

When Images Speak, Words Paint and Students Bloom©
Interchange Professional Development at the St. Louis Art Museum, April
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Presented by Susan Grigsby, Teaching Artist from the St. Louis Poetry
Center

Workshop Description: Research shows that over 50% of your students are visual learners. In this workshop, we'll explore ways to use visual images, including the resources of the St. Louis Art Museum, to engage students in writing prose and poetry with activities focused on enhanced literacy skills and high-level thinking practices. Hand-outs will provide suggestions for modifications for grades Pre-K-12.

USING VISUAL ARTS AS A BRIDGE TO MOVE WORDS ONTO THE PAPER

Notes:

The amount of time spent on the activities outlined in this packet will vary widely depending on many factors. To give you some sense of pacing for one writing exercise, I would ideally spend at minimum with a third grade class: 15 minutes exploring and sharing visual &/or writing pieces, 15 minutes with modeling, 20 minutes writing, 15 minutes editing and revising, and 15 minutes presenting. This does not include the time needed for picture making or curriculum studies done prior to the writing.

Always make the 1st draft the 'sloppy copy', stamping out erasure fears and the concerns of making mistakes which can inhibit writing. Use student writing creations as an opportunity to reinforce critical elements of grammar, spelling, and punctuation via revision and editing. Do this by **STARTING** with selecting what you want them to learn from a writing exercise and identifying what you will assess. Present those assessment guidelines to them when you model the writing exercise.

START BY CHOOSING A FOCUS

Work with just one or two elements in a selected activity.

Possible **visual elements** to focus on: color, shape, mood, texture, contrast, story, character, setting, details, sensory, emotions, historical periods, art styles / genres, art technique.

Possible **writing elements** to focus on: Five senses, simile, metaphor, personification, storytelling elements, dialogue and punctuation of dialogue, character, setting, point of view, descriptive language, parts of speech, vocabulary enrichment, lead in sentences. What do you want to assess?

Possible **cross-curricular connections** include:

Science (such as weather, animals, or habitats);

Social studies (such as a specific historical period, culture, or geographic location)

Math (such as geometric shapes, counting, measurement, symmetry, patterns)

Possible **visual sources** to use:

- Art that the students create
- SLAM art kits / Art prints / posters / museum visits
- Illustrations in picture books
- Pictures in non-fiction text
- Videos from zoo or library
- Natural observation (example: go outside and sketch in detail a tree, cloud, or plant)
- Photographs the students take

Possible **written sources** to use: Collect great samples of poetry, descriptive non-fiction writing, song lyrics, picture book stories, and scenes from stories or plays. Research the students have done.

Warm Up using Word Activities

The words used in these activities might be ones connected to your curriculum unit or theme, or they might simply be wonderful words to know.

To differentiate nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and prepositions, use different colors of paper or ink. Provide each student with a word (e.g. a noun on a red card) and let the students form small groups (e.g. one noun, one verb, one adverb) and combine their words into sentences that "paint pictures with the words" (create sentences that are descriptive). Try letting students create the cards, then shuffle and hand out.

Word banks are a great resource for students. Have students help make some of them.

For Pre-K, K, and ESL - let them pair the words with drawings or magazine cut-outs. Let them act out new verbs.

Let students use these word banks when writing to access ideas and correct spelling.

Ask students to voluntarily contribute wonderful words to classroom word banks. These could be words that they find when reading, watching T.V., or on neighborhood signs. Let them introduce their word to the class, tell what it means and use it in a sentence.

Create thesaurus sheets for your students to use when writing. Hang on the wall or make copies that they keep in a folder. Let them help make some. Start with a basic like 'move' and ask 'How would we describe the way different animals and vehicles move?' or "How many different types of 'walking' are there?" The point is for them to see how finding the right word can provide a better picture of what you want to describe. For example: Instead of "move", does the creature scamper, shuffle, stomp, slither, drift, bustle, crawl, creep, ramble, saunter, or march?

