

THE POWER OF ART: USING ILLUSTRATIONS TO TEACH COMPOSITION

“WHAT IF WE COULD SUPPORT CHILDREN AS THEY MAKE MEANING BOTH VISUALLY AND VERBALLY AND KNOW THAT IN DOING SO, NEITHER ABILITY OR COMPETENCY IS DIMINISHED; INSTEAD, BOTH ARE STRENGTHENED.”

-Katie Wood Ray

Picture Book Making as a Template for Composition for Young Writers

Making picture books is important for beginning writers for multiple reasons:

(as stated by Katie Wood Ray, in her books, *In Pictures* and in *Words: Teaching the Qualities of Good Writing through Illustration Study and Already Ready*)

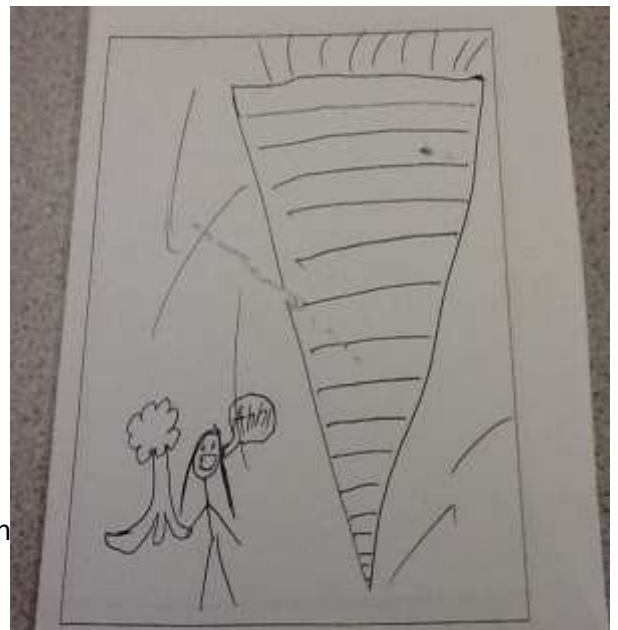
- It takes some time for children to become fluent and proficient with transcription (getting the words down on paper), being able to represent meaning in illustrations makes so much more possible for the beginning writers. Illustrating allows the child to compose a deeper, more involved story than they can with text.

(picture of a tornado)

- Illustrating books is a way for children to be heard. A student who has difficulty recognizing letters, can often compose through illustrations what he knows, thinks, and feels. Through the composition of illustrations, children are learning the craft of writing.

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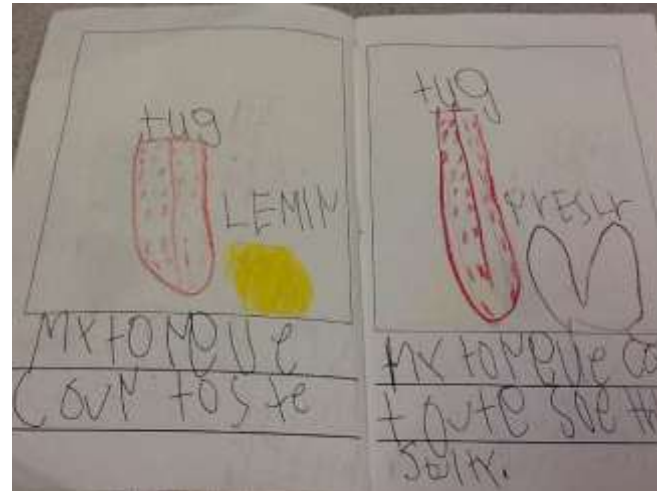
Books made by children in the classrooms of Kara L., Lauren and Nicole H.





- A picture book is a perfect “container” for the composition of beginning writers.
- Because young writers are surrounded by picture books, it makes sense that their writing should match the kind of texts that they know best instead of writing in a journal or on a single sheet of paper.

- The most experienced authors and illustrators use a combination of pictures and words to make picture books, just as beginning writers do.
- When the illustrations have specific details, illustrations can help children read their approximated spellings much more easily, serving as important picture cues for the written text.



