is something that has been plaguing schools since the beginning of education. Ironically, the very institutions that are preparing the next generations to become active, responsible, productive, and innovative members of society seem to be the least respected or supported. We seem to

be falling behind in many areas of education. One of the largest areas we are seeing a decline in is literacy. If a school has a visual arts program one can almost guarantee that the art teacher will be expected to integrate literacy and other core subjects into their weekly lessons. Considering the benefits of merging two important disciplines, visual arts and literacy, is a concept I find exciting and necessary.

What does literacy mean

The simplest definition of literacy is the “ability to read and write,” but in today’s world literacy means much more than that. Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak, listen, and comprehend at an advanced level to be successful in today’s ever-changing world. We can also ask the question, what does it mean to comprehend? “The word comprehension carries so many shades of meaning that the committee that recently revised Bloom’s famous taxonomy of educational objectives breaks the word into six categories: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Comprehending encompasses everything from remembering to creating” (Landay & Wootton, 2012, p. 89). Comprehending is an active process. We have many strategies that will help us teach skills for comprehension but we must also look at what motivates students to want to comprehend. “Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write more than at any other time in human history. They will need advanced levels of literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens, and conduct their personal lives” (Vaca, 1999, p.10). The current literacy rate is shocking. “Thirty-two million adults in the U.S. can’t read. That’s 14 percent of the population. Twenty-one percent of adults in the U.S. read below a 5th grade level, and 19 percent of high school graduates can’t read” (Crum, 2013). Crum says, “We probably don’t need to

spell out the benefits of reading and writing for you. Economic security, access to health care, and the ability to actively participate in civic life all depend on a individual's ability to read." There are also many negative things linked to being illiterate such as, "more than 60 percent of all prison inmates are functionally illiterate, 85 percent of all juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate, two thirds of students who cannot read proficiently by the end of the 4th grade will end up in jail or on welfare, and low literacy costs \$73 million per year in terms of direct health care costs," (Literacy Statistics, 2014). These are startling statistics that we can no longer ignore. Literacy is a learned skill, and we must teach it.

Why integrate literacy into a visual arts curriculum

"We who care about kids and what they learn have been given an interesting challenge recently. The learning sought by the Common Core Standards Initiative, initiated by a group of governors and state commissioners in 2009, raises the bar a great deal from existing standards and the testing designed to assess achievement. An expanded set of skills is moving to center stage in the classroom. Students will need to demonstrate their abilities to think critically, problem solve effectively, reason clearly, listen constructively, and speak and write persuasively. Students will need to show they understand what they are learning; not just memorizing but comprehending the problems to be solved," (Yenawine, 2013, p. vii). The CCSS or Common Core State Standards do not just affect core teachers, but ALL teachers. Being a visual arts teacher, I too am directly affected by the guidelines and expectations of the CCSS. Over the past few years I have had to figure out how to integrate literacy into my art classroom. As visual arts educators we have a subject that is inherently hands-on and immediately engaging for

students. Engaging students in academic subjects is often difficult, especially when our students are not highly motivated or sometimes not motivated at all. I cannot say how many times I have heard a core subject teacher say, “They just don’t care, they are not motivated, they don’t want to do anything!” As teachers, how do we create environments and an atmosphere in which students are eager and willing to learn content? Much of the research on engagement talks about creating lessons that are relevant to the student. “In order to generate and investigate their own questions, students need to see them as relevant to their own lives. In order for students to make meaning from their various encounters, they must be helped to integrate knowledge into their own life-worlds. We have recognized the importance of community involvement as parents and other community members interact with students and the curriculum. Students need to see the connection of school subjects areas to the real world, but also that these subject areas are connected to one another,” (Steward & Walker, 2005, p13). Student apathy is one of the most challenging and frustrating aspects of our jobs, making sure we are providing relevant and engaging lessons is vital for student success.

Our subject, art, allows us freedoms that many other teachers do not have such as: what lessons to teach and when; creating lessons that students are interested in at any one point in time; creating lessons that cross curriculums; and teaching lessons where students are actively engaged. Many art educators do not have a certain text book or curriculum that they must follow for the entire year. However, as we may use several text books and curriculums, we have the freedom to jump around, change lessons and adapt lessons to our audiences as we see fit. “An important key to teaching children is engaging their attention and facilitating their wonder, curiosity, and interests. We all

hope that reading will become a passion for our students, and the arts can play a significant role in encouraging them to become readers,” (The Kennedy Center: Artsedge, Reading Through the Arts). “Children learn best when they can touch, talk, and move. Using art to teach comprehension strategies allows children to use multiple modalities to learn and, most importantly, apply these strategies in a text-free environment before applying the strategies to text,” (Klien & Stuart, 2013, p.1). It seems like a “no brainer” to use art to teach literacy strategies.

What types of literacy strategies can we teach in a visual arts curriculum

Integrating reading, writing, speaking, and visual literacy strategies into a visual arts curriculum encompasses many of the different ways students can learn. After all, the idea of multiple ways of learning or different types of learners is a common concept, much like Howard Gardner’s theory of “Multiple Intelligences.” Howard Gardner, a developmental psychologist, suggests that there is not one all inclusive intelligence that a person may possess, but that there are several different intelligences. He argues that we cannot measure intelligence as a single entity with a standardized test; it is much more intricate than that. I believe as teachers we need to consider this theory, as well as the idea of teaching for different learners. We need to allow multiple opportunities for our students to get the information we need them to learn. This means teaching our material using several different techniques and strategies, not just through traditional lecture and note-taking. “There are an endless number of engaging, effective strategies to get students to think about, write about, read about, and talk about the content you teach. The ultimate goal of literacy instruction is to build a student’s comprehension, writing

skills, and overall skills in communication,” (Edutopia, 2014). We must also consider whether our strategies are direct or indirect instructional strategies and they are engaging for the student. “One way to categorize instructional strategies is to think of them as either involving direct or indirect instruction. In order to move students to an understanding of significant ideas, concepts, and skills, it is often important for the teacher to provide information to students, demonstrate certain skill-based activities, model forms of inquiry or inner speech associated with the reflective learning, provide explanations, and provide corrective feedback. This is direct instruction...Indirect instruction, as we are employing the term, is when the teacher is engaged in guiding students in their own investigations, whether students are working independently or in groups. We know that students learn best when they are engaged actively in an instructional task, so in designing instructional strategies we aim to provide students with opportunities for such engagement,” (Stewart & Walker, 2005, p81). I try to use both indirect and direct strategies throughout my teaching. Journaling, bell ringers, book clubs, literacy-based art projects, Scholastic Art or other professional art magazines, the book arts, and VTS are just a few literacy integration strategies that I use in my classroom. The following curriculum will include each of these strategies.

