Dialogic Visual Literacy

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DIALOGIC VISUAL LITERACY:
ENGAGING FIFTH GRADE ART STUDENTS IN THE PROCESS OF DECODING
IMAGES AND CREATING NARRATIVE WORKS OF ART

A Thesis Presented
By
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DIALOGIC VISUAL LITERACY:
ENGAGING FIFTH GRADE ART STUDENTS IN THE PROCESS OF
DECODING IMAGES AND CREATING NARRATIVE WORKS OF ART

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Sharon LaFrenaye

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of Master of Arts
in Art with Concentration in Art Education

Department of Art
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Rhode Island College
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ABSTRACT

The amount of visual information that children, and adults, receive on a daily basis is continually growing. In this digital age, multiple literacy skills are necessary to successfully navigate through the mire of text, sound, and images deeply embedded in popular culture. While the use of evolving technologies has allowed unprecedented access to information, this bombardment of the visual warrants a call to parents and educators to address the skills that children need to become visually literate. Therefore, it is imperative that art educators include dialogic visual literacy in our curricula. Students must learn how to decode a variety of images and how to encode their own creative works of art using the artistic visual codes and conventions of the 21st century.

In this thesis, a rationale for dialogic visual literacy is presented. An instructional unit for fifth grade students is described and the results from teaching these lessons are analyzed and reflected upon. Students learn to identify artist’s visual codes (also known as the elements of art and principles of design), to decode images in a variety of forms, and to actively create and encode narrative works of art. Conclusions include insights on the importance of visual literacy instruction, student responses to the unit, and teacher reflections on best practices for teaching this unit. As our cultural surroundings in the 21st century change, so too must our curriculum objectives in order to fully prepare our students to become visually literate, critically aware, and active participants of society.
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To my students, thank you sharing your enthusiasm, creativity, and energy with me. I am consistently amazed by your spontaneity, kindness, and hard work. You may view me as your teacher, but you teach me lessons each day that continue to humble me and motivate me to give you my best.

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Democracy is impossible without critical education, just as education is reduced to training when it loses sight of its purpose and meaning in extending and deepening a democracy. A democracy of consumers…cannot fulfill the same task as a democracy of engaged citizens. – Henry Giroux (Giroux, 2005, p.IX)

A visually literate person is able to discriminate and make sense of visual objects and images; create visuals; comprehend and appreciate the visuals created by others; and visualize objects in their mind’s eye. To be an effective communicator in today’s world, a person needs to be able to interpret, create, and select images to convey a range of meanings. - Dr. Anne Bamford (Bamford, 2003, p.1)
CHAPTER 1: THE IMPORTANCE OF DIALOGIC VISUAL LITERACY IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

If the members of a society in the 21st century are multi-literate, and able to decipher multiple forms of communication, they have a complete arsenal of skills necessary to navigate through the barrage of text, sounds, and images they face on a daily basis. More specifically, if young adults are made aware of the commercially driven goals of the mass media at an early age, they will be less likely to fall prey to the ideology of consumerism. “Government and the media commonly manipulate photographs using modern computer technology, raising ethical questions concerning truth and deception…. During the last 150 years, photographs have been manipulated for propaganda, fraud, humor, profit, and just to rewrite history” (Maier, 2000, p.1). As adults we easily accept this concept of false media and yet can still be lured by unrealistic, seductive images. The earlier we begin to educate children about the power of analyzing, discussing, and creating meaningful imagery, the better equipped they will be to handle a lifetime of imagery that will surround them. A question for any responsible citizen of a democratic society should not be if, but when should children learn that they shouldn’t believe everything they see?

As John Palfrey and Urs Gasser (2008) state, “This is the most rapid period of technological transformation ever… the invention and adoption of digital technologies by more than a billion people worldwide has occurred over the span of a few decades” (p.3). Our unprecedented access to technology, which multiplies our exposure to imagery, creates a call to action for art educators. A researcher at Columbia Teacher’s College,
Mary Alice White, has found that “young people learn more than half of what they know from visual information, but few schools have an explicit curriculum to show students how to think critically about visual data” (McKenzie, 1998, p.1). In order to teach our students how to sift through the media quagmire it is imperative that as art educators, we infuse our curricula with dialogic visual literacy instruction beginning in the later elementary school years. This is a framework where students not only learn how to decode messages embedded in imagery, but also how to communicate their understanding of these images through discussions, written reflections, and the creation of artwork that expresses their unique creative voice. Students immersed in dialogic visual literacy instruction learn to “read” imagery and “write” imagery using the codes and conventions of visual language. The following diagram provides a conceptual framework for the Process of Dialogic Visual Literacy (Figure 1). The emphasis in this thesis is on the bi-directional relationship (the arrows) between the decoding and encoding of images, thus creating a dialogic process.

![Diagram of Dialogic Visual Literacy Process](attachment:Diagram.png)

**Figure 1.** Dialogic Visual Literacy Process
Adapted from Schramm’s Later Model of Communication (Moore & Dwyer, 1994, p.91)
Visual literacy is not a new concept in the art education classroom. However, historically two distinct forms of practice have evolved: one involves interpreting images, while the other involves interpreting and creating images. This thesis focuses on the second form, which I call dialogic visual literacy. This form of visual literacy instruction includes students in verbal and written dialogues in which they decode selected imagery ranging from fine art exemplars to print advertisements. Once students learn to decode imagery, they can then encode and create narrative works of art which will allow them to use their emerging skill set. Bamford (2003) states that, “A visually literate person should be able to read and write visual language. This includes the ability to successfully decode and interpret visual messages and to encode and compose meaningful visual communications” (p. 1). The key to dialogic visual literacy is that it is important to be able to analyze images, but also equally important to exercise these skills by creating works of art that have personally significant imagery.

In today’s art room, often with 45-minute class periods, classroom management challenges, and learning standards to address, in-depth dialogues between teacher and students can fall by the wayside. Paulo Freire (1993) argues that, “Only dialogue which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking” (p. 92). Furthermore, he states that, “The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world” (Freire, 1993, p. 73). Rather than subscribing to a “banking” system of education where students memorize and regurgitate culturally accepted information, art educators can create mentally stimulating and
challenging creative environments by using reflective dialogues in their classrooms. In teaching our standards-based lessons, we hope that our students are thinking critically about the artwork they are creating. However, the depth to which they are processing their ideas and creative experiences remains elusive. Taking the time to discuss and analyze images now, more than ever, has become a crucial component to art education as we are helping to shape the voices of young citizens living in a democratic society.

Hope in combating a mass-mediated culture and keeping a democracy alive and well lies within the inherent desire for children to create. While they are still at a relatively young age, fifth grade children are eager to observe, imagine, create, analyze and discuss works of art. They seek approval from their teachers, yet they also have strong opinions and are beginning to use their voice to question the meaning behind culturally accepted ideas, rules, and social expectations. This is where art curriculum units that address visual literacy come to light. At the ages of 10 and 11, students are ready to be exposed to the idea that images hold meanings. We can motivate them to think more critically about the intent of an artist, as well as how cultural and other contextual factors can change the way an image is interpreted. For example, a particular contemporary work of art might be viewed as being revolutionary to one cultural group, offensive to a second group, and beautiful to a third group. The goal of dialogic visual literacy instruction is to instill a sense of visual awareness in students so that they can become confident in using their voices to become active, rather than passive, participants in their communities.
Based on the idea of visual literacy, an educational program called Visual Thinking Strategies, or VTS, was created in the late 1980’s by co-founders of Visual Understanding in Education Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine (VUE, 2009, History section). VTS is most often used as a guide for elementary educators when showing works of art to children. This series of questions, based on 30 years of research by Housen, can be an open-ended and helpful way to begin to guide children in analyzing works of art (VUE, 2009, Research section). The three questions included in VTS are: What’s going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can you find? (VUE, 2009, Teaching Strategy section).

It has been said by educators who use this program that this discussion technique fosters an open-ended approach, where multiple interpretations can be appreciated. Rather than looking at an artwork as a final product, students see endless possibilities (VUE, 2009, Teaching Strategy section). Yenawine (2009) states, “To build a society that is innovative, prosperous, and truly democratic we need to teach next generations not just facts and skills, but how to learn, how to communicate, and how to think creatively, critically, independently” (VUE, 2009, Guiding Principles section). VTS discussions leave students feeling validated in their interpretations of exemplar works of art and not judged for having their own personal views brought forth in class discussions.

Using the three VTS questions has proven to be an effective way for art educators to include sessions of dialogue in their classes. The teacher plays an unbiased role and typically does not reveal knowledge, such as the date, media, or artist name, to her students (VUE, 2009, Teaching Strategy section). She may also neutrally paraphrase
after each student speaks and offer connections between similar or contrasting comments made by students (VUE, 2009, Teaching Strategy section). The benefits of this student-teacher interaction are without question. Students learn how to analyze or “read” images. However, as a result, do they transfer that knowledge into “writing” or creating their own images?

There are some areas where VTS can be expanded upon to maximize the impact on student’s visual literacy development. First, do students realize that they can use the VTS questions when viewing any type of image, such as a magazine ad, rather than just for looking at works of art in a museum or their art class? Second, what do students do with their new awareness of what they see in museum paintings? Nowhere in the VTS training are teachers instructed with ways of synthesizing the dialogues they have with their students with teaching art production. Why shouldn’t we connect visual literacy based discussions with meaningful, thought provoking, hands-on art experiences?

If children are taught to be comfortable verbally expressing their views on works of art, they should also be taught how to use their knowledge of imagery to visually show their points of view. Without this critical step, the depth and message of the discussion is fleeting. Students may be left with a feeling that the works of the Euro western canon on the museum wall are more important to look at than anything they will ever make. However, if art production follows a session of VTS, then students can feel a greater connection to the artist they just discussed with their class because they now share the common experience of artistic creation and a visual language. They can fully appreciate
the technique and style of an exemplar work of art when they have created imagery that has relevance to their own life and point of view.

