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# Fusing Literacy and the Arts to Meet Common Core Standards

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Fusing Literacy and the Arts to Meet Common Core Standards

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### Abstract

The literacy demands of current elementary students continues to increase through the use of state testing and Common Core State Standards while the time devoted to creative exploration suffers on the sidelines. As a way to bridge this increasing gap, educators may look towards new means of integrating literacy with the fine arts to produce a creative, fresh appearance to literacy instruction beyond that of traditional reading and writing instruction. The fine arts can serve either as literacy or as a component to a literacy lesson. This project researches the benefits of including the fine arts in some capacity to literacy instruction while also providing twelve lessons that utilize the fine arts to increase student learning. Each lesson combines literacy skills with a fine art focus, not to use art as part of the lesson assessment but as a tool to increase the student understanding, all while remaining aligned to Common Core State Standards.

*Keywords:* literacy, fine arts, Common Core, differentiation, literacy curriculum

*“Words and pictures are yin and yang. Married, they produce a progeny more interesting than either parent.” ~Dr. Seuss*

As the literacy demands of elementary students continues to tighten its grip through state testing and Common Core Standards while the time devoted to creative exploration in the fine arts suffers on the sidelines, educators may look towards new means of integrating literacy with the fine arts to produce a creative, fresh substance and appearance to literacy instruction. With this strong grip of standardized testing and specific learning standards dominating schools across the country, children are being exposed to a “mono-literacy” (Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2009, p. 340) that is devoid of creative exploration beyond consistent reading analysis of texts. This project seeks to provide educators with information regarding the impact that integrating the fine arts of drawing, painting, and sculpting has on fifth-grade students’ literacy (reading, writing, and speaking) development.

Many teachers still define literacy as reading and writing achievement without considering the new demands of visual components to literacy learning and development (Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2009). Literacy learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century elementary classroom is now expansive and differentiated, yet crucial to the success of a child’s educational future. Many educators now refer to multiple literacies, where student meaning-making and communication extend beyond language and into alternatives to text, such as arts-based experiences to both enhance and support foundational literacy (Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2011; Roswell & Kendrick, 2013). Contemporary children need to learn to create, understand, and analyze written, verbal, and visual information into a single process in a modern educational society that delivers constant information using this multiple literacies approach. Several researchers (Binder &

Kotsopoulos, 2011; Hughes, King, Perkins, & Fuke, 2011; Soundy & Drucker, 2010; Narcy, 2009) discuss this multimodal literacy engagement in terms of the process that fine arts takes to extend language and meaning-making. Other researchers (Grant, Hutchinson, Hornsby, & Brooke, 2008; Lea, Sipe, & O'loughlin, 2011; Corrigan, 2012; Vicars & Senior, 2013) focus on the similarities between fine arts and literacy and how fine arts lessons themselves serve *as* a form of literacy, potentially increasing “participation, expression, and acknowledgement” (Grant, et al., p. 58) of literacy skills. Further studies utilized specific fine arts lessons as part of a literacy lesson to evaluate the impact of arts integration as it informs and shapes children’s literacy understanding, acquisition, and maintenance (Grant, 2008; Meyer, 2013; Roswell and Kendrick, 2013). Fine arts, therefore, can be used as a form of literacy itself or as a companion to literacy, both with the same goal of meaning-making.

In terms of positionality of the researcher, I served as a substitute teacher for two years and a long-term substitute in a fifth-grade classroom. Currently, I serve as a fifth-grade special education teacher. Through these experiences, I am comfortable with the fifth-grade ELA Common Core Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) as well as what fifth-grade students expect and are capable of doing. With the current focus on literacy and math instruction as a way to help students meet these standards, many educators (including those in my school district) follow the New York State produced modules. The modules are prepared resources designed to help educators meet the new standards. Many professional development hours spent by educators in school districts (again, including my own) focused on understanding how and why these standards went into effect with little time devoted to how to follow the standards in creative self-made lessons, as witnessed from attending Common Core professional development.

In addition to teaching fifth grade, I taught as an art teacher for six years in my own studio, instructing hundreds of students in the past six years with a wide variety of abilities and ages. This project intertwines my two areas of teaching and my beliefs about education into a single work dedicated to student success. The three single beliefs I find most important to education involve creativity, diversity, and evolution. First, teachers use their own creativity to unleash the creativity of their students. Since every student engages in a variety of multiple literacies, teachers can encourage students to use their strengths when reading and writing. Second, everyone learns through different methods. Teachers appreciate these differences in others and discover opportunities to build bridges between different ideas, beliefs, and attitudes through a variety of methods and techniques. Finally, teachers evolve, grow, and change with each lesson they teach. Through consistent assessment and reflection, teachers are willing to see possibilities rather than obstacles and respond to challenges to improve their abilities. I believe that each lesson created in this project follows the three core teaching beliefs of creativity, differentiation, and evolution.

