



## Picture Pedagogy Online Resources – Lesson Examples

---

### Lesson Example 3.1 Ideas and Arguments

Subject: Art  
Level: Grade 5  
Country: United States

William introduces his grade five students to the view that pictures are not only about ideas, but that pictures make arguments about ideas. He adopts an eclectic approach to the pictures he displays in his classroom. They include fine art posters like Munch's *Scream* and popular imagery like comic books and posters of the Simpsons. But this fusion of cultural categories is only one example of his curriculum being informed by postmodern art and ideas. He teaches specific postmodern concepts while also encouraging them to produce imagery that is both social and personal.

William begins by introducing his students to a number of postmodern concepts, including recycling, transformation, pastiche, and cultural critique. He then exemplifies these concepts by showing his students a variety of words by postmodern artists. However, his prime example is Duchamp's readymades because of their influence on contemporary postmodern artists who have used non-traditional materials to make social comments. William tells them to find two or three styles of art that they are especially drawn to, though it could also be comic book or advertising styles. For the first half of the first lesson William talks to them and for the second half they talk with them and they talk to each other about the assignment. What idea about society or the world, one that is of particular interest to them, do they wish to focus upon. And what view do they wish to convey? What materials will they use to recycle and transform? Will it be a magazine cover or a toy or something else? The students have to figure out a way to communicate their message about whatever issue they wish to raise.

In one class one student created a 'mixed up' image (his words) of Superman, the flag of the United States, and baseball. Asked what his intention had been, he said that a friend of his had been treated badly and he wanted to say that people should be treated well even if they are not perfect. Another student drew a picture of credit cards being sucked down a swirling vortex. He titled it *Credit Card Monopoly*, and said, "I am trying to say if you use a credit card too much you are doomed". A boy used a hammer to smash up a toy truck and placed beer bottles in the back and the cabin. He said,

I made this because a lot of people like my Dad and uncle used to drink so much. I kept thinking about what would happen if they kept on drinking. I saw a movie where people crashed because they were drinking and driving. I like doing projects like this because you can give people messages. You can get away from your problems and show your feelings.

A girl transformed one of her old Bratz dolls which she battered and bandaged to show what drugs can do to a person. She also rubbed off the colour of M & M's to represent pills and cracked open an egg. She said, "Mr. H. asked us to picture and idea that has meaning. I used a cracked egg to show how drugs can fry your brains".



B L O O M S B U R Y

William says that whatever problems his students are dealing with at home – drug, alcohol or credit card abuse – they have to work out how to get across their message: 'The project must in some way make a statement about society's or students' culture; simultaneously, the message must be personal'.

Staikidis K., and Higgins, W. (2006), 'Visual Culture in Mr. Higgin's Fifth Grade Classroom', in P. Duncum, *Visual Culture in the Art Class: Case Studies*, Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.



## Picture Pedagogy Online Resources – Lesson Examples

---

### Lesson Example 3.2 Advertising Rhetoric

Subject: English  
Level: Grade 7  
Country: United States

Three teachers collaborated to integrate media literacy across the curriculum: Lisa, a school librarian, Tamara, a visual arts specialist, and Tavis, an educational technology specialist. The class was titled, 'Media Literacy Workshop'. It was part of their school's regular seventh grade curriculum. The class included a preliminary set of 10 media literacy analysis and evaluation sessions followed by 15 media production sessions. The class met once per week for a 45-minute period, though during the video production phase this was increased to twice per week for 45 minutes each.

The initial media analysis sessions highlighted a topic related to mass media, commercial media, and media effects. On the first day, the teachers told their students, 'All media is constructed and it's constructed to elicit... it's either after your money, power, or your emotion. There is something that they want and they are going to contrive to get it in some way'.

In each lesson, the teachers incorporated a wide range of print and non-print texts for examination and study. They worked with students to develop their capacities for critical thinking and media message deconstruction by integrating words and terms that students could use in naming and identifying the codes and conventions used by media texts to convey information. For example, in a lesson on the argumentative strategies used by advertisers, Tamara pointed out that advertisers will often 'use fake words' and she called them as 'weasel words'. She explained that "weasel words are words that are used to grab your attention, but if you think about them carefully you're like 'what do they mean? Like 80% breakage. What is breakage? But doesn't it sound good? It sounds like science, but it is really about advertising'. With the idea that words but also images are more about selling than providing information, the class then deconstructed a shampoo advertisement with Tamara modeling.

