

Teaching the ART of Writing

Picturing Writing allows every child to succeed. It has given them self-esteem; it has given them confidence; and it has given them literacy skills. It has allowed them to read and write in such a very short time. I can't believe how far they have come. When I look at the pride, the pride they show in their face, that says it all.

—Phyllis Engram-Dinham, teacher, grades 3-5, Halifax, NS

I have never in my thirty years seen my first graders write like this or be so attuned to literature. This approach works for my low readers and writers; it challenges my top students; and it supports those in the middle.

—Merrilee Thissell, former vice-principal & first-grade teacher, Manchester, NH

Picturing Writing: Fostering Literacy Through Art® and Image-Making Within The Writing Process® are two innovative, art-and-literature-based instructional models that have demonstrated their effectiveness in significantly improving students' writing and strengthening their reading, particularly among at-risk learners. Developed by Beth Olshansky at the University of New Hampshire, these dynamic models provide teachers with a thoughtfully designed, systematic, visual approach to literacy learning. Recognizing the hidden bias that exists within our schools that favors verbal learners (and handicaps those who learn differently), Picturing Writing and Image-Making are designed to reach students with diverse learning needs by offering multiple modalities for thinking and expressing ideas.

Picturing Writing uses simple crayon resist art processes and quality picture books to teach the key elements of writing.

Image-Making utilizes collage made from hand-painted textured papers created by each student. Both models are easily integrated into the social studies and science curriculum, offering project-based, inquiry-based units of study aligned with the language arts standards at each grade level.

Picturing Writing and Image-Making are facilitated during Artists/Writers Workshop. Words and pictures are treated as parallel, complementary, and equal language for learning. Students study both the art and the writing within quality picture books, learning how to make meaning in the dual languages of pictures and words. They learn how to paint pictures that tell a story and write words that paint pictures.





Central to this approach, students draft their story in pictures first and then read their pictures to access detail and description. Supported by specially designed brainstorming sheets, students gain access to rich descriptive language as well as higher order thinking skills through the phenomenon of transmediation (the act of translating meaning from one sign system to another).

I made my collage pictures first. Then I did my words. It was easier because when I was doing my pictures, I thought about my whole story. Later, when I looked at each picture, I saw more detail. I wrote more because I saw more things to write about.

—Noami, Grade 3

Using this highly structured, concrete, visual approach to literacy learning, students craft their own quality picture books that become favorite classroom reading material for the remainder of the school year. Picturing Writing and Image-Making provide a rigorous yet enticing, alternative pathway into the reading/writing process that has proven to be effective for those who struggle with words. (<http://www.picturingwriting.org/pdf/AEMDDFindings.pdf>).

Because pictures offer a universal language, this visual approach to literacy learning is also well suited to support language and literacy acquisition for English language learners.

Picturing Writing and Image-Making serve to level the playing field by allowing all students to enter the reading/writing process from a position of personal strength and enthusiasm.

I just don't know what happens. Every time I go to Artists/Writers Workshop, all sorts of good stuff just pops into my mind.

—Chris, Grade 1



Beth Olshansky is the author of *The Power of Pictures: Creating Pathways to Literacy Through Art* (Jossey-Bass, 2008).



For more information, visit <http://www.picturingwriting.org>