

A DESCRIPTION OF AN 11TH GRADE ENGLISH
CLASSROOM ENGAGED IN THE VISUAL
ARTS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

By

NEDRA KAY SEGALL

Bachelor of Arts
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, Oklahoma
1965

Masters of Education
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, Arkansas
1970

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
August, 2001

COPYRIGHT

By

Nedra Kay Segall

August, 2001

A DESCRIPTION OF AN 11TH GRADE ENGLISH
CLASSROOM ENGAGED IN THE VISUAL
ARTS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

Thesis Approved:

David Yellin

Thesis Adviser

Kathy

John

Sally Carter

Alfred Farley

Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I call them the “Dream Team.” These are the individuals who guided me through the challenges of graduate school, who shared their professional expertise, who valued my ideas, and who celebrated in the successful completion of a research project representing my career long interest in making school more enticing to secondary students.

Dr. David Yellin, my committee chairperson, never failed to find a spot for me to sit in his office so that I could ask a question, badger him about comprehensive exams, or talk about Louise Rosenblatt long after our scheduled time had ended. A busy person with his own never ending list of things to do, his leadership reassured me that this was indeed a task I could complete. Dr. Sally Carter provided the first class that launched this educational quest. Her encouragement that even I could work with clay or paint a picture worthy of display motivated me to think about how those same projects might be utilized in my own classroom. I respect the knowledge she possesses and I admire her knack for making teaching and learning seem so effortless. Dr. Kouider Mokhtari offered consistent, positive guidance in a quiet, gentle way that made me feel like I could accomplish anything. I thank him especially for reminding me about Lawrence-Lightfoot’s portraiture as a way to report data. With that suggestion, I was able to make sense out of the stacks of student drawings, observations, and student

writings. To Dr. Bruce Petty, I am grateful for his willingness to join my committee and become involved in my study late in the process. I value his academic talents and appreciate his careful reading and insightful remarks. Without these four individuals, my graduate program at Oklahoma State University would have been much less successful – and certainly less enjoyable.

I also acknowledge the support my family has provided. It's been a delightful experience being a student along with Andrew, Sarah, and Lorna and to be able to compare school stories with them. Whether one is attending Northwestern University, Florida State University, or Oklahoma State University, there are many commonalities in the business of school.

I am thankful for my parents who long ago nourished in me a curious – and independent – mind and a belief that I could achieve anything I set out to do. Those qualities have served me well – although the independence has sometimes been subject to criticism.

Last of all, I thank my husband Bill for his allowing this graduate program to be my program. He graciously answered questions and made suggestions – but only if I asked. I hope I can wear the title as well as he has. I also hope he doesn't anticipate the reopening of the kitchen any time soon.

It's been a grand adventure. I'm glad I had the opportunity to participate.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Purpose of the Study.....	6
Research Question.....	7
Significance of the Study.....	7
Assumptions.....	8
Limitations.....	8
Definition of Terms.....	9
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	11
Introduction.....	11
The Opponents Speak.....	12
The Language Arts Teachers Speak.....	18
The Arts People Speak.....	29
Summary.....	35
III. METHOD.....	36
Introduction.....	36
Educational Ethnography as Qualitative Research Method.....	36
Participant Observation.....	39
Interviews.....	40
Questionnaires and Inventories.....	40
Personal Writing.....	41
Reporting the Data.....	41
Statement of the Problem.....	43
Purpose and Research Question.....	43
Setting.....	43
Instructional Setting.....	44
Participants.....	45
Research Design.....	46
Procedure.....	48
Data Collection Materials.....	49

Chapter	Page
Data Analysis	49
IV. FINDINGS	51
Introduction	52
The Backdrop	
Portrait # 1 – <i>Reading: Good or Bad?</i>	52
Portrait # 2 – <i>Classroom 203</i>	54
Theme # 1 – Cognitive Involvement	57
Portrait # 3 – <i>No Two Alike</i>	57
Portrait # 4 – <i>The American Dream or the American Disappointment</i>	63
Portrait # 5 – <i>War: Right or Wrong</i>	67
Portrait # 6 – <i>The Public Whitman and the Private Dickinson</i>	69
Portrait # 7 – <i>Battle of the Sexes</i>	79
Portrait # 8 – <i>Pie Charts, Venn Diagrams, and Bar Graphs, Oh, My</i>	82
Theme # 2 – Student Empowerment	86
Portrait # 9 – <i>Who’s in charge?</i>	86
Portrait # 10 – <i>To Draw or Not To Draw?</i>	91
Portrait # 11 – <i>He Did What?</i>	93
Portrait # 12 – <i>Anything Goes</i>	95
Portrait # 13 – <i>The Teacher as Learner: Part I</i>	98
Portrait # 14 – <i>The Teacher as Learner: Part II</i>	103
Summary	107
Portrait # 15 – <i>Going Outside the Lines</i>	107
V. DISCUSSION	110
Introduction	110
Conclusions	111
Conclusions about Cognitive Development.....	111
Conclusions about Student Empowerment	115
Conclusions about Classroom Environment and Teacher Behavior	116
Implications.....	118
Implications for the Classroom Teacher	118
Implications for Teacher Education.....	120
Suggestions for Future Research.....	121
BIBLIOGRAPHY	124
APPENDIX	132

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. War.....	60
2. One Story/Many Views – Many Stories/Many Views.....	62
3. The American Dream Gone Wrong.....	65
4. Fame and Fortune.....	66
5. Bold Lines and Graceful Curves.....	71
6. Private Showing.....	72
7. Public Performance.....	73
8. Inside, Outside.....	75
9. Whitman: Spokesperson for the Common Man.....	76
10. Eating Out of the Palms of Their Hands.....	81
11. Caterpillar Venn Diagram.....	84
12. Pie Chart.....	85
13. Wet TNT.....	97
14. Open Bird Cage: Freedom.....	105
15. Going Outside the Lines.....	109

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The National Commission on Excellence in Education's publication of A Nation at Risk in 1983 launched a spate of criticism about the state of our nation's public schools in its harshly worded opening:

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and a dimension of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility. We report to the American people that, while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur – others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments. (p. 5)

Urging restoration of traditional educational values, higher graduation requirements, more time spent on teaching and learning, and raising the intellectual caliber of teachers, the Commission, perhaps partly because of its harsh words – “a rising tide of mediocrity” -- provided the groundswell for some two dozen study

commissions, panels, and task forces to diagnose the problems of American education (Finn, Ravitch, and Fancher, 1984; Orlich, 2000; Sedlak, Wheeler, Pullin, & Cusick, 1986). E. D. Hirsch (1987) joined the bandwagon with his urgent message that all Americans must share a body of culturally relevant terms if we are to communicate with one another while Allan Bloom (1987), author of The Closing of the American Mind, proposed a great books curriculum to challenge the minds of today's lackadaisical youth. At the heart of these reformers was the assumption that making classes more rigorous, increasing graduation requirements, spending more time on teaching and learning, and raising the academic standards for teachers would eliminate the mediocre state of education and fix what's wrong (Finn, Ravitch, and Fancher, 1984).

That schools are the butt of criticism and are expected to serve as a vehicle for fixing the ills of society is not a new concept. More specifically, the secondary school is frequently targeted, perhaps because it offers the last required educational opportunity for the nation's youth. Before the turn of the century, the Committee on Secondary School Studies (1893) focused on standardizing high school curricula. At the beginning of the 20th century, the National Education Association's Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education (1918) urged broader goals for American high schools, placing special emphasis on citizenship, ethical behavior, and vocational interests. The early 1950s fueled a back-to-basics movement with publications like Why Johnny Can't Read (Flesch, 1955) and Educational Wastelands (Bestor, 1953), both books laying blame for student failure on administrators and those who train teachers (Goodlad, 1984). The post-Sputnik reforms in the early 1960s called for significant changes in mathematics and science curricula as well as reform in teacher training and staff development

(Wilson & Rossman, 1993). Declining SAT scores in the 1970s were attributed to the progressive teaching practices of the 1960s, incompetent administrators, poorly prepared teachers, and higher education faculty who prepare teachers (Goodlad, 1984). A Nation at Risk, one of the most prominent reform publications of the 20th century, joined a lengthy list citing the deficiencies in today's schools. By the late 1980s, the impact of A Nation at Risk seemed to have faded, and its passing set the stage for the Bush administration's America 2000 and eventually the Clinton administration's Goals 2000. These latest "fixes" were intended to accomplish what the curriculum reform movement of the 1960s, the accountability movement of the 1970s, and the excellence movement of the 1980s had been unable to do (Eisner, 1998).

Concerns about our nation's educational system are not new nor will they likely ever be resolved, Eisner (1998) suggests, since schools are responsive to local conditions, shaped by those who teach and those who are taught. Eisner argues there will not be permanent solutions because we "are not trying to invent radar or measure the rate of free fall in a vacuum" but are dealing with tasks "impacted by context, [and] riddled with unpredictable contingencies" (1998, p. 5). What works in one locale may not work in another; what works now may not work then.

The flaw, perhaps, in the recommendations that abound to rectify the problems in our nation's schools is that they come primarily from individuals or agencies outside the environment where the concern originates – the classroom. It would seem only logical that the individual most intimately acquainted with the strengths and weaknesses of the educational process is the particular teacher who works with particular students in particular classrooms. It is that person and not data collected from the scrutiny of

standardized test scores, evaluation of teacher training programs, or theoretical discussions of curriculum design that should guide school change. Knowing what goes on in schools and what might be valuable practices there requires an intimacy that only a person present could know. Eisner succinctly states, “Schooling needs to be ‘known’ in the Old Testament biblical sense: by direct, intimate contact” (p. 11).

It is my “direct, intimate contact” with a classroom environment for the past 30 years that motivated this study. I have been in-serviced; I have been Madeline Hunterized; I have participated in Outcomes Based Education. I have organized relevancy files; I have been held accountable; I have learned the ins and outs of cooperative learning. And, all these programs have been imposed upon me from individuals who may have never been or who are no longer in the classroom. I claim this opportunity to try an idea that has been fermenting in my mind for almost a decade as I have searched for ways to help students make sense of what school asks them to read. It is my contribution to school reform as it plays out in a secondary language arts classroom, and this time I want to speak for myself.

It all began about eight years ago when I attended an Advanced Placement (AP) English conference in Dallas, Texas. One of the sessions I chose focused on art activities in the secondary English classroom. I selected it partly because I was doubtful that tasks like this could be beneficial to older students – and especially AP students. I listened to the presenter’s information, and I participated in the assignments she gave us. When I returned to my classroom, I gave her handouts a cursory reading, reflected on her argument that visual activities enhanced her students’ reading and

understanding, and decided to give it a try. After all, little time or money was involved. What did I have to lose?

Since that experiment, I have been intrigued with what my students reveal through their artwork. For some, it urges them to read more closely in order to depict accurately the characters, the setting, or the symbolism in the text. For others, whose minds wander when they are reading, it encourages them to remain focused. Otherwise, they have nothing to rely on for illustration. For still others, it provides an opportunity to demonstrate understanding in another mode than what the typically language bound secondary classroom affords.

My skepticism about incorporating “such elementary activities” in my 11th grade English classroom has been replaced with enthusiasm, and I have accumulated quite a stash of crayons, magic markers, colored pencils, and drawing paper for the art shelf in my bookcase. My students eagerly ask “Do we get to draw today?” when I pass out white paper, and I am encouraged to continue to provide opportunity for visual expression in their study of literature.

This study is the culmination of these years of experimenting with visual activities in a secondary English classroom. It offers a glimpse of my attempt to contradict the perceived failure of today’s schools.

In order to understand the place of this study in educational research and to understand my interest in refuting the dismal failure oft assigned to public schools, I have included an overview of school reform efforts. The focus of these reform efforts – content and consistency -- provides the framework that has challenged me to develop a classroom encouraging multiple ways of understanding literature, guided by Rosenblatt,

Eisner, and Dewey. This section also gives the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research question. In addition, it contains a brief discussion of the significance of the study along with assumptions and limitations that have been identified.

Statement of the Problem

The emphasis on increased graduation requirements, standardized testing, and prescribed curriculum – components of most reform movements – is not helping students be more successful in their school experience. There is a need to reevaluate how content is presented and envision alternative pedagogical environments in order that high school students can be more involved in and benefit from the learning process (Kohn, 1999; Renzulli, 1998; Zemelman, Daniels, & Bizar, 1999).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe what happens in an 11th grade English classroom when students engage in a variety of visual arts activities. The study describes how high school students interact with literature when they are surrounded by art prints, have access to colored pencils and crayons, and respond to reading in a variety of visual ways.

Research Question

The following research question guided this study:

What does an 11th grade English classroom look like that employs a nontraditional pedagogy using visual arts activities to make sense of literature?

Significance of the Study

The study is significant for high school English teachers who are frustrated with the constrictive environment of a traditional high school English classroom that is largely text bound and may not offer students a variety of ways to engage in thinking and learning (Fiske, 1992; Hynds, 1997; Wilhelm, 1997). It provides an argument for utilizing the multiple ways in which students learn as suggested by Gardner in Multiple Intelligences (1993), and it encourages educators to stretch their vision of classrooms for the next century.

The theme of the 1999 National Council of Teachers of English convention, *Reimagining the Possibilities*, verified the interest among language arts teachers that there are multiple modes for instruction. For example, one NCTE session, “A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words” (Lang and Barr, 1999), demonstrated a dozen ways in which paintings, photos, and graphics help students make connections to literature, foster critical thinking, stimulate written expression, and generate conversation. In another session, a panel of teachers identified ways to integrate art into the curriculum through a variety of mediums and techniques in “Visualize the Possibilities: Using Art in the English Classroom” (Christenson, Carlisle, and Wright, 1999). “When Art Turns to Writing” (Robbins and Rief, 1999) showed links between writing and art. Drama,

computer design, film – all can help students make connections to text in a language arts classroom.

Since there are few models to help teachers implement learner-centered classrooms using visual activities at the secondary level (Hynds 1997), this study may be a helpful source of information.

Assumptions

This study made the assumption that students respond positively when asked to react to reading assignments in ways other than the traditional “read the selection and answer assigned questions” approach. If students were not enthusiastic, this may be attributed to the following reasons: anxiety about trying an atypical response in a high school classroom, lack of experience in giving visual expression to what they read, or insecurity about their drawing abilities (Ernst, 1994; Wilhelm, 1997).

Limitations

As the teacher / researcher, my presence in the school setting had made me a familiar face to some of the participants. My dual role of researcher as teacher could have inhibited participants’ responses. Since I was the primary instrument for data collection in this qualitative study, the descriptions and interpretations were filtered through my interest in the relationship between visual arts activities and learning in a secondary language arts classroom. It was important for me to remain free from formal or informal expectations and to describe rather than judge what was occurring in the classroom (Kamil, Langer, and Shanahan, 1985).

Definition of Terms

Classic View is learning that is effortless and continual (Smith 1998).

Commonsense Schooling is associated with a traditional classroom (Mayher 1990).

Left Brain refers to teaching strategies that encourage logical, rational thought.

A *Nontraditional Classroom* is defined as a classroom where students interact with literary texts in ways other than the typical paper-pencil response. Students are encouraged to sketch what they see, draw rather than write notes, create visual projects, and form pictures as they read. They interact with the words rather than passively reading an assignment. They interact with art to make connections with literature. They collaborate with each other.

Official Theory is defined as learning that is difficult and occasional (Smith 1998).

Old School is the term Kohn (1999) uses to describe traditional schooling.

Right Brain refers to teaching strategies that encourage creativity, imagination, and visualization.

Sketch to Stretch is a concept that invites students to read or listen to a story and then move from language to art to show the story's meaning through sketching (Harste, 1988).

Student Attitude is the feeling or emotion a student has toward learning.

Student Disengagement is the student's lack of effort and interest in learning.

Student Engagement describes a student actively involved in the learning process because of his / her interest or motivation. It is defined by Newmann (1992) as

“the student’s psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote” (p. 12).

Student Understanding is the student’s ability to talk about what he or she has read either literally or interpretively.

A *Traditional* classroom is defined as a classroom that involves lecture, reading, and paper-pencil response to literary texts.

Uncommonsense Schooling is associated with classroom activities that entice students to want to learn (Mayher, 1990).

Visual Activities include drawing, collages, painting, bookmaking, sketching, graphic design, computer-assisted design, photography, etc.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Education will not have permanent solutions to its problems, we will have no “breakthroughs,” no enduring discoveries that will work forever. We are “stuck” with temporary resolutions rather than with permanent solutions. What works here may not work there. What works now may not work then. We are not trying to invent radar or measure the rate of free fall in a vacuum. Our tasks are impacted by context, riddled with unpredictable contingencies, responsive to local conditions, and shaped by those we teach and not only by those who teach. Those who want something easier to do for a career should go into medicine. –Elliot Eisner (1998, p. 5)

Introduction

As a veteran teacher, who has been privy to several of these temporary resolutions, I know of what Eisner speaks. I also know that being “stuck with temporary resolutions rather than permanent solutions” can be energizing. It is this quest for one more temporary fix that recharges my teaching batteries and sends me scurrying for new ideas to try in my classroom. I’m glad I didn’t choose medicine. The challenge of teaching has served me well.

My search for another temporary resolution has lead me down multiple paths as I have sought literature related to this research project. In order to better understand why I disagreed so passionately with the mediocre assessment assigned to public schools by The National Commission on Excellence and a host of other critics, I buried

language arts classrooms around the country. To offer some credibility to my own reform idea, I found myself searching for studies that supported the use of the visual arts in a non-art classroom. And, finally, if I wanted to be my own spokesperson, I needed to learn more about how I, as a teacher, could conduct research in my own classroom. It is in the order I have identified that I review the literature for this study.

The Opponents Speak

Those who beg to differ with the study groups, commissions, panels, and task forces that have blasted the state of the nation's schools are equally passionate in their evaluation of what's happening in today's classrooms. The flaws cited by The National Commission on Excellence and others are countered by their opponents with convincing argument.

In response to the Commission's recommendation for higher graduation requirements, Bruce Wilson and Gretchen Rossman in their 1993 study, Mandating Excellence, found that during the 1980s at least 45 states modified their graduation guidelines, specifically expanding requirements in science and mathematics. But, the results of those state-initiated reforms indicated only a modest effect on student performance at school, in the work place, or in institutions of higher learning. Wilson and Rossman did not find that increased requirements increased equity or access but promulgated what existed: more sorting by ability, continued inaccessibility for minorities and females, and insignificant increase in thinking. Making school better by having more of it did not produce anticipated results (p. 2).

It is this same idea of tinkering with what's already present that raises questions for other critics, too. In a Phi Delta Kappan article entitled "A Rising Tide Lifts All Ships," Joseph Renzulli (1998) maintains that the studies, commissions, reports, and conferences held in pursuit of solutions to the problems facing our schools have yielded minimal results because they have been unwilling to examine critically the issues of time, student interest, and learning styles. Just because schools have traditionally assigned one period per day five days per week to English, for example, should not mean that that is the only way instruction can be scheduled. Eisner (1998) wonders why we group children by age rather than by interest or why high school students move from class to class rather than having the teacher move. George M. Thomas (1995), International President of Phi Delta Kappa, questions the National Commission's recommendation for longer school days and more days each academic year. Like Eisner, he suggests reformers should be looking at assumptions on which current practices rest and consider alternatives rather than having more of the same.

For Alfie Kohn (1999), it is the issue of standardized tests that raises his ire in response to reformers' mandates. Scores from these tests mean little and the "first thing to go in a school or district where these tests matter a lot is a more vibrant, integrated, active, effective kind of instruction" (p. 91). He suggests the widespread reliance on standardized testing, an important component of the call for excellence, may be partly responsible for the mediocrity cited in the Commission's report. In Kohn's estimation, part of the appeal of standardized testing is that it is fast, easy, and inexpensive, relatively speaking, and it accommodates society's need to attach numbers to things. Test scores can be calculated and charted; they can define success and failure.

However, intrinsic motivation and problem solving skills, likely more important factors in the learning process, are much more elusive concepts to measure.

Both Kohn (1999) and Eisner (1998) argue that what standardized tests test is valuable primarily in the context of school. Seldom is it important elsewhere for an individual working alone within a specific time frame to choose the one correct answer from four or five possibilities. Additionally, both Kohn and Eisner maintain that standardized testing delivers the wrong message to students about the nature of learning. These tests emphasize the regurgitation of facts rather than reflection of ideas and suggest that there is always a right or wrong answer for questions and problems in life. An even worse consequence of standardized testing is the likelihood that curriculum planning aligns with test objectives (Eisner, 1998; Kohn, 1999; Ohanian, 1999).

Even if students manage to obtain the additional graduation requirements, endure longer school days, and perform at a minimal level on standardized tests, they still must face the obstacle of the "one size fits all" curriculum model that fails to accommodate the learning style of individual learners. Not only does the learner suffer but the teacher does also when he/she is told to deliver a curriculum invented by external authorities (Ohanian, 1999). Each student is an individual and this diversity -- of both students and teachers -- should be recognized and celebrated (Fiske, 1991; Mayher, 1990; Ohanian, 1999; Smith, 1998). Not every one may benefit from reading the great books (Bloom, 1987) nor is it necessarily beneficial that all share a body of culturally relevant terms (Hirsch, 1987) if a student can make no personal connection to the classic work or if the cultural term has no relevancy in its context. A classroom

setting like this, where curriculum is imposed and the teacher is in control, is as out of date as the Model T and the Morse Code, according to Carl Glickman (1998), a university professor recognized for his writing on school renewal. In Revolutionizing America's Schools, he suggests schools are one of the few aspects of society looking more like 1920 than 2000. This kind of operating system troubles Frank Smith (1998), too. He fears that students who attend to their teacher-directed assignments, speak one at a time when they receive permission, and work individually may gain factual information, albeit briefly. But, they aren't learning how to engage in collaborative activities that may develop trust, self-respect, and initiative – all qualities that should be desirable in school and especially desirable as a member of a democratic society.

In Uncommon Sense, John Mayher (1990) challenges teachers to reject reform mandates and retake control of what happens in their classrooms. He urges educators to rethink the constraints of standardized tests and to value each student's learning rather than following a precise, prescribed lesson plan. Looking at what's old, or common sense, in a new way can spur teachers to take an uncommonsense approach that nudges them to improvise and to create a more enticing climate for learning. Teachers must become questioners, must determine their own curricula, must design their own instructional strategies, and must choose their own texts to meet the needs of today's diverse school population which represents a wide range of socio-economic levels, ethnicities, abilities, and interests. A diverse student body calls for divergent – not convergent – teaching and learning. This idea of diversity parallels what Pat Guild and Stephen Garger (1985) advocate in their book Marching to Different Drummers. Different learners approach academic tasks in different ways, yet each should have

equal access. The visual learner, for example, should have the same opportunity in the classroom as the auditory learner.

