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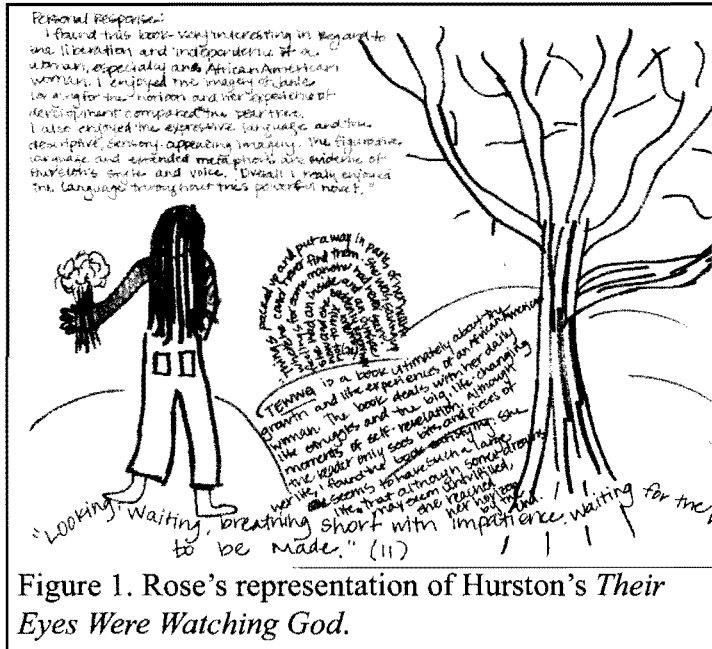Peggy Albers
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Figure 1. Rose's representation of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God.*

In my teacher education classes, I work with secondary teachers who integrate the visual arts into their instruction, invite students to share their pictures, but who often rely on students to explicate their texts with the visual image left undiscussed. More recently, I have begun to work with teachers to study the texts their students create around literature, or students' original stories, in a more systematic way, inviting them to understand that these pictures contain information that may lend insight into their students' understanding of literature. More specifically, I have worked with teachers to study the organization, placement, size, volume, color (and so on) of objects within the visual text, or the *grammar* of the visual text. Additionally, we study students' use of color, written text, titles, and choice of objects to understand

the discourses, or the communities to which they identify. In doing such work, the teachers learn to understand the significance of attending more closely to visual texts and the information that students convey through these texts. Figure 1 is a drawing that Rose, a student, created around her reading of Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* After she had created it, the teacher invited her and the classmates to look more closely at what and how Rose conveyed her understanding of this novel, inviting these students to study the grammar and the discourses of Rose's texts.

In English Language Arts (ELA) classes, students speak to teachers visually all the time about themselves, their learning, or their thinking. At times their visual messages are informational, expressive, humorous, satirical, serious, or sad. Further, they have clear and distinct forms and structures that can be read and analyzed, much in the same way teachers analyze and respond to their written work. Yet, as teachers, our responses are often limited to "That's a really nice picture," or "Tell me about your picture" largely, I suggest, because teachers have had little exposure to understanding how pictures are composed and what and how objects *mean* in a picture. This is most evident when I work with teachers in their classrooms and they remark to their students about an assigned visual text, "don't worry about the art." When educators make these statements about art, we may lead students to believe that art as a language system is not that important. And, yet, this is far from what research and practice in the arts have taught us (see, for example, Albers, "Theorizing"; Albers and Frederick; Alvermann, "Why Bother Theorizing"; Harste; Marsh; Pahl; Rowsell and Pahl).

To describe the texts created from visual media (paint, collage, drawing, clay, photographs, and so on) in ELA classes, I use the term "visual texts" (Albers, "Visual"). In ELA classes, the more common term, "artworks," is used, largely because these texts are created with art materials. However, as Efland ("A History") suggested this term gestures

towards fine art and/or works produced from training in disciplinary processes and techniques associated with an art form, as well as a discussion that considers both the function and value of art (Berger). Winterson posits that artworks also involve the effort of time, money, study, and imagination, and yet students in schools receive very little instruction or practice with art, especially those in the upper grades. In short, artworks are visual texts, but not all visual texts are artworks.