Journaling, bell ringers, class discussions, and critiques

Journaling is an effective way to get kids writing and thinking about a topic or subject. Many teachers use journals or bell ringers at the beginning of the class period. Journaling and bell ringers can be done in a simple handmade book. Throughout my eight years teaching I have had students make journals out of lined paper between two

white sheets of copy paper, to more elaborate book designs; either will work for students to journal write or do bell ringer assignments in.

I was introduced to Zentangling, which is a meditative drawing technique, about two years ago at a Michigan Art Education Conference. Since then I have used Zentangling combined with journaling in many of my classes. I start out the class by dimming the lights and playing soft meditation music. The class will complete one small Zentangle, which is a three inch by three inch miniature abstract work of art, and a journal entry in a half of class period. Sometimes I will talk for a few moments about something specific, maybe how their day is going so far, or about an issue of relevance to them, something for them to subconsciously think about while doing their meditative drawing. For class discussions, class critiques, and journaling, there are different ways a teacher can engage students and get them thinking and vocalizing their thoughts. “Some class discussions are goal oriented, some are more open-ended in that the teacher sincerely wants his or her students to grapple with a question or issue and cannot really anticipate the paths the discussion will take. When planning for a large-group discussion, whether it is goal-oriented or open-ended, teachers should consider ways to encourage participation by all members of the group” (Stewart & Walker, 2005, p82). We can use the same idea when giving journal prompts. When I give a journal prompt I expect anywhere from a paragraph to one page for the journal entry. I will usually give about 30 to 40 minutes for this task. Sometimes a journal prompt can turn into a class discussion either before or after the students actually write.

The process of Zentangling is to clear your mind and refocus your energies using a series of steps and repetitive patterns. “By using repetitive patterns with deliberate

strokes, one becomes engrossed in each stroke and a shift of focus- a heightened awareness in which your mind, instincts, and knowledge all work together quickly, effortlessly, and accurately can occur. They call this a meditational art form” (Krahula, 2012, p9). If we stop and think about how we prepare ourselves to complete a big task, whatever it may be: building a shed; writing a paper; or getting ready to start a new painting, many of us have some sort of ritual that helps us focus before we actually begin the task. Zentangling before journaling is the same thing.

We can also take the approach to journaling by having our students make connections from experiences. I have a file of color copied reproductions of artwork that I have laminated. Before class begins I put one picture at each seat. I then pose the question, “What does this image or picture, make you think about?” Students can start to make connections between their own lives and the artworks. This can also be done with text. “We have recorded the many ways our students responded to art or text. These responses might include text-to-self, text-to-text, or text-to-world connections. Students made connections to an experience, a memory, a dream, an idea, or an image from their imaginations. Or, they often remembered a character from another book, another piece of art, or another scene from a play or movie. All these connections worked together to build rich schema for understanding art and text” (Mantioni & Smead, 2003). Compare and contrast of two different artworks can also be done when using the laminated reproductions. Simply asking students to write down similarities and differences between two artworks, considering subject, content, and elements of art, builds on many skills such as observation and vocabulary skills.

I first started doing bell ringers in my classes about my second or third year teaching. It was really a school-wide initiative to get students on task upon entering the class. Students enter the class and get to work on the bell ringer as soon as they come in, instead of hanging out by the pencil sharpener gossiping. I will say that it did not work on a daily basis for me. In an art room sometimes, if you have students sit down right away and do a bell ringer, they then have to get back out of their seats to get supplies to begin the lesson. It may cause more commotion than it is worth. If we are working on a painting I really want my students to have a full class period painting, because set up and clean up time already takes away from a fifty minute class. Try to figure out the best way for it to work in your classroom; after all, it is another literacy integration strategy which can be very effective if done well. I found that doing a bell ringer once or twice a week worked best for me. If the lights are off and the projector is on with the writing prompt, students automatically know that they need to come in and get a sheet of paper and pencil to begin the bell ringer before getting out art supplies.

As mentioned above, writing prompts can range from goal-oriented to open-ended questions on such things as art related topics, social or political issues that are relevant to your students. At the start of a bell ringer, I quickly go over topic sentences, paragraph format, and supporting ideas and observations with evidence. How to teach the format of a paragraph is something I have worked with the language arts teachers to create. This way, what I do in my room, also reinforces what they are learning in other classes. Class discussions and verbal literacy in the classroom can also be a tricky activity to tackle; making sure that all students participate, making sure the comments are intelligent and thoughtful, and making sure that the environment welcomes everyone to verbalize their

thoughts and opinions. “Classroom discussion is a time-honored teaching technique, but teachers who are truly good at it know that it takes more than just saying, “what do you think?” Traditional recitation structures that often pass for dialogue place the teacher at the center of discussion. Effective dialogue in the classroom, however, is the result of instructional planning, and it must recognize the value of what students have to contribute, as well” (Frey & Fisher, 2008, p127). Sometimes dividing the class into smaller groups for discussion is more effective in engaging all the students in a class. One of the bell ringers or journal prompts that I assign every year is; what does “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” mean? In Stewart and Walker’s book, *Rethinking Curriculum in Art* (2005), they suggest that when working in small groups, assign collaborative learning roles. “Collaborative learning roles such as; Discussion leader, will focus the discussion and keep members on track; Recorder, will record final decisions of the group, Time monitor, will attend to the time allotted for the activity and alert the discussion leader when the discussion gets bogged down, Language monitor, will make sure the group members are polite and respectful and use art vocabulary when appropriate. After this activity, the teacher will lead the entire class in a discussion, asking each of the small groups to report on their decisions, as well as writing in their journals on their personal opinions” (Stewart & Walker, 2005, p84). I use small group discussions often in the classroom, by giving everyone in the group a role keeps everyone on task and responsible. The more opportunity students have to write their thoughts and opinions down and organize them, the better they will become at written and verbal expression/literacy.

Recommended resources for bell ringers and writing prompts:

- *Art Journal Topics*, by Terri Tarr-Schweitzer (1997): provides 200 journal prompts in small hand-held book.
- *325 Creative Prompts for Personal Journals*, by J.A. Senn(1992): This book provides 325 journal prompts through seven different themes.

Literacy-based art projects

Art projects, with a strong focus on literacy is another way to integrate literacy into a visual arts curriculum. There are many resources out there to find ideas on how to do this in your own classroom. I suggest starting simple such as: book arts (making handmade books); pairing with the language arts teacher in your building to collaborate using a novel that your students are currently reading; writing and reading poetry in conjunction with creating a painting (Haiku poems work great for this); collaborating with the history teacher to create timelines of visual records of cultural and historical content; comics; or creating social or political art combined with letter writing to public officials or administration. “Linguistic language and visual language have coexisted on the page since the beginning of the book...The subject areas in which linguistic and visual modes co-exist cover almost the entire curriculum. Mapmaking, automobile engine diagrams, and graphic notations are all visual techniques that define and communicate knowledge in geography, science, and music” (Johnson, 1993, p. 17). “*Literacy Through the Book Arts*,” by Paul Johnson is a great place to get ideas on what types of books to have your students make. “Project books grow out of pupils identifying a special interest which is then researched, drafted, and organized into a basic book structure” (Johnson, 1993, p81). Collaborative writing or themed writing are others ideas

too. “Whenever children “write for a purpose” they are ipso facto making a book or book-like form. Through the myriad approaches to authorship pupils are thinking in a book way, whether or not that aspect of the process has been acknowledged. A crafted sentence as part of a meaningful paragraph is meaningful in any context. What book art does for a child is to integrate all the complex symbol systems of graphic communication into one unified form. The cohesive discussing, drafting, editing conferencing, publishing model is appropriate to almost any learning situation in the curriculum” (Johnson, 1993, p143). So whether you choose to use book arts, poetry, historical timelines, or collaborate with core teacher, there are many ways to integrate literacy into an art lesson.

