

Picture this

Through this art-based writing program, children's visual images are integrated at every stage of the writing process, providing an alternative pathway into writing for children with diverse learning styles.

"I know someone special. Only I can see him. He comes out at the colorful night. He seems to glow at me. He swishes through the trees. He slithers through the grass. He makes ripples in the water and he blows with the wind.

"He's not the swan who swims and drinks from the silver lake. He's not the wind snake who glides with the wind. He's not the great bear paw that belongs to the bear of the wild. He's not the beautiful flower with one leaf and the sweetest of nectar. He's not the sparkling purple rock."

by Beth Olshansky

These are the opening lines from Jamie Cragnoline's latest picture book, *Someone Special*. While her words are remarkable in many ways, what is even more remarkable is that Jamie is 7 years old and in the first grade.

What is not apparent from reading her text alone is the rich visual process in which Jamie was immersed in order to arrive at a strong sense of voice at such an early age. Jamie's wonderful words found their way onto her fat-lined paper over a period of several days as she viewed the series of beautiful collage images she had created.

Jamie not only fashioned these collage images to draft her story, but also created her own portfolio of hand-painted, textured papers from which the images were made. The inspiration for her story actually came as she blew bubbles of paint and then printed them onto a piece of paper.

Jamie recalls this moment fondly. With a twinkle in her eyes, she boasts, "I got my whole story idea when I stared into the blue bubbles. It just came to me!"

Once Jamie had her story idea in place, she began to give shape to her story through cutting and pasting her textured papers to create a series of colorful collage images. As an author/illustrator who had been given the license to work according to her own learning style, Jamie chose to make collage image after collage image, drafting her story in images first.

One day, as she was cutting and pasting, Jamie was asked to share her story idea. She looked up with her big blue eyes and with great sincerity said, "Oh, I can't possibly tell you. It's much too complicated." All the same, Jamie knew exactly what she needed to do.

For weeks, Jamie worked feverishly on her collage story. Often, she would pause to stare at her pictures, deep in thought. After a lengthy pic-

IMAGE-MAKING WITHIN THE WRITING PROCESS



Image-Making Within the Writing Process is an art-based writing program that integrates children's visual images at every stage of the writing process.

Designed to access visual, kinesthetic and verbal modes of thinking, this program provides an enticing alternative pathway into writing for children with diverse learning styles.

Based on rigorous research, Image-Making has been validated by the National Diffusion Network as an innovative and effective literacy program.

For information about federally subsidized teacher-training programs, samples of children's work or subsidized materials packages, write Beth Olshansky, Laboratory for Interactive Learning, University of New Hampshire, Hood House, 89 Main Street, Durham, NH 03824 or call (603) 862-3691.

ture-drafting/silent rehearsal period, Jamie began to write. Her words poured from her pencil as if they had been well-rehearsed. Her written language was transformed by the process.

Her teacher, Sue Rafferty says, "Jamie was already an avid writer, but her writing tended to be flat. Her descriptions were very concrete. Her stories were driven by chronology and void of personal voice. There was no sense of personal engagement in her writing."

Now, supported by a new National Diffusion Network program, Jamie was given the opportunity to move beyond habitual writing patterns and experience her true capabilities as an author/illustrator.

But the program is not just for the Jamies in the classroom. Thomas was quite a different learner. He was a very active first-grader who had avoided writing at all costs. He did not perceive himself as a writer

and nothing his teacher had tried during the year had succeeded in changing his mind — until "Image-Making Within The Writing Process" was introduced into the classroom.

Giving shape to the story

Thomas, along with all the other children in Rafferty's first-grade classroom, immediately became captivated by bright colors of paint, a variety of texturing techniques and beautiful hand-painted papers he had created.

When challenged to discover a story in his textured papers, Thomas had no trouble coming up with a story idea. He was then able to orally rehearse his story-line as he pulled textured papers from his portfolio and laid them out in a row. When invited to create collage images using his textured papers, Thomas dove into his story-making process with vigor.