My purpose here is to discuss the importance of learning to read visual texts created by students more systematically and thoughtfully, and to describe part of the process involved when reading visual texts with an informed eye. Now that more attention is being given to work that addresses literacy and the arts (Albers, "Art as Literacy," 1997; "Literacy as Art"; Albers, "Reading Art"; Albers and Murphy; Albers et al. "Using Popular"; Callow; Calvert; Cherney et al.; Harste; Lewison and Heffernan), literacy and multimodality (Albers, "Imagining"; Albers and Harste; Cope and Kalantzis; Kress and Jewitt; Moss), new literacies (Albers, Vasquez, and Harste; Alvermann, "Adolescent" and "Why Bother Theorizing"; Alvermann and Hagood; Beach and O'Brien; Hull, "Youth Culture," and "Social Networking"; Kist; Knobel and Lankshear; Lankshear and Knobel), and visual analysis of images (Albers, "Theorizing"; Albers and Frederick; Albers, Frederick, and Cowan; Dillon; Magno and Kirk; Marsh; Rowsell and Pahl; Stephens), it is timely and relevant now to pay much more attention not only to the written and oral messages that students communicate in and out of schools, but to other modes of communication too. With easy access to the Internet, many students continually upload images and videos, choose colors and icons that serve as identity markers of who they are, and are exposed to over three thousand images each and every day.

With their world flooded with images, I suggest that it is important that part of English language arts include the teaching of how to read visual images with an informed and critical eye. By doing so, students learn to read their visual world more critically. They, for example, will better understand how and why artists in their literature anthologies choose the objects they do when creating their compositions, how and why posters are designed to appeal specially to teens, how and why advertisers construct ads in the way they do to encourage consumerism in teens and the desire to own or buy a particular product.

When students understand how images are organized and how objects in images encourage particular readings, they can interrogate their own choices; for example, how and why they choose particular images to create class projects through PowerPoint or iMovie. Just as we demystify how to read literature by sharing literary elements with students, so, too, educators must also pay attention to the visual messages sent through the visual texts that students create in ELA classrooms. To do so will invite different and more complex questions about these visual texts. Although this article cannot address all aspects of reading images, this writing begins the conversation, and with more study of visual texts (Albers, "Visual"; "Theorizing"), educators will be able to read these visual texts with a more critical and informed eye.

The Importance of Reading Students' Visual Texts

In schools, visual texts that students create in classrooms often function as wall decorations (Collins) or are constructed because, as many of the teachers with whom I work have remarked, "Students enjoy doing art," or "It keeps them busy on Friday afternoons." Although these are perfectly fine ways in which art materials are used in ELA classes, I argue that the visual texts that students create have greater significance especially in regards to their literacy and content knowledge. When read systematically, visual texts can offer educators interesting insights into students' understanding of text and themselves. Just as educators have learned to respond to written texts, I suggest educators must also learn to read and respond to students' visual texts with the same seriousness.

When treated by teachers as legitimate artifacts in understanding students' literacy, visual texts can offer insights into what students have understood about a piece

> *When students understand how images are organized and how objects in images encourage particular readings, they can interrogate their own choices...*

of literature, or gesture towards aspects of their own lives that may need attention. In essence, we must begin to understand that when art as a language system is used only as decoration or a fun Friday afternoon activity and as mere decorations on walls, we lose the potential of art as a language system to offer students opportunities to express their interpretations in ways that words cannot. Further, as a language system, art necessarily has features that allow for unique expressions. For example, the larger the object size in an image, the more significance it has for the textmaker. When art as a language system is viewed with seriousness, educators and students alike can study more critically the more nuanced or overt visual messages conveyed by the textmaker and interpreted by the viewer, and appreciate the communication potential of art.