Writing Activity: Focus on Storytelling – writing a descriptive lead sentence or paragraph in response to a piece of visual art. (This can be done with poetry or prose.) Visual Connection: Reading a Picture and Drawing Conclusions.

Discuss the components of a great lead-in sentence and read some samples.

Opening lines used in this workshop were from

A Million Fish...More or Less, a picture book by Patricia C. McKissack;
the poem *Down by the Riverside* by Dave Etter from Jan Greenberg's book *Heart to Heart – New Poems Inspired by Twentieth-Century American Art*;
and *The Little Match Girl* by Hans Christian Anderson.

** Greenberg's book provides excellent examples of poets writing stories as a response to paintings.

Imagine that the picture you're looking at is the first page of a story. Write a descriptive page opening to go with the story that YOU are 'reading' in the picture.

What does the picture tell you about the setting (place, season, weather, time of day)? What objects (natural or man-made) in the picture seem important? Who or what is the main character? What do you know from 'reading' the painting and what can you add, using the picture clues and your imagination?

Sample Assessment:

Show in your writing:

Where (Place)

When (Time of Day)

What (Important Object)

Who (Character)

Action (How)

Include Active Verbs

CHALLENGE: Can you use one example of personification? For example, if the tree was a person, how would you describe what it's doing?

Final Copy: Correct Spelling and Punctuation

Option – Verbal First: Before any writing is done, let the students orally tell their openings to other students. Encourage them to improve upon their ideas with each retelling.

Option – Student Art First: Do this activity in response to visual art the student creates.

- Extend this writing activity with a **word bank** that contains words relevant to the theme or curricular connection. Or, use student word banks with **synonyms** for commonly used verbs like run, walk, talk The intent is that they discover how word choices can more specifically paint details (as in the differences between walk, crawl, and scurry or talk, whisper, roar). Add to the assessment the number of words you'd like them to use from the word bank.

An example of the use of Personification, written in response to a Van Gogh painting:

Plants in a Party

Great blue sky,
some clouds are white,
some clouds are blue,
the mountains, far away,
and wind blowing east through the wheat.

Two pines hug each other
and clouds dance as the wind
blows them into figures
of people, eagles and elephants.

Green heat's passing through me,
the wheat's having a party,
and the other plants, with their hands up,
are dancing.

The party will calm when the cold wind's arms
wrap around the plants.

By Jose

Poem by Student in a Long Middle School Interchange Collaboration, Fall 2009

- Provide the students with a **word bank**, drawn from your thematic or curricular connections. Review the words for meaning. Use creative movement to reinforce with **younger students and ESL students**.

- Pre-writing brainstorming idea for **grades 2-4**: present the questions in a list with lines after each for taking notes. Pair the students and have one interview the other. They should focus on being as exciting and entertaining as they can. (such as - the news anchor interviewing the mummy on live T.V.) After the one being interviewed answers a question, ask them to jot down key words they said (not sentences). This is good practice for **note taking**. And it allows for creative development prior to writing.

- Create a 'talking encyclopedia': Assemble a group of pictures relevant to your unit or theme. **Pre-K – 1 and ESL**: Let each picture tell in one descriptive sentence what it is that it does or who it is. **Grades 2 – 8**: A more extensive 'autobiography' for each picture is created.

Example of Voice: A group poem written by ESOL students at Mann Elementary (Teacher: Ms. Berry), Spring 2010, in an Interchange Collaborative. This poem was written after visiting the Arms and Armor Collection and using the SLAM Highlights kit in class.

KNIGHT GHAZAL

I am the dark knight.
I am the armored knight.

But when my helmet door swings shut,
I am lost in the darkness of night.

When ferocious dragons see me, they growl:
I will kill you, you little knight.

But when the sun comes up, my armor shines
and the dragons melt and the winner is always me, the knight.

My armor shines like wishing stars,
fireflies, and silver and gold at night.

Writing Activity: Focus on the Five Senses (Sensory Details)

If you stepped into this picture, imagine what you might perceive through all five of your senses. How can we show that in our writing?

