



Picture Pedagogy Online Resources – Lesson Examples

Lesson Example 9.1 Webs of Connection

Subject: Art, Science Creative Writing and Dance

Level: Grade 5

Country: United States

Jamia began a series of lessons by showing an environmental artwork that led to connections to science, the nature of life, and even reincarnation. She had two influences. The first was spider webs, which she pointed out have survived for millennia because their webs are flexible yet strong and involve numerous connections that carry vital information through their vibrations. The webs led Jamia to construct lessons whose primary goal was for students to create their own multiple connections that strengthen and unify understanding. Jamia's other influence was her school's curriculum-wide theme of Cycles and Flows. In science, for example, students were learning about the cycles of life inherent in nature, for example, how nutrients cycle or flow through a plant and how blood circulates through the body. In language arts, they were dissecting the parts of a story and how they both repeated yet also drive the narrative forward.

Jamia's began by showing her class a PowerPoint featuring photographs of United States artist Andy Goldsworthy's site-specific environmental artwork. She also showed a segment of his documentary *Rivers and Tides* that featured what the students called 'the stick dome'. This was a structure built specifically in a spot where it would be set into motion by natural forces.

The students watched silently, in awe over the man inside the stick dome. 'How is he going to get out?' they wondered. Moments later, the students discovered that he had left a small hole for himself on one side of his sculpture, which he could cover up with more branches after making his escape. Two students compared Goldsworthy's creation to a beaver dam as they realized a connection between animals and humans. Beavers, the class agreed, are their own architects and artists. They discovered that Goldsworthy had built his structure specifically in the spot where the river meets the ocean so as to create a whirlpool to set it adrift and eventually fall apart. Seeing the sculpture float gently away was simultaneously surprising, mesmerizing, and relaxing.

One student made a connection between art and nature, especially of art returning to nature. He said of Goldsworthy, 'When he gives it to Mother Nature... she destroys it, but makes it like another thing maybe on a different side of the world, maybe in Brazil, a beautiful tree'. He mentioned reincarnation and the idea that once a structure submits to the flow of Mother Earth, there is the possibility of its rebirth in a new place. Another student mentioned that 'some people believe that when you die you turn into a beautiful butterfly or like a moth'. Another student made connections to science and social studies. She mentioned a book they read for another class, *Blood on the River*, in which a boy goes off to a new world because apparently the earth had run out of ingredients and people started killing each other. The students wove their ideas together, intuitively combining the experience of reading the book and seeing Goldsworthy's images.

Jamia asked her students to respond to what had especially intrigued them by creating 'pile poetry'. The students jotted down the first words that came to mind as they looked at various



environmental artworks, and then they turned their pile of words into a poem. They circled some of their words and then tried to form a sentence or phrase around each one. For example:

He had to arrange the leaves without wind.

It looks like a snake

It looks like a line

like a road.

The students went on to create a piece of performance art they called 'Weaving It All Together'. Once they thought the poem had a nice flow, they added music and choreographed movements to go along with it.

The student's performance art narrative became a portal that enabled them to create a web of their understanding. For Jamia, it demonstrated that there are no limits in the world of education and that it is art that connects us to the many things of life.

Weir, J. (2016), 'The Way the Light Hits a Web', *Art Education*, 69 (30): 5-11.