Additional to examining explicit advertising media, the students analyzed the point-of-view and they inferred purpose in a variety of print and television commercials and strategies of argumentation. Students investigated product placement in several popular fiction book series such as *The Clique*. Students also analyzed magazine articles that infused information with advertising in the magazines, including *Sports Illustrated* and *National Geographic Kids*. Among non-print texts the students examined were clips from television shows, movie scenes, news articles, and documentary film excerpts as informational texts for study. The teachers' emphasis was on developing their students' abilities to analyze and evaluate.

Complimenting these texts, the teachers drew from students' own media experiences. Lisa and Tamara invited students, as experts of their own youth culture, to contribute to the curriculum. As Tamara noted, 'Asking the kids to contribute is huge. Now with YouTube, you can really invite kids to contribute ideas. There is a way for a student to come to us now and say, "Check this out!'



B L O O M S B U R Y

The teachers learned from their students informing them about media they liked and followed. The teachers acknowledged that their students' knowledge of their media preferences was far greater than they would ever have. The invitation for students to share contemporary media examples from their adolescent culture permitted teachers to enter into a relationship of co-learning with their students. For the teachers, this meant keeping their curriculum examples current, and for the students it meant that they felt ownership over the curriculum. It also contributed to a legacy of text suggestions for future students in media literacy workshops.

Following the ten analysis classes, the production classes began. Students worked in small groups to produce original commercial videos for everyday objects such as paperclips, socks, and soap, all the time employing the persuasive media construction techniques they had examined in the previous classes.

Finally, the teachers hosted a 'Movie Premier Breakfast' for students and their families to view and celebrate the students' final video projects.

Redmond, T. (2015). 'Media Literacy is Common Sense: Bridging Common Core Standards with the Media Experiences of Digital Learners', *Middle School Journal*, 46 (3): 10-17.



## Picture Pedagogy Online Resources – Lesson Examples

---

### Lesson Example 3.3 Elegance and Emotion

Subject: Art/Visual Culture

Level: High School

Country: Hong Kong

A teacher in Hong Kong contextualized documentary photographs and a 1930s movie with paintings from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, believing that they were equally intended to arouse emotion in the cause of social justice.

The teacher began by having his students examine contemporary colour photographs of poor Hong Kong people rummaging through, picking up, and carting garbage in the streets. The photographs represent the plight of city's forgotten rubbish collectors who toil in the shadows from morning to night gathering cardboard and other waste to make ends meet. Mostly elderly people, they manage to scrape together a very meagre amount each a month from selling scraps for recycling.

He asked his students to comment on the formal visual elements of colour and focal point as well as compositional principle of balance which tend to produce a sense of peace and harmony. In the case of these photographs, balance had been achieved by use of 'the rule of thirds' in which a picture is divided into three roughly equal parts. He asked, was there a contradiction between the subject matter and the composition of the pictures?

Then the students examined Millet's *The Gleaners*, in which three women are posed bending down to pick up leftovers from a harvest. Again, they noted that Millet had used the rule of thirds. The teacher asked the students to bend down just as the women were in the painting to pick up rubber bands. They were to bend down for three whole minutes to feel, in however a simulated way, what it would feel like to be bent over hour after hour as were the women in the painting. The also examined the early Van Gogh painting *The Potato Eaters* from 1885, a dark toned picture that represents a poor family at mealtime who are evidently trying to keep warm and looking gloomy. The teacher asked his students to name the first feelings that popped into their heads. What is the difference between the treatment of these poor people? Is the style of one realistic representation of poverty and the other expressive?

The class then moved on to examine photographs by Lewis Hine who had documented the terrible conditions endured by immigrants to the United States early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the photographs document the cruelty of child labour. Again, the teacher asked about the formal elements and principles used, for example, the use of stark contrasts of black and white, the subtle graduations of grey, and the use of the rule of thirds. How can the beauty of the images be reconciled with the subject matter? Was Hine's intention to arouse emotional outrage likely to be undercut by his photographs attractiveness? Does their beauty soften his message that something needs to be done?