- By encouraging children to expand upon their illustrations with thoughtfulness, it encourages them to linger longer with the composing of one book.(helps to build stamina for writing)

- *Most importantly, book making is fun.* It is what children do naturally and playfully. “And playfulness that energizes, challenges and engages is essential in our classrooms” (Horn and Giacobbe). Children bring to book making the same exploratory spirit they bring to all sorts of other play.



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Katie Wood Ray goes on to discuss the idea of teaching INTO illustrations:



- *It is an incredible forward-looking stance, it is not a “just let them draw-they’re children” idea, it requires teachers to hold a deeply grounded understanding about composing all sorts of texts in effective ways- both in terms of process and product.*
- *It is a stance of using intentional teaching of the composition process to demonstrate to children how to use their illustrations thoughtfully to convey the important meaning of their books (since their transcription is not yet at the level to do so).*



It is critical that both mini lessons and read alouds are planned and well thought out with specific teaching points in order for the teacher to be able to intentionally guide children to examine the work of illustrators to determine how to:

- ***use color and a variety of media to make meaning***
- ***expand upon what the words say by intentionally composing with illustrations to leave an impression on the reader***

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- *enhance what good writers do in terms of ideas and content, precision and detail, wholeness of text, tone, and layout and design through the use of illustrations*
- *and demonstrate how an illustrator's decisions about pictures are a lot like a writer's decisions about words.*



(Important point: Yes, we still need to teach transcription. Encouragement to place words on the page- even if just scribbles or a list of random letters- is also important. Children also need the teaching point that most authors place pictures and words in their books and both provide the reader with lots of information.)



Below are examples of open-ended questions that can be used to encourage children to think about the importance of their illustrations (many of these questions could be a mini-lesson or a key point in a read aloud of its own)

Note: many detailed samples of illustration mini-lessons can be found in the books, In Pictures and In Words by Katie Wood Ray and Talking, Drawing, and Writing by Martha Horn and Mary Ellen Giacobbe- many of the following questions were developed based on their lessons)

- Tell me about the colors/materials you are going to use to create your illustrations today for the next page in your book...

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○ Will you use those same materials/art techniques on all of the pages in your books or just some...

○ What additional details/ colors can you add so that the reader understands...

○ How does the reader know which character is who- what details can you add such as hair color, texture, length; clothes; height etc.

○ What colors will help your reader know whether it is day or night, the weather, etc.

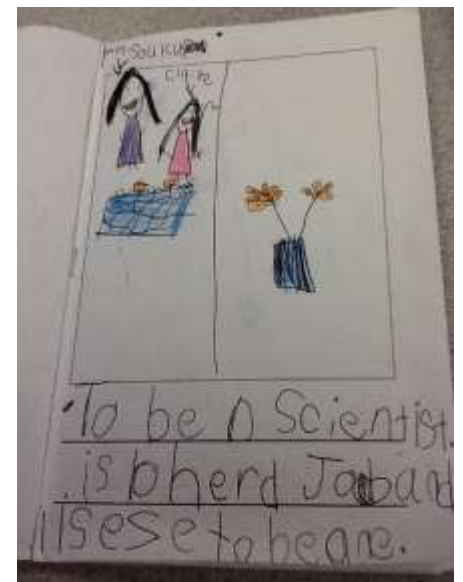
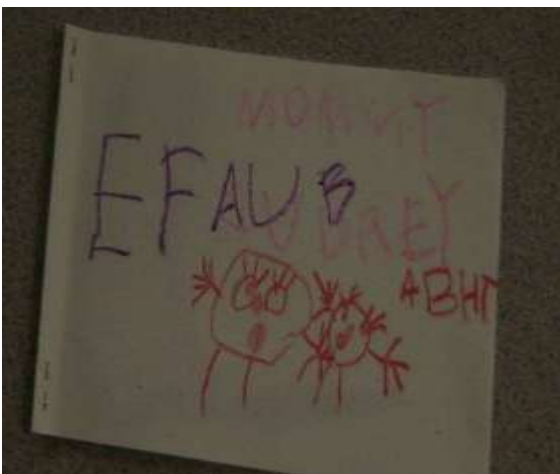
○ Will you zoom in very close or zoom out and show a wide angle?