Scholastic Arts Magazine

I have subscribed to this magazine for my class for three years now. It is a great magazine with relevant topics and issues. The art showcased spans art from hundreds of years ago to contemporary art. There are interviews with middle school and high school artists, who are not only creating exceptional art, but thinking and writing about their art too. Showing your students that there are other peers out there that are similar in age or background that are using the visual arts in a meaningful way can help create and set the tone for a more serious art making environment. Making connections with students’ experiences is something that every teacher should consider. We can have all these great literacy strategies, but if the content we are teaching has no relevance to our students’, then your activity will lack engagement. “Activities of this sort typically do not address the text’s relevance or provide reasons for student engagement. Educators need a dual perspective: one that understands what it means to be a proficient reader and another that

considers what motivates readers to seize the knowledge they gain through extended work with print text. The skillful teacher builds bridges between learner and content and needs to understand both” (Landay & Wootton, 2012, p90). *Scholastic Art* magazine has topics that are pertinent to my student’s interests.

The magazine covers art-related careers, art history, and lessons for teachers to do while providing intelligent and interesting articles. “The visual arts can be a good avenue for teaching children comprehension strategies. Once children understand that comprehension is making meaning out of what they see or experience, they can apply these strategies to reading in order to create meaning from what they have read” (Klein & Stuart, 2013, p2). There are so many applicable articles, and contemporary artists featured in *Scholastic Art* that will immediately engage students. Two of my recent favorites are, contemporary artist Josh Lane, who was featured in the March 2014 magazine focusing on Egyptian art and the artwork he is best known for, Hero-glyphs; and a November 2012 magazine featuring Tim Burton and his drawings, that have evolved into some of the most memorable movies of our time such as, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Frankenweenie*. This magazine also provides many instructional techniques and discussion topics for teachers to use in the classroom. Find an art magazine that you enjoy and try it out in your classroom.

Visual literacy and VTS

Looking at the many different ways we can use to teach literacy strategies, visual literacy is a type of literacy that is not mentioned enough. “Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak” (Frey and Fisher, 2008, p.1). If we

look at how language develops we understand that it is through the visual world that this begins. We first introduce a toddler to the world around him by using sight recognition and pairing language or words to each object or experience they have. This is how we obtain knowledge of the world around us. “The way human language evolves – first sight and recognition, then speaking, later reading and writing. Yet he also evokes a truth that is lost in the trample of teaching the formal literacies-that visual images play an integral part in understanding. The elements of literacy are commonly described as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Viewing is mentioned in passing, if at all. When visuals are utilized, it is often in service of the other literacies. We speak of visualizing as a reading comprehension strategy, or discuss the importance of crafting strong images in writing” (Fisher and Frey, 2008, p.1).

We live in a very visual world. Everywhere you look there are visual texts to decipher. The television, internet, and advertising are the biggest contributors to this and we need to teach our students how to move from text to visual text, reading both words and images. “Probably the most compelling reason for using images in instruction is that images are stored in long-term memory. Unlike factoids and phone numbers that can “go in one ear and out the other,” images are indelibly etched in our long term memory- the key is to make sure students have a picture in their “mind’s eye” of the important concepts and content that they will need to recall” (Fisher and Frey, 2008, p11). Pairing visual images with text uses both sides of the brain and can increase comprehension.

I think the ultimate goal of our educational institutions is to provide students with a solid set of foundational skills in which they can be successful, thoughtful, and productive members of society. Teaching skills that will be applicable later in life is a

main goal. These skills can range from: simple mathematics for balancing a check book or budgeting; team or group skills; critical thinking and problem solving skills; learning how to be assertive and confident; learning social norms, manners, and tactfulness; and learning how to verbally communicate with people. “A fundamental goal of education is to teach effective communication. It is the message that lies at the heart of communication, be it verbal, written, or pictorial, and the challenge to any communicator is to create accurate messages and interpret the messages of others with equal skill” (Fisher and Frey, 2008, p. 1). Cross-curricular activities are when a teacher uses lessons and activities that cross disciplines, creating lessons where skills learned will transfer to another subject area in school.

The types of skills learned in an art class extend beyond that of the art processes. If we look at Bloom’s Taxonomy, or other developmental theories, we can go right down the check list as to which skill each one of our assignments or projects is practicing or mastering. Some projects will focus more on one skill than another, but many skills learned while in the art room will transfer to another subject area. Perspective projects will reinforce math skills (or in many cases learning math skills that never made sense in a math class setting). Sculpture projects require a student to think about design aesthetics, as well as structure, functionality, and stability. Conceptually based art projects require students to research an issue or idea, read about it, learn about it, and then consider how to best represent it. Lessons should promote a high degree of critical, creative, and independent thinking as well as cross curriculums. Getting students to learn and understand content involves more than reading and answering preformatted questions. “Understanding is a subtle and complex notion. To understand something goes beyond

knowing or having a skill. Understanding implies having a certain degree of sophistication relative to a concept or topic, having the kinds of insights that can be demonstrated through a variety of performances and contexts” (Stewart and Walker, 2005, p.12).

In the visual arts classroom using visual literacy strategies should be quite simple, for creating visual works is what we do. Creating, reflecting, analyzing, reworking, and completing a piece of visual art is a daily objective in the art room. When visual arts teachers put emphasis on reflecting and analyzing an image, this will help to teach visual literacy, which in turn will help to teach reading, writing, and speaking literacies also. Abigail Houssen, who is known for her research in aesthetic development and is co-author of the VTS curriculum (Visual Thinking Strategies), believes that using VTS on a regular basis will not only accelerate aesthetic growth but will also transfer skills promoting increased reading, writing, and speaking comprehension. “VTS is a sequential curriculum that includes in-school teacher facilitated discussions about art, yearly art museum visits, and teacher trainer...Our lessons are designed to be carried out in an environment of group discovery. The classroom teacher poses a sequence of open-ended questions about a series of carefully selected images of art works. Discussions unfold in which students puzzle and construct meaning about the art works. The learners are given a lot of ‘time on task,’ and have ample opportunity to build meaning one way and then another. They are also exposed to the thinking of their peers, which can accelerate shifts in their own thinking” (Arts and Learning Research Journal, 2002). I sometimes feel that our in class time with students is so jam-packed with curriculum, standardized test-taking, and preparing for those tests that we do not allow time for students to really grasp

what we are teaching, apply it and then practice it. There is so much material to get through by the end of the year, how is it possible to let students ponder, think, ask questions, and really begin to understand content?