There are many positive outcomes that visual literacy instruction can have in the classroom setting. Four main ways students can benefit are: 1) Images are decoded with much more ease when visual literacy skills are employed, 2) Positive cognitive outcomes result from heightened visual comprehension and can be used for interpreting aspects of the real world such as “gestures, objects, signs and symbols” (Bamford, 2003, p.1), 3) Greater awareness of the meaning behind images can occur, making students less likely to be manipulated by the media, and lastly 4) Appreciation of aesthetic skill, technique, and final product can be heightened (Messaris, 1994, p.3). These results, paired with engaging, hands-on lessons will help students build creative confidence when creating their own works of art.

The effects that visual literacy can have on students will better prepare them to become active, rather than passive, members of society. If they have the skills necessary to question the images before them they will be able to form their own conclusions and make well-informed decisions in all aspects of life. From watching campaign ads for the latest politicians, to viewing print ads before purchasing a new car, students who learn visual literacy skills at an early age will be able to pose questions and think critically as they mature into adulthood. If they are visually literate, they will be able to participate as active citizens within our media-saturated world and be able to articulate their ideas and opinions with greater clarity.
This is an exciting time for art educators. Our students have more access and interaction with the mass media than previous generations, thus they potentially can influence our democracy more than ever before. Palfrey and Gasser (2008) assert that, “Many Digital Natives (people born after 1980) perceive information to be malleable; it is something that they can control and reshape in new and interesting ways. That might mean editing a profile on MySpace or encyclopedia entries on Wikipedia, making a movie, or online video” (p. 6). On the other hand, teachers are concerned about the increasing role technology plays in the “copy-and-paste” culture we have become (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, p. 245). If we can engage students at an early age to think critically about the visual information they are receiving, their ability to synthesize material with their own thoughts and experiences will naturally follow. The more visually literate our students become, the more empowered they will be when expressing their own voice. Visual literacy, and democratic education, is at its best when students can effectively read, interpret, and discuss images of all kinds and write or create responses in original, meaningful works of art.

The importance of developing visually literate students in the 21st century is without question. “Visual literacy as a field of research, study, and teaching becomes increasingly important with the ever-expanding proliferation of mass media in society. As more and more information and entertainment is acquired through non-print media (such as television), the ability to think critically and visually about the images presented becomes a crucial skill” (Arizona State University Libraries [ASU], 2009). The challenge for art educators lies in creating relevant, engaging lessons that encourage critical
thinking and awareness of the mass media, while also supporting and encouraging students to use their personal voice, as opposed to generic imagery, when creating works of art. In this thesis, I intend to prove that students as young as ten-years-old are able to sift through the masses of visual information they receive, develop an ability to identify and interpret the codes of visual language, and to create informed works of art using these codes in a visual narrative form to express their childhood thoughts and dreams.

This thesis addresses the topic of visual literacy through a unit of study created and presented to two art classes. These classes total a group of 53 (one group of 26 and one group of 27), fifth grade students from the suburban town of Bridgewater, MA. In both classes, approximately a third of the students were on Individualized Education Plans (IEP’s) for various reasons and were part of a full inclusion model with minimal pull out for special services. Through the course of these lessons, students reviewed the use of artist’s visual codes (previously know as the elements of art and principles of design). They then analyzed how magazine advertisements utilized these codes in various ways to sell a product. Students also observed how artists and illustrators, such as Faith Ringgold, use visual codes to evoke certain feelings and to aid in the telling of stories. Students then created a personal inventory of their interests, developed sketches, and created visually narrative story scrolls. Each student reflected on their work by using a rubric self-assessment that asked them to decode the images within their own work.

The unit had two main learning objectives related to the concept of visual literacy: for students to read or be able to interpret and discuss an array of codes in a variety of media, and to then to apply that knowledge by learning to write or create their own works
of art using the same codes to depict a story that was personally significant. The format of a visual narrative story scroll was chosen to expand on the student’s prior knowledge of book illustrations and story telling with the use of a beginning, middle and end as a framework. To encourage the individual expression of the students, they were asked to create their story scroll using their choice of media: pencil, crayon, marker, colored pencil, watercolor, cut or torn paper, or mixed media. The subject matter related to the central theme “A Dream I’d Like to Come True.”

Chapter 2: Reading Codes for Visual Literacy discusses why it is important to teach students visual decoding skills in the 21st century. While the traditional definition of literacy is stressed in all public school curricula, children need to be exposed to visual literacy skills that will prepare them to navigate through a society that requires them to be multi-literate. I present two lessons in which students learn to define and interpret visual codes in advertisements, picture books, and fine art. Chapter 3: Writing Codes for Visual Literacy presents lesson three, which focuses on reinforcing the decoding skills learned in lessons one and two. This lesson also guides students through the process of encoding visual codes into their own works of art. The goal of this lesson is for students to begin to move from cultural consumers to cultural creators by learning to decode and encode visual codes in personally meaningful, narrative forms. The relevance of using a narrative format is also discussed in this chapter. Chapter 4: Developing Visual Literacy Skills: Results, Conclusions, and Reflections presents statistical results from lessons one, two, and three, includes representative samples of student work, and conclusions from creating and teaching this instructional unit. The Appendices include a formal unit plan with
mapping to the Massachusetts Visual Art Standards, handouts used during the unit, the rubric used to evaluate the final project, and a list of picture books used to support the visual literacy lessons.
CHAPTER 2: READING CODES FOR VISUAL LITERACY

The use of visual codes dates back to symbolic markings of cave people as they commemorated the hunt (Lacy, 1986, p.13). Throughout time, children have shown that they learn to scribble or make marks, tell stories about their mark making, and recognize symbols and pictures created by others before they develop the skills necessary to decode letters and words (Brandley, 2005, p.1). One could argue then, that visual literacy development is the foundation of all other literacies. Currently in a public school curriculum the traditional definition of literacy, in terms of decoding words and comprehending what is read, is emphasized. As essential skills continue to be focused on, the boundaries between specific literacies need to be broken down and interdisciplinary literacy connections must be fostered to fully educate children in the 21st century (Piro, 2002, para. 26).

Due to the immense variety of images they are exposed to on a daily basis, it is important that children develop an equally varied set of visual literacy decoding strategies at an early age. J. M. Piro states that, “Students live multi-textual lives inside and outside of the classroom, and this demands they become versatile learners able to construct meaning from images they meet head-on in everything from storybook pictures to corporate logos and animated movies” (Piro, 2002, para. 26). Although many art curricula include lessons on analyzing exemplar works, art educators must also create room to explore ways these decoding skills transfer to viewing imagery when students are not in school. David Trend (1992) argues that, “Young people are alienated by the disparity between the type of literacies sanctioned in school and the literacies they
practice in their daily lives” (p. 53). It is time for our educational practices, in and outside of the art room, to focus on teaching to the multi-literate needs of our students. By spending time in the classroom to identify the source of an image and decode the intention behind it, students quickly increase their visual literacy skills. In addition, these activities lead students to discover that texts can have more than one meaning, and that these investigation techniques can apply to a variety of media genres in and out of the classroom (Anstey & Bull, 2006, 96).

In the Massachusetts Visual Arts Standards (Appendix F) for grades PreK-12 there are five areas of focus that directly connect to visual literacy. First, in Learning Standard 2, students must be able to define visual codes, or “demonstrate knowledge of the elements and principles of design” (Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework [MACF], 1999, p. 7). These codes can include, but are not limited to, line, space, shape, value, color, texture, pattern, and movement. Learning to identify and understand the meaning of these codes is the foundation of visual literacy development. Much like a child in pre-reading stages must learn to recognize letters and how to track print from left to right, recognizing visual codes is an important first step towards visual literacy. Second, Learning Standard 5 addresses the area of Critical Response. To exhibit their skills in this area, “Students will describe and analyze their own work and the work of others using appropriate visual arts vocabulary. When appropriate, students will connect their analysis to interpretation and evaluation.” (MACF, 1999, p.7) Whether students are interpreting ancient hieroglyphics, an abstract painting, or a classmate’s drawing, the
more robust their vocabulary of visual codes is, the more clearly they will be able to communicate their ideas.

There are three learning standards that address the deeper connections students can make when decoding works of art. In Standard 6, Purposes and Meanings in the Arts, students get to the heart of the messages behind works of art. “Students…describe the purposes for which works of dance, music, theater, visual arts, and architecture were and are created, and when appropriate, interpret their meanings” (MACF, 1999, p. 7). Learning Standard 7 relates to visual literacy in that it focuses on the roles that artists play in communities. This aspect is important when decoding imagery because students not only learn about the artist, but also about the time period and cultural context in which a work of art was made. This standard states that, “Students will describe the roles of artists, patrons, cultural organizations, and arts institutions in societies of the past and present” (MACF, 1999, p.7). Lastly, Standard 8 discusses Concepts of Style, Stylistic Influence, and Stylistic Change. In this standard, “Students will demonstrate their understanding of styles, stylistic influence, and stylistic change by identifying when and where works were created, and by analyzing characteristic features of art works from various historical periods, cultures, and genres” (MACF, 1999, p.8). Visual literacy skills mean that students learn to decode a variety of art from varying styles and are able to locate defining cultural characteristics within multiple art contexts.

These learning standards are not taught independently, but are interwoven with each other as one teaches her students visual literacy skills. While none of the standards directly use the term visual literacy, each independent goal supports a broader mission: to
be able to think critically, understand, and communicate about a wide variety of imagery and ideas. This set of learning standards addresses many forms of art. However, it does not acknowledge imagery in the mass media. Yenawine (1997) states,

Different skills are called upon to construct meaning from the huge variety of images in contemporary culture... Some images ask to be understood at face value. Others have greater built-in complexity, including the possibility of symbolic, implied, and mysterious meanings. Presumably, the visually literate person can comprehend on various levels whatever he or she chooses (p.1).

If we don’t take the time to address the visual language and meaning of popular culture in arts curricula, then we risk students not knowing that their analytical skills from the classroom do transfer into the real world.