What do you see, hear, taste, smell, and feel. What emotions do you feel?

Brainstorm ways to describe those sensory experiences through the use of descriptive text, active verbs and similes.

Sample Assessment:

Include in your writing:

Two or more things you see

What you hear

What you feel (touch)

What you smell

A Title

A simile

Older students: use an active verb in every line

CHALLENGE: Can you include a taste? Can you show an emotional feeling?

Final copy: Correct spelling and punctuation.

- Pain-free revision extension:

(This is especially helpful with younger students and ESL students) The use of **paper strips** will help them to focus on one line at a time and to learn to revise their writing by **organization**. They will write one description on each strip and then arrange them on a larger sheet of paper, writing in transitions as needed to connect the strips. The final draft is then copied onto writing paper. To avoid confusing these students, model and assign only one **point of view** (1st or 3rd) on a given day.

-The use of **similes** will help make this sensory writing exercise more accessible to beginning writers and help them learn to “paint pictures” with their words.

- **Pre-K & K Group writing:** Transcribe the words they tell you onto **paper strips**. Guide them in playing with different arrangements of the lines and choosing a title.

- **Older students** can of course simply write their first draft on one sheet of paper, but one experience with paper strips will open them up more to the possibilities of revision. Samples of poems by middle school students are printed on the next page. Explain to students that they have the option of writing in the first or third person **point of view** and demonstrate this.

-Suggested curriculum connections to sensory writing activities:

This activity can be done with **poetry** or **prose**.

Use student-created visual art or photos in juvenile nonfiction books and connect to topics such as S.S.: Characteristics of habitat, place, region, or environment;
Science: Weather, seasonal changes, animal habitats, natural observation

You can use the Art Museum kits with studies of America, Egypt, Africa, China and Japan. Also, any of their prints will work if you're doing this as a Comm Arts activity.

Examples of Sensory Work:

Where Am I?

– *lost in a painting by Vincent Van Gogh*

Where am I

where the wind blows south
and the trees tremble slightly?

Where am I

where the land holds a smooth soft light
with a bit of green moisture?

Where am I

where the birds wake me up
singing loud melodies?

Where am I

when a sweet smell of daisies
briefly passes my nose,
where am I?

by Nautika (Long Middle School)

The Beach

Green trees.
Blue river.
A light house.

Birds chirping,
wind hallowing,
water splashing against the shore.

Kids running down the sand,
the blue sky, filled with clouds.

by Donald (Long Middle School)

ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS FOR EXPLORING AND SHARING VISUAL ART

For younger students or any student new to the process, explore a visual piece in a group discussion before asking them to explore another piece independently. With all age groups, work through the critical thinking levels in your discussions.

Example 1: If using art created by a student - ask him or her to orally read their picture to the group (to tell the story). Invite the other students to join you in comments (I like ...) and questions (e.g. Is it day or night? Why is....?).

Example 2: Observational drawings and photographs done by students: ask the students to describe their work & to then tell you the details that they were unable to visually record (e.g. date, time, weather, the bee buzzed, I was in the garden, the leaf was blowing, the flower was as tall as my finger, it smelled like vanilla, etc.) Invite classmates to ask questions.

Example 3: If using a visual piece not created by the students, focus your questions on the visual, writing, and curriculum elements you've selected. For example, if you're focusing on characterization and dialogue, your questions might include -

What objects and people do you see? (**knowledge**)

Describe the actions taking place in the scene. (**comprehension**)

What time of day is it / what season / what's the weather / what part of the world is it / what time period? Why do you think that? (**application**)

How are the characters different from one another? What is their relationship and why do you think that? What do you think they're saying? Looking at the colors and tones, what mood do you think the artist wanted to create? (**analysis**)

What do you think will happen next – if you were the artist, what would you paint on “page 2”? (**synthesis**)

What do you think is the most important part of this painting? What do you like in the picture? What would you do differently? (**evaluation**)

ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS FOR EXPLORING AND SHARING TEXT

Suggestion: Read with the class examples of the types of text you'll be modeling with them.

