
Introduction

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Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. (Berger, 2006, p. 681)

Berger speaks of the way human language evolves—first sight and recognition, then speaking, later reading and writing. Yet he also evokes a truth that is lost in the trample of teaching the formal literacies—that visual images play an integral part in understanding. The elements of literacy are commonly described as *reading, writing, speaking* and *listening*. *Viewing* is mentioned in passing, if at all. When visuals *are* utilised, it is often in service of the other literacies. We speak of visualising as a reading comprehension strategy, or discuss the importance of crafting strong images in writing. But notice how we indicate understanding in everyday speech: “I see what you mean.”

We think of visual literacy as describing the complex act of meaning making using still or moving images. As with reading comprehension, visually literate learners are able to make connections, determine importance, synthesise information, evaluate and critique. Further, these visual literacies are interwoven with textual ones, so that their interaction forms the basis for a more complete understanding. The twenty-first-century learner must master this intermediality of images and text in order to interpret an increasingly digital world (Lapp, Flood & Fisher, 1999).

Ultimately, a fundamental goal of education is to teach effective communication. It is the message that lies at the heart of communication, be it verbal, written or pictorial, and the challenge to any communicator is to create accurate messages and interpret the messages of others with equal skill. Hobbs (1997) describes a set of assumptions about the key analytic concepts of literacy in the age of information:

- All messages are constructions.
- Messages are representations of social reality.

- Individuals negotiate meaning by interacting with messages.
- Messages have economic, political, social and aesthetic purposes.
- Each form of communication has unique characteristics. (p. 9)

Whether they are discussing a novel in a literature circle, listening to a peer describe a visit to the zoo, reading a maths textbook or writing a science lab report, their success is dependent on their ability to master the message. As well, in each case there is likely to be a visual element. The novel may have illustrations, the peer may bring a video of the trip, the maths textbook may contain a diagram, the science lab report may include sketches of what was observed. Yet these elements of the message are unlikely to be addressed in any formal way.

Hobbs' key analytical concepts also describe the critical literacy stance necessary for interpretation of print and visual messages. The emphasis of critical literacy is less about acquisition of skills and more about questioning the author's purpose, searching for alternative meanings and considering the role identity plays. A critical literacy lens assumes that all text is constructed from a particular viewpoint, and that the reader or viewer must analyse the message for who or what is left out. This may include discussions on power, marginalisation and perspective. Again, visual literacy assumes an important position. How does a fictionalised account of a historical event influence understanding? Films like *Amadeus* and *Amistad* have been criticised for playing loose with the facts. How do illustrations influence the meaning of the text? The picture book *Nappy Hair* (Herron, 1998) was at the centre of a controversy because photocopied illustrations from the book were viewed by some as demeaning to African American children. Do comic books and graphic novels constitute an appropriate genre for classroom instruction? School boards, curriculum directors, parents and teachers all over the world view these materials in very different ways. It would seem that critical literacy, as it applies to visual literacy, is a stance that educators must assume on behalf of their learners.

This book was conceived as a means for examining visual literacy in just that fashion. We invited authors and researchers to describe their view of an aspect of visual literacy. We gave them a tall order—provide background information on the subject, describe ways in which they use visual literacy tools in their instructional practices and give the reader some ideas for how to apply it to their own classroom.

In Chapter 1, Lynell Burmark introduces visual literacy as a tool for learning. She discusses principles, such as the effect of colour, and advises teachers on how to use visual images in the classroom. She fills her own work with images to illustrate these elements—truly a case of a picture being worth a thousand words.

In Chapter 2, Jacquelyn McTaggart, a teacher with 42 years of experience, provides an overview of graphic novels, perhaps the fastest-growing literary form in publishing today. Students seem to know about this—we've

Probably the most compelling reason for using images in instruction is that images are stored in long-term memory. Unlike factoids and phone numbers that can “go in one ear and out the other”, images are indelibly etched in our long-term memory. We are more apt to remember a person’s face than that person’s name. The implications for achievement testing are obvious. The key is to make sure students have a picture in their “mind’s eye” of the important concepts and content that they will need to recall.

WORDS VERSUS IMAGES

Here’s another activity to try with your students. Ask everyone in the room to draw a cat. Ask whether they all drew pointy ears, whiskers, perhaps a long tail. Ask whether they feel that the person next to them would recognise their drawing as a cat.

Next ask students to draw a civet cat. Assuming no one in your class has ever seen one, you’ll get cries of “What?” and similar utterances of frustration. You can easily find an image of a civet cat on the Internet. (They are members of the *Viverridae* family and more closely resemble the mongoose than they do the domestic felines we keep as household pets.) Point out to the class that it’s almost impossible to draw with accuracy something they have never seen, then reassure them: “It’s OK to ask for more information when I mention anything that you haven’t seen before.”