As an educator who has studied visual texts for over fifteen years, I believe that reading and studying students' visual texts support several important aspects of learning. First, students' visual texts show a distinct link between cognition and affect (Albers, "Theorizing"). Students share what they understand about ELA content and concepts through their art. They create symbolic, metaphoric and literal messages that point to their interpretation of texts, their connection to a text, and what they want the viewer to know about their reading of this text. An ability to read students' visual texts offers teachers insight into the relationships students see across a range of texts.

Second, art educator Elliot Eisner, a strong advocate of arts-literacy connections, argues that "not everything knowable can be articulated in propositional form" (379). By this he meant that written language is not always the most apt form of representation. That is, there are messages that can be sent best through visual means. For example, children's use of strong bold and thick lines using crayons, pencil color, paint (and other media) suggests their interest in an idea, object or concept (see below, "Vectors, Size, Volume and Use of Color in Images"); while a light swath of pastel colors on a canvas lets viewers know the delicateness of an idea, object or concept. And, third, when educators develop skills in reading visual texts, they offer their students different and unique opportunities to talk about the messages, both print and visual, in complex ways. When educators, and subsequently their students, know how to read visual structures and ideas

associated with object placement on the visual text, this will enable the whole class to ask different questions about what the textmaker wishes to convey.

Rather than default to an aesthetic response to a visual text with statements like "That's a nice picture" or "Tell me about this picture," through knowledge of the visual structures and grammar, and the discourses that underpin these visual elements, educators and students can engage in more complex and critical discussions, conversations that Rosenblatt hoped that literature would generate. For example, when teachers of middle or high school students assign students to create collages and/or draw pictures around literature, they can place the images on the bulletin board or classroom or hallway walls and ask the students to look across the images, identify themes, ideas or concepts most visible across texts, and consider how this range of visual expressions can lead to interesting discussions about areas of the novel, short story or poem (or other types of texts) that interest students, and how these visual texts communicate a different perspective on literature studied.

Relevant Literature

A plethora of formal and informal studies have documented the significance of the arts to literacy learning (see Burnaford et al., and studies cited in a section above). This research and practice demonstrates that the arts contribute greatly to students' literacy development. Most recently, there has been increasing research, both anecdotal and formal, in the analysis of student- and professionally-generated visual texts.

In their study of third grade children's visual texts, Albers, Frederick and Cowan found that children, when asked to draw as if they were the opposite sex, represented traditional gender roles. Boys saw girls in domestic or helpless roles, while girls represented boys in dangerous and courageous roles. Kate Pahl and Jennifer Rowsell studied children's texts as multimodal artifacts and found that across texts children produced similar elements that identified traces of practice and sedimented identities. Albers and Frederick studied seven teachers' visual texts created over a semester. Like Rowsell and Pahl, they found teachers included elements that appeared across texts. They concluded that these "(re)marks" enabled researchers and educators to see learners' ongoing discourses through these elements.

Across this work, researchers collectively have shown the significance of studying the dynamic and interactive nature of students' image production within classroom contexts as a crucial part of literacy curriculum.

All images, suggest Kress and van Leeuwen, are "entirely in the realm of ideology" (12) where particular discourses are privileged, while others are downplayed or even silenced. Thus, Kress argues, "the world told" is vastly different from "the world shown" (1). A number of critical literacy scholars have argued that reading and analyzing images must be critical (Albers et al. "Using Popular"; Callow; Lewison, Leland and Harste; Lewison and Heffernan) because they position not only the viewers to read in a particular way but position the subject of the image in particular ways. Lewison and Heffernan, for example, invited third grade students to study political cartoons in the context of a larger study of critical literacy. Students then created their own cartoons to express their concern about social issues in which they were interested. For example, one student drew a cartoon of Barack Obama on a stage speaking to a large audience, with the child's intention to show his potential to be a strong president. Another child, interested in segregation, drew a person in mid-air striving for rights and freedom. To engage students in a meaningful understanding of art as a language system may allow them to take on a critical perspective that supports a socially just and equitable approach to literacy curriculum and understanding images (Albers, "Visual"; "Theorizing"; Callow; Harste, Chung and Grant).