In the unit plan I developed entitled “Story Scrolls: A Dream I’d Like to Come True” (Appendix A), I wanted to first teach my fifth grade students how to practice visual literacy skills when looking at images from the mass media, in this case, magazine advertisements. I waited to teach this unit towards the end of a sixty-day trimester so that my students had an active working vocabulary of visual codes. For vocabulary comfort, we called them “artist codes” in the classroom. To begin the unit, we first needed to review the codes we had used throughout the trimester. The eight codes I chose to focus on due to exposure through prior lessons, were line, shape, color, value, texture, pattern, space, and movement. In my first lesson, these codes were listed on a poster on the board and we discussed the term “code” as this term signifies a recent paradigm shift in the art education world. Students came to understand the word “codes” as a synonym for the
terms “Elements of Art” or “Principles of Design” which various art teachers have taught them in the past.

On day one of the unit, during Lesson One, I wanted to make sure all students were clear on the definition of each code. First, they broke up into small groups of 3 or 4 students. Each group had a large sheet of newsprint that had one code name on it, such as “Line”. With the assistance of an “Artist Codes” handout (Appendix B), students had approximately 5 minutes to write down as much information as they could about their code. Students were reassured that this work was not for a grade, rather they were acting as “art detectives” and needed to “crack each code” to inform the class about it’s many uses. After showing a poster for “Movement” that I created (see Figure 2), I instructed students that they could write a definition of their word, describe examples of art projects we had done in the past using that code, or draw examples of what that code could look like. When students were done, each team had a turn to describe what they had documented about their code.

Now that the codes were fresh in my students’ minds, we moved onto the second activity, which focused on reading codes. Continuing with the “Art Detectives” theme, students were given the challenge of selecting a magazine advertisement and cracking the codes used in their chosen image. In order to assure the appropriateness of the content, I had pre-selected sixty advertisements prior to the lesson. Using a handout entitled “Art Detectives: Cracking the Secret Codes of Advertisements” (Appendix C) students identified the most prominent codes in the image, analyzed their ads, and wrote down their results. When they finished, individual students volunteered to come to the front of
Figure 2

Teacher Created “Movement” Poster

Used as a Sample to Show Student Teams Various Ways to Define a Code
the room, hold up their ad, and describe their findings to the class. As we moved through a few student descriptions, we changed the format to challenge the seated students to choose the three or four main codes they thought were highlighted in each ad and what type of audience they thought the ad was targeting. Through these two experiences, students gained a deeper knowledge of what codes are, and how they convey a message to consumers to sell products.

On day two of the unit, I began Lesson Two by discussing the use of codes in book illustrations. As stated by Michele Anstey and Geoff Bull (2006), “The contemporary picture book incorporates characteristics that require…understandings on the part of the reader and therefore is particularly suited to the teaching of new literacies” (p.83). To begin the lesson, I showed each class a large reproduction of Faith Ringgold’s story quilt, Tar Beach (see Figure 3). We discussed the codes that students thought were most prominent. Space, pattern, color, and movement were all common answers. Students were encouraged to explain why they chose each code and to describe how Ringgold used the code throughout her work. I then held up the children’s book of the same title, also created by Faith Ringgold, and asked the students if anyone had read the story. In each class a student who had read the story was able to describe the basic plot. They explained that Tar Beach is about a girl named Cassie Louise Lightfoot who falls asleep on the rooftop of the apartment building where her family lives in Harlem, New York. She dreams that she can fly above Harlem and that whatever she flies over, she then owns (Ringgold, 1991). Referring to the production part of this lesson, I asked students to keep the theme of “a dream they’d like to come true” in their mind.
Following this discussion, I gathered students around a large table. I laid out thirty children’s books that I had chosen for their varied use of codes (see Appendix G for a list of the picture books used). The illustrations were created out of cut and torn paper, pencil, marker, paint, and a variety of other media. My intention was to inspire students to select their own media during the production portion of the lesson that would follow. I asked students to choose a book and tell the class what code or codes stood out to them the most. I explained that these books, while they might reflect a younger reading level, were all vivid examples of how artists use codes in a variety of ways. As fifth-grade students are used to focusing their attention on the written word in a book, I pointed out how picture books also show how artists repeat visual codes to develop a story in a narrative form. Referring to contemporary picture books, Anstey and Bull (2006) state, “The narrative in a postmodern picture book is constructed by the illustrative text through the images and by the written text through the words...This requires the reader to be knowledgeable...about how the grammar of illustrative text constructs meaning” (p. 83-84).

To follow this activity, I had students in one of the two classes choose a page from a picture book and evaluate the codes the illustrator used (see the bottom half of Appendix C). With the second group of students, I made the decision to make this written portion verbal instead and we moved onto the next part of the lesson (*see explanation in Chapter 4). The two activities, one reviewing codes and cracking the codes used in ads, and the other reading the codes used in the fine art of Faith Ringgold and children’s book
Figure 3

*Tar Beach*, Faith Ringgold, 1988, Acrylic on canvas, tie-dyed, pieced fabric border

74 x 69”, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Retrieved from: [http://www.faithringgold.com/ringgold/d06.htm](http://www.faithringgold.com/ringgold/d06.htm)

Used with Permission from the Artist
illustrations, were grounded in a basic concept of literacy. In order to develop visual literacy skills; one must first be able to read, in other words identify and interpret, the artist’s visual codes. Michele Anstey and Geoff Bull (2006) offer guidelines for critically engaging with a variety of texts in the 21st century. They state that the following points need to be understood when reading or interpreting texts:

1) All texts are consciously constructed and have specific social, cultural, political, and economic purposes.

2) Text comes in a variety of representational forms that incorporate a range of rules and semiotic systems therefore, viewers may need to draw from more than one rule to engage with some texts.

3) Changes in society and technology will continue to challenge and affect texts and their representational forms.

4) There may be more than one way of reading or viewing a text depending on a range of contextual (e.g., social, cultural, economic, or political) factors.

5) There is a need to consider the possible meanings of a text, how it is instructing the reader, and the world of the reader. (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 83)

During these lessons, students learned how to read artists’ visual codes by actively observing, writing about, and discussing the ways codes are encoded in a variety of imagery. “Text can no longer be seen as print only amid a much more visual culture with the increased use of images in information and communication technologies. These visual texts require new ways of understanding and new systems of analysis for the full realization of meaning by the reader and viewer” (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 3). In addition,
reading codes requires the reader to know that meaning is created by their interpretation and that meaning is not fixed. Through these lessons in reading codes students learned that these essential decoding skills can and should be used to break down a variety of visual media inside and outside the classroom.
CHAPTER 3: WRITING CODES FOR VISUAL LITERACY

Once students learn to read visual codes they can begin to move from positions as cultural consumers to cultural creators by making informed works of art. David Trend (1992) states, “Missing in most school curricula are the notions of active writing, whereby individuals tell their own stories or explore community concerns. Experiences of popular culture or personal history are rarely given credence” (p. 53-54). Trend’s statement suggests a major disconnect between how students are engaged in and out of school. In addition, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996) state,

Until now, language, especially written language, was the most highly valued…and the most meticulously policed code in our society…this is now changing in favor of visual communication [and] educationalists should…rethink what ‘literacy’ ought to include, and what should be taught under the heading of ‘writing’ in schools (p. 32).

To bring depth to the experiences of decoding works of art, I wanted students to have the opportunity to immediately use their knowledge and write, or create, with visual codes to tell their personal stories. In doing so, they would knowingly be able to leave their mark and exercise their voice in their classroom and school communities.

After students were finished decoding the work of various children’s book illustrators, Lesson 3 began when both classes were given a handout entitled “My Personality Inventory” (Appendix D). This was given to students to individually reflect upon some of their favorite people, places, and things and also to stimulate their
imaginations regarding people they would like to meet, places they would like to visit and activities they might like to try in the future.

As students finished writing their thoughts about the future, I had them focus their attention on the “Tar Beach” poster mounted on the board at the front of the classroom. I told them that for the next project, they would be creating a scene reflecting the theme “A Dream I’d Like to Come True”. Inspired by Faith Ringgold’s story quilts and their personality inventories, students were asked to develop a sketch in the form of a “story scroll”. To add visual meaning to their work, they would choose at least three codes to focus on to help tell their story.

After sketching their work on 8 ½” x 11” drawing paper, students were told that their final version, which we would begin during the next class period, would be quite a bit larger (although not as large as Ringgold’s quilt). I chose a large scroll format to allow students to show their theme in narrative form with three parts: beginning, middle, and end. Students were encouraged to work vertically or horizontally. The large size of their final story scrolls, approximately 12” x 36”, would allow them to repeat their codes in a sequential manner.

During the third day of the unit as a class, we reviewed what we had discussed the day before, noting Faith Ringgold’s use of codes in the story quilt “Tar Beach”. Students then offered examples of the ideas they had written on their “Personality Inventory” and told the class what types of images they would like to create in their story scroll. In order to allow students creative freedom and to empower them to choose appropriate media for the codes they were going to focus on, they were encouraged to select the art media of
their choice: pencil (shading optional), maker, crayon, colored pencil, watercolor, collage and mixed media. Because we were nearing the end of the art trimester, each student had been exposed to all the media choices and could make informed decisions connecting their imagery, codes, and media. I showed students an example of how they could cut their poster board to create their long scroll. I also showed them an example of a story scroll that I had begun, and had purposely not finished so as to not influence their work, to show them how they might choose their codes and media.

When students were ready, they were able cut their poster board and begin enlarging their ideas to create their Story Scroll. If they needed guidance with visual coding and media selection, I brought them over to the table where I had left out the 30 children’s books and we would browse the various illustrations together for inspiration. Production of the story scrolls continued for the next six class periods. Students were shown the grading rubric (Appendix E) for the project and it was posted on the board in the front of the room so they could view the grading criteria at any point during the lesson.

To begin each day as a class, we would view sketches or discuss ideas that had been created the day before. During each period, if a student created something in a unique way or showed outstanding use of visual codes and craftsmanship, I would ask for that student’s permission and pause the class to view their exemplary work (see Figure 4 for images of students engaged in creating the story scrolls). At the end of each day we would discuss any challenges that students faced, such as deciding what order to layer their mixed media, and classmates or I would offer suggestions.
Figure 4

Students Engaged in Creating Story Scrolls
On the tenth and final day of the unit, students had approximately ten minutes of working time to finalize their story scrolls. To create a scroll effect, students were shown how to add string in a triangular shape to the ends of their poster board. Some students also chose to cut and glue colored strips of tissue paper to add a banner effect. As a class we then reviewed the grading rubric for the project. Students silently filled in their rubric and wrote reflections on their use of the visual literacy codes. Rubrics were attached to each scroll and students then volunteered to show their work to the class. Each volunteer could either hold their story scroll or have me hold it in front of the class.