In an acerbic tone that makes clear her attitude toward educational reformers, Susan Ohanian (1999) blasts the Standardistos, her term for the saviours of culture and literacy, who advocate raising the standards for all and, in her evaluation, serving few. Ohanian argues that handing out standards designed to prepare all students for employment in the 21st century is “as cynical as handing out menus to homeless people in the name of eradicating hunger” (p. 31). Different students representing different backgrounds have different needs. The educational equity that reformers promise does not address enormous gaps in achievement test scores between rich and poor. Neither does it address the ineffectiveness of asking teachers to deliver a curriculum invented by external authorities. In the name of quality, Standardistos offer a curriculum of death to those students not already on the advanced placement track to prestigious universities.

Schools will be revitalized, according to Ohanian, when conversations take place between the people in the school and those on the outside, assuming those outsiders can acknowledge the strengths as well as the needs of the schoolhouse. Ohanian insists Standardistos’ documents focus more on “bureaucracy, group-think, and getting control of other people” (p. 151) than on curriculum reform. They are merely perpetuating the same old skill drill students have resisted throughout the century.

Using an array of teaching experiences ranging from her first assignment in a Queens, New York, high school, where she shared a desk with two other teachers and

quickly learned she would need to provide her own classroom supplies, to a third grade class of rotten readers [Ohanian's description], Ohanian supports her position that curricular content is not nearly as critical as the way in which the teacher interacts with the students in its presentation. She says, ". . . it is crucial that we ignore the content standards and continue to nurture the children in our care" (p. 147).

In a less combative style than Ohanian's, John Goodlad (1984) may offer the most convincing rebuttal to the reformers' evaluation of education. In A Place Called School, he provides an exhaustive look at what schools are really like. In his study spanning nearly three years, he examines data collected from 8,624 parents, 1,350 teachers, and 17,163 students representing 38 elementary, junior, and senior high schools in urban, suburban, and rural settings in an attempt to explain why deficiencies exist and why schools have received a failing grade. A changing population in terms of age, declining economic support for schools, increasing diversity in school population, eroding of supportive relationship between school and home, segmenting of educators themselves – all these have contributed to mediocre performance. Yet, these conditions also make it unlikely that a return to the basics advocated by the Commission would produce the expected results. A changing society with expanding opportunities to communicate, to travel, to work, and to play calls for an educational system to reexamine its role and to reevaluate how schools can enable students to participate in opportunities not available to previous generations.

Rather than a back-to-the-basics school model that emphasizes concrete, measurable, enforceable curriculum, the time has come to rethink what we ask students to do with curriculum rather than giving them more of it or making it more rigorous.

Students deserve to be more personally involved in the learning and thinking that we educators want them to do. Using visual art activities in a language arts classroom is one way to accomplish that.

The Language Arts Teachers Speak

Arthur Applebee provides an overview of the state of language arts classrooms from research he conducted in 1990. In that four-part study, he investigated typical practices of 650 randomly selected secondary schools in a national representation. Part IV of the series focused specifically on literature instruction in American schools. In his evaluation of data collected, Applebee found that the time devoted to the study of literature, slightly more than 50%, has remained stable since the early 1960s, and the most common source of the literature students read continues to be the literary anthology, a massive, commercially prepared collection.

Instructional techniques, which have remained traditional, emphasize whole-class discussion of a common text and focus on careful questioning of the content. Generally, the teacher in front of the class guides the students toward a common or agreed-upon interpretation. If teachers use student-centered techniques to encourage individual thought, they are most likely employed as motivational devices. Once students are “hooked,” traditional text-based analysis directs the discussion. Traditional writing responses to literature continue to be text-based essays and comprehension questions.

Applebee’s findings align closely with data other researchers have collected. Instruction that relies on traditional teaching styles where students invest their energy in

“performing rituals, mechanistic procedures, and trivial routines” (Newmann, 1992, p. 12) and passively wait to be taught or have their container [mind] filled is common in classrooms across the nation (Goodlad, 1984; Kohn, 1999; Newmann, 1992). Even though students in Goodlad’s 1984 study, A Place Called School, indicated they enjoyed activities that involve them directly or that they collaborate on with others, the dominant activities he observed in secondary classrooms included lecture and individual work on written assignments. Like Goodlad, Newmann (1992) found learning too often delivered to the students, like pizza to be consumed, with too little effort or interest exerted by the recipient.

Based on the data he collected in his study, Applebee urged the reevaluation of the teaching of literature and questioned the continuation of practices that may remain only because they are unexamined. His position is a reminder again of the need to rethink current practices (Eisner, 1998; Goodlad, 1984; Kohn, 1999; Ohanian, 1999; Thomas, 1995).

Fortunately, for some students, there are language arts teachers willing to examine those practices that have survived only because “that’s the way we’ve always done it.” It is these teachers I offer as examples of what can happen when student differences are acknowledged and when alternate teaching styles are employed. It will be to Louise Rosenblatt (1938, 1995) then that I turn for the philosophy that supports these reevaluations.

Susan Hynds (1997) is my first model. In On the Brink, Hynds narrates her study of a middle school language arts pilot program which gives insight into what English classrooms can look like when teachers are encouraged to rethink learning.

The teacher in Hynds' study, identified only as Meg, was assigned five classes of 7th grade students, who would continue with her for a 2-year period until their graduation from middle school. Following Hynds' model, she set out to establish a learner-centered classroom, one where students engage in choice, in collaborative learning, and in project-centered instruction. She set out to establish a classroom where students take charge of their own learning.

Balancing required reading with Literature Circles, where small groups of students choose a book to read and discuss, encouraging students to write about topics of their choice and express their ideas in the style of their choice, and conferencing with her students about their reading and writing, Meg elicited involvement from her students by giving them more control in their language arts activities (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983). Rather than a classroom where information is transmitted to students, she provided an environment where students transacted with the literature and brought themselves into the reading (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1995). This concept will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

Both Hynds, as researcher, and Meg, as teacher, are careful not to gloss over the challenges and frustrations they experienced. But, their goal of providing an environment where students are actively involved in the learning process is of greater significance in addressing changes that need to be made in schools than tinkering with graduation requirements or identifying a common curriculum (Goodlad, 1984; Kohn, 1999; Mayher, 1990; Newmann, 1992; Sedlak et al., 1986; Sizer, 1992; Smith, 1998; Wilson and Rossman, 1993).

Janet Allen (1995) narrates a powerful account of what happened in her own classroom when students became personally and actively engaged in their learning and how it affected not only the students but also the teacher. As a new teacher fresh from the university, armed with an idealistic view of how a high school English classroom might operate, Allen was jolted into reality with her first teaching assignment: five classes of General English I, II, and III; thirty students in each class, many already feeling passive, angry, and defeated about school. She had no textbooks, no curriculum guides, no supplementary materials, and an admonition to “Do whatever you want, just keep them in the room” (p. 2). It was only in retrospect that she was able to appreciate the freedom from prescribed texts, from curriculum guides, and from administrative mandates she had been given.

Initially attempting to join in the conspiracy of presenting a façade of orderly purpose (Sizer, 1992), she quickly learned that assigning a story from the textbooks she managed to borrow and expecting the students to read and answer the questions at the end of the selection would not work for the non-college bound students placed in her classroom. No amount of cajoling would lure her charges into this kind of school behavior. And, for that, as she looked back, she was grateful because it forced her to seek materials that might interest students who did not claim reading as an activity of choice. In the course of these survival days, as Allen (1995) describes them, she says,

I discovered some truths about teaching and learning. . . I discovered that students will read when they are given the time and opportunity to read. I discovered that students will write when they are allowed to write about what is

important to them. I discovered that they could be responsible, for themselves and each other, if given the opportunity. (p. 5)

The secret lies in creating an environment in which students can initiate this interest and can develop this responsibility (Allen, 1995; Atwell, 1987; Hynds, 1997; Kohn, 1999). One of the challenges for Allen lay in convincing students they could make choices about their reading and writing since their previous schooling had ill-prepared them to be decision makers about their learning. They had spent their time in elementary classrooms dominated by what Martin Haberman calls the “‘pedagogy of poverty’ – a curriculum based on teacher direction and student compliance” (qtd in Hynds, 1997, p. 62).

As an educational correspondent with *The New York Times* and a person not involved with the instructional process, Edward Fiske (1991) describes what is happening in public schools as he takes the reader into classrooms around the country where the “building blocks of smart schools are being developed” (p. 15). In Smart Schools, Smart Kids, he gives examples of how smart schools are being built – piece by piece. One of these examples is Judy Phillips’ ninth-grade English class in Louisville, Kentucky.

Phillips became a teacher because she loved learning, but she quickly discovered not all her students shared her zest for knowledge – much like Allen discovered her students didn’t share her enthusiasm for reading. She attributed their apathy and passiveness to traditional teaching methods claiming that “. . . schools have taught them to be that way. We promote and reward that kind of behavior” (Fiske, 1991, p. 77). Determined to engage her students in poetry, she evaluated her method of

teaching, eliminated the technical, tedious details, and encouraged the students to begin writing poetry about topics that interested them. She became a coach to her students teaching them about meter, rhyme, word choice, and punctuation – as they needed the information. Not only did student interest escalate but student performance significantly improved. In Phillips' estimation, student ownership was the critical component (Allen, 1995; Hynds, 1997; Newmann, 1992).

More specifically related to this study are examples of language arts teachers using visual arts activities to engage learners in their classrooms. Karen Ernst's Picturing Learning (1994) investigates the relationship between art and language arts and particularly the relationship between drawing and writing.

When a budget crisis eliminated her 22-year position as an 8th grade language arts and social studies teacher and because she had art certification, she was reassigned as an elementary art teacher. The twenty-two journals filled with narratives and drawings of her 365 students, K-4th grade, describe her journey to developing a student-centered classroom where she and her students worked collaboratively. The writing workshop approach (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983) she had used in her 8th grade language arts classroom provided the model for the workshop approach in her art room. She wanted to know what happens “when writing becomes an integral part of the art experience” (Ernst, 1994, p. 25). In her year-long study, after Ernst observed, interacted with, interviewed, and collected student examples, she stated,

Writing was a form of thinking and expression in the artists workshop. Some students chose to write instead of make pictures; others used writing to express or discover the meaning of their pictures, or to remember ideas of pictures, or to

think about, revise, and assess their pictures and process. Here words were partners with pictures, complementing students' processes, propelling their thinking. (p. 163)

It is this same connection that Janet Olson (1992) describes in Envisioning Writing. She argues that large numbers of children have difficulty with language in an academic setting because they are visual rather than verbal learners. Her study uses the "envisioning" process, a process that integrates the visual and verbal modes of expression. Based on historical and contemporary evidence, Olson maintains the two should not be separated. She says, "When language-arts teachers become aware that children are both visual and verbal learners, and that both pictures and words tell stories, they can make better use of this information in order to educate the 'total' child" (p. 51). Like Ernst, Olson's emphasis is drawing and writing. However, her strategies are less age specific.

To help their students construct meaning in alternate ways, Roberta Murata (1997), an English teacher, and Jacob Matteson, an art teacher, developed an English-Art course at Cibola High School in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Relying on the principle that students need to experience what they are learning, the art they emphasized was not based on masterpieces but on student-made pieces. In planning the course, Murata and Matteson designed a curriculum that utilized some of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory (1993) by combining verbal with visual learning styles. Their nontraditional classroom also included team teaching, a two-period block, no paper-and-pencil tests, and portfolios as assessment. Student responses indicated that

connecting English and art helped them respond more effectively with language, that one mode made the other more accessible.

In the small private Wisconsin high school where she teaches, Janet Jurgeila (1998) uses drawing to help her students face the challenge of reading classic literature. Recognizing their frustration with sentences packed with imagery or description, she asks them to work through the flowery language and create a concrete image on the chalkboard. Once they are encouraged to “see” what they are reading, they are more likely to understand what they have read. In addition to drawing, Jurgeila uses music, dramatic activities, film, and other literature to help her students make personal connections to their reader.

A must read for any language arts teacher searching for ways to develop an interactive classroom involving reading and art activities is You Gotta BE the Book: Teaching Engaged and Reflective Reading with Adolescents written by Jeffrey Wilhelm (1997). After seven years as a successful high school English teacher, Wilhelm transferred to a middle school where he became frustrated with students who resisted reading. In his agonizing, he came up with the idea that “students who hate to read can’t see what they are reading” (p. xii). From this deduction, he began to devise ways to help students see what the words in a text said. In the chapter entitled “Reading Is Seeing,” he tells the stories of three resistant readers and how visual activities aided their understanding of what they were asked to read. He says,

Much of what these students revealed to me made me begin to believe that these students did not ‘see’ anything when they read, and that therefore they could not experience and think about what they had read. They had no ownership over the

process, and no sense that it could work for them in personally meaningful ways. (p. 117)

Wilhelm cites many examples of engaging readers through visual possibilities: making movies, creating snapshot dramas where students freeze their bodies into particular scenes at a moment in time, drawing poster-size pictures, designing postcards. He also challenges the reader to reflect on present instructional practices that may not accommodate the learning styles of many students.

Like Wilhelm, Phyllis Whitin (1996) used her own classroom to explore the idea of students responding visually to literature. Her yearlong study involved two seventh-grade classes in which she investigated how sketching (Harste and Short, 1988) encouraged deeper understanding of literature. As students sketched, they talked and wrote about their drawing, collaborating as they shared ideas. According to Whitin, the students' conversations about the stories they read demonstrated increased insights. She attributed their ability to create meaning to the social interaction the research study encouraged.

Whitin identified two of the purposes for employing sketching as a way for students to respond to literature. First, the sketching caused the students to think about the meaning in order to invent a visual representation. Second, as members of the class shared their sketches, both students and Whitin discovered new insights. From writing the students did reflecting on their sketching, Whitin analyzed the data and determined the study supported teaching practices that provide opportunities for students of all ages to make and share meaning through multiple ways of expression.

The underlying philosophy that supports each of these language arts visionaries is exactly what Louise Rosenblatt has been advocating for the past six decades. It is in her classic work, Literature as Exploration, its first edition appearing in 1938, its fifth in 1995, where she first conveys the idea that reading is an active, not passive, experience and that the reader must be emotionally and intellectually involved. If literature is to be meaningful for students, there must be something that happens between the reader and the signs on the page. This transaction [Rosenblatt's term] is a spiraling, nonlinear, reciprocal occurrence and requires an active participant employing both cognitive and affective elements in his reading. It is the personal connection that the reader makes and not the analysis of its formal elements that gives literature its immediacy and emotional impact on an adolescent reader. The meaning one reader makes from a text may be entirely different from the reading another reader makes, and the same text may have a different meaning and value to the same reader under different times or different circumstances. This makes clear how critical it is that a teacher understand the reader in order to even have a chance at predicting what significance a text may have. A "one size fits all" curriculum is alien to this philosophy.

Another key idea of Rosenblatt's philosophy is that the adolescent needs "to encounter literature for which he possesses the intellectual, emotional, and experiential equipment" (p. 25). In her opinion, too many students may never read the classics because they were imposed upon them at too young an age. If a reader needs to draw on past experience for literature to be meaningful, then the literature he is asked to read needs to be at least remotely related to his realm of past experiences. It is the calling forth of familiar images that brings text to life and elicits an emotional response

enabling the reader to exercise his senses intensely and fully. This kind of reading Rosenblatt identifies as aesthetic as opposed to efferent reading or reading for a practical purpose.

In efferent reading, attention is primarily focused on abstracting information or ideas for later use, i.e. a paraphrase or summary of a biology text in preparation for a test. It involves activity that could be completed by some one else. However, to read a poem – her terminology for an aesthetic reading of a selection – demands an individual's total involvement in the experience using his mixture of sensations, feelings, images, and ideas to “live through” (p. 33) the author's creation. Aesthetic reading elicits total absorption from the reader. This total absorption was certainly a goal for Hynds (1997), Allen (1995), and Wilhelm (1997) as they struggled – with success – to engage students in reading. It is what all of us as secondary English teachers desire.

There may be no better message to be placed above all English classroom doors than Rosenblatt's description of what happens in the reading of a literary work:

The reader, drawing on past linguistic and life experience, links the signs on the page with certain words, certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain images of things, people, actions, scenes. The special meanings and, more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to *him*. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated

combination determine his interfusion with the peculiar contribution of the text.

For the adolescent reader, the experience of the work is further specialized by the fact that he has probably not yet arrived at a consistent view of life or achieved a fully integrated personality. (pp. 30-31)

Is it any wonder high school students don't choose to read or reluctantly read when they are handed a copy of a class set of novels? Schools being compared with other schools based on standardized tests, teachers being evaluated for merit pay based on student success rates, and state departments of education outlining minimum standards for high school graduates might do well to read Rosenblatt. Her philosophy gives me a foundation for using visual art activities in an 11th grade English classroom. Even though I may not be able to always provide only the reading material that students choose – as Rosenblatt suggests – I am hopeful that the connection with art will aid students in having that transaction with text that is critical to meaningful reading.

The Arts People Speak

Too long outside the mainstream of curriculum planning and school spending, the arts need to be recognized for their cognitive contribution to learning. They should no longer be relegated to the status of stepchild when educational philosophy is formed and goals are identified, but they should assume a role equal to the core disciplines of math, science, social studies, and language. Without the arts, a child's education is incomplete. Art must move from the periphery – on a Friday afternoon when the learning for the week is completed -- to the mainstream of curriculum -- where it is a vital part of literary discussion, an integral aspect of scientific experimentation, a

dimension of social studies concepts (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1976, 1978, 1994, 1998; Langer, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1938, 1995).

That art may be gaining some permanence in the school setting is evidenced by a study conducted by the Getty Center in 1996. At that time, thirty states had a high school graduation requirement in the arts. Most of the uncommitted had issued statements of intent (Boston, 1996). Acknowledging the value of art in curriculum planning is not a new idea but, like many topics in education, a recycled concept.

In the 1930s, John Dewey (1934) examined the relationship between intelligence and art and identified the value of art as a vital curricular component. He wrote in Art as Experience:

Any idea that ignores the necessary role of intelligence in production of works of art is based upon identification of thinking with use of one special kind of material, verbal signs and words. To think effectively in terms of relations of qualities is as severe a demand upon thought as to think in terms of symbols, verbal and mathematical. Indeed, since words are easily manipulated in mechanical ways, the production of a work of genuine art probably demands more intelligence than does most of the so-called thinking that goes on among those who pride themselves on being “intellectuals.” (p. 46)

Eisner (1976, 1978, 1994, 1998) extends Dewey’s argument that creating art demands rigorous intellectual activity. Creating a picture, a poem, or a musical composition requires knowledge of the qualities of each. These qualities, Eisner says, “must be seen, modulated, transformed, and organized in the course of one’s work” (1998, p. 62). Curriculum that includes nondiscursive forms of representation, such as

art, music, dance, poetry, and literature, gives students opportunities to use their minds in a variety of ways that cultivate critical, engaged thinking (Eisner, 1998; Langer, 1995).

Langer argues that it is this nondiscursive attribute that gives art its unique and valuable contribution to a child's learning. In an early publication, Problems of Art, she distinguishes between discursive symbolism that is characterized by the scientific method, by logic, and by verbal and written language and presentational symbolism or nondiscursive. Whatever resists logic and order, whatever seems difficult or impossible to communicate via speaking or writing, she calls presentational symbolism or nondiscursive mode. These are the "symbols [like the appearance of a person or the ambience of a particular day] that provide meaning through a sum of their parts rather than through discrete, translatable messages" (Gardner, 1982). A school curriculum that focuses only on discursive activities fails to recognize the multiple ways of understanding represented in a classroom of students (Gardner, 1993; Langer, 1995).

Educational psychologists Robert Ley and Melvin Kaushansky (1985) also argue for the inclusion of right-brain instruction. In response to public schools' heavy-handed focus on left-brain instruction, Ley and Kaushansky urge educators to respect the strengths of right-brain students. They recommend a balance of the two hemispheres in curriculum planning, suggesting the two work in tandem to complement each other.

Because both viewing art and creating art celebrate judgment, risk taking, speculation, and interpretation, these experiences invite modes of thinking that are essential to a strong academic curriculum. Through the arts, a student can examine a

painting, for example, or create his own art and see multiple interpretations. He can recognize that not everything in his world comes in a neat, tidy, explainable package. In a literature class, activities like these help students understand that a text does not possess a single correct meaning. Outside the classroom, these right-brain or nondiscursive activities better prepare students for the ambiguities of the real world (Eisner, 1994; Langer, 1995). Students who do not develop these critical thinking skills may be conditioned to expect an answer for every problem, learn how to follow rules, complete assignments, and do what others expect. They are ill prepared to be independent thinkers.

David Perkins (1994) also sees art as a way to address his concern that schools may not be developing critical thinkers. In his book The Intelligent Eye: Learning to Think by Looking at Art, he proposes looking at works of art to develop thinking skills. Because one can not understand a painting by a walk-by observation, the time necessary to look, examine, and reflect help cultivate cognitive habits that aren't hasty or fuzzy. According to Perkins, examining art provokes reflection, stirs feelings, and elicits different kinds of thinking – visual processing, analytical thinking, questioning, hypothesizing – all which exercise the mind in different ways than students passively sitting in a classroom taking in the knowledge dispensed by the teacher.

Another ardent supporter for arts in the curriculum is Stephen Mark Dobbs (1996) whose introductory remarks to Bruce Boston's Connections: The Arts and the Integration of the High School Curriculum include two arguments for the central role in which he places the arts in secondary curriculum. His first argument focuses on the cognitive contribution the arts make. They promote broad, deep thinking and provide

multiple levels of understanding. They require a student to use his imagination, to interpret, to critique, to analyze, to compare, and to create new ideas, all abilities critical to the highly technological, multicultural, information-laden 21st century we are approaching. His second argument focuses on the curriculum contribution the arts can make. They break the boundaries of the territorial structure of the traditional high school curriculum. They allow students to make connections from one idea to another, from one subject to another. They embody the rich diversity of human experience across time, space, and cultures.