To further make the point that the aesthetics of pictures can sometimes distract from strong messages, the class was shown the first five minutes of the 1936 film *Modern Times*. Charlie Chaplin,



in his persona of the Tramp, is a factory worker who toils on an assembly line that malfunctions and runs amok, causing the Tramp to have a nervous breakdown. The scene is very well filmed and the action is virtuosic, but does the artistry distract or reinforce the message that repetitive, assembly line work is dehumanizing?

Finally, the teacher asked about differences and similarities between the four kinds of pictures they had studied: the contemporary colour photographs of Hong Kong street scavengers, Millet and Van Gogh poor 19<sup>th</sup> century peasants, the poor immigrants to the United States early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the movie *Modern Times*.

Lau, C.Y. (2019), 'A study of a Visual Culture Art Education model for promoting Creativity and Critical Thinking Skills in the Senior High School Context'. The Education University of Hong Kong.



## Picture Pedagogy Online Resources – Lesson Examples

---

### Lesson Example 3.4 Photographic Rhetoric

Subject: History  
Level: Middle School  
Country: United States

Robert and Jarad introduced their students to the history of the Great Depression in the United States by regarding the photographs taken at the time as rhetorical. They used photographs that had been taken by photographers working for the Farm Security Administration (FSA), a unit of the United States Government. Many of the photographs, especially those of Dorothea Lange, have become iconic of the period and lauded for their artistry. Altogether, the photographs depicted the grinding poverty, despair, and economic inequality endured by millions in the Midwest of the United States during the 1930s.

The photographs raised many questions about photographic truth versus bias, intention versus audience reception, and art versus documentation. The intention of the FSA was to demonstrate to the public the extent of the problem and thereby the legitimacy of the FSA. This was in a climate where some critics were calling for the abolition of the FSA as a waste of money. But when originally exhibited in 1939 the photographs caused a furor of deeply divided opinion. The content of the photographs shocked many, but in very different ways: some people were impressed by their formal elegance; some rejected them as not art; some, seeing the people represented as victims, were aroused to empathy; some blamed the people represented for being victims.

In 1939 some people were willing to see the pictures as evidence of ‘the progress being made in the country’s romantic experiment in resettlement’. Others were stricken by the misery of the people depicted and saw the photographs as proof of the failure of capitalism as an economic system. Others saw an indictment on the country, not of human wreckage, but the laziness of the people depicted. ‘Play up the other side’, these critics demanded; there ‘are plenty of farmers who do not look like this’. Others still were outraged because they saw the photographs as Communist propaganda; the photographs were subversive, undermining the spirit of the United States. They were not only false, they were dangerously seditious. What would latter day, middle schoolers think of them?

Robert and Jarad wanted to use these photographs to explore not only the evidential history of the Great Depression, but also how the photographs were constructed, first, to influence public opinion, and secondly, how they were co-opted to serve other agendas. In short, how did the photographs work as rhetoric?

The students were first placed into small groups. To learn something about the Great Depression as an historical reality each student was presented with two FSA photographs to analyze along with an analysis worksheet. When completed, the students shared their findings with their small group. Members in each group responded to each other’s analysis worksheet by adding additional details about the people, objects or activity that may have been left out or may have been interpreted differently.



Then, Robert and Jarad turned to the constructed nature of the photographs. This was where the inference section of the worksheet became important. Their favorite task was 'Write a question that is left unanswered by the photograph'. The students were then asked to imagine themselves as the photographer and, further, able ask the subject of the photographs one question.

The students were then asked to write a title for their photographs. Students then had to draw upon the information elicited in the analysis worksheet to write a summary paragraph that described the photograph from a social perspective, that is, not only what was descriptive of the photographs but an interpretation that included what they had learned of the context at the time.