As students brought their work up to the front of the room, classmates could raise their hand and offer a “star” (a specific compliment), or a “wish” (a suggestion or a question for clarification). One class finished a few days early and their work was finished in time to be displayed in the school-wide “Spring Night of the Arts” show. The second class was a few days behind due to state testing, but they had the opportunity to have their work displayed in the school foyers before the end of the school year.

The learning objectives focused on during the Story Scroll unit (Appendix A) encompassed a number of Massachusetts Visual Art Standards (see table on page 27 for mapping of standards to unit). Learning Standard 1: Media, Materials and Techniques was addressed as students were able to select and work with a variety of media (MACF, 1999, p.6). Skills regarding materials and techniques that had been used in previous lessons were called upon again and students were able to demonstrate and build upon their past knowledge. Standard 2: Elements and Principles of Design was addressed as students first defined visual codes including line, shape, color, value, texture, pattern,
space and movement (MACF, 1999, p.6). Students also learned how to identify each code in a variety of imagery. Using this knowledge, students were able to encode their own works of art using the same codes. Standard 3: Observation, Abstraction, Invention and Expression was addressed as students were encouraged to brainstorm and create original ideas based on the theme “A Dream I’d Like to Come True” (MACF, 1999, p.7). Students addressed Learning Standard 4: Drafting, Revising, and Exhibiting, by creating sketches, enlarging their work and making adjustments to the content as needed, and having the opportunity to have their work displayed in school (MACF, 1999, p.7). Standard 5: Critical Response was addressed as students discussed their work and the work of their classmates using visual arts vocabulary (MACF, 1999, p.7). In addition, they also filled in a rubric and read teacher feedback on the same assessment. Lastly, learning Standard 6: Purposes of the Arts was addressed as students analyzed various art forms including advertisements, picture book illustrations, and fine art. They were able to decode this imagery using visual literacy skills obtained in lessons one and two.
Mapping of Massachusetts Visual Art Standards to Story Scroll Unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MASSACHUSETTS VISUAL ART STANDARD ADDRESSED</th>
<th>HOW THE STORY SCROLL UNIT ADDRESSES THE STANDARD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Media, Materials, and Techniques</td>
<td>Students will be able to draw upon past experiences to select and work with a variety of media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students will demonstrate knowledge of the media, materials, and techniques unique to visual arts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Elements and Principles of Design</td>
<td>Students will be able to define, identify and interpret visual artist codes (or elements and principles of design). They will encode 3 or more visual codes in their own works of art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students will demonstrate knowledge of the elements and principles of design, also known as visual codes, including space, line, texture, shape, value, color and movement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Observation, Abstraction, Invention, and Expression</td>
<td>Students will brainstorm original ideas through filling out a “Personality Inventory”, create sketches based on the theme “A Dream I’d Like to Come True”, enlarge their ideas on a story scroll format and create a final narrative work of art using a variety of media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students will demonstrate their powers of observation, abstraction, invention, and expression in a variety of media, materials and techniques.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Drafting, Revising, and Exhibiting</td>
<td>Students will create sketches, critique each other’s work, assess their own work on a rubric, make revisions as needed, and have the opportunity to exhibit their work in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students will demonstrate knowledge of the processes of creating and exhibiting their own artwork: drafts, critique, self-assessment, refinement, and exhibit preparation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Critical Response</td>
<td>Students will describe and analyze their work and the work of others using visual codes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students will describe and analyze their own work and the work of others using appropriate visual arts vocabulary. Students will connect their analysis to interpretation and evaluation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Purposes of the Arts</td>
<td>Students will decode and analyze magazine advertisements, picture book illustrations, and Faith Ringgold’s Tar Beach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students will describe the purposes for which a variety of works of visual art were created, and interpret their meanings.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4: DEVELOPING VISUAL LITERACY SKILLS RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

As stated previously, visual literacy is a dialogic process based upon decoding and encoding. The following diagram provides a conceptual framework for the Story Scroll curriculum unit.

Figure 5. Dialogic Visual Literacy Process In Story Scrolls Unit
Adapted from Schramm’s Later Model of Communication (Moore & Dwyer, 1994, p.91)
Lesson One Results

To begin this unit, teams of students “cracked” or decoded visual codes: line, shape, color, texture, space, value, pattern, and movement (see Figure 6 for pattern and texture posters). It was crucial to take the time to introduce this lesson first, as we repeatedly used these terms throughout the unit. Because we had covered lessons during the trimester that addressed each code with the exception of movement, students were familiar with each term. To include movement in their visual code vocabulary, I defined this code for my students by creating a sample poster that defined and showed examples of how it can be created in imagery (see Figure 2).

In approximately five minutes, groups of 3 or 4 students were asked to fill a large sheet of newsprint and brainstorm definitions, draw examples, or write project ideas that involved their code. In both classes, the students responded well to this format. Students appeared to be most comfortable defining line, shape, texture, and pattern as they have been taught about these codes beginning in their earliest years of elementary school. They had an easy time listing colors and values and writing basic definitions, but had a more difficult time elaborating on their potential uses. This could be due to their limited experiences with certain codes, especially space and movement.

The code “space” appeared to be the most challenging for students to define. When I noticed the difficulty students were having, I reminded them of the two projects we had done earlier in the trimester discussing space: one focused on one-point perspective house drawings and the other with scale change in landscape paintings. After
Figure 6

Student Team Created “Pattern” and “Texture” Posters
reviewing the posters both groups created, it appeared that the concepts regarding space might still be a bit abstract for some students. Eager to create, a few students in each class asked, “When do we get to make art?” I knew the process of defining codes would be fairly quick and highly beneficial exercise to set up the lessons to come, so I reassured them to be patient and the “fun” would soon begin.

In the second part of lesson one, students were asked to play artistic detectives and to use their knowledge of codes to crack or decode images in magazine ads. They chose one magazine ad from a stack of sixty that I had chosen prior to the lesson to assure appropriate content. On a handout entitled “Art Detectives: Cracking the Secret Codes of Advertisements” (Appendix C), students were asked to identify the object being sold and to: 1) locate and describe a focal point, 2) identify and circle (on the handout) the main codes used in the ad, 3) explain the mood of the ad (and how the codes helped to create that mood), and 4) explain their reason for choosing their ad. Students had approximately 10 minutes to quietly observe, analyze and write down their analysis. When all students were finished decoding their ads, volunteers were asked to come to the front of the room and share their observations. To change the format, some students volunteered to come to the front with their ad while their classmates raised their hands to offer their observations of the three or four main visual codes used in the ad.

The impression that I received while the students actively worked on decoding the ads was that they were excited to have time during the school day to look at and choose images from the mass media. Other than the occasional collage lesson or poster project, they are not encouraged to take the time to look through magazines during class.
Once they had decoded their ad, the majority of students were able to identify the product, focal point, and main visual codes used in the ad. Approximately 20 percent of the 53 students spent time trying to identify all eight of the codes in their ad, thus missing the focus on selecting the main codes used. When I teach this lesson again, I will specify on the handout that students should circle the three or four most prominent codes in each advertisement.

Questions 3 and 4 on the handout seemed to be more difficult for students to answer. When answering question 3 regarding the mood created in a L’Oreal skincare ad, student “Jen” stated, “The mood is wet (all the water droplets) and bright because the blue against the white” (see Figure 7). She also had difficulty identifying the product as she wrote that the product being advertised was “L’Oreal Shampoo” when in actuality it is “Pore Tightening Astringent”. This seems to be an oversight due to her attention being focused on filling out information about the codes. When Jen answered question 4 as to why she selected her ad, she responded with, “It led me to this ad because it had a lot of codes.” Student “Billy” answered question 3 regarding a Target advertisement that the mood is, “Thirsty by making coke cans everywhere” (see Figure 8). Billy answered question 4 by stating, “I like coke and NO code influenced me”. At the age of 10, this student is already showing brand loyalty to certain products and feels that he is immune to the influences of advertising.

After examining all of the student responses, I would change the wording of question 3 regarding “mood.” The identification of moods in images was eliminated as a learning objective. Instead of asking students to describe the mood created in the ad, I
Figure 7

“Jen’s” Advertisement and Art Detectives Worksheet

Art Detectives: Cracking the Secret Codes of Advertisements

Name: ____________________________  Product Being Advertised: L'oreal shampoo

1. What is the first thing that your eyes are drawn to? (This is the FOCAL POINT.)
   The bottle of shampoo in the middle.

2. What do you think are the main codes used in this ad? Circle one or more.
   
   [ ] Line
   [ ] Shape
   [ ] Space
   [ ] Value
   [ ] Movement
   [ ] Pattern

3. Based on your above choice(s), what mood do you think this ad creates (happy, calm, excited, scary, thoughtful, etc.)? Explain how this ad creates this mood (think of the above terms you circled).
   Their mood is wet (call the water drop) and bright because the blue against the white.

4. What lead you to choose this ad? How might the codes used have influenced your choice?
   It led me to this ad because it had a lot of codes.
Figure 8

“Billy’s” Advertisement and Art Detectives Worksheet
would change the question to ask students to describe how each prominent code is shown in the ad. For example students could say, “I chose pattern because wallpaper with stripes covers the background.” In the future if I decide to keep the question about mood, I would need to spend more time defining that term to my students.

As for question 4, I would continue to ask students what led them to choose their ad, but not ask them how the codes might have influenced their choice. It’s clear to me after reading comments such as Billy’s that some students at this age are not aware of the power of advertising and do not think their choices as a consumer are influenced by ads. Some of them may never make this realization in my classroom and thus, think they are immune to the seduction of advertisements. To completely shift my student’s views on the mass media and popular culture was outside the scope of this unit plan but it remains relevant.