Continuing Dobbs' theme, Boston (1996) states that the arts can revitalize today's fragmented curriculum and bring about much needed change. Because art enables students to see the whole picture, it can help them regain a sense of connection to their world. It is this big picture, says Boston, which entices business leaders to join the arts bandwagon. They are confident that art encourages individuals to think creatively, make decisions, solve problems, see with the mind's eye, learn, and reason – all desirable qualities, indeed, for any business. Even though workplace tasks involve interrelationships and interactions, the school world too often continues to wall off and separate subjects. Through art, both Dobbs and Boston are hopeful students will be able to see connections.

These connections make art and visual art activities essential to secondary classrooms. The perception and enjoyment, or esthetic experience as Dewey (1934) calls it, that enables a reader to become steeped in the subject matter demands that he plunge in and become actively involved. It is that excitement stirred up by attitudes and

meaning from prior experience that may best be expressed artistically. The process of the creation may be as valuable to the producer as the outcome (pp. 53, 65).

It is that plunging in and becoming actively involved that Janet Allen (1995) sought in her classroom of reluctant readers. When the nonreaders in her Reading and Writing Workshop finally managed to see pictures in their heads, she called it a miracle. Karen Ernst (1994) observed that literature gave students ideas for pictures and projects and helped them decide on topics. For Jeff Wilhelm (1997), the creation of artwork gave students concrete tools and experiences to think with and talk about. Phyllis Whitin (1996) encouraged her 7th graders to stretch their understanding of literature by sketching what they “saw” in a story, talking and collaborating as they drew.

Eisner (1998) thinks when we say we enjoy reading what we really mean is that “the images it helps us generate are the sources of our satisfaction” (p. 9). He continues by saying that since humans think not only in language but also in visual images, the “surest way to create semiliterate graduates from American secondary schools is to insure that many of the most important forms through which meaning is represented will be enigmas to our students, codes they cannot crack” (p. 19).

The external embodiment [the visual] of the reading experience for each of these examples is what makes it complete (Dewey, 1934). The work of art a student produces not only tells something about the nature of that person but it also helps him see the world in a new light. This study will focus on helping students see the world in a new light as they give visual embodiment to the literature they read. Along the way, they may even “be set on fire by a thought or scene” (Dewey, 1934, p. 65). I can only hope.

Summary

In this literature review, I have presented the arguments of those who disagree with the mediocre evaluation A Nation at Risk (1983) provided of schools in these United States. They also challenge the solutions that reformers like Finn, Ravitch, and Fancher (1984) offer: more rigorous classes, greater graduation requirements, more time spent on teaching and learning, and raising academic standards for teachers. Rather than trying to fix an out-of-date school model in need of an overhaul (Glickman, 1998), these opponents maintain the educational climate must become more enticing, students need to become engaged, active learners, and collaborative learning should be encouraged.

I have also included specific examples of language arts teachers who have worked to create a classroom environment that engages students in collaborative learning – and have succeeded. In addition, I have given space to the art community to present their argument that the arts are important for the cognitive contributions they make in the curriculum. Lastly, I focus on Louise Rosenblatt, Elliot Eisner, and John Dewey, who provide the foundation for my interest in incorporating visual arts activities into a language arts classroom.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Introduction

Chapter III explains the method of the study. To provide an argument for educational ethnography and to encourage its consideration in educational research, I begin this chapter with an overview of educational ethnography as a qualitative research method. I have also included information about the characteristics of educational ethnography: participant observation, interviews, questionnaires and inventories, and personal writing. This overview is followed by a brief description of portraiture, the data reporting model I used (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997).

After this general discussion of educational ethnography and portraiture, I have included information that is more specific to the study. There I have stated the problem, identified the study's purpose and research question, and described the physical as well as instructional setting. Next, I have presented the participants and the research design and procedures. Finally, I have listed the materials I used for data collection and described the data analysis process.

Educational Ethnography as Qualitative Research Method

Educational ethnographic research has become a major naturalistic alternative to experimental methodologies (Bishop, 1999; Goetz and LeCompte, 1984; Kamil et al.,

1985; Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997; Woods, 1986). Educational ethnography is an expansion of the term ethnography, which was originally used in the field of anthropology to refer to the process of studying a whole culture. While ethnography describes a culture, what being a member of that culture means, and how that culture differs from others cultures (Kamil et al.), educational ethnography examines the culture of an educational setting. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) state its purpose is “to provide rich, descriptive data about the contexts, activities, and beliefs of participants in educational settings” (p. 17). Since the focus involves an educational setting, the investigation may include only a single class or a sampling of a whole school system.

Specifically, Peter Woods (1986) in Inside Schools and Wendy Bishop (1999) in Ethnographic Writing Research provide the theoretical framework for this study. Both Woods and Bishop extend the term ethnography from its anthropological meaning of a description of a group of people, or a natural culture, to a description of a group of students in a classroom, or a “temporarily convened culture” (Bishop, p. 3).

In Inside Schools (1986), Woods suggests ethnography and the teacher as researcher make an ideal match because much of a teacher’s time is naturally spent in ethnographic activities, i.e. observing, listening, trying to understand students and colleagues. In addition, ethnographic research conducted by the on-site teacher is well suited to closing the gap between educational research and educational practice, between theory and practice.

Woods (1986) identifies parallels between anthropological ethnography and educational ethnography that make them suitable partners:

- Both are concerned with telling a story.
- Both present their work in the form of a commentary on some aspect of human life.
- Both yield results that cannot be acquired in any other way.
- Both can have considerable practical value.
- In both, the researcher is the chief research instrument and has a large measure of control over the work done.
- In both, the researcher must work at developing personal qualities of curiosity, insight, discretion, patience, determination, stamina, memory, and the art of good listening and observing.
- In both, the researcher is on a personal quest in a situation that has unique properties.
- In both, the researcher must try to neutralize his/her own views, opinions, knowledge, and biases.

In Ethnographic Writing Research (1999), Bishop describes ethnographic research as a “complicated hybridization” (p. 4) of sociological, cognitive, and anthropological research traditions. She identifies the following characteristics of the emerging ethnographic tradition in education: 1) It tries to understand human behavior from participants’ frame of reference; 2) It observes patterns of behavior as participants engage in regularly occurring activities; 3) It develops hypotheses grounded in events; and 4) It confirms using a variety of information sources.

Bishop’s interest in ethnographic research methodology began with her own dissertation in 1988 as she grappled with identifying it as naturalistic research or teacher research or case study research. Even though she eventually focused on ethnographic research as it specifically involves writing classrooms, she encourages the reader to make her book a resource to fit his/her needs.

Bishop acknowledges there are researchers who argue that naturalistic research like ethnography serves to augment and supplement cognitive research or that it identifies and develops hypotheses that can then be tested. She, however, maintains that

ethnographic approaches and methods are not “*in service of* but are *equal to*” (p. 5) other methods of inquiry. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) concur with Bishop that ethnographic research stands on its own merit. Their investigation of ethnographic research evolved, much like Bishop’s, out of their commitment and belief in the rigor and importance of educational ethnography.

Participant Observation

Woods (1986) identifies participant observation as the chief method of ethnographic research. The central idea of participation is to experience personally the group as much as possible and participant observation allows one to observe from the closest range. By participating, the researcher both acts on and is acted upon by the environment. Because teachers already occupy a role within their own classroom, they are ideally placed observers. However, the teacher must balance personal involvement and a measure of detachment or objectivity (Woods, 1986; Bishop, 1999).

Potter (in Bishop, 1999, p. 75) identifies three observational choices: passive observer, active observer, and active participant. The second choice – active observer – is the stance most frequently selected because it allows the researcher to move into the scene where it seems natural and to move back to observe more carefully when that seems more appropriate. The second choice – that of active observer – was the one I selected.

As an active observer, Goetz and LeCompte (1984) recommend general guidelines for the researcher: 1) *Who* is in the group? 2) *What* is happening? 3) *Where* is the group located? 4) *When* does the group meet? 5) *How* is the group connected –

from the participants' point of view or from the researcher's perspective? 6) *Why* does the group operate as it does? An observer would not address all these questions, but they provide an organizational framework.

Interviews

Woods (1986) suggests the terms conversation or discussion are more appropriate in an ethnographic study. Interview, a more formal term, implies a formality the ethnographer seeks to avoid. These conversations or discussions encourage a two-way, informal, free-flowing process where the interviewer and interviewee do not feel bound by roles. They may be structured or unstructured; formal or informal; documented by note taking or audio taping, or both; exploratory or confirming; individual or group; specific or grand-tour questions (Bishop, 1999). The researcher must assure confidentiality and anonymity for the interviewee and should maintain a middle ground that neither encourages nor discourages, approves or disapproves. The researcher's role is to facilitate conversation and remain open to the interviewee's ideas and comments (Woods, 1986).

Questionnaires and Inventories

Questionnaires and inventories collect general information from the members of the research population. They are a convenient way to collect data from a wider sample than can be reached by personal interview. They provide a baseline of information and help the researcher get acquainted with the population and/or establish rapport. They can be used for broad comparative purposes and can be analyzed for recurring themes

or showing a range of answers (Bishop, 1999). Questionnaires should be brief and appropriately designed for research study (Bishop, 1999; Woods, 1986).

Personal Writing

Personal writing, i.e. reader response journal, can provide information about a student's attitudes and views and his/her background and experiences. Personal writing may contain more information than a questionnaire or inventory because the student has time to think about his/her responses (Woods, 1986).

Reporting the Data

Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) provides a model for my reporting of the data. In both The Good High School (1983) and in The Art and Science of Portraiture (1997), a book she co-authored with Jessica Davis, Lightfoot describes and illustrates portraiture, a method by which she links research and an imaginative, artful telling of that research. By definition, she says portraiture shares many of the techniques, standards, and goals of ethnography, but it pushes against the constraints of those traditions and practices. Portraiture, according to Lightfoot, aims to combine empirical and aesthetic description. It focuses on the convergence of narrative and analysis. It speaks to a broader audience beyond the academy. It recognizes the use of the self as the primary research instrument for documenting and interpreting. In portraiture, the researcher/portraitist wants to develop a narrative that is convincing and authentic, one that records the subtle details of the culture. She desires to document the complexity

and detail of a particular experience or place, hoping the participants will see themselves reflected and trusting that the readers recognize themselves (1983, p. 14).

Lightfoot's methodology evolved from her own experience of having her portrait made. When she saw the final product, she didn't think it looked like her, but it captured her essence. She also thought it told her things about herself she had never noticed before or admitted. Thus, she wanted her encounters as a social scientist, and especially in schools, to show dimensions that the subjects themselves may not recognize. She wanted to create portraits "that would inspire shock and recognition in the subjects and new understandings and insights in the viewers/readers" (p. 6).

She describes her process of creating a portrait as:

On each canvas, in broad strokes, I sketch the backdrop. The shapes and figures are more carefully and distinctly drawn, and attention is paid to design and composition. Using another artistic metaphor, for each portrait, the stage is set, the props are arranged, the characters are presented, and the plot develops. Individual faces and voices are rendered in order to tell a broader story about the institutional culture. The details are selected to depict and display general phenomena about people and places. I tell the stories, paint the portrait – "from the inside out." (1983, pp. 6-7)

Lightfoot also wanted her inquires to begin by examining what works rather than looking at what is not working in schools. It is her opinion that, in recent years, too many scholars studying schools have emphasized the negative rather than any positive aspects.

Since I wanted to paint a picture of what happened in my classroom as a teacher/researcher and since I wanted to emphasize what can work rather than what doesn't work, Lightfoot's presentation of data seemed like an ideal model for me.

Statement of the Problem

The emphasis on drill and skill teaching, frequent testing, unengaged secondary students, and prescribed curriculum – characteristics of traditional education – is not preparing students for the 21st century. There is a need to reevaluate how content is presented and envision alternative pedagogical environments in order that high school students can be more involved in the learning process (Kohn, 1999; Renzulli, 1998; Zemelman, Daniels, & Bizar, 1999).

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to describe what happens in an 11th grade English classroom when students engage in a variety of visual arts activities.

The following research question will guide this study:

What does an 11th grade English classroom look like that employs a nontraditional pedagogy using visual arts activities to make sense of literature?

Setting

The site for this study was a high school located in a university community in the Midwest. It is the only high school for the approximately 43,000 residents who live in the town and its surrounding rural area. About 1200 students attend grades 10 – 12.

The racial composition of the high school is 86% Euroamerican, 4% African American, 2% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 6% American Indian. Because the university attracts students and professors from other countries, there are sometimes sons and daughters, brothers and sisters from these minority cultures attending the public high school while family members complete programs or teach at the university. The socioeconomic status [SES] of the population is largely middle-class.

Thus far, this school has remained insulated from problems besetting urban schools. Gang activity is minimal, student misbehavior is manageable, and school violence only occasionally makes the news although more of this may exist than administrators or teachers acknowledge or know about. Like most towns this size, municipal and school authorities prefer clinging to an idyllic view of a smaller, rural community located in the nation's heartland.

Instructional Setting

As the teacher / researcher, my English III classroom was the specific setting for this proposed study. Decorated in a Route 66 theme, it offers a very visual – and atypical -- school environment for students. Both males and females enjoy the license plates and state shields secured to the walls as well as the motel and highway signs painted on the walls. The blend of student desks and rectangular tables affords space for students to engage in art activities and collaborative endeavors. The walls provide display areas for completed works and art prints. Bookshelves housing crayons, magic markers, colored pencils, and paper of all types – butcher, construction, white drawing – invite students to give visual expression to what they read. The taupe walls and the

Route 66 themed wallpaper encourage a relaxed atmosphere, one where students, though obligated to be there, feel welcome.

On a typical day in Room 203, students might be seen sketching Captain Ahab after reading an excerpt from Melville's Moby-Dick, making a design of Prince Prospero's castle described in Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death," drawing the images they "see" in the portion of Whittier's Snowbound included in the literary anthology, or presenting a dramatized version of a short story. Scattered around the room are visual connections to books students have read. Examples include: a scaled version of Lennie's dream farm in Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men – complete with a clothesline and tiny clothespins, landscaping, a carefully constructed red barn, miniature farm animals, etc.; a steering wheel explaining the symbolism in Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings; a large package illustrating the theme of Lowry's The Giver; and children's books written and illustrated by students.

Participants

The participants in the proposed study were my 1st and 3rd period classes, two groups of 16- to 18-year old juniors in high school taking an on level, required English class. There were approximately 40 males and females representing a mixture of abilities and interests. Students were generally well behaved and responsive. Participants were involved in the study during the fall semester of the 2000-2001 school year. A semester represents a yearlong course meeting five days per week in an 18-week block of time.

Research Design

An ethnographic approach guided this study of what happens in an 11th grade English classroom when students engage in a variety of visual activities in their study of American literature. The research met the requirements established by the Internal Review Board (IRB) when human subjects are involved. Wendy Bishop's Ethnographic Writing Research (1999) and Peter Woods' Inside Schools (1986) provided the framework to describe what occurs when students interact with literature in nontraditional ways. Since, as Woods suggests, much of a teacher's time is naturally spent in ethnographic activities, i.e. observing, listening, trying to understand students and colleagues, who, then, can better tell the story of a "temporarily convened [classroom]culture" (Bishop, 1999, p. 3) than the teacher who is part of it? Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot's The Art and Science of Portraiture (1997) provided the model for the reporting of data.

As a teacher/researcher immersed in the site of inquiry, I acknowledge my subjectivity and recognize that I was not the objective researcher who was an outsider coming in to observe in an unfamiliar setting. It is this subjective perception that constitutes a major distinction between ethnographic research and research from other traditions (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). Wolcott (1995) identifies subjectivity as a strength of qualitative inquiry; I follow his lead. Bishop (1999) agrees with Wolcott and claims that ethnographers admit and celebrate the subjective nature of their inquiry. I was aware that I must make the familiar strange and aimed for the "heightened feeling of aliveness and awareness" Heshusius (1994, p. 16) advocates. And, as Woods (1986)

suggests, as much as possible, I neutralized my own views, opinions, and biases, seeking to make the study as rigorous as possible.

Describing ethnographic research as a “complicated hybridization” (Bishop, 1999, p. 4) of sociological, cognitive, and anthropological research traditions, Bishop identifies the following characteristics of the emerging ethnographic tradition in education: 1) It tries to understand human behavior from participants’ frame of reference; 2) It observes patterns of behavior as participants engage in regularly occurring activities; 3) It develops hypotheses grounded in events; and 4) It confirms using a variety of information sources (p. 4). She acknowledges the evolving nature of this research approach but she also argues its worth in the hierarchy of research genres.

I was not gathering measurable facts nor was I looking for the same answer from every student. Rather, I was trying to understand how students respond to literature when given an opportunity to transact with text in a variety of ways (Rosenblatt, 1995). I interacted with students, engaged in interviews, and asked them to reflect on nontraditional ways of “doing English.”

Claiming the view of Eisner (1994) that school studies are best conducted by those involved in the educational process, i.e. teachers, and that the researcher’s voice should be present in the presentation of data, I have written a descriptive, first-person account about what goes on when high school juniors draw, color, write, make personal connections, and collaborate with peers in regards to specific literature they are reading in an English classroom.

Two challenges presented themselves in using my own classroom as a research site. I needed to balance the demands of collecting and making sense of data and the

daily demands of classroom preparation. I was aware that analyzing data is an ongoing process demanding time management skills (Lareau, 1989). Because I was assuming a dual role of researcher and teacher, I encouraged honest evaluation by students when they completed surveys, wrote reflections, and participated in interviews.

Procedure

In order to answer the research question identified in Chapters I and III, as author/researcher of this study, I developed a thick description of what happens in an 11th grade English classroom when students interact with literature using visual activities. Thick description is defined as “description that goes beyond the mere or bare reporting of an act, but describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action” (Denzin, 1989, p. 39). This thick description, which produces trustworthy and convincing stories based on carefully collected data, is the traditional reporting of ethnographic research (Bishop, 1999).

To carry out this qualitative study, I have identified the process that I followed. As the teacher / researcher, I designed activities that fit the characteristics of a nontraditional classroom as defined in Chapter I. I obtained permission from the central administration of the school district as well as the Institutional Review Board at Oklahoma State University to conduct research. I identified the participants [my 1st and 3rd period classes] for my study and sent letters to the parents of those participants requesting permission for their son or daughter to be part of my study.

At the beginning of the semester, I described my research project to the students. I explained that I would be observing them while they did art activities, that they would

write about those experiences, and participate in interviews. I also explained that each student would be assigned a fictitious name to assure his or her anonymity.

As a researcher, I knew responses gleaned from one source of data collection might support data gleaned from another – or they could raise new ideas. Mathison (1988) suggests this is a very real possibility since “different methods [may] tap different domains of knowing” (p. 14). However, gathering data from participant observation, interviews, reflective writing, and drawing provided trustworthiness to the study. There is no promise of data triangulation, says Denzin (1989) but it does show a commitment to a rigorous study.

Data Collection Materials

First, students completed a reading attitude inventory at the beginning of the study. Secondly, data were collected from participant observation, informal interviews, and taped interviews. Thirdly, drawings, projects, and portfolios illustrated student interaction with literature utilizing visual activities. Fourthly, reflective papers provided information about how high school students view art activities.

Data Analysis

I continually evaluated the data collected -- from observations, interviews, student drawings and writings -- and from the analytic memos to make sense of my findings. Numerous readings, multiple codings, and repeated rearranging enabled me to recognize emergent themes, always trying to look at the findings as an outsider might view them. I wanted them to lead me into new knowledge rather than my forcing them

into stories I already expected to tell (Bishop, 1999). These themes provided a frame on which to display the portraits of thick, descriptive narrative.

A narrative of the information gained from the Reading Attitude Inventory (Gambrell et al., 1996) described students' general interest in reading and how they view themselves as readers.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot's The Art and Science of Portraiture was my model for creating word pictures to show what happened in two 11th grade English classes when a teacher/researcher used visual arts activities to help students make sense of literature. Following her lead, I have blended the social scientist's method of inquiry and documentation, concerned with rigor and evidence, with aesthetic expression. Like Lightfoot, I have attentive to themes and imagery. Writing in a narrative style, I have bridged the realms of science and art by sketching a series of portraits to present data collected from the observations, student writings, student drawings, and interviews.

I was the teacher/researcher and the 11th grade English classes were my assignment for the fall semester of the 2000-2001 school year. The nontraditional pedagogy of drawing at the high school level had begun sneaking into my lesson plans for the previous five or six years, but this time the focus was on *seeing* what was happening in the classroom and not just *looking*. Eisner (1985) makes a clear distinction between the two activities in The Educational Imagination. In that text, he states, "Seeing is an accomplishment, something that is learned; it is not an automatic consequence of maturation" (p. 166) while looking implies a task to be done. As a

veteran teacher, I desired to participate in active, intentional seeing and not to fall prey to the automatic looking that can come with familiarity.

From the very beginning of the school year, drawing and sketching were common occurrences in Room 203. Sometimes used to introduce a selection, sometimes used to respond while students read a selection, and sometimes used to provide synthesis at the end of a short story or unit, they became part of the American literature curriculum for the Fall 2000 semester in my 1st and 3rd period classes. The boxes of crayons and the stacks of drawing paper were as familiar to the students as their anthologies or library books. The first two portraits provide a backdrop for the study.

The Backdrop

Portrait # 1 – *“Reading: Good or Bad?”*

Since literature (reading) is a major part of any secondary English class and since literature is a major component of the research question, it seemed important to know how the participants in the study viewed reading. To do this, I asked each student to complete a reading attitude inventory (Gambrell et al., 1996) at the beginning of the semester.

Of the 35 students in the two English III classes, all rated themselves as OK, good or very good readers. No one labeled himself or herself as a poor reader. Thirty-one individuals claimed that knowing how to read well was important or very important. Twenty-five indicated they understood almost everything they read when they were alone. Seventeen could almost always figure out a word that they didn't know

when they were reading while 16 could sometimes figure out the word. Yet, in spite of feeling reasonably competent with their reading abilities, not many viewed reading as an enjoyable or desirable leisure time activity. Of these 35 students, fewer than half (15) would even choose to talk about books some of the time and only nine rated reading as fun or really fun. Spending time in a library was mediocre or boring to 27 of these students although 24 anticipated reading some or a lot when they are adults.