Visual Discourse Analysis as a Theoretical Framework
Situated within the field of semiotics, and drawing from discourse analysis (Gee) and the grammar of visual design (Kress and van Leeuwen), visual discourse analysis (VDA) is a term that I use to describe a theory and methodological approach to analyzing visual language, especially as it naturally occurs within classrooms. Visual discourse analysis is informed by semiotics, a theory that explores the nature and function of signs as well as the systems and processes underlying signification, expression, representation, and communication. In brief, semiotics is a study of signs and sign systems, or systems that have distinct grammars: art, music, language, math, movement, and dance. Semiotics

offers a way of thinking about meaning in which language and visual texts work in concert, and in which written language is not the primary source through which meaning is mediated and represented. Hodge and Kress define a *text* as "a structure of messages or message traces which has a socially ascribed unity"; and *discourse* "refers to the social process in which texts are embedded...text is the material object produced in discourse" (6). A visual text, then, is a structure of messages within which textmakers embed social conventions and/or their perceptions, and which make visible the discourse communities to which visual textmaker identifies (Albers, "Theorizing"). According to Halliday, texts are in a dialectal relation with context: the text creates the context as much as the context creates the text. Meaning arises from the friction between the two. Thus, to read students' visual texts is to read the context in which students' expressions are made (in ELA classes), and how this context also shapes the structure of messages and the discourses that students express.

As a method and theory, visual discourse analysis examines the structure and organization of visual texts (grammar) and how certain social activities and social identities (discourses) get played out within these texts (Albers, "Theorizing"). Those of us who use VDA are concerned and interested in analyzing the marks on visual texts within the constructs of art as a language system, and the situations in which art as a language is used. Further, we also note what are good texts to study, what constitutes ideal discourse analysis when viewing and interacting with visual texts, and the validity of discourse analysis.

It is not uncommon for those of us interested in visual discourse analysis to be thought of as "reading too much into the text," especially the texts created by children in ELA classes. Yet, Kress and van Leeuwen have argued that visual texts are amenable to analysis because they have identifiable structures and organizational patterns. However, those of us interested in VDA study language use within visual texts not merely for the structural approach (Kress and van Leeuwen), but also for how viewers interact and read the visual language within visual texts. Harste has argued that to be literate, one has to see oneself in literacy. By this he means that learners must be able to create, read and interpret a range of texts. He continues,

that in a world saturated with visual images, we must engage students in the critical reading and interpreting of all texts. Creating space in ELA classes to engage in such work enables students to participate critically in the world and interrogate a range of messages from written to oral to visual to musical and so on. Inherent to VDA is the concept of the critical perspective. Visual texts can and do indicate the visual textmaker's beliefs about who has and to what extent someone has power by what they include or do not include, how objects in the visual text are structured, what social meanings these objects have taken on, and what particular structures and materials are commonplace.

Within VDA are three principles about language (Gee): (1) visual language is reflexive; (2) language allows for situated meanings; and (3) language is composed of many social languages. I use Rose's response to Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God (TEWWG)* (Figure 1) to illustrate these principles. In this ELA class, Rose was asked to create a one-page response to the novel, including two favorite and meaningful quotations, a personal reflection, and a visual image. Rose's visual text was reflexive in that it created and reflected the context in which it was produced, and acted on the viewer to the degree in which the viewer was familiar with the context of the text. That is, Rose's response contributed to the context of the literary discussions as much as it was created from these discussions. Further, Rose expected that the viewers in her class had read Hurston's novel and that they would be able to read and respond to the elements that she embedded in this visual text: Janie, the bare-foot, loose hair character in blue jean overalls, the sun, and the tree. With Janie and the tree positioned in the foreground, these two visual elements served to make the sun the apex, or central, image in this picture. In essence, these three elements were structured in an inverted "V" shape, a triangle of symbiotic symbols that represented Janie's coming of age and Rose's representation of what she found significant in Hurston's novel. Sonesson suggested that the textmaker positions the viewer to see particular messages. By positioning the viewer to see Janie's coming of age as a central message, Rose was able to allow the viewer to accept her interpretation as central.