When the students had finished their analysis, they were asked to discuss two questions. 'Did the photographer have a bias when he/she took the photograph? Are these photographs truthful?' Given the extraordinary differences in the reception of these photographs at the time, the teachers then asked, 'Are photographs examples of propaganda? What purpose should photography serve?'

In this way, these middle-school students learnt about the Great Depression through photography. In this case, this meant simultaneously learning not only from the evidential qualities of the photographs as primary documentary resources, but also as documents that inherently constituted the photographer's point-of-view.

Stevens, R. L., and Fogel, J. A. (2009), 'Using F.S.A. Photographs to Teach Media Literacy', *Social Studies Review*, 48 (1): 50-52.





## *Picture Pedagogy* Online Resources – Lesson Examples

---

### Lesson Example 3.5 Emotive Persuasion

Subject: Media Education

Level: Grade 5

Country: United States

Sheng taught lessons that focused simultaneously on the seductive, emotive associations of cigarette advertising with their intended message of consumption.

Sheng began his Ad-Deconstruction Project with a writing activity. He placed a file folder on the desktop of each of the students' computers in which he had stored three cigarette advertisements and an activity worksheet. The students chose one of the advertisements and analyzed it according to the prompts on the worksheet. The prompts included questions about visual components, advertising techniques, and both intended and implicit messages. He did not explicitly tell his students that they were critiquing advertisements for cigarettes.

One student who did not notice the cigarette logo in the corner of the advertisement, wrote, 'There is a woman in the ad. She is smiling and she is pretty'. The student liked the woman because she appeared especially pleasant and the advertisement seemed to be about clothes or jewelry. When she realized its actual purpose, she thought the message was something like, smoke this brand and you 'will look young, slim, and beautiful'. Another student noted that the people in her advertisement were having fun and said, 'I think the ad would make people think that smoking is cool. Make people feel fit-in and look mature'.

Sheng thought that his students seemed to have no trouble articulating the intended and implicit messages of a cigarette advertisement, but did they also understand the negative aspects of smoking if not guided to analyze the advertisements critically? He gathered them in a semi-circle and introduced them to the strategic similarities between cigarette advertising and the activist art of Barbara Kruger, and the Guerrilla Girls, a group of contemporary female activist artists. Both Kruger and the Guerrilla Girls have used graphic design techniques to raise gender and race issues. The students noted that both the advertisements and the activist artists had used a brand name, logo, slogan, human characters, and images. They could see that in both cases purposefully arranged textual and visual elements had been used to persuade, or as Sheng put it, 'to convince people to believe what they want them to believe'. One student said, 'Lighting is used for emphasis. The people are emphasized because there is a spotlight on them.... the contrasting colours help the characters be seen, the use of movement in the text makes it stand out more'. Asked to comment on what the advertisements were suggesting, the students agreed that to buy the product they would, 'Feel happy, pleasure, joyful, and maybe fit-in'.

When asked about their attitudes to smoking they responded negatively; second hand smoke made them feel dizzy, cough, or hard to breath. They were also angry that people abused their health.

Sheng then asked his students to talk back to the positive messages of the advertisements by creating their own anti-smoking advertisement. They were to use the advertisement they had chosen



earlier, and using the elements of text, logo, and picture, turn the message around. One student left the advertisement much as it has been but substituted the brand name with a badly decomposed body. Another student aged the woman in her advertisement with grey hair and made her appear fat as if smoking was unhealthy. One of the advertisements showed someone trying to lift something heavy with the text suggesting that smoking would lighten the load. A student substituted the heavy load with a skeleton; smoking would indeed lighten the load.

A peer critique followed. In groups of three, the students wrote down their initial reactions on Post-It-Notes and arranged them around the edge of their computer screen. These were then used to create written group summations of the students' impressions of their fellow students' intentions.

Finally, the redesigned advertisements were displayed at a local art gallery and many parents expressed their approval of the activity. Sheng was aware that students might respond to the advertising based on what they thought he wanted to hear, but he nevertheless felt that the activity could increase, at least to a certain extent, students' levels of consciousness about cigarette smoking.

Chung, S. K. (2005). 'Media/Visual Literacy Art Education: Cigarette Ad Deconstruction', *Art Education*, 58 (3):19-24.