What’s the bottom line? Words are used to *recall* things we have already seen and experienced. This is why writing is so much more detailed and evocative when students can look at an image before they start writing. A wonderful project called “Images in the Writing Process” asked year ones to create collages with colourful pieces of tissue paper.

The student who made the collage shown in Figure 1.7 went on to write a story in which she described clouds “like fluffy pink pancakes”. Would she ever have “seen” those clouds in such a vivid way without having first created the collage?

When students are first learning to read, particularly if they have had limited life and language experience, comic strips and comic books can be a fun way to make the image-word association. The visual clues make it more probable that the students will have a positive experience while reading and feel encouraged to read more. The Internet can be an excellent resource for comics, such as the official Peanuts website, www.snoopy.com.

In “Teaching Visual Literacy in a Multimedia Age”, Glenda Rakes (1999) claimed that, by combining visuals and text, we can increase comprehension:

Using positron emission tomography (PET scans), medical researchers have been able to demonstrate that different areas of the

side, you have it made. You needn't worry about how students will react to graphic novels because that's a given. They'll fight to check out the ones you have, and they'll clamour for more. I promise.

Can Graphic Novels Be Plugged Into the Existing Curriculum?

Age-appropriate graphic novels can be incorporated into some curriculum areas, but not all. Several titles are available for supplementing art, history, literature, music, mythology, science and social issues units, whereas others are used primarily for getting struggling and reluctant readers into books or leading high achieving readers into more enriching endeavours.

The following list is a minute sampling of currently available graphic novels that are being used effectively in the various curricula strands and as motivational tools. I have (for lack of a better word) labeled the motivational category as "General". The titles listed below represent only the tip of the iceberg of what is out there. Thousands of worthwhile graphic novels are already in print, and new ones are being released every month. If you are planning to develop a classroom or media centre collection of graphic novels, you will want to consult one or more of the references and websites listed at the end of this chapter.

Upper Primary

Art:

Manga Mania: How to Draw Japanese Comics by Hart. Watson-Guptill (2000) Drawing

General:

Comic Adventures of Boots by Kitamura. St. Martin's Press (2002) Humorous fiction, cats

Marvel Masterworks: Daredevil by Lee. Marvel Books (2001) Daredevil, superheroes

Spirited Away by Miyazaki. Viz Communications (2002) Fantasy, action, magic

The Essential Uncanny X-Men by Lee. Marvel Comics (2003) Superheroes

Ultimate X-Men by Sanderson. DK (2000) Superheroes

spective (overt instruction). Next, students could be helped to generate a list of the characteristics, components and purposes of a film review (critical framing), making explicit and reflecting on what they will need to do in their own writing to produce a successful example of this genre (see Teasley & Wilder, 1997, for a useful rubric to evaluate film reviews). At this point, teachers might ask students, depending on their experience and skill level, to do any number of culminating tasks, including a class-wide review of *Millennium Actress* making direct reference to claims made in the packet of published reviews; group-authored reviews of another anime film viewed in a film circle as described above; or individually authored reviews of a film chosen from the list provided in Figure 4.1. Regardless of how the task is organised, students will have a chance to apply the skills (transformed practice) they learned from the scaffolded activities in which they participated around the core film.

Activities such as mapping visual inferences and writing film reviews allow students to practise literacy skills with high utility for both print and media texts. Since these skills tend not to be intuitive—most students need explicit instruction in order to make mental leaps with texts as well as formulate well-supported arguments in writing—students will benefit from the additional scaffolding provided by teacher modelling and peer discussion around a common text. The genre and topic of those texts can vary tremendously, however, allowing for connections to existing curriculum or students' interests, as the main point of the two activities highlighted in this section is to build transferable skills, rather than cover particular texts. In contrast, I suggest in the next section that teachers consider using a very small cross-section of anime films by a well-regarded director in order to focus more closely on culturally specific aspects as well as to explore in more detail how visual texts such as anime are created.

From Author Study to “Auteur” Study: Spotlighting the Work of Hayao Miyazaki

It's common in print-literacy-dominated English classrooms for students and their teachers to engage in focused studies of a prominent author's work. At the primary level, such study takes place during teacher read-alouds or in literature circles where groups of children choose a favourite author to explore from a list of teacher recommendations. At the secondary level, students often explore a number of different works by the same author—most notably, William Shakespeare or John Steinbeck—over several years in school. In either case, the practice allows students to make connections between that author's work and their own lives, to consider how one writer treats a theme across different texts, and to use that writer's language choices as a model for their own (Jenkins, 1999).