The second principle of language is that language allows for situated meanings to occur, images or texts that are "assembled on the spot" (Gee 94) in a given context and based upon previous experiences. Meanings are negotiated between textmakers and their interaction with other texts and conversations. In schools, visual texts take on a history, a way of constructing and interpreting in which certain texts are created and socially acceptable (Albers, "Visual"). Students create texts based upon teachers' directions, as well as earlier experiences with texts produced in schools. The negotiated meanings and intentions that underpin texts that children create in the early grades are similar to those created in older grades; the difference is that the texts of older learners represent more conventions and beliefs held by the larger social community (Albers, "Art as Literacy," 1996). Rose's text, a two-dimensional text, is representative of so many visual texts created in ELA classrooms (Albers, "Literacy in Art"): it is created with media that are simple, easy to use and manage, and clearly shows a connection to a literary text. In my own work with teachers, they often see visual texts as a graded or non-graded assessment of a student's understanding of the literary text or to accompany an original piece of writing. Across years of schooling, students have learned that they must include in their visual texts cues that indicate that they have read the literary text. Rose does just that in her visual text. She includes three central images in the novel: Janie, the tree, and the rising sun.

The third principle of language is that it is composed of many different social languages (Bahktin). How ELA students speak visually differs from how professional artists speak. In essence, students' visual texts have become "hybridized" (Gee 105). That is, these texts contain clues or cues that indicate some knowledge, whether schooled or self-taught, of art principles and elements as well as literature and literacy. Rose's visual text represented several social languages including those around what is expected in a literary response, those in art, those in being a student, those of being a female, and so on. Within social languages, Rose applied art knowledge to her written text by using color, was able to pick and choose elements that enabled her to say what she wanted to say including choice of media, message (coming of age), the placement of the objects on a canvas (the sun as central, Janie on left and the tree on the right, and so on). She also had agency in this visual text; that is, there were few constraints on her as to how and what she conveyed in this text—unlike the conventions ascribed to written text.

Although viewers can interpret this text flexibly, they must do so within the confines of the literary text.

A more systematic study of student-generated visual texts supports students' development of language, enables them to understand that language is flexible and that not all expressions of worth must be oral or written. Individually and collectively, educators can see in a glance the visual messages their students assembled in their classroom and in the context of literature or language study.

Reading Visual Texts: A Brief Introduction

For the past fifteen years, I have studied the visual texts of many students and teachers across the US in whose classrooms I have done research, or who have participated in my workshops or presentations. Over time, I have discovered that nearly all textmakers, through their general and everyday interaction with art in the world, have internalized particular visual structures and use these structures to convey their interpretation of literary or original texts. In this section, I describe the visual grammar—visual structures and organizational patterns—involved in doing visual discourse analysis, predominantly referencing Rose's visual text, to describe how students structure their interpretations, how visual information is organized on canvases, their use of color, how and why viewers interact with images, and how to read discourses in visual texts. Although different aspects of visual grammar are highlighted, it is important to note that these elements must be read in relationship to one another to understand more fully the visual message(s) conveyed by the textmaker. Further, I offer but one of a number of interpretations that can be made about these pictures, a belief I have about literary and originally written texts.

Basic Areas of the Canvas

Pictures are generally oriented *horizontally*, left to right, or *vertically*, top to bottom. They are also generally organized into four quadrants with an effective center of attention (Kress and van Leeuwen) (see Figure 2). An image that has a *vertical orientation* (see Figure 3) will display information in the upper and lower two quadrants, and the image is often read from top to bottom. The upper half of the picture often suggests freedom, happiness, and triumph (Bang),

as well as the *ideal*, or that which is "promised" (Kress and van Leeuwen). In advertisements, beauty (actresses, models, the ideal look) is often located in this area. The bottom half of the picture, according to Bang, feels more threatened, heavier, sadder and constrained, and grounds the image. From Kress and van Leeuwen's perspective, the bottom half is where the *real* of the image is located. This is where information is located, and where product is often shown in ads.