Not having known these individuals during their elementary, middle school, or junior years, I do not know if their attitudes toward reading have changed as they have grown older or if these are consistent with earlier stances. In this study, the Reading Attitude Inventory (Gambrell et al., 1996) provided a baseline that allowed me to know more about how these 35 students perceived themselves as readers in terms of ability and attitude. This provided a framework in which to observe their interaction with the literature they would be asked to read in an English III class focusing on American literature.

The knowledge that these students viewed themselves as possessing at least adequate reading skills -- yet exhibiting a less than enthusiastic attitude toward the experience of reading -- laid the groundwork to see what an English III classroom using visual art activities looks like. I wanted to see how these activities affected what sense students make of the literature they are asked to read. I also wanted to see whether or not these activities affected their interest in the literature they were asked to read. Since student engagement is critical to enhance learning, according to Fred Newmann (1992) in his book Student Engagement and Achievement in American Secondary Schools, I was hopeful visual activities would allow students to become actively involved and

more attentive in their literary study. These opportunities to draw contrast sharply to the ritualistic, mechanistic, and trivial routines that Newmann says dominate American secondary schools and produce little substantive understanding.

Portrait # 2 – “*Classroom 203*”

Room 203 has the basic look of a “standard issue school” in that the walls are cement block, the shape is rectangular, and the finishing details are spare. Rubber molding serves as base board and the carpet is industrial strength designed to accommodate the traffic of many feet in a nine-month period. With these stark elements as a backdrop, this junior English classroom builds on the utilitarian features to provide a departure from the usual classroom look.

The Route 66 theme gives a visual appeal atypical of most secondary classrooms. Three of the four walls are painted a neutral sand color to provide a display for signs depicting reminders of historic Route 66: Mom’s Diner, an arrow that might promote a drive-in theater, a motel sign entitled the Dew Drop Inn, a border near the top of the room suggesting a road, and a replica of the Route 66 road sign. On the border are anchored state signs of six of the eight states through which Route 66 was built and a mixture of license plates, many of which represent these eight states. The fourth wall is a medium blue that accents one of the colors in the Route 66 wallpaper covering an inset behind a storage cabinet. The paper is a pleasing mixture of browns, blues, greens, and black. The border of car tags on the small blue burlap bulletin board on that same west wall is one that coordinates with the paper. Prominently displayed on the south wall are framed poster size pictures of Marilyn Monroe and James Dean. An

architectural rendering of an early day gas station that still stands in Bristow, Oklahoma, hangs beside a basket of old state maps.

The furniture is also atypical of most secondary classrooms. Room 203 contains a mixture of rectangular tables (approx 3 ½ feet by 6 feet), trapezoidal tables that can function alone, together, or as connectors to the rectangular tables, and traditional one-piece student chair-desk combinations. The mix of tables and desks offers an alternative to the familiar line-up of rows of desks that students usually see. They can be and frequently are rearranged.

The stage is set; the props are arranged (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). It is time to unveil what happened. From the data I collected, I worked to try to understand what I had seen students do, what I had heard students say, and what I had read that students had written in this semester-long study. I wanted to present as accurately as I could their stories and not what I assumed I would find. To do this, I transcribed and numbered the observations, interviews and writing responses. Then I was able to begin the coding process and look for themes that might emerge from the data.

Consistently, the coding identified a variety of activities that students were involved in which fit into three categories: preparatory, tactile, and reflective. The first group of activities included those processes that helped students get ready for the tactile engagement. These I have labeled preparatory and involve brainstorming, conferring, collaborating, clarifying, and questioning, as examples. The second group of activities, the tactile, involved hands-on projects. Examples include sketching, making a chart, or creating a web. A third group of activities I have called reflective and most typically would be the last of the thinking processes about a piece of literature. Reflective

activities might include evaluating, explaining, or reflecting. However, the three groups work together and in any order so that they continuously engage the reader in thinking.

From these activities that students engaged in, two themes emerged. The first theme is that employing the nontraditional pedagogy of using visual arts activities to make sense of literature in an 11th grade English classroom encourages students to be involved cognitively with the literature. They interact with text in a variety of ways that show they are engaged in their reading and thinking about it.

A second theme that emerged from my semester long inquiry with two of my 11th grade English classes focused on the classroom environment and the role of the student in that environment. As I read and reread the data, a frequent idea surfaced suggesting that employing the nontraditional pedagogy of using visual arts activities to make sense of literature empowers students. The emphasis in the classroom changes from competition to cooperation; it becomes less teacher-directed and more student-led. The playfulness identified with elementary classrooms blends artfully with the seriousness associated with high school learning.

Using a series of portraits (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1977) to present my data, I invite you to view the participants and the events as they show these two themes that emerged from the data. The first series showcases the relationship between cognition and visual activities. A second series of portraits illustrates the student-friendly environment.

Theme # 1 – Cognitive Involvement

Portrait #3 - “No Two Alike”

One of the first experiences for the students in Room 203 to read and draw came early in the semester after they had read an excerpt from Hiroshima (Hersey, 1948) and one from Dispatches (Herr, 1977), both part of a collection of 20th century nonfiction writers. While both authors focus on war – Hersey, WWII; Herr, Vietnam -- they present it very differently. To draw attention to these differences, I asked my juniors to make a T-chart, writing Hersey on one side of the “T” and Herr on the other, that would show the characteristics of each author’s writing style. A familiar graphic organizer for students, a T-chart is an easy way for students to show similarities and/or differences between two things, i.e. writing style, content. The large “T” drawn across the page visually divided the paper into two parts and made it easy for students to number the distinctions between Hersey’s and Herr’s writing. An exchange of ideas followed which gave them an opportunity to add, delete, or clarify information in their chart.

Then, I passed out sheets of unlined paper and requested that they portray visually their interpretation of how Hersey and Herr presented a war situation. Some students were unsure how to approach an assignment like this that asked them to synthesize the information in their T-charts and translate it visually. Three or four asked questions trying to get specific information about what I wanted them to do. Others quickly took up their pencils and began their illustrations. Some picked up a box of crayons or colored pencils from the art table before they started. Others waited to get

crayons and pencils after they had completed their sketches. Some students shared boxes of crayons and pencils. Others preferred their own boxes.

Students approached the assignment in a variety of ways. Anna, a conscientious student, with little hesitation, began her illustration. The look on her face was serious; she was intent on what she was drawing. Often opening her anthology to look at the text, she worked without stopping from the beginning of art time until the end of the class period – about 25 minutes.

Jeremy and Brandon occasionally conferred with each other about their drawing and both consulted their textbooks periodically. When Brandon handed in his work at the end of the period, he jokingly said, “Jeremy copied.” One of the first students to complete the visual activity, Brandon began reading his library book while the rest of the class continued drawing. Marty, too, finished early and joined Brandon in library time. Stefan came to the art table to get a second piece of paper so that he could “start over” with a new idea. Leanne drew a line down the middle of her paper, dividing it into two parts, and sat for almost ten minutes before she ever made another mark. She then picked up her pencil and began sketching. Stefan watched Anna sketch for a few minutes before he became involved in his own creation. Matt used two colored pencils together to make a silhouette effect.

Except for the few questions that were asked at the beginning of the drawing time, the room was almost silent. Once students became involved in trying to communicate visually, they seemed oblivious to the others around them. Occasionally, a student leaned over to look at another’s paper or borrow a book, but those interruptions did not distract students from the task in process.

During the first 20 minutes or so of class, students made and explained what they had included in their T-charts. The rest of the 85-minute period they were engaged in drawing. Since they had previously read the selections, their textbooks were used only to clarify an idea or revisit a section of the assignment. The 22 students in this 1st period class produced a variety of visual interpretations delineating the difference in the two authors' writing styles. Stefan drew a notebook with the word AGENDA written on the front. Below that, he numbered and/or bulleted lines to suggest text. In his explanation, he stated, "I was trying to show Hersey was organized. He thought everything through and set it up before putting it in writing." To illustrate Herr, he scattered light bulbs across the paper and drew lines to suggest writing beneath each one "because that is what Herr's writing was like. Every time he got a thought or idea he would just write it down. He wasn't organized; he was more random."

In a very different visual interpretation, Anna drew eight wavy lines across her paper and alternated the colors of purple, red, purple, and blue. In her explanation, she said,

Hersey is a very descriptive author. He was able to write about something [war] so dark and dramatic and was still able to capture the beauty of his tale. I drew these lines flowing across my paper to represent the nice flow of Hersey's writing. They also go in a pattern. This represents Hersey's time pattern and how he stuck to it. The colors represent the mood of the story. The red is the bomb in the story (Figure 1).

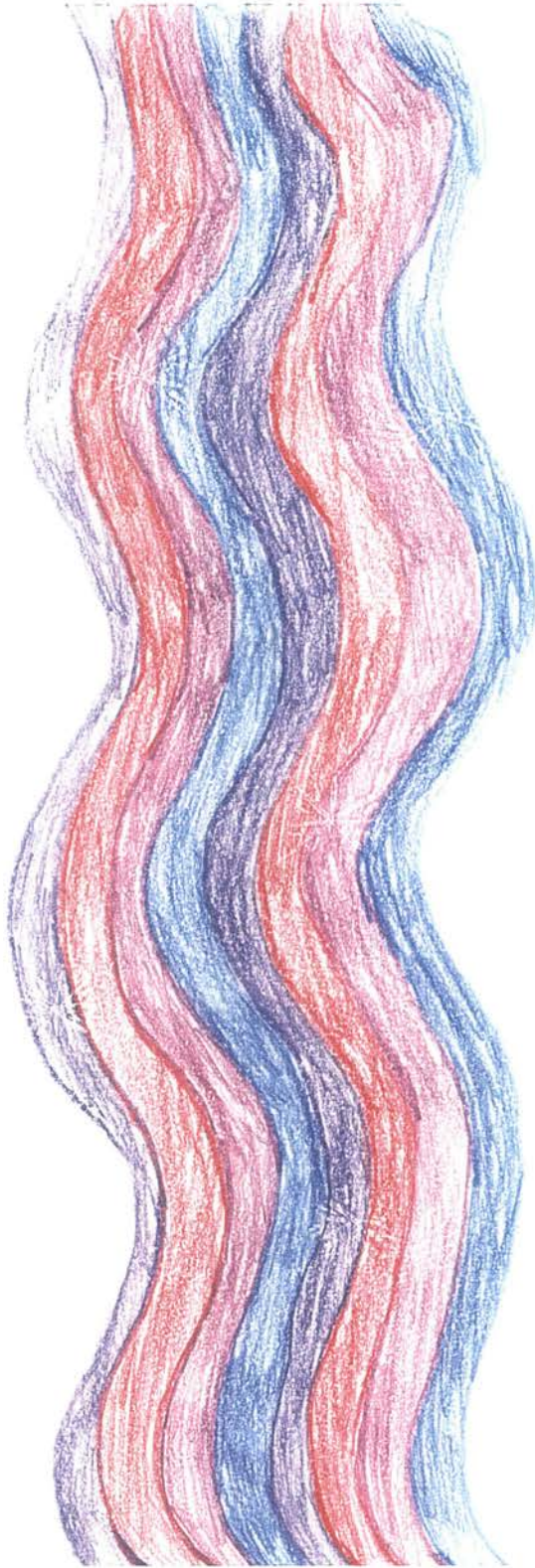


Figure 1. *War*

Anna drew figures suggesting flashes of light to illustrate Herr's writing style, explaining that he "wrote in a sporadic sense. He jumped from one thought to another, like brilliant flashes of light."

Stefan, one of the more reluctant readers in this 1st period, illustrated only Herr's writing. He drew a clock because "Herr's stories are written in different sections with different headings so the clock shows the different times a story is written."

Morgan drew a picture of the "bomb hitting Hiroshima because, with Hersey's drawing, it shows the big picture. I tried to draw a lot of detail because Hersey's writing is very descriptive and he goes into detail. For Herr, Morgan "tried to draw little sections just like how Herr writes in sections (with a new idea in each section)."

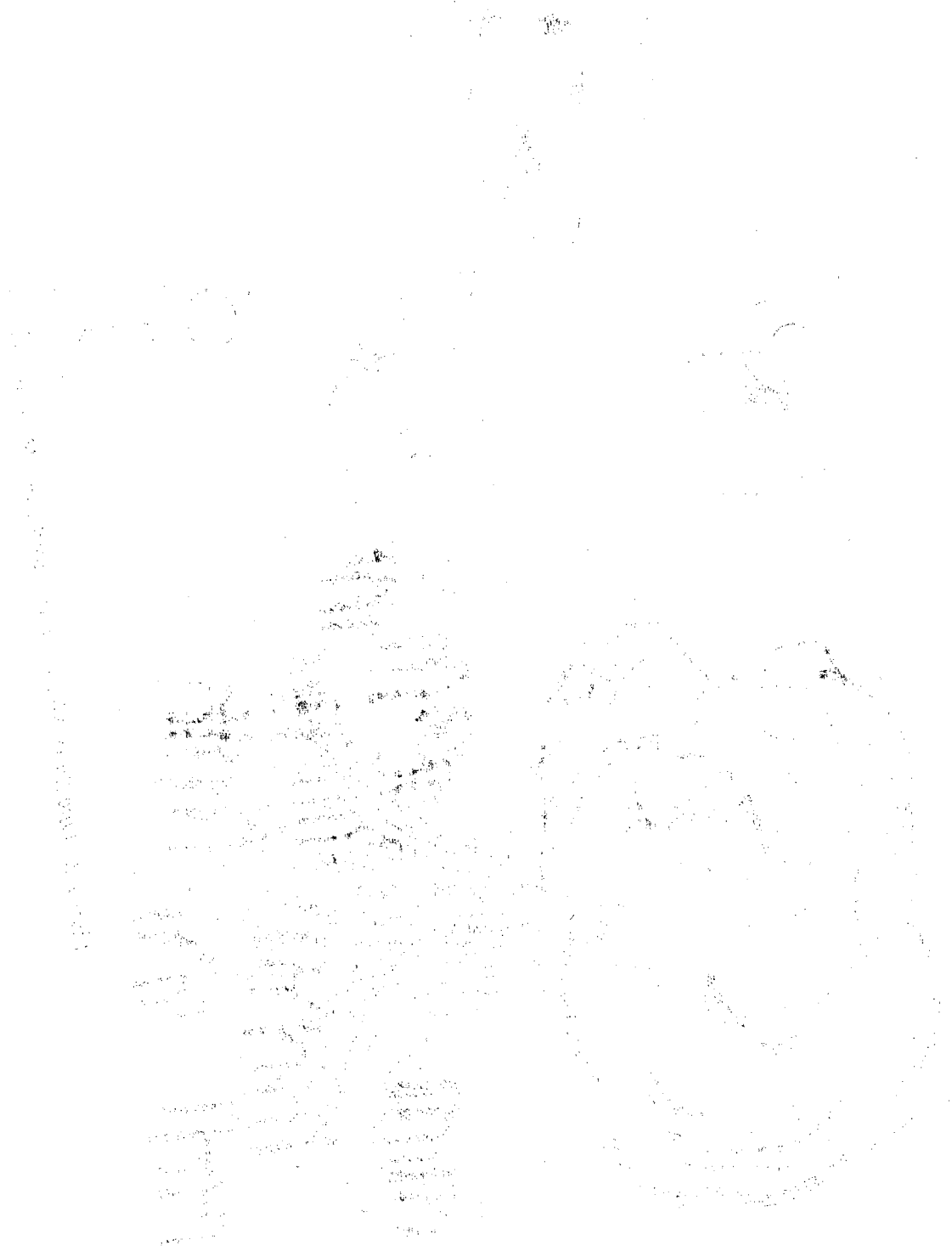
Shane said, "Hersey's story was mainly about the A-bomb so I drew it but it also talked about the B-29s. Herr's story was fought with AK-47s and helicopters. At the first of the story, the troops burned the people's crops."

Janine placed all the items in her sketch about Hiroshima close together because Hersey "told one story many times." In contrast, she suggested one thought leading to another in her illustration of Herr's writing since "he recalled many things" (Figure 2).

Each student read the same selection. Each student came to the text with different background information and with different interests. Each student wrestled with the ideas in each excerpt to clarify what happened rather than sitting passively waiting for the teacher to distribute knowledge. Each person was actively involved and engaged with the text. And, as Rosenblatt (1975) suggests in Literature and Exploration, each student had a different experience or transaction with the text. Each



Figure 2. *One Story/Many Views – Many Stories/Many Views*



student “saw” something distinctive in his or her visual interpretation. It is this awareness that literature is a unique experience for each reader and that each reader can be actively engaged with the text that encouraged me to continue to offer visual opportunities to my students.

Portrait # 4 – “*The American Dream or The American Disappointment?*”

To introduce 20th century fiction, I asked students to read a selection by Sherwood Anderson entitled “The Egg.” It is a short story that uses an egg, in various forms, to serve as a symbol for the family’s disappointments in achieving the American Dream. After completing the reading, their task was to explain what the story means in some visual way.

Leanne’s drawing gave a very literal explanation of the story. She said, I drew a big egg to represent the title of the story. Then I drew all the details inside it. I drew the boy from the story because he was the narrator and the main character. I then drew chickens like they talked about in the story. They said some came out healthy while others were deformed so I drew normal chickens and some chickens with a leg missing or extra legs to represent the deformities. I also drew the farm to represent the setting of the story. And I also drew eggs to represent the rebirth of the chickens in the story.

Chad focused on just one part of the story. He “decided to draw the restaurant, which was getting little to no business. The deformed chickens are on the counter. The whole scene, the deformed birds, the restaurant with its cheap prices and still no

business, show failure, which is the story of the kid's life. His mom wanted the best for him, but she just couldn't make anything work."

Jeremy drew a picture of the father wearing a blindfold. He said, "In the story, we have an individual who is so focused on entertaining that he doesn't focus on the whole picture. If he would just open his eyes, he could do much better. He is trying to find a new hope, but he is looking in the wrong place. If he wants to succeed, he needs to first conquer his own self. This story could have been written specifically for today's society. It applies now more than ever."

Jay, one of my most unpredictable students in terms of interest and preparedness, drew an American flag furled around a cracked egg.

The flag represents the setting and the American Dream. There is also an error in the flag. This was intentional. There are thirteen stripes on the flag starting left to right but as the flag waves in the air a stripe disappears in one of the wrinkles, like our government was trying to pull a fast one over us. The egg represents life and, in a way, shelter. The crack represents going beyond the boundaries that even you set for yourself (Figure 3).

Like Jeremy, Janine singled out the father for her emphasis. "The father was a man who was looking for fame and fortune. He thought that the egg was his way to do this. So, I drew an egg with a path to fame and fortune. Sherwood Anderson is very similar to modern authors in that he uses symbolism and has hope for something better. His character was looking for more than what he had. He needed more!" (Figure 4).

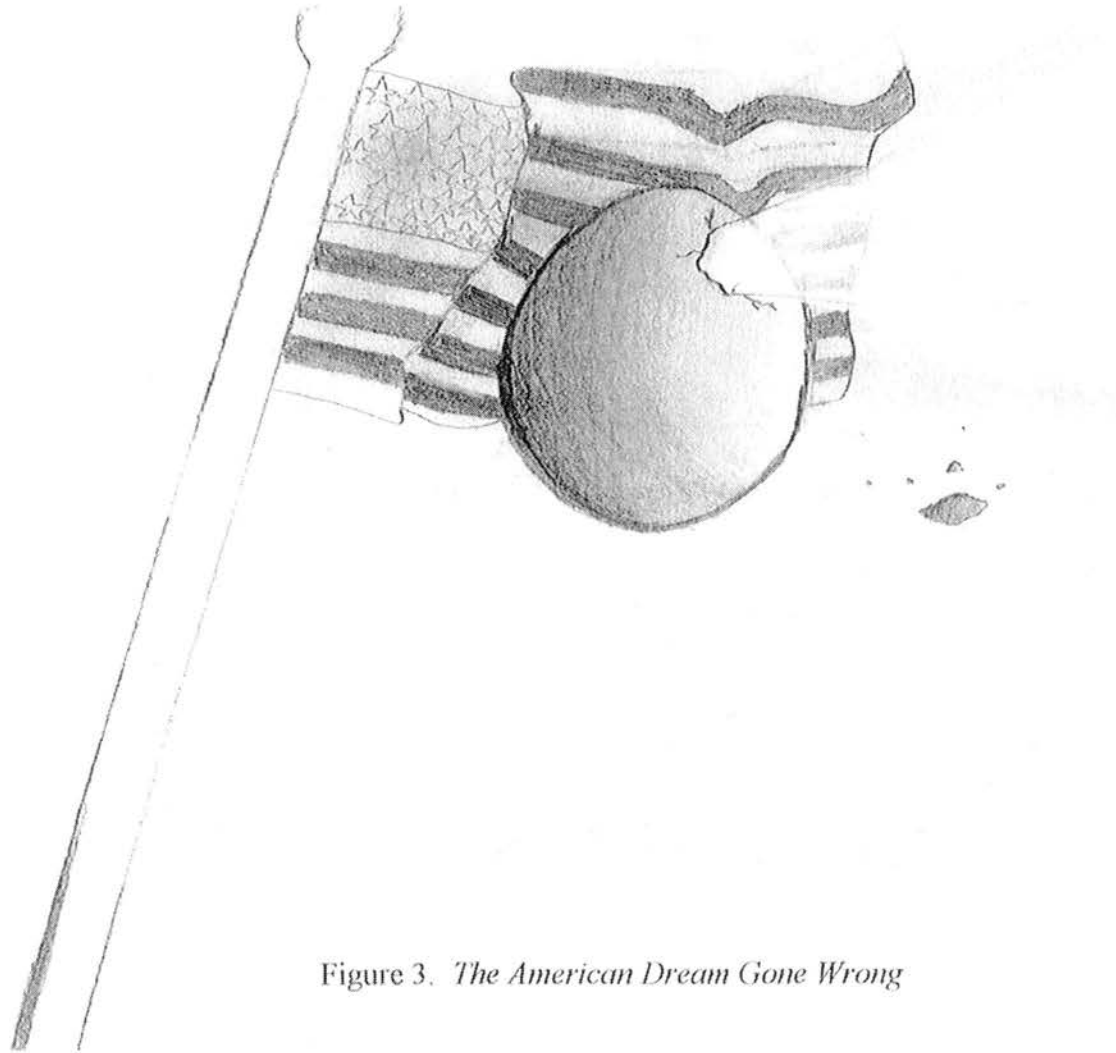


Figure 3. *The American Dream Gone Wrong*

Since students come to a piece of literature with differing levels of literal and interpretive reading skills, it seems only reasonable to allow them to grapple with a short story with a skill level they possess. With no wrong answers to a visual explanation and with no two alike – as long as each is grounded in the text – this kind of activity can be a way to engage students by meeting them where they are in terms of ability and learning styles.

