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The Paper Boy

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

The teacher had identified that the class needed help with reading comprehension, and so it became a focus for the year's activities. She used the resource *What is Comprehension and How to Teach It* to help plan the programme, including ideas on introducing and exploring narrative texts.

When their reading comprehension skills improved, the teacher turned to visual texts. She began by sharing *My Dad* by Anthony Browne. Over a number of sessions the class explored the different features of the text and how the illustrations reflected the text. Students were questioned in response to verbal text – what sort of dad is this? What qualities does he have? Can we tell what the book is about from the verbal text only?

The book was read and discussed. Students responded to the visual text as a class and in small sharing groups, and then reported back. Questions focused on the visual links and the quality these were expressing, for example:

Question: On page 8, Dad is represented as a horse. Why do you think this is?
Answer: Dad is portrayed as a horse's head and the back of the chair legs are a horse's legs and hooves. The quality is that he is healthy. He eats a lot. He has a big appetite.

They then compiled of list of qualities represented in the visual text.

The teacher introduced the features of a book cover, which were labelled on a photocopy. She asked:
- Why do you think the illustrator has selected this colour for the background?
- Where do we find the dominant image?
- Look at the font – what do you notice?
- Does the picture match the title?
- Where do we find extra information, for instance, the author's name?

In small groups the students analysed a variety of sophisticated picture book covers. The task was to discuss particular features and the rationale behind them. The main elements were then shared, and summarised on a chart.

A graphic designer was invited to talk with the class. He focused mainly on discussing "What's the point? What message are we trying to get across to our audience? If we are attempting humour, we need to select our audience carefully."

He shared examples of his work and students asked why he had selected particular features, especially in relation to layout. His main points were summarised on a wall chart.

The teacher had laminated a number of lettering cards, and downloaded activities from English Online (http://english.unitecnology.ac.nz/). Students completed a contract independently over a period of days. These activities were then assessed using two different items from the Assessment Resource Banks (http://arb.nzcer.org.nz/nzcer3/Nzcer.HTM).

They were to select a book they enjoyed and produce a response in the form of a static image conveying a strong sense of the book. They were now ready to determine particular criteria for their static image – the charts around the room were used as a reference.

The class developed the following criteria:
- The message must be clear: there needs to be a point to the image.
- It must reflect a theme explored in the text.
- We want it to have impact. We need to think about colour, font, dominant image, layout, framing, white space.
- We must include a verbal feature. This could include a question, a quote, a joke.

Students drafted their images in small groups so that that teacher could question and conference on the spot. There was such a range of abilities she varied expectations accordingly.

Teacher-student conversations

Ivana was in a bit of a hurry to complete her image. The teacher initially conferenced with the group while they were drafting their work, and she was happy that Ivana had a clear understanding of her next tasks. However, when the published copy was completed the teacher was concerned about the rush in regard to the font, title of book, and author. She decided to point these out and ask Ivana to reflect and possibly make alterations.

Teacher: The riddle is fantastic and has worked out really well. Let's look at the original criteria we set. How do you feel about the font? [It was handwritten in pencil, lower case.]
Ivana: Umm, it's OK.
Teacher: Let's think about what we learned from the activities we did from the cards about font. Do you think it reflects the book?
Ivana: Well no, it's a bit boring and rushed.
Teacher: Yes, it lets down what is a great image. Maybe you could cut the two images out and paste them on to another white background and have a play around with different ideas for the font.
Ivana: I think I'll type it in the font like the riddle, because it's sort of like newspaper writing – which is what the theme in the book is about.
Teacher: Yes, great idea. Why don't you play around with different sizes and print them out a few times. Then you can cut them up and trial to where it would look best.
Ivana: OK.

Ivana then completed this task and shared her ideas for the font with a buddy before completing.

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The Paper Boy

INTEGRATING VIEWING AND PRESENTING

Students benefit from many opportunities to explore, view, and discuss a variety of static images. They can be encouraged and guided to use these visual techniques. Throughout the programme there will be a large supply of images, illustrations, wordless texts, advertisements, posters, logos, signs, and symbols that can serve as useful models for students to develop skills.

Older students can analyse features and provide explanations in small and class groups. Emphasis can be placed on balance, composition, perspective, atmosphere, exaggeration, and how words can anchor illustrations.

By questioning students in terms of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, the teacher can encourage them to think more deeply about the elements chosen and how they combine to create impact. In turn, students can develop their own criteria for success.