Pictures that have a *horizontal orientation* (see Figure 3) are read from left to right, and the left side (left top and bottom quadrants) often presents information that
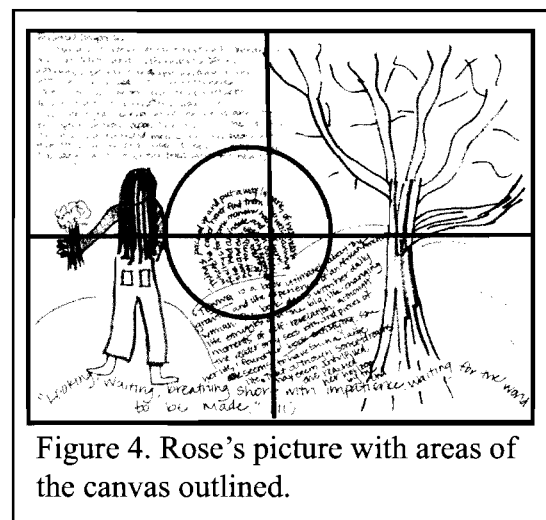

Figure 4. Rose's picture with areas of the canvas outlined.

is already known or *given*, while information on the right (top and bottom right quadrants) is *new* information. Given our own understanding of Western language conventions, such organization makes sense, since written text is read left to right and top to bottom.

Rose's visual text (see Figure 4) has a horizontal orientation and conveys a narrative about Janie's journey in the novel (Albers, "Theorizing"). When read from Bang's and Kress and van Leeuwen's perspectives, Rose's piece places Janie in the known or given part of the canvas while the tree is in the new. Hurston started her novel with a flashback, in which Janie ambles down the road, hair down and loose--another symbol that represents Janie's new found sense of self. By placing Janie in the known or given, Rose allows the viewer to see that this is how Janie now sees herself, a progressive and modern woman. With the placement of the leafless tree on the right side,

Rose represents Janie's potential for new growth. As the effective center of attention, the rising sun represents Janie's perspective on her own future; and with a bouquet in her left hand, the future is bright.

Knowing the significance of object placement in the basic areas of the canvas, and concepts often associated with this placement, enables educators to ask different and more complex questions about Rose's interpretation. Rather than merely state, "This is a lovely picture," an educator can invite Rose to consider how her understanding of the growth and maturity of Janie has been depicted on the canvas. Questions like, "Talk more about why Janie is placed on the left side of this picture?" or "What is the significance of the barren tree?" Other students can be brought into this discussion, and those with vertical orientations can be invited to talk about why a vertical orientation, and why and how they placed their objects in the canvas as they did. For example, Latisha used a vertical orientation with a dark blue outlined flower as the center of attention, and placed close to the top (see Figure 5). Latisha's visual text is more symbolic than narrative; the flower and bee represent the continuation of life (Janie's future) as it is placed in the ideal area of the canvas. Educators can ask Latisha about the significance of the flower, the placement of the bee in the most ideal area of the canvas, and how these relate to the novel. These questions elicit a more complex interpretation of the novel, and engage students in a transaction with the text (Rosenblatt) that is both visual and linguistic. Further, conscious attention to canvas orientations can lead students to consider how authors and artists alike engage readers, and how such readings become visible in readers' interpretations.

Vectors, Size, Volume and Use of Color in Images
In pictures, artists use a number of techniques to create visual interest and depict movement, excitement, and transaction within and among the elements on the canvas, including vectors to show how the eye is directed towards particular parts of the canvas, size and volume of objects, and use and application of color. Vectors are lines, either explicit or implicit (Albers, "Visual"), that draw the viewer's eye in a particular direction. Vectors are important when reading students' visual texts as these lines provide information as to how they wish their pictures be read, or how they see the relationship among and between elements in their visual

texts. Vectors carry the eye towards different areas of the canvas, which again adds to the information that students represent in their pictures. Another technique that artists use is their use of size and volume of objects depicted. The larger the object, the more importance it has in the overall picture. Moreover, the larger the area that an object takes up on a canvas (its volume), the more significance the object has for the textmaker.