Portrait # 5 – “*War: Right or Wrong?*”

Even though the student drawings were more consistent when they responded to Stephen Crane’s “The Mystery of Heroism,” they still expressed a variety of responses and evidence of thinking in the explanation accompanying their visuals. In this very short story, set in the midst of a Civil War battle, Private Fred Collins decides he is willing to risk death to get some water. He returns safely only to have the container of water knocked to the ground by two lieutenants. Because a spilled bucket of water is the prominent image in the short selection, almost all students included a bucket somewhere in their illustrations.

Jennifer drew a full-page, detailed, open-ended wooden bucket lying on a field of grass.

Rachel drew a smaller bucket with water running out of it and surrounded by soldiers. She said, “The bucket represents war. The water spilling represents the uncertainty of war. You never knew when the bucket will spill. War is pointless and uncertain. War is stupid.” Joy drew a similar picture. She explained her illustration by stating, “In this picture, the bucket is representing the waste of time spent on war.

Because a guy risked his life to get water and then two of his soldiers decided to fight over it and spilled it shows they were not that grateful for what he did.”

Marty drew an aerial view looking into the bucket with the suggestion of water pouring out of it and into the lives of those affected.

Leanne’s bucket lay on its side with the liquid coming out of it colored red. She said, “Sometimes war is pointless and it could always backfire on you. People would end up dead for no reason. The bucket is war and it has spilt. The blood is the people who ended up dead because some people made the wrong choice.”

Jeremy had the most distinctive drawing. He placed a large ball in the middle of his paper with a man standing beside it. On either side he had flames of fire rising into the air. He explained, “War is a never ending struggle that doesn’t really accomplish anything. You run around in circles and never get anything except burned.”

Ashley juxtaposed two feet next to her bucket. She included only the lower portion of the legs next to the bucket to emphasize the soldier’s representing soldiers everywhere. She commented, “He risked his life for a bucket of water, only to have it spilled in the end. That’s what war is – risking your life for something only not to need it in the end.”

Cindy sketched several scenes from the story: the line-up of the Collins’ company, the battlefield scene when the Private aids the Lieutenant, and Collins at the well filling up the bucket. She explained, “I think that Crane is saying that war is very hard, that it is something that you have to have strength and courage to go to it. He is also saying that is very courageous.”

Students expressed their ideas differently and offered a variety of explanations. However, they were all supported by the implication in Crane's short piece that war is senseless. Some may have relied on the behavior of Collins to help them understand Crane's writing. Others might have made connections between the author's satirical poetry and the short story. Recent study in a history class could have affected a student's response. Personal loss or involvement of family members in war situations undoubtedly would make a difference in a student's response to a literary piece about war. All of these illustrate how students transacted or connected with a text in ways that allowed each to make meaning from the reading.

Portrait # 6 – “*The Public Whitman and the Private Dickinson*”

After students had read samples of Whitman's Leaves of Grass and a collection of Emily Dickinson's poems, I asked them to explain visually the differences they saw in the two poets. Some emphasized the poets' writing styles. Some emphasized the content of their poetry. Some emphasized the biographical information they acquired about the two writers. Some combined all these. The drawings ranged from abstract interpretations to literal details gleaned from the poetry.

Emily divided her paper into two parts. On the left side, she drew a series of intersecting lines to represent Whitman because he was “a very bold man with bright writing and strong ideas. I drew these lines to show the boldness he had and his strong opinions. The bright colors [orange and yellow] are there to show his bright stylish writing. I also chose to randomly space the lines to show the characteristic of free verse.”

On the right side of her paper, Emily illustrated the “beautiful, graceful poetry” of Emily Dickinson. She placed on a black background a number of “curly cues to show the grace her poetry had.” She chose “the bluer colors to show her [Dickinson’s] melancholy attitude in life, and the black background shows her death attitude. It also helps make the simple drawing stand out” (Figure 5).

In a very different presentation, Jennifer drew an empty theatre as her explanation of Dickinson. She “didn’t write poetry for others but for herself. She didn’t need an audience to love what she did” (Figure 6). For Whitman she drew “the same theatre but with people in the seats because it represents him writing for others and not just for himself. He wrote more for entertainment than because he loved it.” As a postscript, she added, “They have different writing purposes” (Figure 7).

Morgan drew a city to represent Whitman because “he had and liked big audiences and wasn’t shy. I drew a plane with the world behind it because Walt Whitman liked to travel.” In contrast, he drew

an empty grass field to represent the fact that she [Emily Dickinson] was more secluded and she was more shy. I also drew a tombstone because a lot of the poems we read from her had to deal with death. The X crossed over the plane meant that she liked to stay in one place and not travel. The grass and trees also represent how she talked about nature.

Jay, a member of my 3rd period class I described earlier as an unpredictable student in terms of interest and preparedness, created a very artful explanation of Whitman and Dickinson. He drew Whitman balancing on a tree limb as he walked across it to show to show that “Whitman was a traveler. He explored this world the best



Figure 5. Bold Lines and Graceful Curves

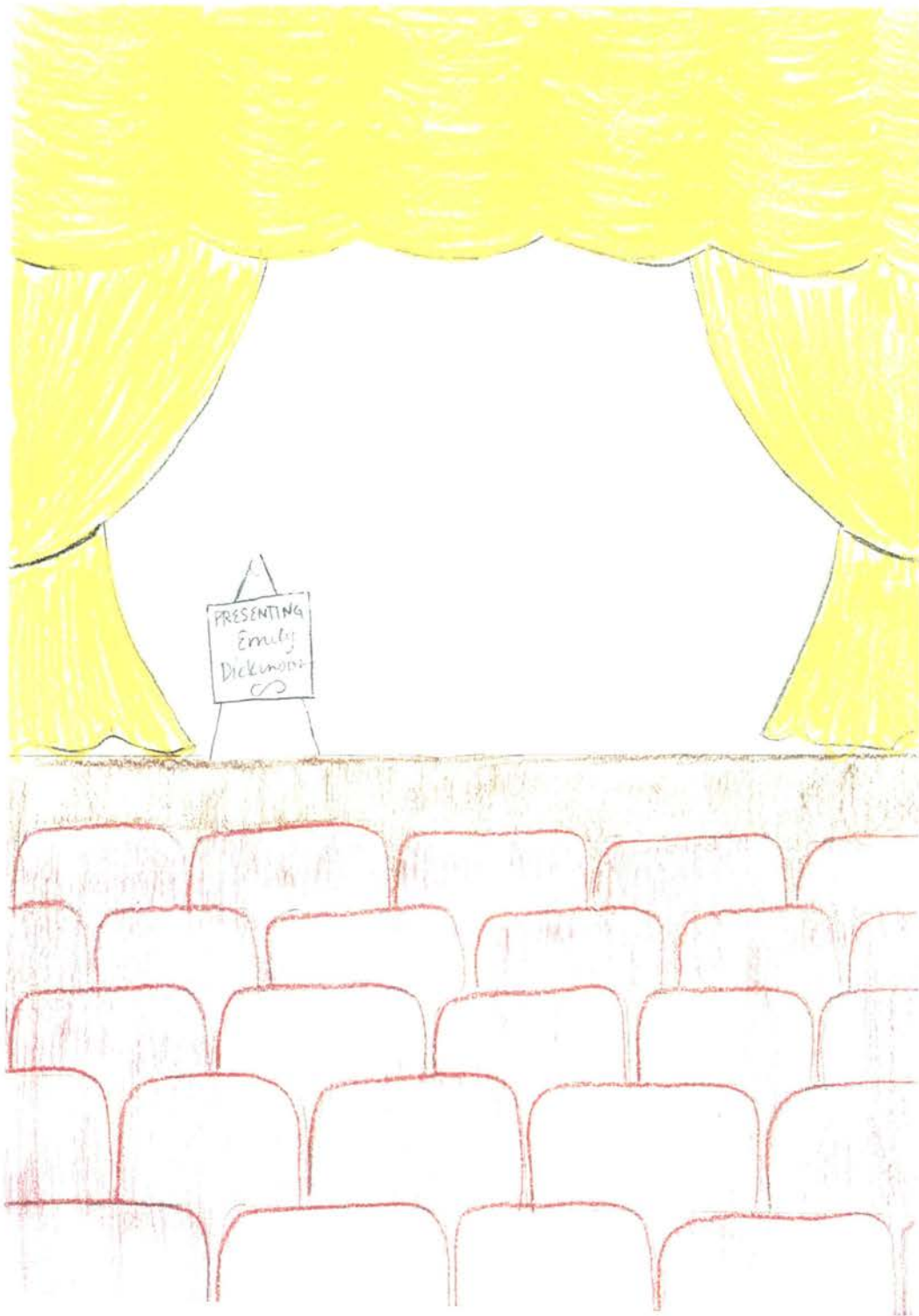


Figure 6. *Private Showing*



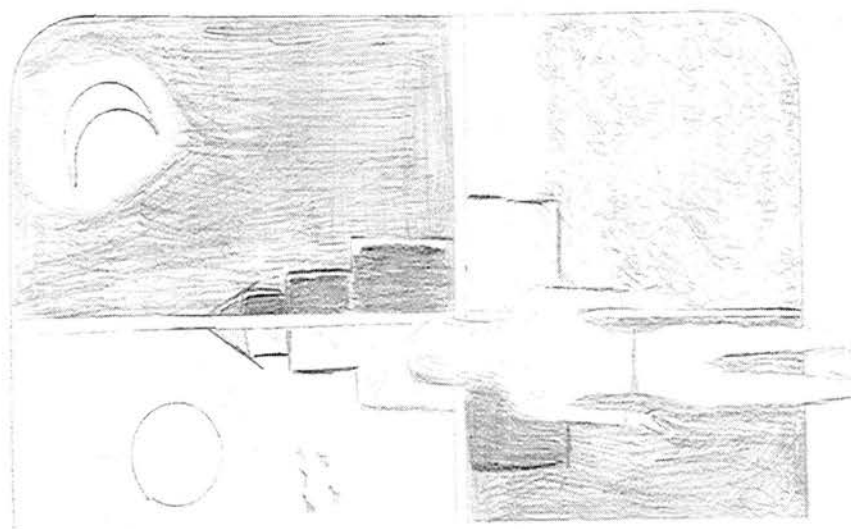
Figure 7. *Public Performance*

he could and wrote of his experiences.” For Dickinson, he produced a picture of the poet standing in front of a window. He explained, “Emily Dickinson spent much of her life looking through her window at the world she barely knew. She wrote to and for herself as if words comforted her” (Figure 8).

For Jay, drawing tapped one of his strengths – and one of his interests. Even though he can read well, he prefers not to. Thus, allowing him the vehicle of art to think about literature lures him into an engagement with a text that he oftentimes avoids. This engagement through art, consequently, makes his thinking about and his understanding of a piece much more likely than if he were expected to read a poem and answer a series of multiple choice questions, an activity all too common in too many secondary classrooms.

Jeremy offered a very different visual explanation of Whitman. In the center of his drawing stands a tall, modern looking, well-dressed individual wearing a nametag with BOB prominently visible. Behind him hangs a large sign with FRIENDLY BOB’S USED CARS written in bright red letters. On one side of Bob is a pick-up truck; on the other is a sports car. The personalized tag on the sports car has three letters: BOB (Figure 9).

Jeremy explained his artwork by stating, “Walt Whitman was very outgoing, boisterous, and vociferous. I think Walt kind of can be hypocritical at times. He always talked about the working man and how he is the staple of American life, but he is a poet. Almost seems as though he writes just to see his own words.”



Emily Dickinson

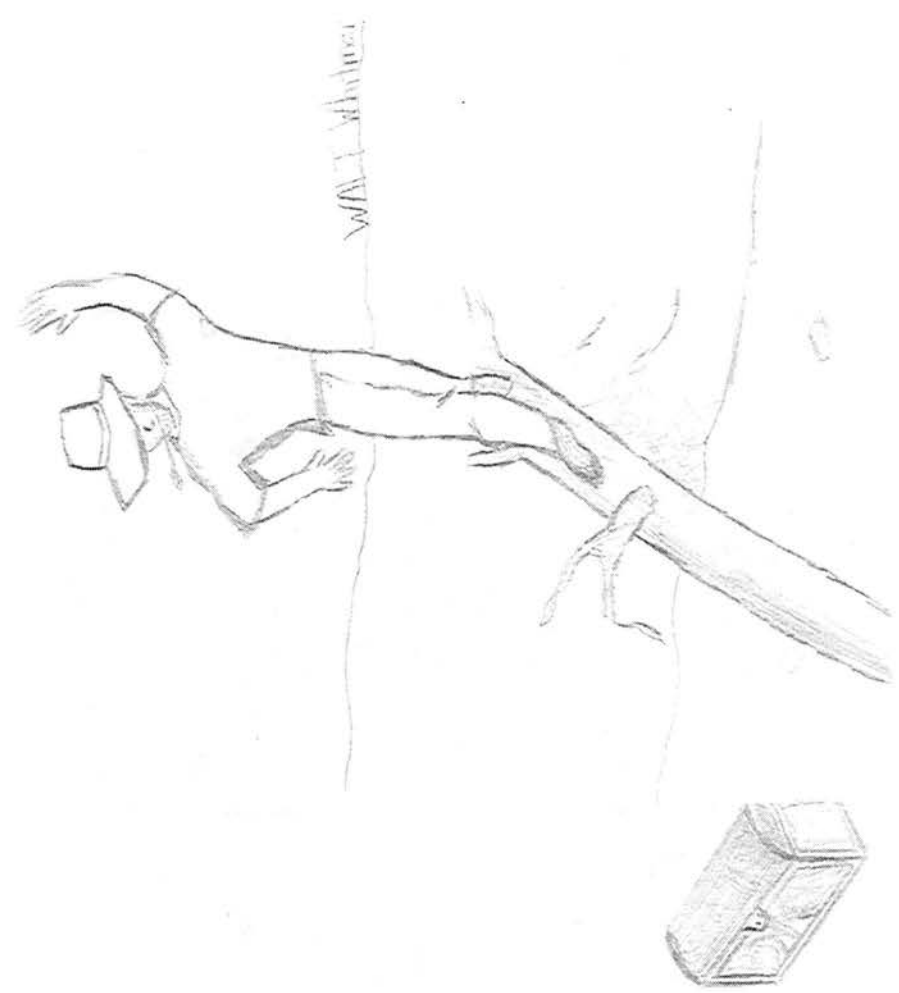


Figure 8. Inside, Outside



Figure 9. Whitman: Spokesperson for the Common Man

Jeremy drew a more conventional illustration for Dickinson. He positioned her inside a house looking out a window. A tree stands beside the structure. He explained that Dickinson was “more content with life as it is now, not about changing the way things are through poetry. She seems like a Romantic poet who wrote short poems that are much more to the point. She doesn’t need all the fanfare to write good poems.”

A 3rd period student who was very vocal about his dislike for school – but who offered exceptional insight in literary discussions – drew an eclectic assortment of items to depict Whitman and Dickinson. Adam’s explanation identifies the items.

The hill, sun, and moon represent that Whitman believed his message would go on forever. The pencil on the canvass is how he wrote bold strokes on a wide canvass. The book saying, ‘I’m Alive,’ is supposed to be that he was alive while he was published. The people represent his love of the people. The globe represents how he loved to travel.

For Dickinson, he stated, “The paper behind bars is how she thought her writing would be in oblivion forever. The small piece of paper is how she wrote on such minute details. The tombstone is how she was published after death. The figure of a woman looking at a black line depicts her blindness to the world itself.”

The vocabulary and insight in Adam’s responses belie his façade of indifference to school. Identified as a gifted and talented student in elementary school, he had few scholastic successes as a high school junior. Because he had much academic ability and because he liked to draw, visual arts activities served as a way to sneakily engage him into thinking about literature. His perceptive comments in class, both verbal and written, erased any doubt that a transaction with a text had occurred for him.

Like Adam, Brooke also drew an eclectic assortment of items to portray Whitman and Dickinson. She identified the items in her commentary.

Walt Whitman was a very patriotic person so I drew the American flag as representative of that characteristic. Parchment and quill represent his writing. The boots, map, and walking stick all illustrate the great traveling that he did. The boot sole with the word "ME" on it goes along with a quote of his that states roughly that if you want to find [him] again just look under the boots you are wearing. I drew a glass that is half full to represent his optimism. Two shaking hands present his love of people, an audience his gregariousness, a shirt his admiration of the blue-collar, hard working American.

For Emily Dickinson, Brooke drew a girl looking out of a window to show her reclusiveness, quill and parchment for her writing, and a glass half empty for her pessimism. A broken heart shows her unrequited love. I included the grim reaper because she always writes about death and a flower because she writes about nature. I drew a KEEP OUT! PRIVATE sign with barbed wire surrounding it to represent how private she was.

Elizabeth drew a lone tree and a dying flower to illustrate her understanding of Dickinson and her writing. She said, "I drew a tree for the nature she wrote about. Then I drew a dying flower for the death she wrote so much about. The tree is almost completely alone/secluded which stands for Dickinson being a homebody. The whole picture is focused on the tree because she wrote about what she saw."

Her sketch for Whitman included a stage with a microphone on one side and a hobo's bag on the other. She stated,

I drew a stage and microphone because he was an outgoing guy who was a spokesman. I drew the audience because his writings were for an audience. I also added the traveling stick with a bag because he liked to travel and move around. I drew it to be more focused on the stage because most of his stories were about him.

Each of these individuals showed evidence of thinking about a piece of literature, albeit in different ways. Quite likely, all of these individuals acquired similar knowledge about the distinctive writing styles of Whitman and Dickinson, about the focus of each in their writing, and about the very different lifestyles of the two poets. However, gaining access to that information came via a variety of textual transactions. It is this opportunity to grapple with literature in visual ways that makes it accessible to some students. To deny them that avenue is to deny them an opportunity to learn.

Portrait # 7 – “Battle of the Sexes”

Perhaps no selection elicits a stronger reaction from both male and female readers than F. Scott Fitzgerald's short story entitled “Winter Dreams.” One of Fitzgerald's early stories, it shows the frustrations Dexter Green experiences in his desire to gain both material success and the hand of Judy Jones, an upper class beautiful young woman with many suitors. The 1920s setting of that selection provides the perfect backdrop for the emerging female voice to assert itself. The personalities that

Judy and Dexter exhibit are clearly recognizable to 21st century high school students and make a convincing argument for the timelessness of works of literature.

After students had read this Fitzgerald short story, I asked them to think of a way to suggest visually the overall impression of the characters. Even though the students were fairly consistent in their overall assessment of the central female character, their modes of presentation varied.

Elizabeth drew a dog collar and leash “to stand for the way the women have so much power and control the men. The collar stands for the men – who are lead on by the women (the leash) the way a dog would be lead by his owner.” SC, a quiet, rather insecure member of my 1st period class, had moved beyond the literal meaning of the text to a symbolic explanation.

Maria placed her female character in a chariot drawn by a male/horse figure. She explained, “I drew a woman being carried by a guy in a chariot and her whipping him to show the power women had over man.”

Janine’s drawing consisted largely of an open hand covering most of the 8 ½ x 11 piece of paper and in it she had placed a small amount of food. On the back of the paper, she stated, “I drew a hand with food because in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s stories the women were in charge. They made the men ‘eat out of the palm of their hands’” (Figure 10).

A male student, Jeremy, used the male and female symbols to identify his characters – just in case there was any question about his drawing. On the left of his paper, he placed a girl who was climbing to the top of a pedestal with a boy looking in awe of her. The additional figures he sketched represented “the others who are fighting

over who gets the girl. In the upper right is a girl who is crushing the heart of a boy.” Surprisingly enough, this Fitzgerald story is fairly lengthy and, on first glance, elicits groans from students as they imagine the drudgery they will endure to complete it. Yet, the plot engages them because they recognize people they know all too well in the characters. And, of course, the timeless battle of the sexes is one that will never be resolved – nor perhaps do students want it to be because each new group of juniors enjoys taking on the cause. These are the issues that Rosenblatt (1938, 1995) says must be at the heart of literature if readers are to have transactions with those words on the page.

Portrait # 8 – *“Pie Charts, Venn Diagrams, and
Bar Graphs, Oh, My”*

The last portrait to illustrate Theme #1 shows the creative thought that can be generated when students work together. To provide closure to the selections bound together by the label Romanticism, students were asked to think about the pieces and explain their commonalties and/or differences by using a Venn diagram, a pie chart, or a graph. While the task included a visual presentation, it demanded a different thinking process than sketching plot details or personality characteristics. Some students didn’t recognize the term Venn diagram but when a student drew two overlapping circles on the marker board they immediately understood. Pie charts and graphs needed no explanation. With this brief question and answer session, students formed groups and began the assignment.

Since this activity involved thinking about more than one selection and since it involved thinking about the selections as a whole, the students began slowly and with much discussion about how they could best tie the ideas together in a way that they could all agree on and understand.

The most popular choice among the groups was the Venn diagram. Because there were no compasses available in the classroom to draw a circle, much effort was given to finding circular objects to create a suitable shape. A dessert plate found in the closet was the best size choice and was passed around from group to group to create Venn diagrams. One group used a Styrofoam cup to make multiple overlapping circles in the shape of a caterpillar (Figure 11). Another group used a Styrofoam cup to create five overlapping circles resembling the Olympic rings. One group made a line graph. One group made a bar graph. One group made a pie chart (Figure 12).

After groups established designs, they then began the task of deciding what kinds of information should go in the Venn diagrams, the pie chart, or the graphs. Since the purpose of the assignment was to get students to think about the selections they had read and to make connections between and among them, the graphic design served as a vehicle to encourage talk about the literature among the group members. Especially for those students for whom reading alone is not adequate for understanding, the visual component may provide that additional assistance to make literature meaningful.