In conclusion, students enjoyed identifying visual codes in the magazine advertisements. They enjoyed the challenge of “cracking the codes” in images that they see everyday and most often see outside of the classroom. The majority of students were successful at pointing out codes that were the most prominent in each ad. Some students were able to figure out what moods the codes represented in the context of the ads, and some viewed the codes in a more literal way. While the identification of codes was the main learning objective of this lesson, the benefit of actively viewing and discussing ads will extend beyond the classroom. Students were guided to look at an ad for more than 3 seconds; the time advertising companies believe it takes to grab a consumer’s attention (Hough, 2005, para.1). Not only did they look at ads, but they also decoded images
created to elicit targeted reactions from consumers, thus planting a seed for greater awareness of mass media devices.

Lesson Two Results

To begin the second day of decoding, we began by viewing a large reproduction of Faith Ringgold’s story quilt “Tar Beach”. First, students identified the most prominent codes used in the quilt. Color, pattern, space, and movement were all student responses. I was impressed that some students picked up on the use of spatial depth in the quilt, as Ringgold created a tilted birds-eye view of her rooftop dream scene in Harlem. In addition, students in both classes were able to describe how Ringgold created movement by repeating colors and patterns throughout the scene. Although space and movement had been the two most difficult codes for students to define in the first lesson of the unit, this class discussion was another way to illustrate the two codes in a new way.

We continued by discussing the plot of Ringgold’s picture book, Tar Beach, which she wrote based on her story quilt of the same name. After discussing the basic story about a young girl who dreams she can fly over Harlem and take ownership of all that she sees, we moved onto viewing other illustrations. My initial plan was to make sure that students had a firm grasp on identifying codes in a variety of media. To do so, I had them each select a picture book from a stack of approximately 30 (see Appendix G for list of books). I had selected the books prior to teaching the lesson for their variety of illustrations and media. Illustrations included images created with watercolor, collage, pencil, cut paper, and mixed media. I then asked students to decode one page or the cover from their chosen book, just as they had done with the magazine ads during our last
class period. They were to fill out the bottom half of the “Art Detectives” handout they used when they decoded their ad (Appendix C).

I taught this lesson to the first group of students, and they responded with low levels of enthusiasm. The students expressed that they wanted to begin the hands-on portion of the project and that they were tired of writing. They said that they view art as a time to “have fun”. While I had hoped this would not be the case, I should have predicted their reaction to this extended period of writing. It has been my experience after 5 years of teaching that any time lessons include extended periods of writing in the art room, as short as they may be, students become resistant. I assured this first group of students that we would quickly go through this portion together. The activity took approximately 15 minutes total and we then moved onto the production or encoding portion of the unit.

Although they were successful at identifying the codes used in the variety of picture book illustrations, the majority of the students written responses were quick and superficial observations. Due to the resistant response from this class, I decided to alter the lesson before I taught it to the second class. Wanting the students to gain the same core experience of decoding the illustrations, I decided to discuss, rather than have students write about, the variety of codes used in the picture books. The second group was decidedly more responsive to discussing the codes used in books that volunteers selected, as opposed to the group that wrote to decode the illustrations. When I teach this lesson again, I plan on breaking up the two decoding lessons by having students begin their sketches in between the advertisement and illustration lessons. This way, students
would have a mental break from the process and have had a chance to actively apply codes in their own work.

Lesson Three Results

To introduce the encoding process to students, I reminded them of our discussion regarding the story of *Tar Beach*. I told the students that similar to Ringgold’s work, the theme of the next project would be “A Dream I’d Like to Come True”. To brainstorm about this theme, I gave students a “Personality Inventory” (Appendix D) to fill in. This questionnaire asked students to list items such as, “Three places I’d like to travel to (real or imaginary)” and “Favorite food” (see Figure 9). An interesting observation I made during this lesson was that the majority of the students enjoyed filling this sheet in, even though they were writing. The fact that there were no right or wrong answers and that they were writing brief ideas about themselves proves that it is the type of writing and not the *act* of writing that students can be resistant to in the art room.

The “Personality Inventory” proved to be an engaging way for students to create individualized, rather than generic, ideas for their sketches. After instructing students to create a three-part sketch with a beginning, middle, and end, or narrative format they began to draw on small white paper. I chose this narrative format as a way for students to show their knowledge of codes by having the opportunity to repeat them in multiple scenes (see Figure 10). In addition, I wanted to give students a chance to tell their story as a way to show their creativity in an open-ended, yet sequential way. Trend (1992) states,

Our narrative relationships are constantly in flux—both those we find in books
Figure 9

Student “Personality Inventory”
Figure 10

“Melissa’s” Sketch in Preparation for “Story Scroll: A Dream I’d Like to Come True”
Figure 11

Students Engaged in Developing Story Scrolls
and the diverse narratives we encounter in such items as movies [and] television…Our understandings of many of these texts are…always partial and incomplete, always in need of some revision to adapt them to change and circumstance. As people continue to adjust and adapt our interpretations, they are making the meaning that is culture (p. 63).

Keeping the theme of “A Dream I’d Like to Come True” in mind, students synthesized ideas from their Inventories and were encouraged to change their ideas as they saw fit. After viewing student’s sketches and final copies, many students altered their sketches as they worked on their final copies (see Figure 11).

When the majority of students finished their sketches, each class was instructed on how to cut a length of poster board for their final copy. This long poster would be called a “Story Scroll” and students were challenged to focus on showing three or four codes in their work, similar to Ringgold’s story quilt. I chose this long, large format to allow students ample room to develop their stories and to thoroughly explore the use of three or more codes in their imagery. As students began transferring and enlarging their sketch ideas onto their scrolls, I encouraged them think about the orientation (vertical or horizontal) of their poster board and the media that they thought would best show the codes they were going to highlight. The project rubric was also introduced at the beginning of the production period so all students were aware and comfortable with the grading criteria for the project. For each graded lesson during the trimester, students always reviewed the rubric before the end of the project as to encourage success for all learners.
In many art projects, there are often students who have a difficult time filling the page. During the Story Scroll project, this was not the case. Students were overwhelmingly excited to be able to work on a large surface. The poster boards were too large to have everyone work in their assigned seats so I encouraged students to work on the floor in designated areas or on empty counter tops. During our class time, if I noticed students were using unique layouts, creative details, or interesting media combinations I would ask for permission to show their art in progress to their peers. For closure at the end of each class I would ask students about any challenges they may have had during their working time. Students offered suggestions and I would remind the class to consider how they would show their codes, and what order they could try to apply their media (pencil sketching first, then overlap the pencil with crayon, then fill the areas with watercolor, etc.). Because students were allowed multiple areas of creative freedom with content, codes, and media selection, they responded actively and were engaged throughout the process (see Figures 12 and 13 for examples of student work).

When approximately 90 percent of the students were finished in both classes I passed out the grading rubric (Appendix E). Together, we went over each of the criteria including five questions worth 20 points each. Students silently filled in their rubrics with their Story Scrolls in front of them. After reviewing question number five on the rubric I realized that the wording could have been more clearly stated. When the students read it, it stated, “5. Connection to Visual Literacy: List each code you focused on to help visually tell your story. Explain why you chose each code (ex. You could connect it to wanting to show a certain emotion in the story or create a certain mood).” After
reviewing the student answers and the slight confusion this question brought, I would word it to say, “5. Connection to Visual Literacy: List each code you focused on to help visually tell your story. Next to each code, explain how you show it throughout your scroll.” I would change the last portion because as stated earlier, the learning objectives did not include the identification of mood in a work of art. Rather, they focus on the identification and application of codes in a variety of visual imagery. I would also change question five to include a section where students could write down the theme of their story. While I heard the ideas behind most of my students work through informal or formal class discussions, I would like to have been able to read their thoughts as well.

Another area on the rubric that some students were confused about was the use of the codes “movement” and “space”. As mentioned previously, these two codes were the newest additions to the student’s vocabulary. The students who chose to write about movement or space in question five often confused them with other definitions of each term. Instead of describing movement as “a way to guide a viewer’s eye around the picture”, approximately half of the students wrote definitions such as “I drew a car that was flying in the air so it showed movement”. For the code space, approximately a third of the students who used the term described it by saying, “I drew a flying gopher in outer space”, rather than, “I showed space by overlapping objects and making things look smaller as they went further back in the picture”. This code did not create as much confusion as movement as we had covered the term space in two projects prior to the story scroll one. When I teach these codes again, I will know next time to spend more time showing examples and defining these two terms as they are used in the art room.
After grading both classes work, there were a total of approximately 12 students that received a grade of 80 or below (4.6%). Most of these students received their grade due to absences or falling behind their classmates for various reasons. Throughout the trimester, it had been my policy that students could revise their artwork during study periods up until the last week of the sixty-day cycle in art. These particular students had two study blocks that they were eligible to sign up for, and they chose to come and finish their work. Coming to the art room during this time was optional but all the students that had received C’s or D’s wanted to take the time to revise their work, which I see as a sign of dedication and pride, infused into their Story Scrolls. Students with grades below 80 did not always want to come to revise their other projects so this was a positive sign. After grades had closed, all 53 students had a recorded grade of 80 or higher.

While in an ideal situation it would have been great to have given both classes the opportunity to display their work at the annual “Spring Night of the Arts” show in our school, unfortunately this was not possible. Due to our class schedules being re-arranged for state testing, one class fell four days behind the other. One class did put their work on display, along with other works of art from the trimester, and parents and family members responded positively. When the second class was finished, I gave them the opportunity to have their work displayed in the art room or school hallways (see Figure 14) and some of the students were happy to do so, while others were eager to take their work home to show family members. The positive response of the students and their family members was gratifying to hear and to know that each step of the unit lead up to these creative, dynamic, and personalized works of art.
Cut paper, crayon, and watercolor techniques (below)

Crayon, marker, and tissue paper (below)

Crayon, colored pencil, markers, and stamps from home (below)

Figure 12

Student Examples of Finished Story Scrolls
Marker (left)

Crayon, colored pencil, maker, and fabric (right)

Figure 13

Student Examples of Finished Story Scrolls
Figure 14

“Story Scrolls: A Dream I’d Like to Come True” on Display
Case Study: “Taylor’s” Story Scroll

One male student named Taylor enjoyed the process of creating the Story Scroll as he and his friend in the class often spent time drawing fantasy scenes of creatures and robots at war (see Figure 15). At the onset of the sketching stage, I reminded all students to keep their dream scene “rated PG” (as I had with other lessons throughout the trimester) to avoid the use of guns and violent scenes in their artwork. These boys always argued that guns are in cartoons and that they should be allowed to show them. We compromised that they could only use paintball guns and that no one could be seen getting hurt.

