

STORY COLLAGES

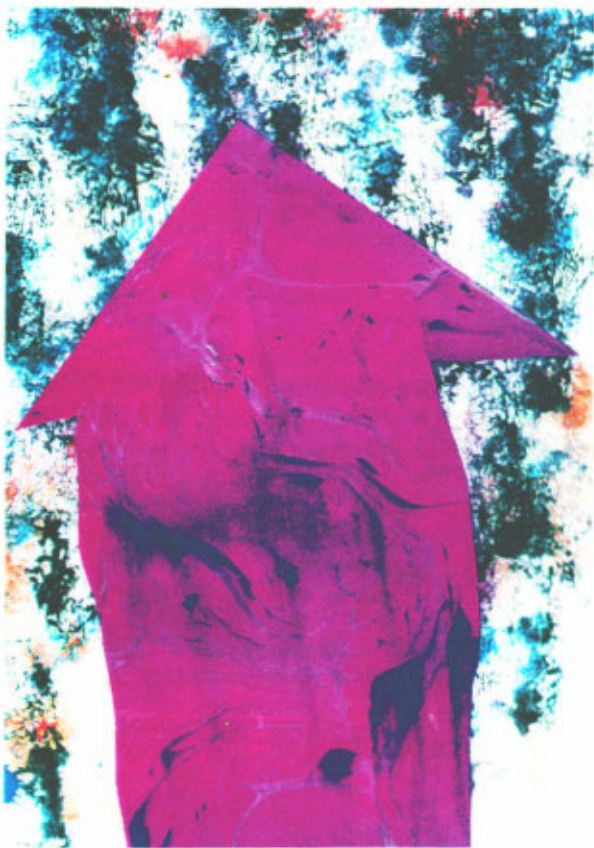
HELP FOR RELUCTANT WRITERS

BY LESLIE A. BROWN

FOR ADAM, WRITING stories was a painful chore. He'd often spend his time erasing the few words and pictures he'd put down. When Adam did write, he had trouble sticking to a single topic. One of his stories started out about trains, then shifted to cars, and finally ended with rocket ships.

Adam's dislike for writing changed when he tried a new approach. Adam began by creating a story in collage images, which he made from a variety of textured papers he had made himself. Working with the brilliantly colored, richly textured papers, Adam felt at ease. He no longer had to draw his pictures; he could build them. He used his artwork to inspire both story ideas and written text. As a result, Adam's writing began to flow more naturally and his ability to create text began to improve. Adam has also been motivated to become a better reader because he wants to read his own stories.

Like Adam, students who have trouble getting started with writing can take this alternate path and blossom. Some may come up with a plot first and then illus-



There was a full moon. A storm was coming. The clouds looked like whales swimming in the sky. The wind was whipping around the house. Trees were falling everywhere. Leaves were flying all over the place.

—Kevin Rook, Grade 2

trate it. Others — like Adam — may let the textured papers influence their writing. Still others may combine the two processes.

The textured-paper approach to story writing was developed by Beth Olshansky, an art educator and researcher. Students using Olshansky's approach have become better at developing plots, creating imaginative story topics, and using descriptive language. You can follow this method to help your students learn to better express themselves visually and verbally. The integrated process will inspire them to become more adept at observing, formulating ideas, sequencing, drafting, editing, revising, and writing

vivid descriptions. Here's how the process works.

Prelude to paper texturing

Before teaching your students how to make textured paper, introduce them to the concepts of tactile and visual texture.

To help your students understand tactile textures, have them close their eyes and feel such highly textured objects as a

pinecone, a bamboo place mat, and an aluminum-foil ball. Ask them to describe the objects.

To showcase visual texture—and to provide examples of the kinds of collage pictures students will be making—share illustrations found in books by such artists as Eric Carle and Leo Lionni. Note that a visual texture may appear rough to the eye but may feel smooth to the touch. Have your students describe the textures they see. As you go along, list descriptive vocabulary your students can use in their stories.

Before each paper-texturing session (see “Paper Texturing Made Easy,” p. 24), spotlight different illustrators and discuss possible texturing techniques they used to create their collage images. For example, Leo Lionni uses a Plexiglas print in his book *Swimmy* (Knopf, 1987). Eric Carle uses a variation of the acrylic smear for some of his illustrations. Seeing these examples will help your students believe that they can do exactly what professional author/illustrators do.

Marrying words and pictures

After several paper-texturing sessions, your students will have pro-

duced an ample supply of textured papers. Even though they’ve been concentrating on making designs and textures up to this point, the kids will likely have already begun to discover story ideas within the colors and textures they’ve created. For example, a child might find a large winged dragon within a sheet of marbled paper. A child who’s created a brilliant red and yellow paper might say, “I’ll be able to use this for a sun.” The variety of colors and textures the children end up with will give them many options as they begin creating their stories in pictures and words.

Model the story-making process for your students by having them help you create a class story. To make the collage pictures, tear or cut the textured papers into shapes. Arrange (and later glue) the shapes onto white card-stock paper according to the class’s story plan. Then let students begin creating their own stories according to their individual creative processes. For example, when one child cut a shape from a piece of blue splatter paper, it reminded him of a splash. This made him think of a man overboard in the sea. Soon, he was on his way to

creating a sea adventure story, “The Sailor Sailed on Back.” Another child decided to write about a peacock because a piece of green marbled paper reminded her of the eyespots on a peacock’s tail feathers. Then a sheet of paper covered with swirling purple lines inspired her to include a tornado in her tale. But by the end of her story, the words had begun to influence the art. After writing about how the peacock stared out a window, the child decided to use orange marbled paper to create the bird’s arresting eyes.

Creating a storybook

Allow space and time for your students to continue interweaving the pictures and words until they have a complete story. They may want to fill in details on certain collage pictures with a fine-point black pen. Or they may revise their texts, adding descriptive language they “discover” in their collage pictures.

Students must be sure to keep their materials organized as they work. For example, they may choose to paper-clip each collage picture to the corresponding part of the story in preparation for putting the story together.



Me and My Dad

***Me and my Dad
sitting on a dam
having a good time
dreaming about being
under cool, deep smooth water***

—Jimmy Bolduc, Grade 3

When your students have their stories' words and pictures all ready, have them write the text that goes with each illustration on a single page. They can create "typeset" pages on the computer if that's an option. Or you might ask parent volunteers to type the text onto clean pages. Glue text pages onto the back of illustration pages, keeping in mind that text pages are placed opposite — not behind — corresponding illustrations. The finished stories can be turned into books using any binding technique. If possible, laminate the pages and use a spiral binder to create a durable "published" book. (Use clear plastic front and back pages to protect un laminated bound stories.)

After each book is finished, have a publication celebration to recognize each author/illustrator's accomplishment. Invite the newly published author/illustrator to sit in a specially designated "author's chair" and read the book aloud to the class. This is a chance for your students to receive well-deserved congratulations. Their pride in their beautiful collage books will increase, and so will their self-esteem as they come to see themselves as real authors and illustrators.



Editor's note: Beth Olshansky's program, "Image-Making Within the Writing Process," is being disseminated through funding from the U.S. Department of Education's National Diffusion Network. For more information about teacher training and subsidized materials, contact: Beth Olshansky, Laboratory for Interactive Learning, Hood House, University of New Hampshire, Dept. L93, Durham, NH 03824; (603) 862-2186. In addition, a video workshop and resource guide on the program are available from Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 361 Hanover St., Portsmouth, NH 03801-3959; (603) 431-7894. Cost: \$50 for videotape rental; \$150 for purchase. Resource guide comes free with video or can be purchased separately for \$4.50.

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