As I walked around the room listening, looking, and occasionally stopping to ask or answer a question, I overheard and saw students engaged in discussion about content, theme, and Romantic characteristics of the eight selections on the board. The selections included: "Thanatopsis" by Bryant, "The Devil and Tom Walker" by Irving,

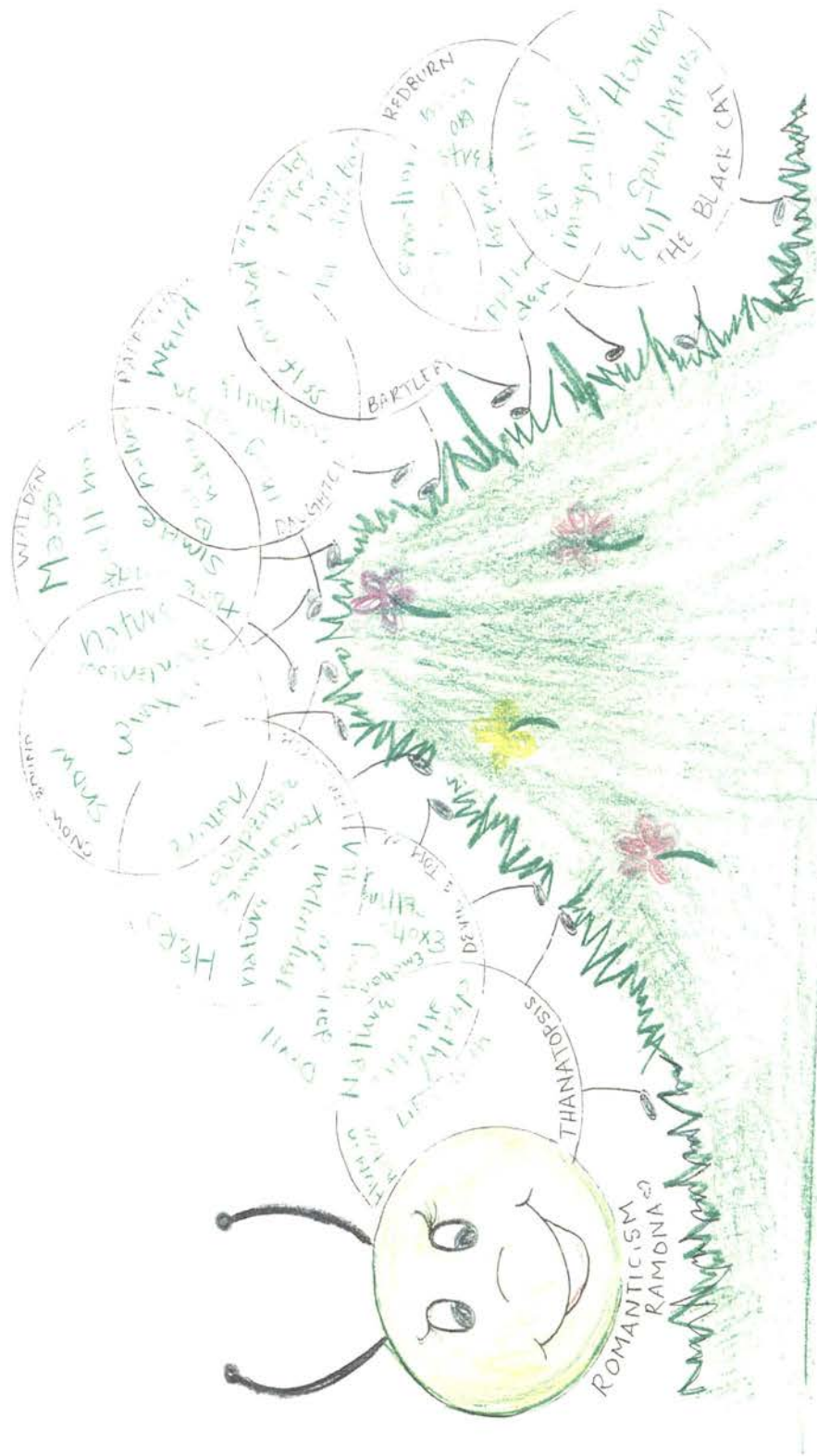


Figure 11. Caterpillar Venn Diagram

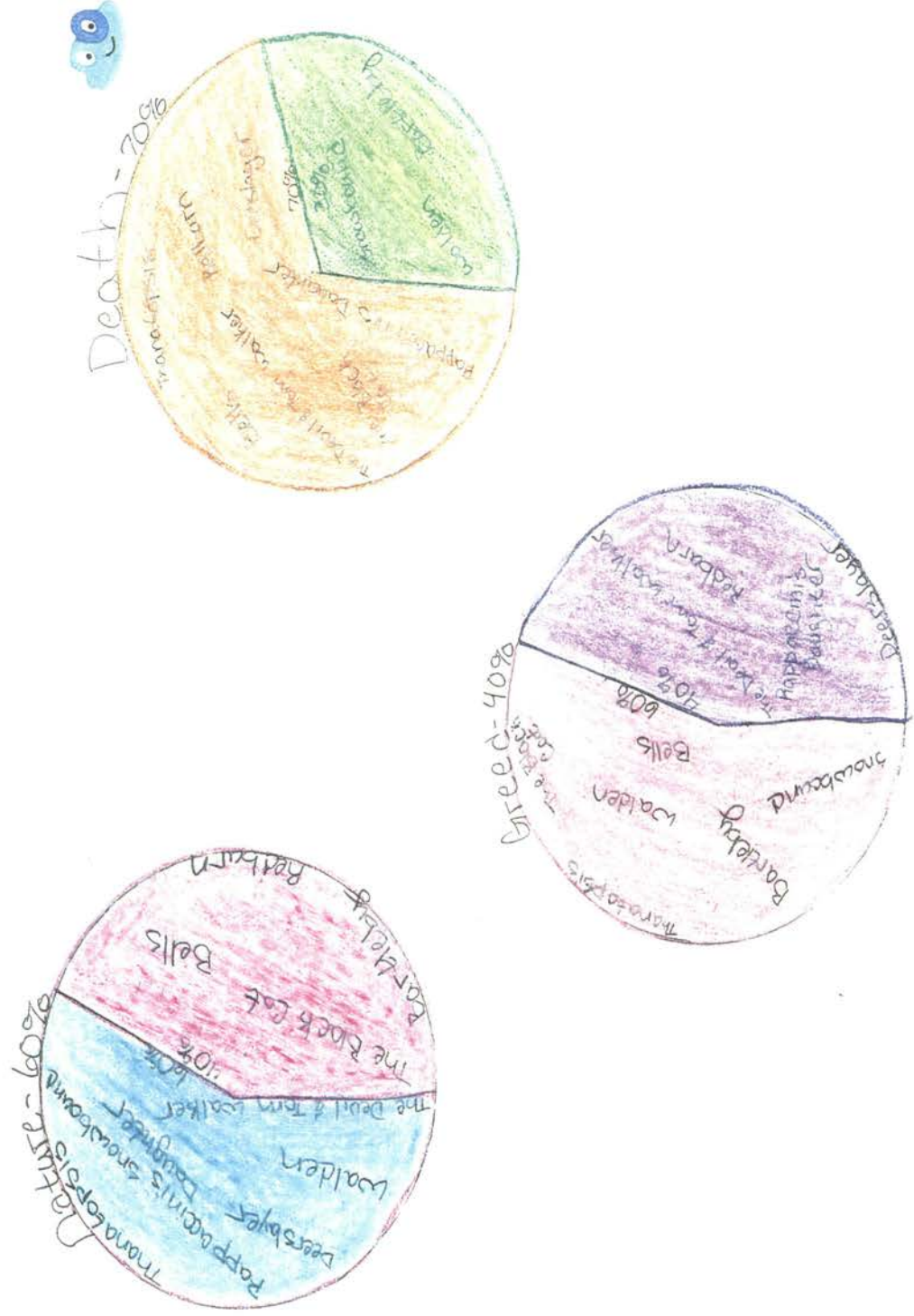


Figure 12. Pie Chart

an excerpt from The Deerslayer by Cooper, an excerpt from Walden by Thoreau, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” by Hawthorne, “Bartleby” and an excerpt from Redburn by Melville, “The Black Cat” by Poe, and an excerpt from Snowbound by Whittier.

Generally, group members easily reached consensus about content. Reflecting on the characteristics of Romanticism gave students an opportunity to synthesize as they identified the commonalities these writings and authors share. Most remembered from a previous class period that nature, imagination, intuition, emotion, and a focus on the individual were Romantic qualities. Several recalled that the Romantics also revered the past and had an interest in the supernatural.

Thinking about theme, however, demanded more thought as they wrestled with human nature’s propensity toward selfishness or as they puzzled over a different view of immortality. They negotiated among themselves what might be important to record on their chart.

Each group’s visual was distinctive but each represented what made sense for that particular mixture of students. Some visuals may have been more detailed and/or imaginative than others, but the importance of the activity was the thinking that it generated. What was valuable was the exchange of ideas that occurred as class members grappled with what made a literary selection similar or dissimilar to another.

Theme #2 – Student Empowerment

Portrait #9 – “*Who’s in Charge?*”

Early in the semester as students collaborated with each other in their discussion of literature and/or their drawing about it, I became aware of the responsibility each had

assumed in staying focused on the assignment and gently pulling straying classmates back on task. I was also frequently surprised with the intensity and quiet that pervaded the classroom.

One of the cooperative efforts students completed in early September involved a portion of Whittier's fairly length work Snowbound. A very descriptive poem about the arrival and subsequent isolation of a snowstorm, it is a perfect choice to pair with visual expression. After a brief introduction to Whittier and his writing, I handed out pieces of unlined paper for students to fold into eight parts. Then, I identified numbers, corresponding to lines of poetry in Snowbound, to be written in the corner of each rectangle. After choosing partners and before they began reading, I asked class members to close their eyes for 45 seconds or so and visualize a snow experience they had had. After their brief foray into darkness – with my awareness of the danger of leaving a group of high school students sitting quietly with their eyes closed for too long – they exchanged stories about building snow forts, skiing, and snow ball fights.

The stage set for a wintry scene, students, with their partners, began to read to each other or silently and then stop, sketch, and share, although not necessarily in that order. The 22 class members scattered out at tables or pulled student desks together to be able to hear each other as they read and discussed, the carpeted floor absorbing the usual scrapping that accompanies desk and chair movement in a classroom.

While students were getting started on the assignment, they were fairly noisy. However, within just a few minutes, each duo had settled into a routine of reading and sketching. As I walked around the room, I overheard one member of a team say, "I

have no idea what I read.” Immediately, her partner shared her own understanding and the two were soon busily drawing.

Students frequently laughed at their own drawing attempts – maybe as a defense tactic to deter any criticism a classmate might make – while others looked at a buddy’s drawing to get an idea to build on for their own. Pairs were discussing what was happening in each section and worked together to make sense of the poet’s description. In one group close by my observation spot, I overheard two males deducing that the deadly storm had not arrived because the author mentioned there was no snow on the ground.

With only five packages of colored pencils for 11 groups to use, there was much sharing necessary. All students had boxes of crayons but the pencils seemed to be more desirable. I must remember to purchase more colored pencils.

A new student who had arrived just last week had been quickly claimed earlier and the two worked intently on their reading and sketching.

As I overheard students trying to figure out word meanings, i.e. stanchion, in the poem I reminded them they were welcome to use dictionaries. Most of the time, if one person didn’t understand a word, his or her partner did.

Reading about snow lead one student into wondering how well his new 4-wheel drive vehicle might handle snow. His partner suggested he might experiment in the high school parking lot. Another team engaged in a brief discussion about football. In both instances, after the aside – and without a reminder from me – they returned to the task at hand.

In some groups, students constantly moved back and forth from reading to drawing. In others, the reading was completed before the drawing began. In some groups, the students discussed the reading. In others, they worked much more independently. Some students worked in almost complete silence while others exchanged constant banter.

A question I overheard several times was, "How are you supposed to draw snow?" As I walked around the room glancing at what the students were doing, it appeared there were multiple interpretations of how one can indicate snow on a white piece of paper. Periodically, I heard the sound of pencils tapping rhythmically on the paper to create the effect of snow falling.

Two or three students used hand gestures to attempt to explain to a partner what was happening in the poem. Facial expressions also aided understanding.

Stefen, a student who often comes in and puts his head on his desk even before class starts, stayed very involved in the drawing assignment.

One student wanted to draw a car in one of his rectangles but his partner reminded him that there would not have been cars in the 1800s, when the poem was written. He shared his knowledge about the car's entrance into society and was supported by an individual in nearby group who overheard the conversation.

Several students discussed the well described in the poem. One individual said his grandma had a well. Another said a friend in the country uses a well as a water source. If one person didn't have a clear picture of an idea in the poem, that individual's partner usually clarified the confusion.

One student commented, "This is a lot of drawing." I asked him if the drawing helped him *see* what was in the poem. His partner quickly responded and said it really helped him. He said that it made the poet's description "much clearer than if he just sat and read the words."

As the end of the period neared, several students asked, "Do we get to draw again tomorrow?" I collected their unfinished works and placed them in a secure place for completion during the next class period.

Sitting on a stool in a position where I could pan the entire classroom, I had watched 22 students working very seriously on a reading and sketching assignment. Even though there were sounds of laughter, noisy exchange of ideas, and even unrelated talk, students never strayed far from the assigned task. This activity that had given students space to work and talk, freedom to interact with each other, and some control over their own learning had generated meaningful transactions with the text they had been asked to read. These same 22 students working individually and sitting quietly in student desks lined up neatly in the room might not have produced nearly as much thought about Whittier's writing, nor would a classroom where the instructor dispenses knowledge and the students passively receive it.

It is this student ownership that Fred Newmann (1992) claims is critical if students are to engage rather than disengage in learning. They need control over the conception, the execution, and the evaluation of the work itself. When students have some autonomy over what they are given to do in a learning situation, they are much more likely to study and benefit from the material. Even though learning is not necessarily easy, Newmann says there should be opportunities for lighthearted

interaction, for play-like and imaginative activity. Using visual arts activities in an 11th grade English classroom helps to create this play-like, imaginative atmosphere.

Portrait #10 – *“To Draw or Not To Draw”*

As the teacher / researcher in Room 203, I was aware of the possibility that the students would draw because I, as their teacher, asked them to. Therefore, throughout the semester, I encouraged them to be honest in their responses to my questions about drawing.

Student responses to the visual arts activity described in Portrait #9 support the idea that my 11th graders were empowered to express themselves honestly about assignments. The follow-up questionnaire elicited a variety of responses.

Elizabeth said, “Drawing for me helps quite a bit. I am mainly a visual learner. I also like it because it makes my mind work and imagine what it might look like. I pay more attention to details that way, not to mention all of it helps me remember the story / poem better for tests.”

Anna stated, “I enjoyed drawing what I read. When you draw it, you have [her emphasis] to think about it and understand to know what to draw.”

Dan, an easy-going, sometimes prepared, sometimes not student, said, “It helps us actually show that we understand the poem and are getting a good mental picture in mind.”

Marty commented, “I think this activity was really helpful. Before I could draw anything, I had to analyze what he [the author] meant and what exactly he was saying.”

Jennifer, one of the most enthusiastic and talented sketchers, said, "I think I benefited from drawing after every paragraph. While reading, I am easily distracted and seem to let my mind wander. When I draw what is happening, I get to see, and I understand what is going on. The partners were nice, too!"

Chris said, "I think it was also beneficial. It was also fun; therefore, I think I learned more. When I take my time to draw pictures, I learn more because you keep retracing what you read in your head."

Brandon, a conscientious student, stated, "I guess it helps some because it makes you go back and think about the detail and what the author was trying to make you see. On poems that do not have a lot to do with description, I don't think this would help on them."

Sean indicated the partnering was more important than the drawing. He said, "I think talking with a partner was good and helped me understand better. But drawing didn't do anything but slow the process of reading the poem. At the same time, it made it a little more fun to read and made me concentrate on details a little more."

Cindy also questioned the value of drawing. She said, "I thought that the activity was not useful. I drew what I thought the poem was saying but it did not help me understand it any better."

In contrast to Cindy, Shane said, "I remember the poem better with taking visual notes and have a partner. I enjoy it more and I find that I learn better this way."

Even though illustrating scenes from Snowbound was not rated equally by all students, the accompanying activity of collaboration seemed to negate any significant opposition to the drawing. Since choice is very much a part of the process of learning

in my classroom, those who may not endorse drawing as enthusiastically as others always know they are free to utilize other ways to help them understand literature.

Portrait # 11 – “*He Did What?!*”

While students respond passionately to Fitzgerald’s presentation of gender roles, it is the element of horror in Poe’s writing that elicits strong response. In spite of his complex sentence structure and challenging vocabulary, his plot line reels students in and they become totally embroiled in the dastardly deeds many of his characters perform. A short story entitled “The Black Cat” in which the narrator tells about not only killing his cat but also his wife is no exception.

In preparation for reading this selection, I asked students to recall the Poe selections they were familiar with. Many cited ones that appear regularly in 8th, 9th, or 10th grade anthologies: “The Telltale Heart,” “The Pit and the Pendulum,” and “The Cask of Amontillado.” Generally, students commented on how weird they think Poe’s writing is. They all knew that he drank, that he married his cousin Virginia, and that he lived a troubled life. Beyond that, details about Poe were sketchy.

To be sure students understood where the narrator is when he begins his tale in “The Black Cat” and to be sure students understood exactly what he asks the reader to believe, I read the first two or three paragraphs to them, stopping occasionally to clarify words that might be confusing. With that introduction, I distributed drawing paper and gave instructions to read and sketch.

As students began to read about the horrible deeds the narrator does, e.g. cutting out his cat’s eye, hanging him by a noose, they voiced expressions of horror. Normally,

as students read, there are few audible comments, but Poe's account of what he does to his own pet is too gruesome to remain silent. Either they really respond to blood and gore – or Poe's writing totally captures their emotions. I'd like to think it's the latter. Besides the comments students made, the room was almost silent as they became involved in the reading and sketching the events in the story.

Even Stefan, my student who came early each day to rest, remained awake and totally engrossed in drawing. He had told me that he worked at a local restaurant every night and rarely got home before 10:30 p.m. Even if he had chosen to do his homework, he would not have been able to start until rather late in the evening.

One student asked how many events he should sketch. Other than that inquiry, the class began the assignment without any questions. As students needed help, they conferred with their neighbors by whispering quietly to each other. Some paid close attention to the details of their drawing and chose carefully the colored pencil to best represent their interpretation. Others were satisfied with hastily drawn stick figures. A few read longer sections of the short story before they began drawing.

After 45 minutes, students continued to read and sketch the details of Poe's thriller. Occasionally, an individual stopped briefly to look around the room or adjust a hair barrette. Shannon made his way to the pencil sharpener with a handful of colored pencils to sharpen. The noise distracted Maria. She stopped her reading and watched Shannon sharpen his pencils. A late arriving student picked up a copy of the short story and instructions for the reading and sketching. He immediately began work. An occasional "Yuck!" was heard when students got to a new event in the story.

Joy asked if there would be time to finish tomorrow or if she should take the assignment home. As I looked around the room, I noticed that most students hadn't completed their drawings. I told the class that we would continue the task tomorrow. I collected their papers and copies of the short story and sent them on their way to a second period class.

I came to value the kind of interaction students exhibited when they were working together on an assignment and recognized that verbal exchanges did not mean student distractions. Consequently, my classroom was rarely completely silent and I was comfortable with the sound of students talking to others. I wanted to provide an environment that allowed them to feel comfortable trading ideas but not one that deterred their focusing on the task at hand. That's a balancing act, indeed.

Portrait # 12 – *“Anything Goes -*

As long as it's grounded in the literature”

Once students became comfortable with the freedom to express their ideas -- knowing they needed to be able to support their thoughts – and once they recognized there was not a singular expected interpretation, they created a variety of visuals that allowed each ownership in showing understanding. A review activity illustrates this.

As a way for students to think about the Realism collection they had recently read, I asked them to work with a partner and to show visually the recurring theme(s) that they recognized between and among the selections. The authors of these short stories and poems included Bret Harte, Ambrose Bierce, Stephen Crane, Frederick Douglass, Kate Chopin, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and Willa Cather.

Joy and Rachel divided the authors into two categories. For the female writers – Chopin, Freeman, and Cather – they drew the cover of a family photo album. They explained that these three fit together because they wrote about past history, family, and gender roles. For the second category, the male writers, they drew a stack of TNT sitting in a pool of water and explained that “war is like TNT wet. [It is] worthless” (Figure 13).

Nicole created a different visual, but one also grounded in the literature. Like Joy and Rachel, her first line of stratification was gender. To depict the female authors, she sketched two women on the right side of her paper. She explained, “On this side, I showed women’s roles in society. I drew them lightly to show they were not dominating in their relationships, and their hands are behind their backs, tied up because they felt imprisoned. They are not happy [frowning] because of this.”

On the other side of her paper, she drew a large red design suggesting the explosion of war. Beneath it she placed small human figures and explained that she “drew little people to represent how the main characters did not do anything huge but tried to help out in little ways.”

Sean and Dan placed all of the writers in one category. They drew a series of bars suggesting a prison and the bars wrote the names of the short stories. The theme that they thought all the selections shared was the idea of imprisonment. To these two students, “The majority of the stories are about people who feel that they are imprisoned in their lives.”