Taylor was one of my students who was on an IEP for language and processing delays. He had imagination to spare; yet his standard for being “done” as compared to other students in his class was what most would call “unfinished”. After asking him to tell me his story, and describe the codes he focused on, I suggested that he fill in the manila areas with color. After trying this approach gently two or three times, I came to the conclusion that he was indeed “done”! Because his story was full of action with robots and creatures in battle, and he could explain to me that his codes were movement, color, and line, I could let the seemingly “unfinished” areas stay just the way they were.

Students like Taylor often remind me how subjective art is. Despite learning standards and rubrics, there is something to be said for having a conversation about a work of art and appreciating where the artist is coming from. In this case, Taylor is the author, the storyteller, and hopefully, he is has developed his understanding and fluency of visual language.
Figure 15

“Taylor’s” Story Scroll: A Dream He’d Like to Come True & Rubric
Case Study: “Melissa’s” Story Scroll

While Melissa did not speak much during the school day, she made her artistic talents known from the first day of the trimester. As I was transitioning with my new group of students, I asked Melissa’s homeroom teacher, “Why doesn’t she speak in class?” Wanting to know if this was due to my classroom environment or other factors, her teacher informed me that she was new to our school district as of this year. Melissa had apparently endured very traumatic experiences at her previous home in another state. Her mother and soon-to-be stepfather were trying to start a new life, moving in a positive direction. While her teacher had met with the mother and her home life seemed supportive and stable, it was clear that emotional scars had left an indelible mark on this young girl. The few times Melissa did speak in class, it was barely audible. Lucky for her, her classmates were supportive of her and would “interpret” what she was trying to tell me if I could not understand. This unconventional arrangement gave Melissa a small boost in confidence by the end of the trimester and she was speaking more frequently and audibly before the last day of school.

Melissa had a wonderful way of personalizing every art lesson. When she finished a project early, she would go to the “Creativity Center” in the room, take drawing paper back to her seat, and proceed to cover it with an array of dragons and fantasy creature drawings. When given the assignment for the Story Scroll, it was no surprise to anyone that Melissa chose to include a dragon in her “Dream She’d like to Come True” (see Figure 16). As noted on her rubric, the codes she chose to focus on were color, movement, texture, and line. She wrote, “I used texture by using grass. I
used color on the dragon, and around it. I used movement by the dragon’s purple scales. And I used line by the house or tent, and the lines on most of the things in the dream” (see Figure 17).

As stated earlier about the rubric, I wish I had Melissa’s ideas on paper about her Story Scroll. From the arrangement of triangles she chose, it could be read from top to bottom or from the largest triangle in the center, and then proceed in either direction. The powerful, vivid imagery she created does not have to be fully understood to be appreciated. For a ten-year-old girl to have such creative vision and superb craftsmanship is rare. I hope that this experience was positive for Melissa and that art remains a constant in her life and a means of expressing her voice. Potentially, art making can provide a way to bring about peace in her life for many years to come.
Figure 16

“Melissa’s” Story Scroll: A Dream She’d Like to Come True
**Figure 17**

“Melissa’s” Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>20 Points: Above &amp; Beyond</th>
<th>15 Points: Meets Standard</th>
<th>10 Points: Approaching Standard</th>
<th>5 Points: Little/No Evidence</th>
<th>Points Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Craftsmanship of Color/Value</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The overall correctness of the work)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Use of Codes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Line, shape, color, texture, space, value, movement, pattern)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Creativity of Visual Story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The ability to combine visualization with your own idea)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cooperation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(How your work related to the whole project, whether or not you had a positive attitude)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Connection to Visual Literacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(How the story shows your dream and ideas in unique and creative ways)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extra Credit: ___________

Final Grade: ___________
Case Study: “Shane’s” Story Scroll

From the first day I had Shane as my student, he went above and beyond with each task and assignment he was given. In a class of students with various skill levels, he not only had what seemed to be natural artistic ability in terms of draftsmanship, but he also strove to create original ideas for each project (see Figure 18 and 19). The Story Scroll assignment was no exception. When I gave the class the option of working vertically or horizontally, most students chose to work horizontally. Shane chose to work vertically. When I showed students that they could divide their picture plane into three sections in a variety of ways, Shane chose to create various sized triangles with wavy lines. With regard to his subject matter, he chose to create a series of boat scenes. This lead him to use a watercolor and crayon resist technique, along with salt and gradient techniques which students had been taught earlier in the trimester.

Reading Shane’s Personality Inventory gave me insight into why he chose the subject matter he did. Listed under, “What would your dream job be in the future and why?” Shane stated that he would like to be an oceanographer. Under, “Three activities I’d like to try in the future” he wrote, “Buy a yacht and go sailing”. While he was a very polite and conscientious student, he could be a bit shy at times when describing his work in front of his classmates, perhaps due to fear of them feeling intimidated or envious of his work. Also, I think he didn’t want his classmates to steal or copy his ideas, as this is often a concern of fifth grade art students.

When viewing streamers Shane was gluing to the right hand side of his Story Scroll, I asked him if he’d rather put them along the bottom. Being respectful yet calm
he stated, “No, I like them along the side.” Shane reminded me of the importance of keeping my personal biases in this case. My bias for symmetry, in check. Shane proved to be a role model student within his group of peers. His work reflects his willingness to try new ideas and challenge the standard point of view. He is just one of many examples of how my students keep me on my toes and teach me something new every day.
Figure 18

“Shane’s” Story Scroll: A Dream He’d Like to Come True
**Figure 19**

"Shane’s" Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>20 Points: Above &amp; Beyond</th>
<th>15 Points: Meets Standard</th>
<th>10 Points: Approaching Standard</th>
<th>5 Points: Little/No Evidence</th>
<th>Points Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Craftsmanship of Color/Value (The neatness and quality of your work)</td>
<td>All of the color/value is neat and finished</td>
<td>Most of the color/value is neat and finished</td>
<td>Some of the color/value is neat and finished</td>
<td>Little/none of the color/value is neat and finished</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Use of Codes (Size, shape, color, texture, space, value, movement, pattern)</td>
<td>4 or more codes are focused on and are repeated throughout the beginning, middle, and end of the scroll</td>
<td>3 codes are focused on, and are repeated in some parts of the beginning, middle, and end of the scroll</td>
<td>2 codes are focused on, and are repeated in a bit of the beginning, middle, and end of the scroll</td>
<td>1 or 0 codes are focused on, and are not repeated in the beginning, middle, and end of the scroll</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Creativity of Visual Story (The ability to combine your visual designs with your own ideas)</td>
<td>The entire story shows your dream and ideas in unique and creative ways</td>
<td>Much of the story shows your dream and ideas in unique and creative ways</td>
<td>Some of the story shows your dream and ideas in unique and creative ways</td>
<td>Little/none of the story shows your dream and ideas in unique and creative ways</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cooperation (Your effort, participation, attitude)</td>
<td>Shows great effort, participation, and has a positive attitude</td>
<td>Shows effort, sometimes participates, and has a positive attitude</td>
<td>Shows little effort, hardly participates, and has a positive attitude</td>
<td>Shows no effort, does not participate or have a positive attitude</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Connection to Visual Literacy: List each code you focused on to help visually tell your story. Explain why you chose each code (ie. You could connect it to wanting to show a certain emotion in the story or create a certain mood). The reason you chose each code is what really helped the story.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>B+</th>
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<th>B-</th>
<th>C+</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D+</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>D-</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rating</td>
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<td>91-90</td>
<td>81-90</td>
<td>82-80</td>
<td>72-81</td>
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<td>69-71</td>
<td>68-68</td>
<td>62-65</td>
<td>59-59</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Final Grade: Excellent
Conclusions & Reflections

In this thesis, I aimed to present visual codes as a language and also as an entryway into building my fifth grade students artistic vocabulary and confidence when decoding meaning in imagery. Once they understood that images carry meanings, they were able to use visual codes as tools to encode or create meaning in their own work. The element of choice was a key factor in students developing their work. Each student was encouraged to select their own theme to create into a visual narrative, their own media, and three or more codes to help visually tell their story. This challenged students to think critically and synthesize multiple factors to create truly original and personally meaningful works of art.

I realized early on in my research of developing visual literacy instruction that it is important to combine culturally relevant images with strategies for decoding works of art.

Accessible imagery allows viewers to discover intended meanings on their own. Each encounter leads to successful interpretation, without expert intervention. From this, viewers learn to trust that most art can be interpreted to a meaningful degree through examination, association, and deduction - and that they are capable of this level of interpretation (Yenawine, 2003, p.8)

This concept takes the more standard classroom use of identifying visual codes in fine art exemplars, and applies the concept to imagery that is readily found in the mass media and outside of school settings. When students wrote and answered questions to decode images, I learned that the process must be engaging and allow room for personal insight.
Questions must directly connect back to central learning objectives so that students understand the purpose of their writing and have ample time to spend exercising their creative voice.

In his book *Stealing Innocence: Corporate Culture’s War on Children*, Henry Giroux (2000) cites a disturbing quote from Consumer Union Education Services. The passage states, “School is…the ideal time to influence attitudes, build long-term loyalties, introduce new products, test markets, promote sampling and trial usage and-above all- to generate immediate sales” (p. 83). If this is indeed what marketing agencies have in mind, it in turn becomes our job as educators, parents, and community members to stand up against our classrooms being overshadowed by commercialism. Giroux (2000) later cites the opposite end of the spectrum and quotes the research of Steve Manning.

Manning states,

In Seattle, parents organized a series of “commercialism walk-throughs” of the schools, collecting as many examples of commercial material as they could. Their findings helped to stop a proposed district wide policy that would have allowed corporate advertising in schools, and led to the formation of a school/community task force to study the issue (p.104).