Using VTS in the classroom is one way to help students develop not only aesthetically, but build on transferable skills such as: remembering or recalling information; paraphrasing; explaining; comparing and contrasting; finding and speculating; and lastly, supporting observations with found evidence. “The curriculum’s three foundation questions prompt beginner viewers to reason about evidence by asking “What is going on here?”, “What do you see that makes you say that?”, and “What more can you find?”(Housen, 2000). Students are observing, citing evidence, and re-evaluating. “The use of questioning allows students to immerse themselves in a book or a work of art. When students create deeper-level questions about a work of art, they are able to understand where the artist was coming from and start to make sense of the artworks meaning” (Klein & Stuart, 2013, p37). We question when viewing art and we question when reading a text. “ Questioning is a necessary skill for developing thinking, setting purposes for reading, comprehending text, and understanding the world around you” (Klein & Stuart, 2013, p36). Encouraging your students to ask questions about what they have read or seen, or about what they think or feel promotes active readers, which is one of our goals. “Questioning can: motivate children to read as they search for the answers to their own questions; allows children to set purposes for reading; activates background knowledge; sparks interest; helps the reader focus; deepens comprehension; develops active readers; and develops higher-order thinking skills” (Klein & Stuart, 2013, p37). Whether we are doing this verbally or using written language, all of these skills are

used in all other subject areas. When choosing a VTS image you want to consider both your audience and the level of viewer they are. “Good, well selected art has several remarkable attributes that allow children to immediately exercise their thoughts. First encounters with art do not take years of background preparation. A well-chosen work of art is a self-contained world. It has all the information one needs to begin to interpret it. And its presence is a challenge to make new meaning” (Housen, 2000, p121). Housen adds, “Art is accessible. Art can speak to all viewers, allowing them to enter its space early and easily. Children can ‘read’ a picture long before they can read print; Art touches timeless issues. Art can take the viewer as deep as the viewer has the capacity to go; Art is compelling. Seeing a work’s meaning change as interpretations grow can rivet attention; Art is ambiguous. Art has more than one ‘right’ interpretation. Its crafting contains carefully shaped clues. Its ambiguity invites speculation; and Art viewing unfolds. The more one looks, the more one sees. The interpretative possibilities in art keep unfolding” (Housen, 2000, p121). I don’t think we give our students enough time to sit and ponder, to ask questions, and make assumptions. These are skills that lead to deeper thinking. If we use VTS in the classroom on a regular basis it can open up a door to deeper thinking, but also a creative thought process.

“Housen had started our research simply wanting to see if we could build viewing skills and cause measurable change in thinking about art. In time, we recognized something bigger: the expansive power of the eye/mind connection and of talking about art as a way to jumpstart many cognitive processes. Soon enough, following the insights of teachers, we began documenting the impact of VTS on writing. Eventually, as they had always done, teacher showed us how VTS could provide an avenue into teaching

interactively in other subjects” (Yenawine, 2013, p.18). If students are given time to observe, analyze, think about, and reflect, and then are able to voice their opinions, thoughts, and findings in an environment that is unbiased and free of ridicule they will gain confidence in their own opinions and thoughts. They will also open up their minds to the opinions and ideas of their classmates.

Book clubs and classroom libraries

Lastly, incorporating book clubs and classroom libraries into the classroom can be another great way to integrate literacy into a visual arts curriculum. For the past two years I have been building a classroom library, of not only art- related books, but of fiction, non-fiction, historical, and biographical books of various reading levels. “A classroom library is a critical component of a multitext classroom. By creating a classroom library of books in a range of reading levels and in a variety of genres, including picture books, poetry, historical fiction, biography, and information, teachers increase student access to books and contribute to their motivation for learning” (Vacca, 1999, p177). I believe if students have access to a myriad of books and time allotted for reading, they will read, and not only will they read, but they will read something of interest, and that is the key to engagement. “The more time students spend reading, the higher their reading achievement. To encourage reading and demonstrate its importance, many schools provide uninterrupted sustained silent reading time....sustained reading time lets students practice reading and read for their own purposes and pleasure....providing students with opportunities to choose their own books and time to read during content area classes allows students to engage with interesting texts that they themselves have chosen” (Vacca, 1999, p178).

Figuring out how to present books clubs in the classroom can be tricky to do, and it is something I have struggled with. I have about ten different titles that I have multiple copies of that students are able to pick from to form a small book club within the larger class. Students first choose up to three books based on their interests, they submit their choices to me. I then go through all the submissions and create book clubs with anywhere from three to six students per group. Throughout the semester I have weekly time allotted for silent sustained reading, as well as time for getting together with the other members of the book club to discuss the book. Everyone in the group is given a task or a role. Making sure everyone is actually reading and talking about the book is difficult. I find a 'book club discussion' format on each book from the internet and make sure that each group has its own set of discussion questions. The group leader is responsible to report on anyone that is not participating in the group discussions. There are so many ways to include various texts in the classroom. This year, I would like to try a whole class book club. I have ordered and read the book, *Moxie and the Art of Rule Breaking*, by Erin Dionne. Make sure that students have multiple ways to access different texts in an environment that promotes and encourages reading.

DISCUSSION

I have learned so much over the past three years while looking at different ways to integrate reading, writing, speaking, and visual literacy strategies into my visual arts classes. I have attended professional development seminars on literacy, school improvement meetings, and collaborated with English teachers in my building. Since it has been one of my individual teaching goals based on my school's School Improvement Plan, I started integrating literacy strategies into my lessons before I even knew what I would be writing my thesis on. Once I had been doing this for two years it seemed natural to write my thesis on this topic and research it further. It was a scary and intimidating process for me since I do not have an English background. I often found myself feeling inadequate to even think about teaching literacy strategies in my classroom. I also wanted to make sure that my main focus was on creating visual artworks in my class. I believe so strongly in the transferable skills we teach in a visual arts classroom through making art. I didn't want the art making process to become lost in teaching something else. Working with other teachers in my building has been a fun process. Although, sometimes it has been difficult with the way our students are scheduled to always make a lesson work for two semesters in a row. One of the things I love about teaching art is the ability to mix it up all the time; so if collaborating with a teacher works out this semester but it won't the next semester, that is o.k.

I understand the need to integrate literacy into all curriculums. I see my students struggling to make sense of their feelings and ideas. I see them struggling to organize their thoughts. I see them frustrated and intimidated by lack of skills that they will need to be become successful in today's world. I see every day the shortage of time that all

teachers feel. I believe that in teaching a literacy integrated visual arts program, that it can only increase literacy rates and better prepare my students for the world, while giving them confidence and providing them a creative outlet.