Jennifer and Emily also thought the theme of imprisonment or entrapment was present in all the selections. They placed a large birdcage in the middle of their drawing

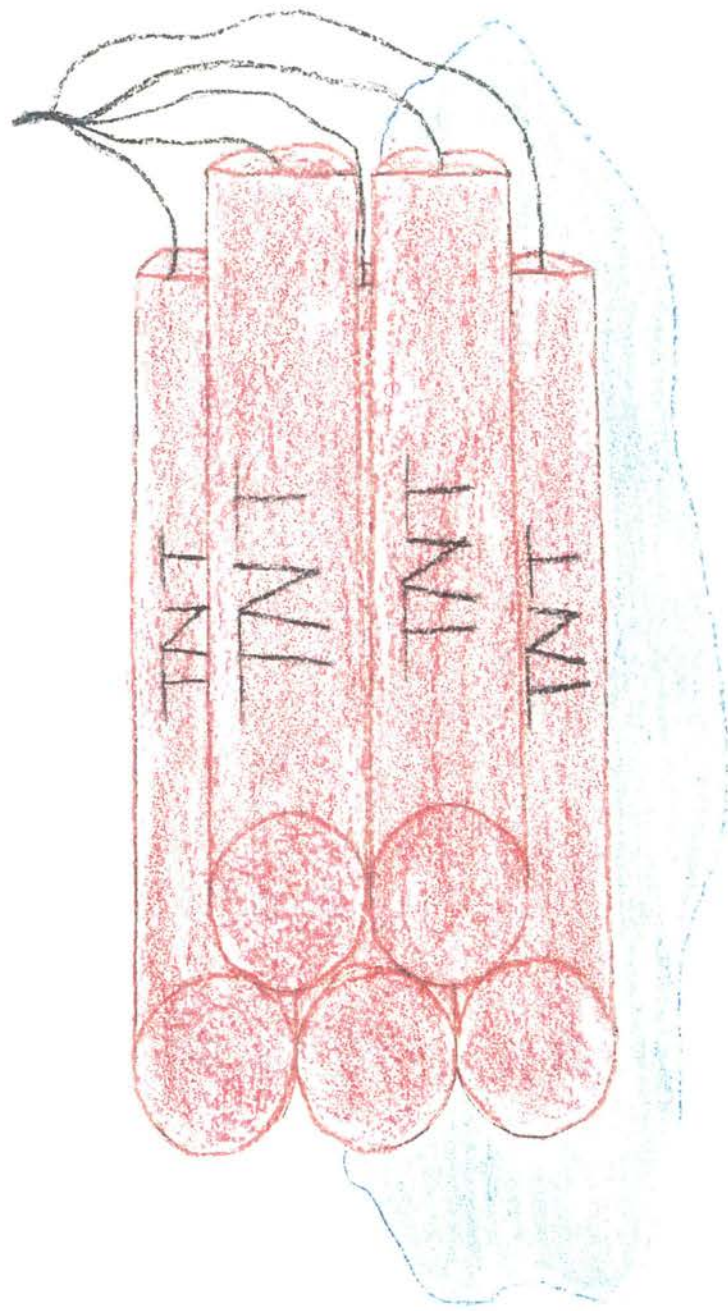


Figure 13. *Wet TNT*

and surrounded it with items representative of each story. The open door of the cage indicated the desire for the characters to be freed from their confinement (Figure 14).

Brooke separated the Realism readings into three groups. She identified three prevalent themes in the pieces: 1) Man can rise above various evil adversaries. 2) War is bad and changes people. 3) Women are subordinate and obedient to men. Her visual illustrated these themes by showing a collage of characters representing each selection.

Each drawing was distinctive. Each explanation was valid. Each student felt confident in his expression of thought. The fuzziness of drawing – the knowing that one person’s work is not expected to look like another’s – grants students the power to take charge of their learning and to be actively involved.

Portrait # 13 – “*The Teacher as Learner: Part I*”

Throughout the Realism Unit, students had read and sketched – and shown understanding of the selections. In the review activity for the unit test, they had discussed and illustrated – and shown understanding of the selections. Yet, when I graded the objective portion of their tests, I was surprised that even the most consistently prepared and involved students had not scored as well as I had anticipated.

As I reflected on this apparent mismatch of knowing and showing, the thought occurred to me that I had encouraged students to collaborate with each other and to create their own visual understanding of what they had read, but I asked them to demonstrate their understanding via a traditional objective test format. I had used a nontraditional pedagogy of instruction in providing multiple visual arts activities as a way to understand literature; however, I had remained traditional in how I evaluated the

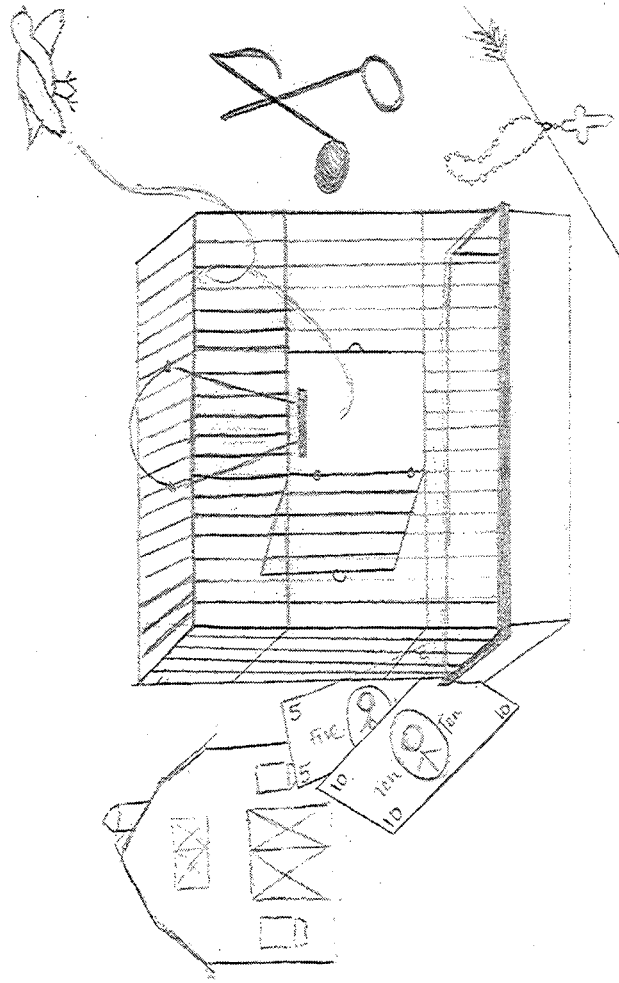


Figure 14. Open Bird Cage: Freedom

knowledge they acquired. Even though the test included a discussion question, which allowed variety in student response, I still felt like the multiple-choice questions were a contradiction to the pedagogy of the research study.

With this troubling thought guiding me and before the students saw their test results, I invited them to participate in an experiment. Each person would be assigned a partner and a new copy of the Realism test they had taken earlier. After discussing the possible responses, the groups were to mark the best answer of the four possible choices. My hope was that they would look more closely at what they didn't understand and talk to their partners about what was confusing. Since there would be someone to help them make sense, they would be less likely to make a quick judgment.

I placed students in pairs, according to their scores on the initial test, which only I knew at this point. For the most part, this created different combinations than the ones that form when students choose partners. They were spread out as far apart from each other as possible to discourage "overhearing" information. An Edgar Cruz CD played classical guitar music in the background.

Some students carefully discussed each question, eliminating the obvious incorrect choices and scrutinizing the one or ones that remained as possibilities. Other students quickly read each question, chose an answer, and moved through the 45 items with little deliberation. Test items included a mixture of literal and interpretive questions. The dialogue I overheard as I walked around the room suggested there was a correlation between familiarity with the material and the intensity in evaluation of test items.

As they worked, I wandered among the groups, stopping occasionally to ask questions about the worth of the experiment. Comments included:

“Some were confusing.”

“Two answers seemed really close.”

“Some questions seemed like there could be two answers.”

As groups finished, I collected copies of the tests. The next day students wrote a brief reflection paper about the test retake experience. I asked them to comment on whether or not the “experiment” had been helpful and what strategies they had used to choose an answer. I also asked them to indicate whether or not they had read all the assignments prior to the test. Students still had not seen their original scores or the retest. All I had told them was that all grades had improved.

The comments were positive. Leanne said,

It was easier because you could go back and rethink why you chose certain answers. Also, if you were stuck between two answers, you could eliminate one by talking to your partners. When you are talking to other people, you get to see a different view on different stories. I thought I had a logical argument for a question but, when I talked it over with my partners, they made better arguments, which made me change my mind.

Marty commented,

When my partner and I went through the test, one of us read the question out loud and then each of us picked what he thought the right answer was. If we picked two different answers, we discussed why we picked that answer and why

we thought it was right. Then we came to a conclusion and picked the answer of the person with the best argument.

Cindy said,

Working with other people on the test was very helpful. I began to see how many different ways [there are] that you can look at a question and analyze it to find the answer. It was also helpful because there was a lot of useful discussion about each question and all of the stories. It was also fun to work with people that you are not normally around.

Brooke, a consistently high performing student, stated

This process was highly beneficial. With a lot of the questions that I was not sure on I could narrow the answers down to two possibilities. Being able to discuss those with someone was good because with two minds we were better able to discern possible flaws in the remaining answers that most likely would not have been reasoned alone. Overall, I feel this was an excellent exercise to do.

Jeremy said,

When you talk out a question with someone else, it helps you to not only have someone else's input but it also helps you to think through the problem. The questions can sometimes seem confusing but, if you slow down and think logically about the question, it will generally come to you. Of course, you first have to have the knowledge to have any hope of recalling the information.

After students handed in their reflection papers, I returned their original tests, their new tests, and their essay questions. All were pleased with their improved scores.

Even though this activity did not specifically involve a visual arts component, it did result from my using visual arts activities to help students understand their literature assignments. From observations of students at work in the classroom, from student writings in response to visual arts activities, and from talking to students, I had begun to recognize the value of expanding the ways in which juniors in high school can be successful in their literary experiences. My awareness of how visual arts activities empowered students made it possible for me to see how my method of assessment unempowered them. Had I not seen this happen when they were engaged in reading and sketching, I might never have examined my evaluation technique.

Portrait # 14 – *“The Teacher as Learner: Part II”*

After students had had a fair introduction to American authors during the first part of the 20th century, I resolved to combine visual arts and assessment to be sure each student had an opportunity to demonstrate understanding of the literary selections. I wanted them to focus on the ideas the writers expressed and not on the factual details of who, what, where, and when. This is not to suggest these are unimportant but I had encouraged students throughout the semester to think about personal connections when they read, to think about how the piece reflects society, to think about its relevance to our own time. I had tried to nourish their having a transaction (Rosenblatt, 1938) with the text they were reading. I had tried to provide an environment that empowered them to think about a piece of literature and to be confident in their understanding of it.

This particular assignment was to be an essay/visual combination that gave a glimpse into each student’s grasp of literature represented by Anderson, Fitzgerald,

Steinbeck, Hemingway, Faulkner, and O'Connor. Labeled an essay test, students were instructed to draw what they wanted to say and then explain their illustration in writing.

Spencer, a student in my 1st period class who came to understand the importance of wakefulness and preparedness late in the semester, drew a road with a truck poised between ABC blocks and a tombstone. He explained,

This is the highway of life. I thought all the authors were talking about life. I drew everything from ABC blocks (school) to a graveyard (death). By the graveyard, you see a "No Passing" zone cuz that is where it ends. In the story, "The Egg," it talks about dealing with family. That fits in to life cuz people do it every day. "A Rose for Emily" shows her love others and it also shows death. In "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," O'Connor shows how hypocritical society is these days. By not being able to trust others (Figure 15).

For a student who reluctantly engaged in learning, his "highway of life" was an insightful metaphor. His drawing gave him a voice that I might have never heard in a classroom that excluded alternate forms of expression. A person who rarely talked in class, his understanding likely would have remained unexpressed. Drawing empowered him to speak.

The unifying theme for Gill was judgment. He said

As I was drawing about the six stories, I started brainstorming about things I could draw. I thought of the word "Judgment" and I thought that there was a little of it in each story. Take "Winter Dreams." There was a lot of judgment, like when the rich hung out in one crowd and when they wouldn't even do much

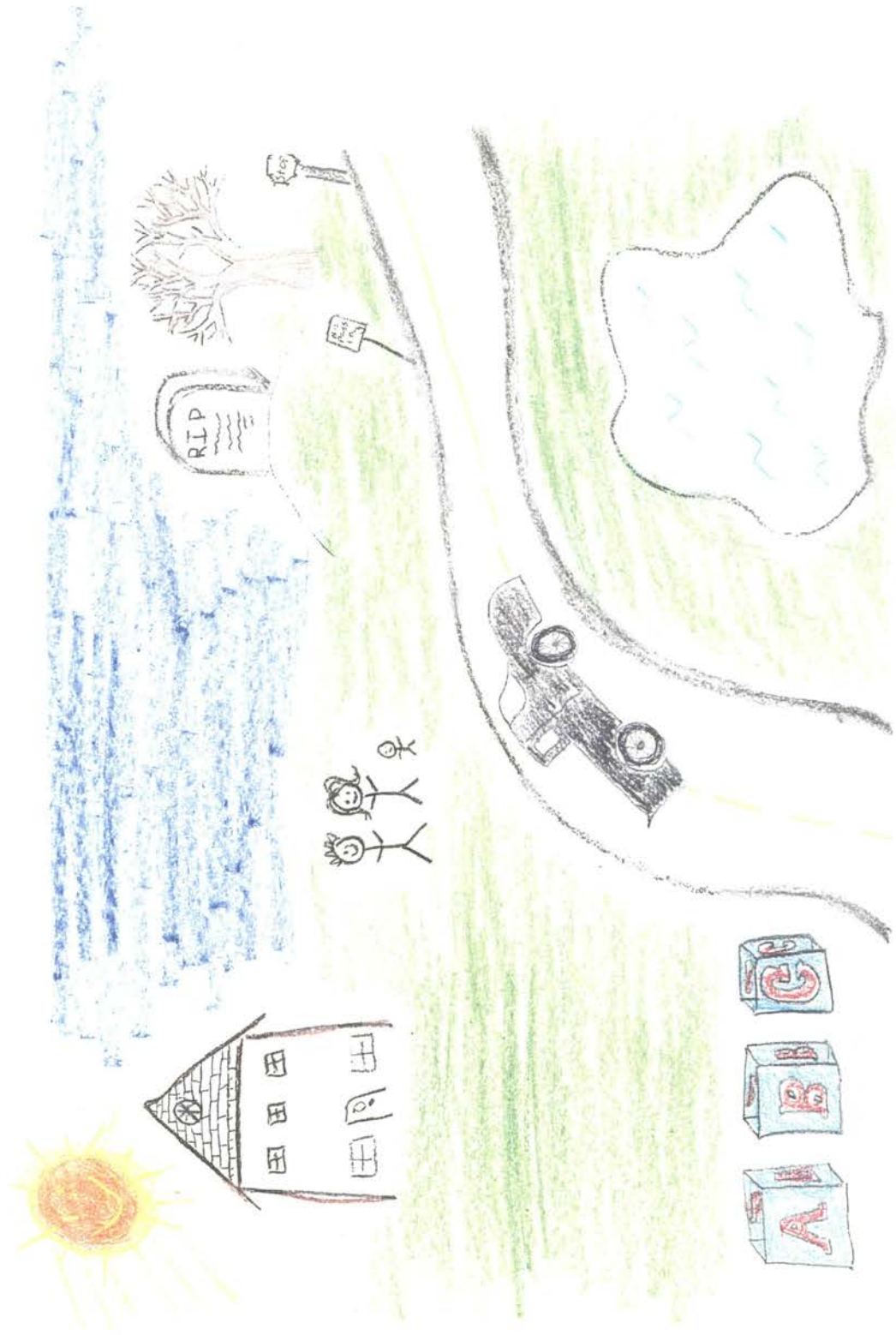


Figure 15. Highway of Life

with the poor. Then, in “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” Shiftlet was judged by his Christianity. In “The Egg,” there was judgment by the people against him and his chickens. In “A Rose for Emily,” when her boyfriend went for someone else, he really judged her. In all of these stories, there was a lot of judgment. That’s why I drew the judge.

Stefan, a talented artist and an often-unengaged student, surprised me with his thought-provoking drawing and his thoughtful remarks. He drew a collection of question marks in a shaded blue circle surrounded by a black shaded background. Beneath his illustration, he wrote,

These stories seem to be written during the time of the Great Depression in which many people were unemployed. These stories represent how people were living, their problems, and their time of silence and sorrow. The question marks represent what these people went through, towards having to do nothing, or confused in what to do in this Great Depression.

He might not have read every selection and he might not have made connections to each author, but I was encouraged that he had had some engagement with these 20th Century writers.

Nicole pictured a father/son disagreement to represent the general theme of the six authors. She explained,

I believe these authors are presenting the common idea of disappointment and frustration. In my picture, I showed frustration and disappointment with a father and son. The son was off playing and got in a fight. The father trusted him enough to know better, but the boy let him down. He feels disappointed and

ashamed as he thought he taught the son better. Also, the son is frustrated that he let his dad down. He is in trouble with no way out.

Summary

This chapter contains a collection of portraits illustrating the two themes that emerged from the data: 1) Employing the nontraditional pedagogy of using visual arts activities to make sense of literature in an 11th grade English classroom encourages students to be involved cognitively with the literature. 2) Employing the nontraditional pedagogy of using visual arts activities to make sense of literature in an 11th grade English empowers students. Both themes can evolve only when students and teacher are willing to stretch their thinking and break away from traditional school experiences – to go outside the lines. My last portrait illustrates this idea.

Portrait # 15 – *“Going Outside the Lines”*

At the end of the semester, Jennifer spanned the entire century in her visual explaining 20th Century Fiction. She said,

When we began to read short stories by 20th Century authors, I noticed that many of them “went outside the lines.” Many of the stories had types of writing that had never been used before. Previous authors seemed to keep stories plain and simple, but 20th Century authors seemed to take a different direction from what everyone was used to writing. They were very outspoken and wrote exactly what they were thinking. It was like they were in a box, and they exploded!

These stories taught me that it's okay to be different from everyone else. The authors didn't do what everyone else was doing. They even turned out to be great stories that are popular today. They went in different directions and it became okay to write in a different style.

I thought drawing a plain box with colorful things coming out of it would show how they had made a change in their writing styles and how far they've come as authors (Figure 16).

Employing a nontraditional pedagogy that used visual arts activities to help students make sense of literature helped my 11th grade students go outside the lines in their thinking about literature and in their thinking about themselves as students. The explosion of ideas and the sharing of responsibility between teacher and students produced a collection of masterpieces.

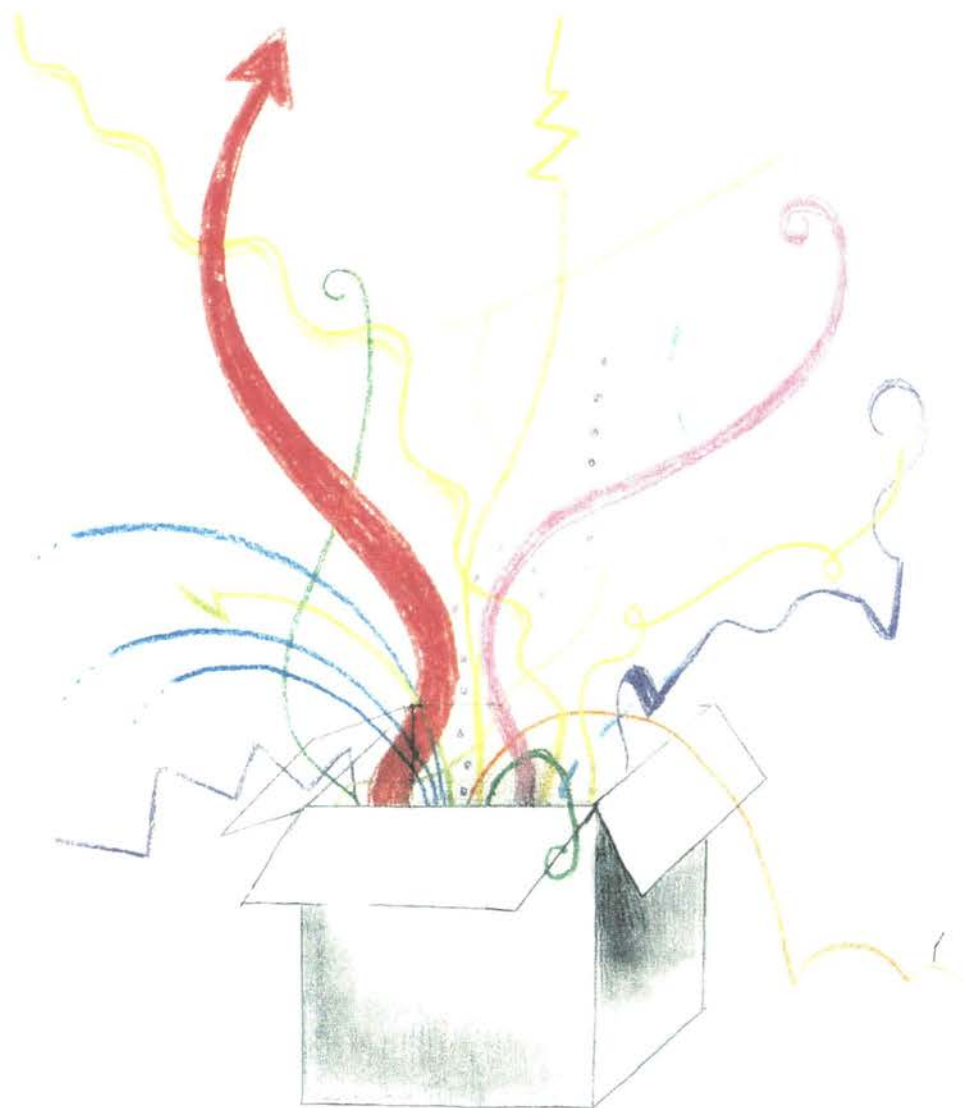


Figure 16. *Going Outside the Lines*

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

We who are teachers would have to accommodate ourselves to lives as clerks or functionaries if we did not have in mind a quest for a better state of things for those we teach and for the world we all share. It is simply not enough to reproduce the way things are. -Maxine Greene (1995, p. 1)

Introduction

It is this “quest for a better state of things” that led me to dabble in using visual arts activities to help my 11th grade students make sense of the literature they were asked to read. And, it is from this quest that I have concluded these visual arts activities, i.e. drawing, painting, and coloring, helped students make connections to their reading and become learners who were active and engaged rather than passive and unengaged.

The intent of this research was to “see” (Eisner, 1985) what happened when I employed a nontraditional pedagogy using visual arts activities to make sense of literature in an 11th grade English classroom. I wanted to watch students as they responded to reading in ways other than writing. I wanted to watch students when they expressed themselves in a variety of ways using a variety of intelligences (Gardner, 1983; Lazear, 1991).

Based on observations, interviews, personal writing and student drawings, the conclusions I have drawn from this semester long investigation support the two major themes that emerged from the analysis of data: 1) Employing the nontraditional pedagogy of using visual arts activities to make sense of literature in an 11th grade English classroom encouraged students to be involved cognitively with the literature. 2) Employing the nontraditional pedagogy of using visual arts activities to make sense of literature in an 11th grade English classroom empowered students. In addition, this nontraditional pedagogy challenged the teacher to model daring and imaginative behavior and created a relaxed, caring classroom environment.

Conclusions

Conclusions about cognitive involvement

The first group of conclusions illustrates the cognitive involvement students exhibited when the nontraditional pedagogy of using visual arts activities to make sense of literature was used in an 11th grade English classroom.