While my lesson in identifying the visual codes in advertisements was not nearly as radical as the above task force, I hope that the ideas presented will slow students down when viewing imagery and encourage them to think twice when viewing advertisements.

“All too often artists…or teachers cast themselves as experts to whom others should look for answers, inspiration, or insight. As useful as this can be in
mobilizing students…teachers and artists need to recognize their responsibility to create
dialogues with their readers” (Trend, 1992, p.4). As a reflection of Trend’s statement, I
tried to provide my students with every opportunity to make choices and express their
opinions during this unit. Although students made decisions about the subject matter,
media, and codes, one component I would add in the future to help deepen the evaluative
process for students would be in the area of in-process reflections. While students were
continually making thoughtful decisions about their work, I would like to add a time
during the sketching process or in the middle of working on their story scrolls where
students could write about what they are trying to show in their story and explain why
they are using the codes and materials that they select. This could help them understand
how artists actively think and make choices with specific reasons behind their decisions,
and not just “because it looks good”.

As I began to plan the production or encoding portion of the unit, I first thought
I could have students create a book to connect with the narrative structure of the picture
books we would be decoding. After hearing my students discuss how tired they were of
book making (they had recently finished a poetry book project in their English Language
Arts class), I decided that would not be the best format and decided on the story scroll
format instead. In this situation, actively listening and taking part in the casual
conversations of my students proved to be highly beneficial for all of us. Students
enjoyed working in a large format and being able to choose to work vertically or
horizontally. At the end of the unit, many students told me that this project was their
favorite of the trimester “because they got to do whatever they wanted.”
When considering media options, I first was drawn to having students work in cut or torn paper. The more I reflected on this choice, I realized that limiting the use of media in this lesson would also limit their self-expression. After having the students in my room every day for over 40 days, I did not want my students to continue to simply listen to me; I wanted us all to engage in a creative dialog where they could showcase their skills. I believe that is exactly what happened. “When youngsters receive collective authority for the execution of work, art class can become a laboratory for the practice of democratic decision making” (Trend, 1996, p. 92-93). The variety of narrative imagery and aesthetics that can be found in the students’ story scrolls, paired with high levels of craftsmanship and a variety of media choices, proves that students were confident in encoding their ideas and expressing their creative voices.

By encouraging my students to actively use their creative freedom, paired with their knowledge of codes, they were immersed in a dynamic exchange of creative ideas and expression. They were able to experience a shift from consuming images in a concrete way, to being able to decipher messages and devices used in a variety of visual forms. Students also began to think of images as not just works of fine art seen in the artroom, but also magazine advertisements and picture book illustrations which created different contexts in which they were able to decode using visual literacy skills. By making original and personal works of art they were able to analyze and discuss imagery in the mass media, rather than just listen, and tell their own stories.

An area in which I believe this thesis could be expanded upon in the future is in the realm of technology. When beginning the writing process for this document, I
initially thought I would create lessons that would teach visual literacy skills by having students create narrative works of art on the computer. Logistical complications such as scheduling conflicts with the computer lab in school, and my relative inexperience with teaching students in a computer lab setting proved to pose two challenges that appeared insurmountable at the time I was preparing and teaching the unit for this thesis. However, I do realize the importance of digital technologies in the art room and how incorporating them is essential for visual art programs to remain relevant and current sources of creative information for children today. For example, I often use Power Point to introduce lessons and will also enlist the help of Google Images from the one computer in my room when children ask for specific images as inspiration. While these are small steps in the direction of creating a visually literate and technologically engaged room of art students, it is a starting point that I plan on continuing to grow exponentially.

For future purposes, all the lessons included in this thesis could be adapted and taught using multiple forms of technology. For example, Power Point slideshows could be created to show exemplar works and advertisements. Digital cameras could be used by students to capture images that could be downloaded and altered in programs such as Photoshop. Student’s final projects could be digitally created narrative works of art that could be displayed in slide show form on projectors during a school art show or open house. The use of technology to teach visual literacy skills would be another way to encourage students to exercise their creative freedom while infusing lessons with current media.
The Massachusetts Visual Art Standards encompass many areas of art production and appreciation, yet it is clear that there are areas that need to be updated to keep up with the changing dynamic of school cultures. There are a number of standards that address components of visual literacy. However, in order for visual literacy to be elevated to a primary objective that is seen as necessary in the eyes of curriculum developers, administrators, and teachers it must be directly addressed in the standards. This document was published in November of 1999 and a lot has changed in this past decade. Twitter, Facebook, iPods, and a number of other technological advances and are now a part of many households. Parents and guardians, while meaning well, may give into their children’s requests to use new technologies while the adults in the household may not have experience or the skills necessary to engage in dialogs about how to safely use them. These advancements increase the need for visual literacy instruction beginning at least by the fifth grade so that students are equipped to understand the layers of persuasive meaning within the mass media that surrounds them.

With each cultural advancement, multiple literacies need to be employed. Galda states, “Children need the ability to see in the fullest sense and to recognize the significance of what they are seeing. As children become visually literate, they will be able to communicate effectively through both comprehending and creating” (as cited in Brandley, 2005). To have the ability to decode and encode imagery is just the beginning. Teachers must create opportunities for students to analyze and discuss culturally relevant imagery, as well as imagery that exposes them to other cultures. In addition, Trend (1992) states, “…The closest thing to a culture we hold in common is popular
culture…For this reason we must contest…pedagogies that deny the very real ways that we all both consume and *produce* culture” (p. 5). The earlier we can introduce and reinforce dialogic visual literacy skills with our students, the more successful they will be in decoding images and become confident in encoding their own creative pursuits to fully engage in a dialog with the world around them.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: UNIT PLAN: “STORY SCROLLS: A DREAM I’D LIKE TO COME TRUE”

OVERVIEW:

Students will be introduced to the idea that artists and designers use visual codes (also know as the elements of art and principles of design). They will learn that artists use these codes to deliver specific messages to their audience through a variety of media including magazine advertisements, book illustrations, and fine art. Once students are comfortable identifying and interpreting visual codes in these three art forms, they will brainstorm and create a narrative story scroll using the visual codes. The prompt for the story scroll is the theme “A Dream I’d Like to Come True”.

CONCEPT:

Using visual literacy skills, students learn to decode a variety of art and imagery. They can then transfer these skills to encode an original, personal narrative work of art.

GRADE LEVEL/AUDIENCE: Grade 5 (ages 10-11).

Students have had prior exposure to the terms color, line, shape, texture, pattern, and space (they will be introduced to the term ‘movement’). They also have had artistic experiences with using a variety of artistic media including pencil, crayon, marker, colored pencil, watercolor, cut or torn paper, and mixed media.

TIME: 10, 60-minute class periods

OBJECTIVES: Students will be able to:

- Define 8 visual codes: color, line, shape, texture, pattern, space, and movement
- Identify and decode how artists use these visual codes in artistic media including magazine advertisements, picture book illustrations, and the story quilt Tar Beach by Faith Ringgold
- Synthesize and encode their personal experiences, ideas, and dreams into a written personal inventory, sketch, and final “story scroll” based upon the theme “A Dream I’d Like to Come True”
- Select at least 3 visual codes and use them effectively in their narrative project
- Determine and work with artistic media that highlights their selected codes. Choices include: pencil, crayon, marker, colored pencil, watercolor, cut or torn paper, or mixed media.
- Exhibit strong craftsmanship by creating a cohesive final product

VOCABULARY:
• Visual/artist codes: visual tools that artists use often to create meaning, a mood, or idea in a work of art
• Decode: to find or determine what visual codes an artist used to show viewers what they mean
• Encode: to use visual codes to create an original work of art
• Review the codes: color, line, shape, texture, pattern, space, and learn the term movement (See Artist Codes handout for definitions)

LESSON 1 (Day 1): Defining and Decoding Visual Artist Codes

Supports and Materials:
• List of visual codes on the board
• Large newsprint with the name of each code written on 8 separate sheets, markers
• 30 “Artist Codes” handouts (defining visual codes)
• “Art Detectives” decoding worksheet for each student
• 50+ magazine advertisements (age appropriate) in plastic sleeves

Overview:
Working in small groups, students will define a visual code by writing definitions and drawing examples of that code on a large sheet of newsprint. Teams may use the “Artist Codes” handout to assist them if necessary. When they are done, all groups will share their findings with the class. Once the visual codes are defined, students will each select an advertisement to decode. On the “Art Detectives” handout, they will identify the most prominent codes in their ad. As time allows, students will volunteer to share their findings with the class.

LESSON 2 (Day 2): From Decoding to Encoding- Transitions in the Visual Literacy Process

Supports and Materials:
• 30+ picture books with illustrations in a variety of media including Faith Ringgold’s picture book Tar Beach
• Large reproduction of Faith Ringgold’s story quilt Tar Beach
• “My Personality Inventory” brainstorming worksheet for each student
• 8 ½” x 11” drawing paper for each student (for sketching)

Overview:
To reinforce skills used in the previous lesson, the class will view Faith Ringgold’s story quilt Tar Beach in picture book form and as a large reproduction for ease of viewing. Students will decode Ringgold’s work and identify how the artist uses codes throughout her work.

Students will then decode picture book illustrations. Using picture books that highlight a variety of codes, the teacher may choose to have students discuss their
findings as a group or write their observations independently on the bottom of the “Art Detectives” handout.

Students will move onto encoding their own work of art by filling out a “Personality Inventory” brainstorming worksheet. They will use this information to create a sketch with the theme “A Dream I’d Like to Come True”. Students will divide their sketch into a 3 part narrative format with a beginning, middle, and end.

LESSON 3 (Days 3-10): Encoding a Personal Narrative- Story Scroll: “A Dream I’d Like to Come True”

Supports and Materials:
- ~ 18” x 36” poster board for each student (can cut large poster board in half)
- Scissors
- A variety of artistic media including but not limited to: pencils, crayons, markers, colored pencils, watercolors, cut or torn paper, yarn, tissue paper, glue, and mixed media

Overview:
Each student will enlarge and transfer their sketch onto long poster boards to create a “story scroll” format. They will choose at least 3 visual codes to encode their work of art. Students will select their choice of artistic media to best convey the personal narrative and visual codes they are using. The lesson will culminate with students self-assessing their story scroll on a rubric. Each student will have the opportunity to display their work in school.