With my work with textmakers across age groups, color and the application of color has significance in their visual texts. Colors have cultural significance and these cultural connections are often integrated into their pictures. For example, blue ranges in meaning from hope to sadness, while red often takes on the meaning of love. The application of color, especially crayon and pencil color, gestures towards the interest that the textmaker has with an object or concept. For example, if the crayon or pencil color is applied heavily on the canvas, I have found that the textmaker is much more interested in that object or concept, and the intensity of color often relates to an intense bold meaning. Conversely, pastel colors often indicate tentative emotions, lack of connection to an object or concept, and/or a more feminine concept.

In Rose's visual narrative, Rose uses a number of vectors to direct the eye: the rays of the sun, branches of the tree, and flower bouquet move the eye upward and towards the ideal part of the canvas. The implicit vectors that form the triangle between Janie, the sun and the tree move the eye inward, almost as if it were three-dimensional, and towards the rising sun. Additionally, the rolling hills, the water waves, and even Janie's toes point upward. In combinatorial relation with each other, these elements convey a very positive and ideal message. Even though Janie's third husband, her only true love, dies after contracting rabies from a dog bite (and is shot in self-defense by Janie), Rose understands that Janie's life holds a great deal of hope. Unlike some media that can be manipulated more easily, Rose's choice of colored markers suggests her strong and confident understanding of Janie's story. These bold yellow, blue, and brown marks are immovable and decisive, and stand strong against the white space.

Rose uses colors that have been culturally inscribed: the yellow rising sun represents hope, the written text inside the sun written in red, a symbol of love, and blue represents

Janie's sadness but her sense of hope. The sun, the tree, and Janie are the largest objects on the canvas, and their volume suggests that these objects in the novel are important to Rose. The written texts share a dual role in this canvas. At once, they describe Rose's response to the text and also serve as part of the aesthetics of the picture. They are written in red and two shades of blue; they become visual objects through her use of color. That the written texts take up so much of the canvas suggests the ultimate importance of written language in assessing this text. Rose wants to make sure that the teacher knows that she did indeed read the novel and can write about it.

The Gaze: Images and Interaction with Viewers

Like authors, artists intend to establish a particular relationship with the audience through their visual texts, whether informational, persuasive, humorous, and so on. When a character, object, or person in an image looks or gazes at the viewer, she or he establishes one of two types of relationships, an *offer* and a *demand* (Kress and van Leeuwen). In relationships of demand, textmakers seek to establish direct eye-to-eye contact with a viewer to bring about an imaginary relationship between the people in the image and the viewers. Images of demand stop viewers and order them to participate in this visual world. In a second type of relationship, the viewer is *offered* a relationship with the image. As viewers, we are not the object of gaze, but are subject of the gaze (Kress and van Leeuwen). Minimal or no contact is made between the viewer and the people/objects in the image. Rather, the viewer's role is that of onlooker—we participate vicariously in the lives represented in the image, almost as if they were museum objects.

The gaze in Rose's visual text is one of offer. The viewer is invited to look on as bystanders at Janie's present life. The viewer is positioned behind Janie from afar and looks as Janie looks—at the rising sun and the promise of a new life. Janie's smallness magnifies the viewer's volume; Rose wants the viewer to participate vicariously and actively in this picture and, thus, in Janie's present situation. Rose has drawn Janie with her back to the viewer, a position of strength. Rose creates desire in the viewer: we want to see Janie's emotions but can only imagine that Janie is fine, especially when read in combination with the other visual elements that signify promise.