EIGHTEEN-WEEK 7TH GRADE LITERACY INTEGRATED ART EDUCATION CURRICULUM

My goal in creating the following curriculum was to provide students with fun, creative, and thought-provoking lessons that would encompass many different materials and art processes, while also integrating relevant literacy strategies into each lesson. I wanted to make sure that my lessons were teaching both foundational art skills such as perspective and color theory, but also experimental techniques and processes like salt on watercolor and needle felting. Using a variety of literacy strategies I hope to encourage my students to think deeply about their art and the world around them, while they are actively engaged in a literacy activity. I hope to create an environment that promotes creative and critical thinking. The following lessons are created for an 18 week course. There are nine lessons total, with each lesson taking about two weeks. The following shows a weekly schedule of events. Each week students will complete a thirty minute VTS session at the beginning of class on Mondays. Each Thursday at the beginning of class students will write in their Journals and complete a Zentangle. The last twenty minutes of class of every other Friday, students will gather in their small book club groups to go over their visual time lines of the book and any discussion questions. Spaces where it is listed as, 'art project' is the time the student will be given to work on the actual art project and literacy integration strategies. Listed beneath each lesson title, and VTS image, are the literacy integration strategies I will be using over each two week period. These strategies may be plugged in on different days throughout the course of each project. Book club books will be read when students have extra time in class or will

be taken home to read the weekly chapter or selection. Students should be reading five chapters every two weeks. The book club book I chose for this unit is titled, *Moxie and the Art of Rule Breaking*, by Erin Dionne. I selected this book because it is an exciting fictional read based on true events of the 1990 Isabella Stewart Gardner art heist. I think my 7th grade students will identify with the books two main characters, who are middle-school students trying to solve a dangerous mystery.

Lesson One: Sunflower Study and VTS

VTS Image/ Week One: “Leisure, Homage to David” by Fernand Leger

Literacy Integration Strategies: Article on the Life of Vincent van Gogh;

Comprehension groups with group roles answering questions and discussion on readings;

Whole class discussion; Making Connections :Visual Writing, ‘What does this painting

make you think of ?’ Using Vincent van Gogh’s sunflower paintings; Book Club 1-5

chapters (due week2); VTS session.

Overview: There is no better time of the year in Michigan to paint sunflowers, than early fall when they are in full bloom! For the past few years I have started off each one of my classes the first week of school using sunflowers as inspiration. Each class uses a different medium and has their own set of objectives. I like to do this the first week of school for a few reasons; first, sunflowers are in bloom. Second, I love getting creative the first day. My students sit through all their other classes the first day listening to rules and expectations so it is nice to put a pencil or paint brush in their hand on day one and just take off! I do rules and expectations about the third day. Having a real live bouquet of flowers sitting in front of each student sets the tone for the semester and the assignment. Students tend to take the lesson more seriously and really learn what observational skills really are. Last, I love to adorn the drab hallways with brightly painted and unique compositions of sunflowers on the second week of school. The artwork gives an energy and excitement to the start of a new school year!

On day one each table has a large bouquet of sunflowers on it. I try to buy sunflowers with several different colors, so students can see a range of colors not just that

typical image of a sunflower in their head that has a large brown middle and big yellow petals. We spend some time looking at the flowers and talking about them. I want them to really observe them and notice subtle differences in color, petal size, stems and leaves. We then discuss the difference between gesture drawing and contour line drawing. We spend a class period considering and practicing both ways of drawing. On day two we look at past examples as well as Vincent van Gogh's famous series of Sunflowers. We start a final drawing. I encourage the students to make their composition as unique as they can, while still drawing from nature. On day three we focus on color theory, and I give a demonstration of how to start a painting starting with the largest areas and slowly working your way down to small details. We spend several days painting. I usually give a few five minute demonstrations throughout the painting process. We talk about van Gogh's color and texture in his sunflower paintings and how that adds movement and dimension to the artwork.

Objectives:

- Students will learn the difference between gesture drawing and contour line drawing
- Students will use live sunflower bouquets to draw and paint from
- Students will study the color wheel and learn to make secondary and tertiary colors
- Students will learn to create a composition that considers depth through overlapping, color, and size variation.
- Students will participate in their first VTS session. They will write their first VTS essay on observations of a painting.

- Students will read an article on the life of Vincent van Gogh. They will consider a few discussion questions on Vincent van Gogh from, *Short Lessons in Art History: 35 Artists and Their Work*, by Phyllis Clausen Barker

Materials and Preparation:

- Live bouquets of sunflowers
- Pencils for sketching, newsprint for sketching, water bins,
- Acrylic or watercolor paint (whatever classroom teacher has) paper plates for color mixing, color wheels
- Assortment of brushes, heavy watercolor paper 12x18, newspaper

Instructional Resources: Vincent van Gogh's sunflower paintings

VTS session 1: Fernand Leger, "Leisure, Homage to David" 1948/49 For this first VTS lesson, students will write an observational essay while looking at Leger's painting. At the end of the 18 week course, students will revisit this painting and write another essay.



Figure 1. Sunflower paintings by 7th and 8th grade students.

Lesson Two: Abstract Landscapes, Reading and Discussion

VTS Image: Edouard Manet, “A Bar at the Folies-Bergere” 1881-82

Literacy Integration Strategies: *Scholastic Art* Issue Sept/Oct. 2012 Elements and Principles; Vocabulary/Picture Cards of Elements and Principles; Book club chapters 5-10

Overview: Perspective drawing is a technique used to represent three-dimensional space and objects on a two-dimensional picture plane. It was developed around 1500 during the Renaissance Period. It is an essential skill to learn for all artists. Learning about linear and aerial perspective is important. I always teach a lesson in one perspective in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades each year. It is something that I believe is a foundational skill. Perspective is a hard thing for students to grasp so repeating a lesson in one point perspective is something that I find necessary. Your lessons in one point perspective can range from an interior room in one point, a cityscape in one point, or for this lesson, an abstract landscape. I spend one class period working up at the projector showing students steps and also having them follow along. We go over the steps for one point perspective and all the basic forms: cube, cylinder, pyramid, sphere, and cones. We practice letters in 3-d using one point perspective and also learn how to make a checkerboard floor in one point perspective. Students have to create a landscape using each of the basic forms plus drawing four more additional cubes. They must have one word in three-D and a checkerboard floor. We also discuss a few main techniques that show perspective such as : overlapping; difference in size as objects get farther away; placing objects/forms on different levels of the picture plane; differences in details; altering the value and intensity of color as objects

go back in space; and using correct one point perspective and converging lines of perspective. We also spend time on revisiting coloring techniques. Many times I find that students have a handle on drawing in detail, but they lack coloring and fine motor skills so their artwork suffers when they get to coloring. They do not understand that using coloring techniques such as fading, color mixing, shading and highlighting can turn an average drawing into a spectacular drawing, so I really spend time on teaching these techniques.