○ How can you show the reader that _____ is really close to/far away from you...

○ How much background detail do you need to add for the reader to understand...

○ Are you going to use a single illustration, or multiple, separate vignette illustrations?

○ How do the colors you chose represent the feeling of the story, the setting of the story...



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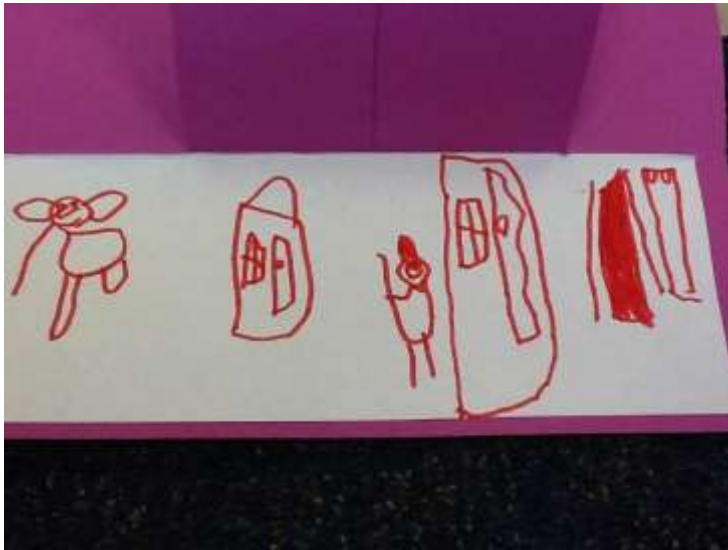
- How could you create a feeling of happiness (fear, etc.) for the reader...
- What art techniques and materials best match the mood (theme, etc.) for your story..
- What clues can you add to your illustration to give to help the reader predict what will happen next...
- How can you show in your illustrations that _____ is moving fast/slow...
- What facial expressions can you add to allow the reader to know how your characters are feeling?
- What clothing, hairstyles or adornments can you add so that the reader understands your character's personalities?

- Where will you put the ...
- How does this look differently in ... (sense of time, seasons, lighting: i.e. in the morning, on a windy day, in the winter, when the lights are off, etc.)

Even our youngest students are capable of great book making composition way beyond their level of transcription- with the expectation that they are authors and they are three or four and that they are going to compose a story in a three/four year old way. (Engaging Young Writers by Matt Glover)



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These are four examples of the many awesome books that were authored by three/four year old students in the three year old program and one in the Pre-K four year old program:

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Riding Horses and Dancing



Julianna riding on a horse and the sun. This is the gate that they ride from.



My words say, "Girls dancing."



I made the sun and the clouds and the flower. The flower is dancing.



A different horse. My mom riding on the horse.



Back cover with picture of the author and illustrator.

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Zoo (this book was completed after a very brief conferring with a small group introducing the making of books in a PreK room)

The zebra is in its cage.



The giraffe has a long neck.



The flamingos live in the water and on land.



The penguins are in the building. It is brr cold there. (hard to see in pic but there is white ice on the top of the cage)



The bull is different from a cow. It has horns and it runs. (T: "how can we show the reader that it is running"- looked at some examples in mentor text. S: "I can add footprints." (the squares behind the bull)

(oops I need people on each page so that they are watching the animals)

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The Princess and the Prince

The author of this book is written by Madison.



Here's the princess and she got burned.
(notice the pink on the forehead- that is the burn)



The prince is running to bring her sunscreen.
(bottles of sunscreen in his hands and notice the wobbly legs- "that is because he is running.")



They kissed and lived happily ever after.
(she spent a long time trying to figure out how to get the two faces together so that they could kiss!)

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