Unlike Rose's text, Latisha's is one of demand. Kress and van Leeuwen argued that even inanimate objects carry messages of demand. In this visual text, Latisha draws in crayon a blue flower and a yellow and blue bee that command nearly half of the canvas. Its yellow flowerhead center demands that the viewer pay attention to the flower's prominence; we cannot look away from the flower. Latisha's use of size, volume and gaze of the flower and bee, in combinatorial relationship, conveys her simple but direct interpretation of Hurston's novel: Janie's search for the right man to fulfill her life.

Although there are many other elements that go into analytical readings of visual texts, this brief introduction into visual discourse analysis enables educators to consider how to use language that pushes students to think about the invisible messages they convey through their pictures: the structure, orientation, use of color, size, volume, and vectors, and the transactions among and between the elements. In the final section, I describe the significance of reading such texts with the complexity with which they were designed and created.

Discussion

What, then, can be inferred from this analysis to inform literacy and language arts education, and especially in communication systems that are not linguistically-based? I offer several overarching implications that will hopefully encourage a different perspective towards the visual texts, one that moves beyond "I like that picture," to one in which the visual text is discussed with the same enthusiasm and seriousness of a written or oral text. First, if viewing, interpreting, and creating art are parts of regular literacy and language arts instruction, and the many studies in arts-based literacy have shown this, educators must ask themselves to what extent do visual texts offer more information about a textmaker's interpretation of a written text than meets the eye?

Visual texts surround our everyday lives. Learning to read professionally- and student-generated texts using visual discourse analysis is essential if educators and students are to understand the hidden and visible messages conveyed through these texts. That both Rose and Latisha focused on the romantic relationships in the novel and the importance of a man to provide fulfillment in Janie's life suggests a more societal ideology of how gender roles are presented in visual

texts, Internet, media and literature, as well as other texts, and who gets to fulfill whose life (in this case, Janie's third husband fulfills her life). Although this novel was written in the late 1930s and gender roles were more traditional, Rose and Latisha choice to focus on this tradition suggests that a larger discourse is at play and in need of interrogation.

Second, just as literacy and ELA educators study written and oral language as representational systems of communication to provide strong instruction to students, so too, they can learn much if they learn to read and analyze visual texts so they can support their students in reading, interpreting and communicating in this language system. When students learn to read, communicate, create, and interpret in other sign systems like art, they can interrogate the many different types of texts that they encounter daily. Further, they can use multiple sign systems to communicate rather than focus solely on written and oral communication. Since, as Eisner wrote, not everything can be communicated in written language, educators and students alike must begin to become more facile at expression across systems of communication. Further, educators must recognize that art as a language system is significant and that messages conveyed visually are as important as those carried through written and oral language.

Third, I suggest that students should become active and thoughtful readers and interpreters of visual texts. Students must begin to read the visual messages around them from the cereal boxes, candy wrappers, and school posters (Vasquez), to digital media (Jenkins; Mango and Kirk), to a range of media texts like advertisements (Albers et al., "Using Popular"). This will require that literacy and ELA educators do more than invite conversations about the quality of the image, but study the image for the structures and organizational patterns that highlight particular concepts, and study the discourses that underpin these concepts. Further, once discourses are made visible, educators can build inquiry studies that frame these social issues. Such work transforms and makes obsolete the older literate social practices (legible cursive writing, spelling correctly, attending primarily to written text in books), and instead involves a shift towards *critical curricula* (Lewison, Leland, and Harste) and literacy practices that include reading, interpreting, and interrogating all texts.

From work in visual discourse analysis, literacy and ELA researchers and educators, I hope, will take a more serious and more critical look at the role of the visual arts in literacy learning, not just as a catalyst for strong writing or for development of comprehension in written texts, but as a language itself with the potential to communicate messages in unique and important ways. I also hope that literacy researchers and educators will begin to study visual texts with the complexity in which they were constructed. To ignore the structure of messages within visual texts is to ignore a large part of the messages students communicate. Schwandt argues that when children finish school, they should have "acquired the disposition of an endless curiosity about how things work and why we think the way we do about ourselves" (204). Education, especially in the English Language Arts, should be about helping students cultivate these capabilities, including the reading and interpreting of visual texts, their own as well as others'.

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