Objectives:

- Students will participate in a second VTS
- Students will learn how to draw an abstract landscape using one point perspective
- Students will learn how to draw basic 3-d forms
- Students will learn to use linear and aerial perspective techniques
- Students will use coloring techniques to enhance their drawing
- Students will read and discuss *Scholastic Art* September/October 2012 issue on *Elements and Principles of Art*

Materials and Preparation:

- Pencils, eraser, ruler
- 9x12 or 12 x 18 paper
- Colored pencils
- Scholastic Art September/October 2012 issue

- Assortment of colored pencils
- Handout on perspective and basic forms



Figure 2. Object drawing by 7th grade student.

Lesson Three: Self-Portraits and Book Clubs

VTS Image: Pablo Picasso, “Guernica” 1937

Literacy Integration Strategies: VTS session, book club chapters 10-15, one page essay on describing “who you are”, participation in a group critique (verbal literacy).

Overview: Students secretly love doing a self-portrait even though they moan and groan at the start of it. Portraits have been a popular expression for artists for thousands of years. While many of the earlier portraits were of kings, queens, or religious deities, many artists also created self-portraits. We will look at several artists and their self-portraits as well as other portraits they painted. Two artists that I find particularly important to look at are: Rembrandt, he created almost 80 self-portraits from his youth to his old age; and Frida Kahlo, she painted many self-portraits of her agonizing physical condition also using rich symbolism to portray her life story; Several other artists we will look at are: Seurat, Degas, Cassatt, Picasso, and Warhol. On the first day of this lesson we study our faces in mirrors at each of the tables. We note the shape of our head which is not a perfectly round basketball. We note the shape of our eyes, mouth, and nose. I then have the students turn the mirrors down on their desk, otherwise they will sit through the rest of the lesson making faces at themselves or messing with their hair. I pass out paper to each student and we do a step-by-step drawing of a face. We use the method of breaking down the oval faced shape we began with. You can find the measurements of breaking down the face into general proportions on several websites or books of portraiture. The students really like this part. I draw on a large white board or the projector so students can see my steps as I verbalize each one. They get a kick out of

putting their finger at the bottom of their nose and dragging it along the side of their face and realizing that is where the bottom of their ear lands. I make sure I tell them that these are generalizations and everyone will not have these exact measurements. We look at Frida Kahlo's work and notice all the background imagery she adds into her paintings. We talk about what makes each one of us unique and what imagery can we show in our own drawings that will symbolize who we are. Students will each take time writing a one page essay on who they are, and what makes them unique. They should consider; nationality or cultural background, religion, political or social views, hobbies and interests, favorite colors, and also outside appearances. I have typically done this as a mixed media assignment, but depending on the class and what materials they have worked with you can alter as needed. I like using watercolor, sharpie, colored pencil, and marker. Since we have already covered coloring techniques with colored pencil, we have a quick refresher on using watercolors and also learn some watercolor techniques such as: salt; cling wrap; wet on wet; and wax resist. We can use these techniques in the background of our self-portraits. I encourage students to really focus on one physical feature that they think makes them unique to really try to depict. It may be the shape of their mouth or hair line, large round eyes or the color of their hair. I also try to have them look for an accessory that makes them unique: glasses, a necklace they always wear, a sports jersey, etc. We spend a day or two drawing and brainstorming before we begin the final drawing. Students are free to use at least no less than two different materials. They must create a self-portrait depicting themselves, and also giving some insight to who they are as a person such as; hobbies, interests, ideas, or religious/social views.

Objectives:

- Students will participate in a third VTS session
- Students will learn how to draw a portrait in general proportions
- Students will think of images that can symbolize their own personalities
- Students will learn watercolor techniques
- Student will write a one page essay on 'who they are'

Materials and Preparation:

- Pencils, drawing paper, watercolor paper
- Hand out with general proportions of the face guidelines
- Watercolor, sharpies, brushes, markers, colored pencils



Figure 3. A Self Portrait by 7th grade student.

Lesson Four: Animal Clay Vessels, Reading and Discussion

(Lesson Four and Lesson Five will be presented together. Half the class will work on clay while the other half works on a Zentangle Mandala. Then they will switch)

VTS Image: Antonio del Pollaiuolo, “Hercules and Antaeus” 1475

Literacy Integration Strategies: *Scholastic Art* March 2014 Issue Read the article

“Everyday Beauty: We can learn about Ancient Egyptians through the objects they left behind” Class Discussion from article, Book Club Chapters 15-20, VTS session.

Overview: For this lesson we are looking at Ancient Egyptian artifacts and the functionality of clay vessels. Sometimes we forget that art can be functional in our everyday lives. We view it as something that hangs on a wall and is mainly pleasing to the eye. We forget that so many of the objects that we come in contact with on a daily basis may have started out as a functional object, but then aesthetics were considered in the overall design; a chair, a coffee table, a teapot, a lamp, or a jar or vessel. *Scholastic Art* March 2014 is all about Egyptian Sculpture. I have done this very lesson for several years with a different twist each time. This year when the March issue of *Scholastic Art* came out, I decided to focus on canopic jars, or rather clay vessels that housed the remains of ancient Egyptian people after they died. We will not be using our clay vessels to hold organs, but money or trinkets, or even a bowl of Lucky Charms. We will begin our lesson viewing images of artifacts and maps from ancient Egypt. We will read the article in the March issue of *Scholastic Art*; “Everyday Beauty: We Can Learn about Ancient Egyptians through the Objects They Left Behind.” Each student will decide on an animal that best represents them or someone they know. They will make some

preliminary sketches of their animal. In my classroom since I do not have student laptops and sometimes research is difficult, I have something called a resource book. In this resource book which I have been continuously adding pages to, on everything from, animals, hairstyles, sports equipment, logos, and other objects. Each student will have to decide how their animal will turn into a vessel, where will the opening go? I will give a demonstration on coil building and pinch pot techniques. I will then divide the class into two groups and half the class will begin on this assignment and the other half will work on a Zentangle Mandala with a focus on the chosen animal for their Egyptian vessels. I do this for a few reasons. First, I do not have enough space to put 30 in-process works of clay. Second, working in clay can be a difficult material to master. Students usually need a lot of my help getting started and creating a strong structure. When time is an issue due to clay drying out, I need to be able to help all my students, so it helps to have only 15 working on clay, and the other half working on something where they already have the basic skills mastered.

Objectives:

- Students will participate in a VTS session
- Students will learn coil building and pinch pot technique
- Students will look at Ancient Egypt for inspiration
- Students will consider functionality as well as aesthetic design for their animal vessel
- Students will read an article and discuss on Egyptian artifacts

Materials and Preparation:

- Paper and pencil for sketching
- Images and maps from ancient Egypt
- Clay and clay tools

Instructional Resources:

Scholastic Arts March 2013 Issue



Figure 4. Owl Vessel by 7th grade student.