The teacher used a number of sophisticated picture books. Combined with text the illustrations were invaluable in exemplifying the impact of combining the verbal and visual. The guest graphic designer shared a number of his own advertisement designs for viewing in terms of visual features.

WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Ivana towards the next learning step, the teacher could help her to focus on:

Concept
- Explain ideas, techniques, and sense of audience in more detail. She could target the audience with greater care.
- Focus more on ideas than on the content of the book. The teacher could support her to explain ideas with greater confidence.

Impact
- Explore a variety of fonts or font size, to make the verbal features easier to read.

CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Achievement objectives

Level 3: Viewing and Presenting Functions

Viewing: Students should respond to and discuss meanings, ideas, and effect, identifying the purposes for which the verbal and visual features are used and combined.

Presenting: Students should combine verbal and visual features to communicate information, ideas, or narrative through drama, video, computer, or other technologies and media.

Levels 3 and 4: Viewing and Presenting Processes

In achieving the objectives of understanding and using visual language:

Exploring Language: Students should identify important features of verbal and visual features and use them to create particular meanings and effects.

Thinking Critically: Students should identify and discuss ways in which verbal and visual features can be combined for a particular purpose and audience.

Processing Information: Students should view and use visual texts to retrieve, interpret, organise, and present information coherently; use appropriate technology, including fluent handwriting for effective presentation.

English in the New Zealand Curriculum, pages 40–41

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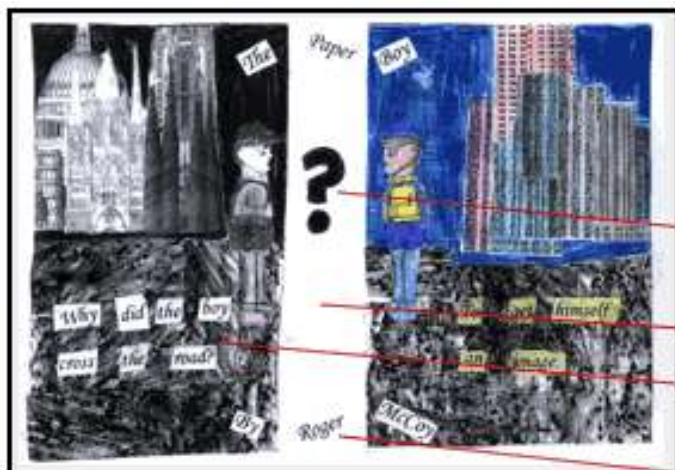
Ministry of Education (1994). *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.

English: Visual Language

Presenting: Static Images

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The Paper Boy

WHAT THE WORK SHOWS: Ivana has provided a somewhat startling mirror image by contrasting black and white with colour, and using a riddle to invoke curiosity.

Impact

Begins to combine visual and verbal features to convey an idea or mood.

Uses contrast to show two worlds.

- Uses a dominant question mark to reflect the query "What is real?"

- Uses white space effectively.

- Uses a riddle to add to the atmosphere of mystery.

- Uses a font that reflects the ideas in the story (a newspaper style).

Uses texture and multi-media to help emphasise the contrast between the two worlds.

Presenting: Static Images

The Paper Boy

Student's explanation

I tried to show two worlds. The real world is in colour and the black and white side is the fantasy world – or is it? It also changes from old fashioned to modern building style. I didn't want them to be too different from each other though as it would make it a bit tricky. In this book, the paper boy wakes up and doesn't know what is real anymore. He has an accident on his way to work when he was crossing the road. He's really confused. When he wakes up the world was somehow different. Is it the future or is it the past? Which world does he prefer? He goes on a sort of emotional journey.

Because of this I thought a riddle would fit, as it's kind of confusing too. I hoped it would be a mysterious question for the reader, to get them thinking. The two boys in this picture are mirror images of each other. I used a large question mark to represent the fact he doesn't know where he is. I thought just keeping it black on a white background would help it to stand out. The font I used is also similar to a newspaper style and once again I kept it black and white. I wanted some texture so decided to do a rubbing off the road and collage it. The pictures are a bit busy so that's why I separated them with a plain white border. It helps you see them better.

Concept

- Explains an idea to be conveyed.
  - Begins to explain how the visual and verbal features combine to convey the idea or mood.
  - Shows awareness of audience through questioning.
  - Uses some appropriate terminology to plan for and/or explain the techniques.

The Paper Boy

Student's original work