

Better Learning and Expressing of Learning through Visual Literacy

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Our cave ancestors were visually literate; their lives depended on how well they could visually read the world around them. Today our students are visually literate within their world of “electronic images” such as TV, video games, and the Web; they want to be visually literate in their school which is often devoid of visuals.

One major component of 21st century skills is Digital-Age Literacy. This literacy consists of scientific/technological literacy; visual literacy; and cultural literacy. Visual literacy is the ability to see, to understand, and ultimately to think, create, and communicate graphically. Students can use images that are realistic or abstract. They can use an image by itself or any image with words or sound. They can use one image or a series of images. They can use visuals to express their voice, their views, and their conceptualization of a information. They can learn to read and express themselves from the knowledge level up to Bloom's evaluation level using visuals. They can work with visuals individually or in groups. However, the ability to read a visual depends on the student's background knowledge. We can help students to learn visually in school through providing them with a variety of images.

We can start with helping students learn to read and to express themselves with still a single visual.

The students can:

- Identify the basic content of the picture
- Get information from the picture
- Put an item into its context through a visual
- Learn new words from visuals.
- Analyze an image for its media impact
- Depict the meaning of written materials through a created or chosen visual..
- Write about a topic due to the power of a single visual
- Analyze information from a chart or graph

When teachers and students use a series of visuals, students increase in their learning through in-depth analysis and understanding. A group of visuals may be in visual series where the main object and background change or visual series where only the main object changes. Students can:

- Tell a story through structured visuals
- Write through structured visuals
- Show changes over time using a series of visuals
- Represent the many steps in a process or an event
- Compare and contrast several images of the same event
- Illustrate the many different perspectives of a single event through many visuals
- Show a discrepancy or misconception through multiple images.

Teachers can help students to read visuals from other cultures, countries, and time periods. Students can:

- See up-to-the-moment images from a country
- View many images rapidly to get a visual overview of a country's geography or of a topic
- Compare how different cultures deal with the same event through visual comparisons
- Contrast paintings of the same event from different time periods
- Discover that a visual may look like one thing when really it is portraying something very different unless they know the culture or time period.

Teachers and students can obtain and produce visuals easily. They can use:

- A digital camera or digital camcorder to record class, school, and community images
- Inspiration like programs to create graphic organizers that consist of visuals
- Word processor and insert graphics from the Web or from the digital camera
- Use iMovies (Mac) or Window Movie Maker (PC) to produce their own movies.
- Web sources such as Google.com and Flickr.com for still images
- Web sources as a GoogleEarth for geographic images
- Web resources such as Youtube.com for movies

Teachers can employ meaningful visuals in the classroom and can have students express themselves visually so that students can demonstrate their deep knowledge about a topic.

Some Resources:

<http://flickr.com/creativecommons/by-nc-2.0/>

Shows photos that can be used by students and teachers as long as they give credit to the authors (about 56,000 photos)

http://www.jakesonline.org/visual_lit.htm

Focuses on the use of Flickr

<http://www.woophy.com/map/index.php>

Allows students and teachers to locate images by geographical location

<http://www.ivla.org/portal/intro.htm>

Is the site for the International Visual Literacy Association

<http://www.museumca.org/picturethis/visual.html>

Has many visual literacy activities especially historical photos

<http://k-8visual.info/>

Demonstrates good examples for K-8