Lesson Five: Mandalas and Journaling

VTS Image: Diego Rivera, “Man, Controller of the Universe” 1934

Literacy Integration Strategies: VTS session, Book Club Chapters 20-25, Revisit the discussion and notes from previous lesson on “We can learn about Ancient Egyptians through the objects they left behind”. Journal/Zentangle on “What will the objects you leave behind tell future civilizations about yourself and our society?”

Overview: As you will notice when you look at the weekly schedule for this semester class, one of the literacy integration strategies that I am using on a weekly basis is journaling. Each week students will spend approximately 30 to 40 minutes on a small 3x3 zentangle drawing. Below the drawing is a space provided for a written journal entry. Sometimes there will be a journal prompt, discussion, or idea, and other times students will be free to write whatever comes to mind. I found this to work really well in my classroom. When students understand the idea behind meditative drawing and journaling, they seem to relax and let the process take over. It becomes a time for relaxation, refocussing energy, and meditation. Since we will have spent time each week learning new zentangle patterns, for this lesson students will have a large pool of patterns to assist in their large zentangle mandala. Students may choose to create a mandala using the animal that they focused on for the Egyptian clay project, or purely work the mandala with decorative pattern. There are two examples shown below. As mentioned above in lesson four, half the class will be working on this project and the other half of the class will work on the clay assignment and then switch after one week.

Objectives:

- Students will create a large Mandala drawing using Zentangle method of drawing
- Students will consider coloring techniques throughout their Mandala
- Students may work in the animal they used for the Egyptian clay assignment as a focal point within their Mandala

Materials and Preparation:

- Large square paper
- Sharpie markers, colored pencils, watercolor
- Zentangle patterns from journals

Instructional Resources:

“Zentangle Untangled Inspiration and Prompts for Meditative Drawing” by Kass Hall

“One Zentangle A Day” by Beckah Krahula

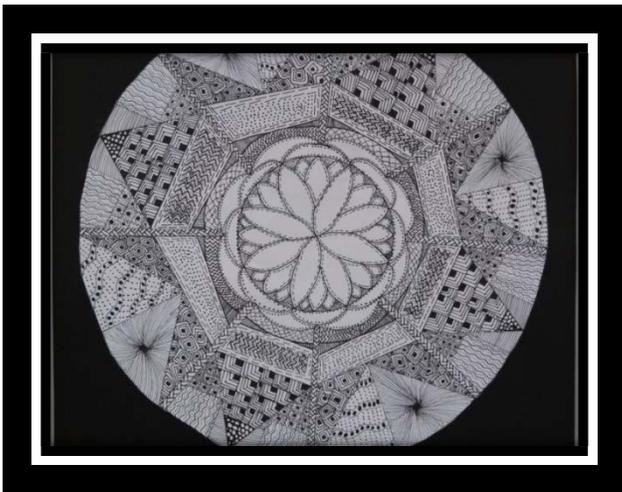


Figure 5. Zentangle Mandala by 7th grade student.



Figure 6. Bird Mandala by Author.



Figure 7. Zentangle Mandala with Color by 7th grade student.

Lesson Six: Pastel Landscapes and Haiku Poetry

VTS: Robert Campin, “Merode Altarpiece, Triptych of the Annunciation” 1425-28

**Literacy Integration Strategies: VTS session, book club chapters 25-30,
collaboration with English teacher on Haiku Poems.**

Overview:

Ted Harrison was born in England in 1926. He attended art school and also received his teaching certification and taught for almost 30 years before moving to Canada with his family. This is where Harrison began to make his most recognizable paintings of the Yukon. His paintings are saturated with bright colors and bold lines. I use Harrison’s paintings as inspiration for this assignment and also work with the English teacher on Haiku poems. I start out by showing students slides of Harrison’s work and the area he lived. The area around my school is quite flat and uneventful, but students can create landscapes with simple line drawings. When showing Harrison’s work I break down his paintings showing simple lines that will make up the foreground, middle ground, and background. He does not use small details, but rather uses medium-to-large shapes and bold lines. Collaborating with the English teacher, students will write Haiku poems that are nature inspired. A Haiku poem is a three-lined Japanese poem. They have seventeen syllables: five syllables in the first line; seven in the second; and five again in the third line. Haiku poems often describe things in nature, so it is perfect for a landscape assignment. For this assignment I have used both florescent tempera paint on brown paper bags, and chalk pastel dipped into liquid starch. Using florescent tempera as opposed to regular really makes the landscapes glow on the paper bags. Dipping the

chalk pastel in liquid starch makes the colors not only extremely vibrant but also sets the chalk so there is less of a mess. Students will spend one day looking at slides and examples and then creating some line drawings of their own landscapes. Encourage them to try out different landscapes; mountains, canyons, flat land, and water. Remind them to break up the sky into swirls or flowing horizontal lines. We also spend time talking about color theory and looking at the color schemes (lots of analogous color schemes) Harrison used. Have students come up with a few different color schemes they would like to try. My students tended to make one to three landscapes in a one week period.

Objectives:

- Students will learn about the artist, Ted Harrison, and view his landscape paintings
- Students will create their own landscape paintings breaking down a simple line drawing into foreground, middle ground, and back ground
- Students through collaboration with the English teacher will write at least three Haiku poems to accompany their landscape drawings
- Students will use chalk pastel and liquid starch to finish their landscape drawings
- Students will be introduced to a number of Haiku poets and their work

Material and Preparation

- 12 x 18 heavy drawing or watercolor paper
- Chalk pastels, liquid starch, mini cups
- Pencils and paper for sketching

Instructional Resources:

Slides of Ted Harrison's work, printouts to put on desks of various landscapes (old calendars work great for this), an assortment of haiku poems.



Figure 8. Chalk Pastel Landscape by 7th grade student.

Lesson Seven: Needle Felting Minions and Movie Review

VTS: Georges de la Tour, “Magdalen with the Smoking Flame” 1640

Literacy Integration Strategies: VTS session, book club chapters 30-35, Have students use websites or magazines to read professional movie and book reviews on various films, then they will write their own movie review of *Despicable Me*. Websites to use are:

www.rottentomatoes.com, www.megacritic.com

Overview:

Oh, this assignment is so much fun! Needle Felting is something totally different and students will love to do it. Make sure for your first assignment that you choose to make something small or medium, and with a simple base. You do not want to start your students off with something large and complex. I had a few students the last week of school choose to make another needle felted project for their independent assignment because they were so successful with their first needle felting. I first came up with a list of movies and characters that would be reasonable to try to needle felt. Second, we discussed as a class, took a vote, and decided upon Minions from the ever popular movie *Despicable Me*. I really like it when I can let my class take part in the planning and decision making process. It doesn't always work, and I usually have to give a few options to choose from, but I feel that because they are a part of the process they feel a greater responsibility towards their work. For the first part of this assignment we look at many different pictures of Minions. We focus on looking at the simple shape of their body first, and then we look at what details make each minion unique. I start out giving step by step demonstrations on how to make the body of a Minion, and then I show

how to add arms and legs. Once students understand how to add arms and legs, it is easy for them to see how to add details, such as a guitar or bouquet of flowers. The first three days are really spent on making the body, and getting the roving hard enough so that the structure of the body will stand up. The second part of this assignment is reading various movie and book reviews and can be done while students are taking a break from needling (arms may get tired). Make sure you have printed off several reviews of the movie *Despicable Me*, as well as using magazine or newspapers that offer weekly movie reviews on other films. Have students write their own movie review on the movie *Despicable Me*. Again, working with the English teacher on a list of criteria of what each review should have and posting that for the class to see is vital to having successful and insightful movie reviews to hang aside next to your needle felted minions.