Like Jamie and many of his first-grade peers, Thomas chose to give shape to his story through visual images at first. Only later, after all his pictures were complete, did he go back to set his images to text. Unlike Jamie, Thomas did a lot of oral rehearsal of his story-line as he literally pieced together his story in collage.

When Thomas finally began to write, his words were not those of a child who had a tentative relationship with written language. Inspired by his beautiful collage image, his first page read, "Night falls. Fog covers the peaks of the mountains. It is a beautiful sight."

Thomas meekly shared his first writing with his teacher, not realizing the simple beauty of his words. As he cautiously eyed her for her reaction, his tentative expression melted into a big grin.

Later on that day at Author/Illustrators Circle, Thomas shared his pictures and his words. His teacher asked him where those wonderful words had come from. Imme-



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Excerpt from *Someone Special*, written and illustrated by Jamie Cragoline, age 7

diately, Thomas pointed to his muted collage image in which he had combined a soft gray Plexi-glas print with a watercolor on wet paper. "From my picture," he said with a grin.

From then on, Thomas began to identify himself as a writer and an illustrator. The next day, he announced that he loved Image-Making so much that he was going to make his book 100 pages long!

New-found love of language

While these stories tell of only two of the 21 children in Sue Rafferty's classroom, each child has his or her own story to tell: For some, it was developing a sense of voice, learning to use descriptive language, or moving away from straight personal narrative into imaginative fiction.

For Daniel, a very young first-grader, it was simply creating a sequence, a coherent story-line and

a series of delightful collage images he was proud of.

Despite the great range of ability in this first-grade classroom, one thing was certain. Every child went home with a beautiful collage book and a new-found sense of pride. The children's self-esteem soared.

Delighted by this as well as the daily hum of excitement that filled her classroom, Rafferty was immediately sold on the process. However, she was even more pleased with what has happened after the children had completed their collage books.

"My children demonstrated a newfound love of language I had never seen before. I see evidence of it all around me," she said.

With excitement, she pulls out a thank-you letter written to her from Jamie. "Dear Mrs. Rafferty. Thank you for the book you gave me. It is my most favorite book in the whole



wide world! When I read this book, it lifts my spirit and makes my heart soar."

Sue pulls out another piece of student writing, a story called *As The Shining Sun Rose*.

She reads Michaela's piece: "As the sun came up, I woke from a good night's rest. The sun shined in my eyes. Day was coming!"

Sue beams, "When I read these, I know I've really tapped into something that just wasn't there before. This [Image-Making Within The Writing Process] has impacted my kids as writers in very profound ways."

But it is not just these first-grade author/illustrators who have experienced the satisfaction of the image-making process. Language arts teacher Margaret Belowski has seen all 110 of her seventh-graders soar with this creative process.

"This has been an eye-opening experience for me. Ten years ago I wouldn't have believed it," Belowski confesses. "One of the things that impressed me the most was that every student, even those without artistic ability, can shine with this process. It enriches both the students who have a hard time with writing and the students who are already writers.

"I think the children really astonished themselves by what they created," Belowski added. "And it was not just the students. ... Everyone who sees these books takes a breath, amazed at how beautiful they are. How can the children not be thrilled?"

But Melissa, a first-grader, summed it up best when she viewed her own published collage book for the first time. With hands on hips, she stated, "I can't believe that a child actually made this book." ■

Children as Authors, Children as Illustrators: The Whole Story

*designed and written by
Beth Olshansky*

This lively Heinemann video provides a colorful overview of Beth Olshansky's nationally renown art-based approach to process writing. *Image-Making Within The Writing Process* has won validation by the US Department of Education as an innovative and effective literacy program. By infusing art into every stage of the writing process, *Image-Making* provides an irresistible pathway into literacy for children with diverse learning styles.

The package comes complete with a Resource Guide detailing all of the art techniques displayed in the video. Videotapes are available for purchase or 5-day rental.

For details, contact:

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Time: 48 minutes

Purchase: 1/2" VHS: \$150.00

Five-day rental: 1/2" VHS \$50.00

Beth Olshansky is the developer and program director of Image-Making Within The Writing Process, a program validated by the National Diffusion Network as an innovative and effective literacy program.