Massachusetts Visual Art Standards Addressed:

1. Media, Materials, and Techniques - Students will demonstrate knowledge of the media, materials, and techniques unique to visual arts.
   - Students were able to draw upon past experiences to select and work with a variety of media

2. Elements and Principles of Design – Students will demonstrate knowledge of the elements and principles of design, also known as visual codes, including space, line, texture, shape, value, color and movement.
   - Students were able to define, identify and interpret visual artist codes (or elements and principles of design)

3. Observation, Abstraction, Invention, and Expression – Students will demonstrate their powers of observation, abstraction, invention, and expression in a variety of media, materials and techniques.
   - Students brainstormed original ideas through filling out a “Personality Inventory”, created sketches based on the theme “A Dream I’d Like to Come
True”, enlarged their ideas on a story scroll format and created a final narrative work of art using a variety of media.

4. **Drafting, Revising, and Exhibiting** – Students will demonstrate knowledge of the processes of creating and exhibiting their own artwork: drafts, critique, self-assessment, refinement, and exhibit preparation.
   - Students created sketches, critiqued each other’s work, assessed their own work on a rubric, made revisions as needed, and had the opportunity to exhibit their work in school.

5. **Critical Response** – Students will describe and analyze their own work and the work of others using appropriate visual arts vocabulary. Students will connect their analysis to interpretation and evaluation.
   - Students described and analyzed their work and the work of others using visual codes.

6. **Purposes of the Arts** – Students will describe the purposes for which a variety of works of visual art were created, and interpret their meanings.
   - Students decoded and analyzed magazine advertisements, picture book illustrations, and Faith Ringgold’s Tar Beach.
APPENDIX B: ARTIST VISUAL CODES HANDOUT

**Line:** Two points that are connected, or a mark that describes a shape or outline is a line. Lines can be, but are not limited to: vertical, horizontal, diagonal, wavy, jagged and contour lines (that show the shape of an object).

**Space:** Creating a sense of space in your art helps show depth or separate areas in your work. (Think: One-Point Perspective) Things that appear closer to you will usually be larger and things that appear farther away will be smaller. Sometimes a human’s eye needs empty areas (negative space) to look at and rest. This negative space will also let the eye notice the part that’s meant to be focused on (positive space).

**Shape:** A shape is a closed, 2-dimensional (flat) line with no form or thickness. Shapes are flat and can be grouped into two categories, geometric and organic.

**Value:** Value is the darkness or lightness in a work of art. High contrast would be using light values next to dark values. Low contrast would be using similar values next to each other.

**Color:** Color refers to specific hues (ex: red). The color wheel is a way of showing how all the colors are made with the primary colors (red, yellow, and blue). Complimentary pairs (opposites on the color wheel) can produce a dull and neutral color. Black and white can be added to produce tints (add white) and shades (add black).

**Movement:** Movement is created by repeating codes. This helps to guide the viewer’s eye around a work of art. Great works of art create visual movement by repeating and spreading codes around the work (for example: the color blue). The viewer's eye plays a game of "connect the codes" and will move from one point to another all the way around the picture. This is a great goal to have when creating any work of art!

**Texture:** Texture is about surface quality, either the way something feels (tactile) or the way something looks like it feels (visual).

**Pattern:** Pattern is anything repeated 3 or more times. It usually helps to spread patterns all around your artwork.
APPENDIX C: ART DETECTIVES- CRACKING THE SECRET CODES OF ADVERTISEMENTS

Name: _____________________    Product Being Advertised: ____________________________

1. What is the first thing that your eyes are drawn to? (This is the FOCAL POINT.)

2. What do you think are the main codes used in this ad? Circle one or more.
   - Line
   - Shape
   - Color
   - Texture
   - Space
   - Value
   - Movement
   - Pattern

3. Based on your above choice(s), what mood do you think this ad creates (happy, calm, excited, scary, thoughtful, etc.)? Explain how this ad creates this mood (hint: use the above terms you circled).

4. What lead you to choose this ad? How might the codes used have influenced your choice?

Art Detectives: Cracking the Secret Codes in Book Illustrations

Name: _____________________    Title of Book: ________________________________

1. On the cover, what is the first thing that your eyes are drawn to? (This is the FOCAL POINT.)

2. What do you think are the main codes used in this illustration? Circle one or more.
   - Line
   - Shape
   - Color
   - Texture
   - Space
   - Value
   - Movement
   - Pattern

3. Based on your above choice(s), what mood do you think is created in this illustration (happy, calm, excited, scary, thoughtful, etc.)? Explain how this illustration creates this mood (hint: use the above terms you circled).

4. Without reading the book, what clues do the codes tell you about the story (characters, setting, plot, etc.)?
APPENDIX D: MY PERSONALITY INVENTORY

Name: ___________________________ Color Class: ___________________________

To help you create ideas for your next art project, we'll first collect some information about a few of your favorite things…and things you might like to do some day. Have fun and be creative with your ideas!

1) When I have free time, I like to do these things the most:
   1) ____________________________________________
   2) ____________________________________________
   3) ____________________________________________

2) Three activities I'd like to try in the future would be ($ is no object):
   1) ____________________________________________
   2) ____________________________________________
   3) ____________________________________________

3) My three favorite places (real):
   1) ____________________________________________
   2) ____________________________________________
   3) ____________________________________________

4) Three places I'd like to travel to (real or imaginary):
   1) ____________________________________________
   2) ____________________________________________
   3) ____________________________________________

5) Favorite food:

6) Favorite subject (in or out of school):

7) Favorite movie and/or book:

8) What would your dream job be in the future and why?

9) If I could meet three people, living or deceased, famous or not, they would be:
   1) ____________________________________________
   2) ____________________________________________
   3) ____________________________________________

10) If I were stranded on an island and had to choose 3 people and/or items to be with me, they would be:
   1) ____________________________________________
   2) ____________________________________________
   3) ____________________________________________
   4) ____________________________________________
   5) ____________________________________________
   6) ____________________________________________
APPENDIX E: RUBRIC FOR STORY SCROLL- “A DREAM I’D LIKE TO COME TRUE” (Revised after Teaching)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Craftsman-</td>
<td>1,4</td>
<td>All of the color/value is neat and finished</td>
<td>Most of the color/value is neat and finished</td>
<td>Some of the color/value is and finished</td>
<td>Little/none of color/value is neat and finished</td>
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<td>ship of Color &amp; Value</td>
<td>(The neatness and quality of your work)</td>
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<td>2. Use of Codes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 or more codes are focused on, and are repeated in the beginning, middle, and end of the scroll</td>
<td>3 codes are focused on, and are repeated in the beginning, middle, and end of the scroll</td>
<td>2 codes are focused on, and are repeated in the beginning, middle, and end of the scroll</td>
<td>1 or 0 codes are focused on, and are repeated in the beginning, middle, and end of the scroll</td>
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<td>(Line, shape, color, texture, space, value, movement, pattern)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Creativity of Visual Story</td>
<td>2,3</td>
<td>The entire story shows your dream and ideas in unique and creative ways</td>
<td>Much of the story shows your dream and ideas in unique and creative ways</td>
<td>Some of the story shows your dream and ideas in unique and creative ways</td>
<td>Little/none of story shows your dream and ideas in unique and creative ways</td>
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<td>(The ability to combine inspiration from others with your own ideas)</td>
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<td>4. Cooperation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shows great effort, often participates and is positive</td>
<td>Shows effort, sometimes participates and is positive</td>
<td>Shows little effort, rarely participates and is positive</td>
<td>Shows no effort, does not participate and is not positive</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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5. Connection to Visual Literacy: In complete sentences (using capital letters, punctuation, etc.)

A. List each code you focused on to help visually tell your story. Next to each code, explain how you used it in your Story Scroll.

B. Briefly describe what is happening in each scene of your Story Scroll (the beginning, middle, and end).

5. Points (20 max): ______

Final Grade: ______

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<th>Points Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<td>A</td>
<td>A-</td>
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APPENDIX F: MASSACHUSETTS VISUAL ART STANDARDS

From: Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework, November 1999

Learning Standards

1. Media, Materials, and Techniques - Students will demonstrate knowledge of the media, materials, and techniques unique to visual arts.

2. Elements and Principles of Design - Students will demonstrate knowledge of the elements and principles of design. (Elements ("tools") can include: space, line, texture, shape, value, form, and color. Principles ("rules") can include: unity, balance, emphasis, movement, pattern, contrast, rhythm.)

3. Observation, Abstraction, Invention, and Expression - Students will demonstrate their powers of observation, abstraction, invention, and expression in a variety of media, materials and techniques.

4. Drafting, Revising, and Exhibiting - Students will demonstrate knowledge of the processes of creating and exhibiting their own artwork: drafts, critique, self-assessment, refinement, and exhibit preparation.

5. Critical Response - Students will describe and analyze their own work and the work of others using appropriate visual arts vocabulary. When appropriate, students will connect their analysis to interpretation and evaluation.

Connections Strand

6. Purposes of the Arts - Students will describe the purposes for which works of dance, music, theatre, visual arts, and architecture were and are created, and, when appropriate, interpret their meanings.

7. Roles of Artists in Communities - Students will describe the roles of artists, patrons, cultural organizations, and arts institutions in societies of the past and present.

8. Concepts of Style, Stylistic Influence, and Stylistic Change - Students will demonstrate their understanding of styles, stylistic influence, and stylistic change by identifying when and where art works were created, and by analyzing characteristic features of art works from various historical periods, cultures, and genres.

9. Inventions, Technologies and the Arts - Students will describe and analyze how performing and visual artists use and have used materials, inventions, and technologies in their work.

10. Interdisciplinary Connections - Students will apply their knowledge of the arts to the study of English language arts, foreign languages, health, history and social science, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering.
APPENDIX G: LIST OF PICTURE BOOKS SELECTED FOR THEIR VARIED USE OF CODES


Lewis, R. (2002). *In the space of the sky*. Harcourt Children's Books. (Color, Pattern, Movement)


Young, E. (2002). *Seven blind mice*. Putnam Juvenile. (Color, Pattern, Shape)