1. *Using visual arts activities to make sense of literature encouraged students to wrestle with the ideas the author was expressing.*

Rather than reading in preparation for a traditional assessment, i.e. multiple choice test questions, students were reading to be able to compare or contrast visually two selections or writing styles, to illustrate a theme, to portray common characteristics among a group of writings, or to picture personal connections. The emphasis moved from the literal level of setting, plot details, and character description to a more critical

level of understanding that results from the reader's transaction with the text (Rosenblatt, 1938). By encouraging a student to rely on past knowledge and experiences as he thought about the reading and as he illustrated what he had read, he became more engaged in the process and grappled with ideas instead of searching for specific facts that he anticipated would appear on a test.

Through these opportunities to become engaged, i.e. making inferences, synthesizing, comparing, and contrasting, students used cognitive processes valuable not only in English and other school subjects but also in their preparation for post high school education and adult roles they will assume. It is exactly this kind of classroom that Alfie Kohn (1999) extols in The Schools Our Children Deserve. He argues that the classroom should not be a place for transmission of learning, where the student's mind is filled with knowledge, but it should be a place of interaction where the student is allowed – and even encouraged – to think.

2. *Using visual arts activities to make sense of literature enabled each student to engage on his level of ability.*

Visual arts activities provided a way to accommodate the different ability levels in a secondary English classroom. Particularly, in heterogeneous school groupings, adding a visual dimension to learning expanded the likelihood that each student would be able to demonstrate understanding of a literary selection. While each reader's transaction with a text was unique, each visual expression was also unique – and acceptable. Even though one person's drawing may have been more insightful and more complex than another's, that did not diminish or elevate the worth of either. Rather than students' competing with each other for a right answer on a test, they

cooperated with and supported each other in their visual interpretations and explanations that represented a variety of capabilities.

3. *Using visual arts activities to make sense of literature stretched students' imaginations.*

Just as each reader's transaction with a text was unique (Rosenblatt, 1938), each reader's visual interpretation of a text was also unique. Each one visualized an entirely different picture as he read -- based on connotations of words, personal connections, past experiences, previous reading, or present concerns. To transfer these images as well as the textual understanding to a visual expression challenged students to stretch their imaginations. Knowing it was acceptable to go beyond the lines -- to take risks, to create, to explore -- freed students to be more adventuresome in their thinking, to be more secure in valuing their own imaginative thought, and to produce a wide range of valid illustrations and explanations.

4. *Using visual arts activities to make sense of literature developed collaborative, not competitive, skills.*

The emphasis in a nontraditional classroom that employed visual arts activities was on the group rather than the individual. Students were not pitted against each other in an effort to see who had the most right answers, but they were encouraged to work together, to cooperate, to support, and to clarify in an effort to be sure all benefited. Even though the drawing was an individual activity, its purpose was not to see whose drawing was more accurate. Instead, the aim was to view the wide range of depictions and explanations that a class of students created and to be respectful of each. In

addition, it offered high school juniors a chance to interact with a variety of personalities and to recognize and acknowledge their likenesses and differences.

Collaborative opportunities also encouraged students to be able to offer substantive explanations for their ideas or drawings. It encouraged them to be more thoughtful in their responses and to be prepared to exchange ideas with group members.

Since the majority of endeavors awaiting these individuals as adults will likely involve cooperative efforts, i.e. marriage, parenting, organizational memberships, employment, honing these collaborative skills in the classroom was beneficial not only for classroom activities but for the future as well.

5. *Using visual arts activities to make sense of literature encouraged students to become more responsible learners.*

Visual arts activities encouraged students to assume responsibility for making choices. Since the outcome of a drawing assignment was not pre-planned, students developed confidence in making decisions and competence in conveying ideas without fear of disapproval. This acknowledgment of the rightness of each person's idea -- with the understanding that it was grounded in the reading (Rosenblatt, 1938) -- challenged each student to rely on his judgment, rather than watching the teacher for cues on what was expected. In turn, this independent thinking nourished discussions that showcased active, divergent thinkers and not the convergence that passive learners demonstrate.

Conclusions about student empowerment

The second group of conclusions illustrates how students were empowered when the nontraditional pedagogy of using visual arts activities to make sense of literature was used in an 11th grade English classroom.

1. *Using visual arts activities to make sense of literature allowed each student to have a voice in the classroom.*

Alternate ways of expression gave a voice to the student whose strength lay in visual or spatial intelligences rather than verbal (Gardner, 1983). Unlike traditional language arts instruction that is predominantly reading and writing (Goodlad, 1984), a nontraditional pedagogy that included visual activities embraced those individuals who would otherwise have been marginalized. The individual who might not have chosen to contribute verbally may have been the most expressive when drawing was an option. His self-worth as a student was enhanced; his classmates had an opportunity to see him as a valuable colleague.

2. *Using visual arts activities to make sense of literature shifted control from the teacher to shared power between both teacher and students.*

In a visual arts dominated classroom, the teacher became less a dispenser of knowledge and more a facilitator of understanding. Because the students were actively engaged in meaning making, they were as involved in the process as was the instructor. This shift of power from teacher to teacher/students builds a student-friendly and learner-centered classroom, both of which are critical if students are to see school as more than a list of tasks to be completed (Hynds, 1997). Hynds maintains that one of

the reasons secondary students are so eager to escape the confines of the American public high school is that we miss their “unique and subtle signs of maturity” (p. 131). Using visual arts activities was one way to acknowledge these signs of maturity. No longer were class members expected to function like a homogeneous group but each was valued for his unique and acceptable contribution.

3. *Using visual arts activities to make sense of literature empowered students to accept responsibility for their own behavior.*

Behavior became more student directed and less teacher controlled when students were engaged in their learning. The challenge to talk, when permission to do so is parceled out at the discretion of the teacher, diminished when students were encouraged to discuss literary selections with classmates. The need to escape, i.e. get a drink or go to the restroom, which must be approved by the teacher, declined when students had free rein of space in the classroom. The fear of asking the teacher a question and risking embarrassment dissipated when students had the freedom to seek answers from classmates. Giving students the responsibility for deciding when or if to talk, move about, or ask a question empowered them to determine their behavior. Instead of outwardly imposed expectations, they made their own decisions.

Conclusions about classroom environment and teacher behavior

Two additional conclusions related to classroom environment and teacher behavior.

1. *Using visual arts activities to make sense of literature challenged the teacher to model daring and imaginative behavior.*

Because the literature is limited in describing secondary classrooms that use visual arts activities and literature in tandem, the teacher who chooses this alternate method of teaching must be willing to answer questions and have an imaginative spirit when skeptical colleagues question the paintings hanging on the walls or wonder why there are boxes of crayons in the classroom. A teacher who desires a quiet classroom where students work independently on the assignment and raise their hands when they have questions will likely be uncomfortable in an environment that includes much exchange between and among students. But, a teacher who constantly searches to make things better in the classroom and who chooses not to continue to do things only because that's the way they've always been will enjoy the challenge of a nontraditional pedagogy. Perhaps this is what Maxine Greene (1995) is talking about in Releasing the Imagination when she says,

It may only be when we think of humane and liberating classrooms in which every learner is recognized and sustained in her or his struggle to learn how to learn that we can perceive the insufficiency of bureaucratized, uncaring schools. And it may be only then that we are moved to choose to repair or to renew.
(p. 5)

Using visual arts activities to help students make sense of literature enabled a daring, imaginative teacher to begin that process of repair or renewal.

2. *Using visual arts activities to make sense of literature created a relaxed, caring classroom environment.*

The nontraditional pedagogy that paired literary study with drawing and coloring established a humane, liberating environment (Greene, 1995) in which students

were comfortable and in which they could succeed. Visual arts activities piqued interest in marginal students; visual arts activities appealed to visual learners; visual arts activities broke the tedium of school for some students. The presence of crayons and drawing paper for other students was a pleasant reminder of bygone elementary days that are reminiscent of more secure, more enjoyable school experiences. Whatever the reason, however, the hands-on activities of drawing and coloring diffused typical teenage angst and allowed even 1st period, not-so-awake students to make some sense out of a literary assignment.

Implications

Implications for the classroom teacher

An implication specifically for the teacher using this nontraditional pedagogy is that he may need to evaluate how he evaluates. Asking students to respond to literature in atypical ways, i.e. drawing and painting, demands that students also be given opportunities to be assessed in atypical ways. An individual who is encouraged to have a transaction with a piece of literature; to contemplate that literature in a visual activity, to ponder the personal connections, and then is expected to perform well on a quantifiable, objective assessment has been given a mixed message about what's important in the learning experience.

This reevaluation of assessment raises two key questions for a teacher to ponder in our standardized testing crazed society: 1) Will students be prepared to perform at an acceptable level when given the exams that largely include multiple choice questions mandated by most state legislative bodies? 2) Will students be able to score

competitively on college admission tests, i.e. the ACT, that also emphasize multiple choice questions? I argue that students encouraged to collaborate with others and to express their ideas in nontraditional ways are developing thinking skills that will enable them to be successful on standardized tests. Students may need to develop these skills but they can learn to be critical thinkers and to trust their abilities to make wise decisions in testing experiences. Even though Portrait # 13 – “*The Teacher as Learner: Part I*” implies a mismatch between pedagogy and evaluation, I maintain that the cooperative test taking I described in that portrait provides a model for close reading and evaluation of test items that can lead to confident individual testing.

Another – and perhaps even more important implication for teachers – is the urgency of knowing more about the variety of styles in which learners learn. Educators need to become familiar with the intelligences Gardner (1983) identified in his work Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences and utilize that information in the classroom. Even though school districts may endorse Gardner’s theory, in many instances this has involved little more than inviting an expert to town for a one-day session. In my own district, David Lazear (1991), author of Seven Ways of Teaching: The Artistry of Teaching with Multiple Intelligences, spoke to all of the middle school, junior high, and senior high teachers one morning for three hours. The middle school faculty stayed on for an additional three hours in the afternoon. However, even a six-hour session of thinking and talking about different ways to help students learn does not a competent user make.

Not only should we as educators be exploring ways to use Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences in the classroom but we should also be expanding our efforts to

make curriculum offerings more integrated. Research shows the effectiveness of interdisciplinary study yet the typical secondary school still operates with each discipline taught independently of another (Perkins, 1994; Rief, 1999). It is this fragmentation of learning that Eisner (1998) identifies as a “problematic consequence of how we define the school curriculum” (p. 215). If students examined literature, history, and art together, for example, not only would their knowledge of each be enhanced but they would be able to see the relationships between and among the three content areas. If drawing helps students make sense of literature, could it also help them make sense of math? or science? or history?

As more and more schools reconfigure time by using block scheduling, visual arts activities may have serious implications in the curriculum planning for these longer stretches of instruction. In an 85-minute class period, students not only need a variety of activities but they also have time for a variety of activities. Secondary teachers who can become comfortable with an arsenal of crayons and drawing paper in their classrooms will welcome the extended time that allows students to draw and color as a way to understand literature.

Implications for teacher education

One implication for teacher education is to devise ways to help future teachers recognize and be sensitive to the variety of needs, interests, and strengths their prospective students will have. These individuals, who will soon occupy classrooms of their own, should be exposed to alternate pedagogies as a way to develop their own

abilities to venture beyond the transmission model of learning that many may be familiar with.

Another implication for teacher education that this study illustrates is the educational value of integrating disciplines. Knowing that students are more likely to remember what they learn when they recognize relationships between and among the subjects they study (Boston, 1996; Dobbs, 1996; Eisner, 1985), it behooves teacher educators to be sure these curriculum integration skills are included in their preparatory classes at the university.

A third implication for teacher education is to make clear the critical role a teacher should always retain as learner. Moving from student to teacher, of necessity, involves a change in responsibilities, i.e. lesson planning paper grading, activity coordination, but that move must not remove the individual from learning, from being receptive to new ideas, from being willing to admit inadequacies. Somehow, somewhere in teacher preparation programs teachers-to-be need to see veteran teachers who are enthusiastic, adventuresome learning facilitators.

Suggestions for Future Research

Even though this study evolved from an idea gleaned from an Advanced Placement English conference, its focus was on participants who were enrolled in an on-level 11th grade English class. Research could be conducted with students participating in an Advanced Placement English class. Individuals who choose a more challenging English class are typically skillful readers and writers, but it would be interesting to see how visual arts activities might enhance their learning. Because their

verbal/linguistic intelligences are strengths, they may have fewer opportunities to utilize other intelligences.

Research that included a larger and more diverse student population could also be valuable. For example, using visual arts activities in a class where most of the students struggle to understand what they read might offer a way for them to access text in a more appealing format. Research replicating the study to either confirm or disconfirm the findings can strengthen the conclusions or raise questions – both of which are important for educators thinking about what works best in the classroom.

A quantitative study could be conducted that compared two junior English classes, one employing a nontraditional pedagogy using visual arts activities to help students make sense of literature and one using a more traditional pedagogy of lecture and written discussion. Objective tests over common literature studied could be given to both groups throughout the study and at the end of the study. This traditional assessment could provide additional data to evaluate the value of visual arts activities.

Since schools have been and likely forever will be subject to criticism and are regularly given mandates to improve, there is always a need for research to try to understand how to better tap the needs and interests of students. There is no more competent person to conduct this research than the teacher who is in the classroom on a daily basis. This is the person, whether he acknowledges it or not, who is always collecting data and evaluating. In his position as an insider, his research can make a difference in how well schools serve students.

It is this desire to seek ways to better serve students that motivated me to take on the challenge of this study. Because I would not be content to live as a clerk

(Greene, 1995) nor would I want the instruction in my classroom to be no different now than it was when I began my teaching career, the conclusions, implications, and possibilities for future research validate the time and energy involved.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, J. (1995). It's never too late: leading adolescents to lifelong literacy.
Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Anderson, R., Brinnin, J., Leggett, J., Arpin, Gary, and Toth, S. (Eds.) (1993).
Elements of literature. Dallas, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
- Applebee, A. (1990). Literature instruction in American schools. Report 1.4.
Albany, NY: Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature.
- Atwell, N. (1987). In the middle: Writing, reading, and learning with
adolescents. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Bestor, A. (1953). Educational wastelands. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois
Press.
- Bishop, W. (1999). Ethnographic writing research. Portsmouth, NH:
Heinemann.
- Bloom, A. (1987). Closing of the American mind. New York, NY: Simon &
Schuster.
- Boston, B. (1996). Connections: The arts and the integration of the high school
curriculum. New York, NY: Getty Center for Education in the Arts.
- Calkins, L. (1986). The art of teaching writing. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Christenson, D., Carlisle, S., & Wright, J. (1999, November). Visualize the possibilities: using art in the English classroom. Paper presented at the meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Denver, CO.

Denzin, N. (1989). Research act. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Dewey, J. (1934). Art as experience. New York, NY: Minton, Balch & Company.

Dewey, J. (1916). Democracy and education. New York, NY: Mcmillan Publishing Company.

Dobbs, S. (1996). Introduction. Connections: The arts and the integration of the high school curriculum. New York, NY: Getty Center for Education in the Arts.

Eisner, E. (1972). Educating artistic vision. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Eisner, E. (1976). The arts, human development, and education. Berkeley, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corporation.

Eisner, E. (Ed.) (1978). Reading, the arts, and the creation of meaning. Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.

Eisner, E. (1982). Cognition and curriculum. New York, NY: Longman.

Eisner, E. (1985). The educational imagination. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co.

Eisner, E. (1991). The enlightened eye. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Eisner, E. (1994). Cognition and curriculum reconsidered. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

- Eisner, E. (1998). The kind of schools we need. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Eisner, E. and Peshkin, A. (Eds.) (1990). Qualitative inquiry in education. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.
- Elmore, R. and Associates (Eds.). (1990). Restructuring schools. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Ernst, K. (1994). Picturing learning. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Finn, C., Ravitch, D., & Fancher, R. (1984). Against mediocrity. New York, NY: Holmes & Meier.
- Fiske, E. (1991). Smart schools, smart kids. New York, NY: Touchstone.
- Flesch, R. (1955). Why Johnny can't read. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.
- Gambrell, L., Palmer, B., Codling, R., & Mazzoni, S. (1996). Assessing motivation to read. The Reading Teacher, 49, 518-533.
- Gardner, H. (1982). Art, mind, and brain. New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc.
- Gardner, H. (1983). Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Gardner, H. (1993). Multiple intelligences. New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc.
- Gay, L. and Airasian, (2000). Educational research. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- Glasser, W. (1969). Schools without failure. Evanston, IL: Harper & Row Publishers.
- Glickman, C. (1998). Revolutionizing America's schools. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

- Goetz, J. and LeCompte, M. (1984). Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research. New York, NY: Academic Press, Inc.
- Goodlad, J. (1984). A place called school. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Co.
- Graves, D. (1983). Writing: Teachers and children at work. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Greene, M. (1995). Releasing the imagination. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Gross, P. (1992). Actions and perceptions of students and teachers when changing toward a whole language instructional mode in secondary level English classrooms. (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University Teachers College). Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services.
- Guild, P. & Garger, S. (1985). Marching to different drummers. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Harrington, C. (1999). Students' perspectives about utilizing kinesthetic activities in a secondary level English classroom. (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Alabama, 1999). Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services.
- Harste, J. and Short, K. with Burke, C. (1988). Creating classrooms for authors: the reading-writing connection. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Heshusius, L. (1994, April). Freeing ourselves from objectivity: Managing subjectivity or turning toward a participatory mode of consciousness? Educational Researcher, 15-21.

- Hirsch, E. D. (1987). Cultural literacy. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Hynds, S. (1997). On the brink. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.
- Jurgeila, J. (1998, March). Classic connections: Aiding library comprehension through varied liberal arts alliances. English Journal, 87, 17-20.
- Kamil, M., Langer, J., & Shanahan, T. (1985). Understanding reading and writing research. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Kohn, A. (1999). The schools our children deserve. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Lang, K. and Barr, J. (1999). A picture is worth a thousand words. Paper presented at the meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Denver, CO.
- Langer, J. (1995). Envisioning literature. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.
- Lareau, A. (1989). Home advantage. New York, NY: Falmer Press.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1983). The good high school. New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. and Davis, J. (1997). The art and science of portraiture. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Lazear, D. (1991). Seven ways of teaching. Palatine, IL: Skylight Publishing.
- Ley, R. & Kaushansky, M. (1985). The 4rs: reading', 'riting, 'rithmetic, and the right hemisphere. From Annes Sheikh & Katharina S. Skeikh (Eds.), Imagery in education (pp. 89-108). Farmingdale, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc.

Mathison, S. (1988, March). Why triangulate? Educational Researcher, 13-17.

Mayher, J. (1990). Uncommon sense. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton / Cook Publishers.

Moline, S. (1995). I see what you mean. York, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Murata, R. (1997, November). Connecting the visual and verbal: English and art for high school sophomores. English Journal, 86, 44-48.

Myers, C. and Simpson, D. (1998). Re-creating schools. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1984). Cambridge, MA: USA Research.

Newmann, F. (Ed.) (1992). Student engagement and achievement in American secondary schools. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Ohanian, S. (1999). One size fits few. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Olson, J. (1992). Envisioning writing. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Orlich, D. (2000). Education reform and limits to student achievement. Phi Delta Kappan, 81, 468-472.

Perkins, D. (1994). The intelligent eye: Learning to think by looking at art. Santa Monica, CA: The Getty Center for Education in the Arts.

Renzulli, J. (1998). A rising tide lifts all ships. Phi Delta Kappan, 80, 104-111.

Rief, L. (1999). Vision and voice. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Robbins, J. and Rief, L. (1999). When art turns to writing: imagining the possibilities. Paper presented at the meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Denver, CO.

Rosenblatt, L. (1938, 1995). Literature as exploration. New York: The Modern Language Association of America.

Rosenblatt, L. (1978). The reader, the text, the poem. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Sedlak, M., Wheeler, C., Pullin, D., & Cusick, P. (1986). Selling students short. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Sizer, T. (1992). Horace's school. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Smith, F. (1998). Book of learning and forgetting. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Thomas, G. (1995). Education – past, present, future. In Walling, D. (Ed.), At the threshold of the millennium (p. 51-55). Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.

Whitin, P. (1996, February). Exploring visual response to literature. Research in the Teaching of English, 30, 114-140.

Wilhelm, J. (1997). You gotta be the book. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Wilson, B. & Rossman, G. (1993). Mandating academic excellence. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Wolcott, H. (1995). Art of fieldwork. Walnut Creek, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Woods, P. (1986). Inside schools. New York, NY: Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc.

Zemelman, S., Daniels, H., and Bizar, M. (1999). Sixty years of reading research – but who's listening? Phi Delta Kappan, 80, 513-517.

APPENDIX

**Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board**

Protocol Expires: 8/17/01

Date : Friday, August 25, 2000

IRB Application No ED0114

Proposal Title: A DESCRIPTION OF AN 11TH GRADE ENGLISH CLASSROOM ENGAGED IN THE
VISUAL ARTS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

Principal
Investigator(s) :

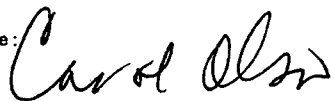
Nedra Segall
1908 Brooke Hollow Ct.
Stillwater, OK 74075

David Yellin
254 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed
and Expedited (Spec Pop) **Modification**

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) : Approved

Signature :



Carol Olson, Director of University Research Complian

Friday, August 25, 2000

Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

VITA

Nedra Kay Segall

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: A DESCRIPTION OF AN 11TH GRADE ENGLISH CLASSROOM
ENGAGED IN THE VISUAL ARTS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Education: Graduated from Bixby High School, Bixby, Oklahoma, in May 1961; received Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May 1965; received Master of Education in English from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas in January 1970. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education with a major in Curriculum and Instruction at Oklahoma State University in August 2001.

Experience: Taught at Bell Junior High School in Tulsa, Oklahoma from 1965 to 1967; taught at Cadiz High School in Cadiz, Kentucky from 1967 to 1968; taught at Murray High School in Murray, Kentucky from 1968 to 1969; taught at Mulhall-Orlando High School in Orlando, Oklahoma from 1969 to 1970; taught at Stillwater High School in Stillwater, Oklahoma from 1970 to present.

Professional Memberships: National Council of Teachers of English, Assembly on Literature for Adolescents (ALAN), Kappa Delta Pi, Phi Delta Kappa, Stillwater Education Association, Oklahoma Education Association, National Education Association.