If using text other than picture books, present the text you've selected on individual handouts or on a large display that all can see.

Vocabulary - discuss words that students may not be familiar with. With ESL and elementary students, have them act out new verbs. Show pictures of new nouns. Place new adjectives and adverbs in a familiar context, demonstrate or show.

Read one of the writing examples aloud to the class, demonstrating the pauses in poetry (at line breaks) and in prose (at periods).

Even Pre-K students can echo read, line by line. Depending on student grade, try a variety of reading techniques. These approaches include - boys and girls alternating lines of poems; dividing class rows in half and alternating lines; dividing the group into dancers or creative movers and readers; moving through the rows with each student reading a line or sentence. Experiment with readers' theatre techniques that you know.

Discuss - First ask what words or phrases they liked in the writing. Do they have any questions / is there something they didn't understand? For stories, discuss the elements of story. For descriptive nonfiction, what is the key point of the passage?

Introduce the creative writing element you've chosen to work with (e.g. simile) and ask them to identify examples.

MODELING THE WRITING PROCESS

Modeling is the simplest part of the process and the one that seems to fire-up the students' creativity and enthusiasm.

Have a writing activity selected. For students in grades 1 and up, if you are using assessment guidelines for the writing exercise, this is the time to present them. (e.g. We want to be sure to write four or more lines / use one simile / show the setting and time of day.)

If the activity includes a brainstorming component, do that as a group also.

Explain that you're going to write a group piece and that all of the ideas may be great, but that those that work best together will be recorded. The students can always save their unused contributions for their own writing. Explain that you'll be writing a 'sloppy copy' first, as you quickly try to write all of the great ideas down. The students' individual writing will be structured the same as the modeling, and they can work at their own pace on the different steps.

Demonstrate **reflection** and **revision** - read the group writing aloud - does it sound right? Does it make sense? Is there a more exciting or specific way to say something? What changes might be made?

Demonstrate **assessment** - does it meet the assigned criteria? If not, what can we do to fix that? (e.g. did we include a simile)

Demonstrate how to **edit**, checking spelling, punctuation capitalization, etc.

You might have a **revision checklist** containing the most common grade level errors available for the students to use for group and individual writing.

REVISION and EDITING: CHECKLIST SUGGESTIONS

Create a checklist of your students' most frequent spelling and grammar errors. A few common areas of difficulty are noted below. Perhaps provide one checklist per student. If they make one of these errors on their writing draft (AKA Their Sloppy Copy), circle the error and ask them to look at the revision sheet to figure out how to correct it.

That cat is big. = That cat's big.

1 cat + 1 cat = two cats

The food that belongs to one cat = The cat's food

The food that belongs to two cats = The cats' food

HOMONYM HELP

they are = they're

The dog belongs to them = That is their dog.

Where is the dog? It is there.

2 = two

also = too

I go to the store.

PRESENTATION IDEAS (INCLUDING WRITERS' WORKSHOPS)

At the end of a writing session, ask the students to read their work aloud. If there's time, invite peer comments. If there's not time for everyone to read, let a few read each day.

Other possibilities:

Display writing and art in the class or hall.

Have a poetry concert at the end of the semester. Invite an audience. Ask students to select their best work to read.

For Pre-K to grade 1, make class picture books that are read together. For all grade levels: Have the students make individual books (a story, a collection of poems, a collection of observations, a collection of descriptive nonfiction, etc.). For Pre-K - K, create books to read using picture prompts and have just a line of words, or less, per page.

Publish a collection of poetry written by the students. Older students can serve as editors. Use the opportunity to practice keyboarding skills.

Combine the written work with music, song, or dance.

Create a dramatic play.

WRITERS' WORKSHOPS:

Students sit in a circle with a teacher moderator and take turns reading a poem. The intent is that they will receive feedback to improve their work. Fellow writers comment on what they liked and ask questions that will help the writer, such as *who was talking, where does this take place, what did _____ mean.*