Objectives:

- Students will learn the art of needle felting
- Student will each create a unique needle felted minion
- Students will read several reviews or critiques of various movies
- Students will each write their own movie review of *Despicable Me*
- Students will participate in a weekly VTS session

Materials and Preparation:

- Needle felting supplies, roving in all colors
- Paper and pencil for sketching
- Copies of movie reviews
- Movie to show if needed

Instructional Resources:

YouTube is a great place to find “how to” videos on needle felting, handouts of minions, handouts of movie reviews



Figure 9. Needle Felting by 7th grade students.

Lesson Eight: Masks from Around the World and Self-Reporting

VTS: Jean-Honroe Fragonard, “The Meeting” 1771-73

Literacy Integration Strategies: VTS session, Book club chapters 35-40, class brainstorm on the different function and uses of a mask, write a story on the function, history, or idea behind your mask.

Overview: Masks from around the world are an intriguing art form to look at. I start this lesson out by viewing a slide show and discussing the functionality of masks from around the world. From theatrical purposes, to ceremonial purposes, to wearing a mask for safety purposes, cultures have been wearing masks for centuries. Have a slide show that shows many different types of masks from several cultures. You can also show a short video clip of a ceremonial dance (African antelope dance) to help students understand that other cultures use masks in different ways than we would normally think to. After the slide show and discussion, which will take most of one whole class period, talk to students about the type of mask they would be interested in making. If you have examples of masks from previous years make sure you show them and pass them around. I usually talk about positive and negative aspects to each mask. Also explain the thinking behind each mask that you are showing. It helps students to visualize their own ideas into a mask. Many of the masks that are made become conceptualized self-portraits of the students. Students can pick a theme that best represents them or a theme in general such as: nature, music, or theatrics. I also talk a lot about design and layers patterns.

Have students sketch out several ideas, I usually have them come up with at least three different mask ideas. Have students think about color schemes and materials. Show them all the materials that will be available to them to use; paints, fur, gems, yarn, fabric,

beans, etc. I give a demonstration of how to start a plaster mask. I use the plastic face molds. I have many different types of molds; theatrical, animal, and regular face molds. I use the plaster wrap in rolls. If I am able to cut up the rolls beforehand I will, if not I will have each student take a roll and cut into short strips and place in a large bowl at the center of each table. Make sure you explain in your demonstration that they should not wrap the plaster around the plastic mold because once it dries you will pop the plaster mask off of the mold so it can be used again. The plaster process will take about two days. I then have students start with one to two base colors, and then they begin to paint small-to- medium details on top of the base color. Working with acrylic paint is all about layering. After all the painting is done on the mask, they may then use the other materials to embellish the mask. Painting and embellishing the mask usually takes about 5 class periods. When their mask is complete I have them write a one page paper explaining the mask's meaning. What does the mask as a whole represent? What do the colors signify? Do the materials used symbolize anything specific? They must also tell which masks or cultures they were inspired by. If you have access to computers, have students type up the one page report. I mount reports on a sheet of black construction paper and hang each report next to their mask.

Objectives:

- Students will view masks from around the world and discuss the many different functions of a mask
- Students will work with plaster and plastic molds to create their own plaster mask

- Students will embellish their masks with several materials considering a color scheme and aesthetic design
- Students will write a one page report critiquing and explaining the masks meaning

Materials and Preparation

- Plaster rolls, plastic face masks, acrylic paints and brushes
- Fabrics, gems, beans, glitter, fur
- Glue guns and glue sticks
- Bowls to hold plaster and water
- Newspaper to line tables



Figure 10. Plaster Mask with White Feathers by 7th grade student.



Figure 11. Plaster Mask with Gems and Flowers by 7th grade student.

Lesson Nine: “The Outsiders” and Comic Strips.

Collaboration with the English teacher

VTS: Georges Seurat, “A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte” 1884

Literacy Integration Strategies: VTS session, Book Club chapters 40-45, Novel *The Outsiders*, Visual Timeline of important events of the book.

Overview: Collaborating with other teachers can be difficult, but also very rewarding and exciting. For my last lesson of the eighteen weeks, I will collaborate with the English teacher on a novel that students will be reading in her class. They read about four novels a year, so I can do this lesson on any of the novels throughout the two semesters. Teaching visual literacy with comics is often overlooked. “Comic books—more so than any other visual medium—allow teachers to pose questions that help students do two things: understand how images produce meaning, and become engaged in the search for this meaning....but unlike photography comics are largely driven by narrative, so one ‘picture’ signifies not only by itself but also in relation to the other ‘pictures’ that surround it,” (Frey & Fisher, 2008, p96). This lesson can be done at the end of the novel, but it is something you will want to work on throughout the reading of the novel to make sure that they are keeping track of characters and focal points within the story. *Teaching Visual Literacy*, by Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher, is a great resource to use for this lesson. “The point is that any given comic book panel contains a variety of information that must be processed, and the “static” format allows a teacher to spend time focusing on analytical skills like those needed to study a still photograph,” (Frey & Fisher, 2008, p96). Basically students will be creating a rough timeline of main events and focal points

in the book and then creating a visual comic with text that will explain the book's plot, characters, and main points in sequential order. Making sure that students are taking notes, and working on a timeline, while reading the book in their English class, is an important aspect of this assignment. After students create a rough draft of their comic including text, the teacher and student should have a brief critique, making sure that the student's comprehension and understanding of the books themes and events are correct. The next step is to color the comic strip. I like to give students an opportunity to use a variety of material for comic strips, so they have access to: colored pencils, watercolor pencils, markers, sharpies, and watercolors.

Objectives:

- Students will participate in their last VTS session of the semester, writing a observational response to the image shown
- Students will participate in a collaborative lesson between the English and Art departments, reading a novel and creating a visual comic strip demonstrating knowledge and comprehension of the text
- Student will use mixed media to create a visual comic

Material and Preparation:

- **Pencils, rulers, erasers**
- **18 x 24 sheet of heavy mixed media paper**
- **Colored pencils, markers, sharpies, watercolor**

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