Regarding my personal education, I received my undergraduate degree at the College at Brockport, with a major in History, a minor in Studio in Art, and Childhood Inclusive and Students with Disabilities certifications. Currently, I am completing a Master's degree in Childhood Literacy at the College at Brockport.

Researching this topic allowed me to explore the impact the integration of the fine arts has on elementary literacy instruction, along with its benefits, weaknesses, and cautions to educators as a way to break up this “mono-literacy” (Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2009, p. 340) grip of basic reading and analysis of text. The end result will provide rationale that can be shared with other educators for using the arts in elementary literacy instruction through numerous lessons,

samples, and ideas to further this new way to teach the ELA Common Core Standards. Utilizing the fine arts as a way to help students understand, communicate, and think in alternate ways will allow educators to see how children make meaning from visual cues. My purpose through this curriculum project is to present the current literature regarding the inclusion of literacy and the fine arts while also providing educators with detailed lesson plans regarding how to integrate fine arts-based literacy into Common Core ELA classrooms. It is my hope that this research and the sample lessons will spark other teachers to think creatively when teaching the Common Core standards. Thus, my research questions are as follows:

- How can the fine arts of drawing, painting, and sculpting be integrated into fifth-grade students' literacy (reading, writing, and speaking) development?
- What types of lessons are conducive to both Common Core ELA Standards and fine arts integration?

In summary, there is a great potential for ELA and art integrated lessons for children. As educators, our responsibility is to make learning accessible and appealing to all learners and by integrating the fine arts, our literacy lessons can become more differentiated, unique, and effective to a larger variety of students. Therefore, I will research the literature behind the integration of literacy with the fine arts and organize this research into two categories: fine arts *as* literacy and fine arts *with* literacy. Fine arts *as* literacy are lessons when the fine arts serve as a primary form of literacy. Fine arts *with* literacy are reading or writing lessons that contain a fine arts component to extend or reinforce the concepts taught. After compiling this information,

I will develop lesson plans that address each Common Core ELA standard in the fifth-grade with the fine arts into a collection of adaptable lessons for educators.

### **Literature Review**

*“If the arts are to help define our path to the future, they need to become curriculum partners with other subject disciplines in ways that will allow them to contribute their own distinctive richness and complexity to the learning process.”*

(Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 1999, p. 45)

Much research exists regarding literacy instruction and the inclusion of the fine arts, both in terms of using the fine arts as literacy and as the fine arts with literacy. Both methods of including the arts of drawing, painting, and sculpting reveal numerous benefits to the learner and are described in detail through the current research and findings that accompany each method.

### **Fine Arts as Literacy**

Several studies focus on the similarities between what is learned during fine arts lessons and what is learned during literacy lessons, revealing how fine arts lessons serve *as* a primary form of literacy. Since children aren't always able to, “express themselves through the printed word, visual representations become the language of meaning-making” (Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2011, p. 339). Adoniou (2013) focused on the art of drawing as a strategy for teaching writing, as drawing and writing are both semiotic (or related to making meaning from symbols) systems that



are comparable. The practice of writing marks on paper is similar to drawing because both activities use the same psychomotor skills (such as coordinated activities of fingers) and cognitive abilities (such as problem solving) as developmental processes (Selvester & Steffani, 2012; Mackenzie, 2011). Selvester & Steffani (2012) discovered a positive correlation between a total drawing score and writing the alphabet through an assessment of preschool children, as the research suggested that children with higher scores realized that, “marks and lines can stand for an object or a word and that others can interpret an assigned meaning to their representations” (p. 16). The study’s participants were 33 preschool children from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. The qualitative data was generated from the children’s drawings of the alphabet and then quantified to correlate with quantitative data from kindergarten assessment scores. These children learned early on that one mark stood for a specific meaning, helping them as they assign letters and eventually words to represent different ideas. Despite the fact that writing letters are, “culturally determined, commonly acknowledged, constrained in number, and constitute a closed system” (Mackenzie, 2011, p. 324) while drawing is, “cognitively determined, debatable in nature, age and task dependent, and unfixed” (Mackenzie, p. 324), both processes are acts of creating something. Both processes also require similar thinking and composition development as ideas are built upon each other (Meyer, 2013). Drawing, therefore, uses many of the same skills as writing but without the rigidity of learning to write letters. Instead of focusing on self-expressive or “time filler” motives as drawing in schools is often used, drawing can be utilized as “a particular kind of child speech” (Adoniou, 2013, p. 262) and in essence, a different way to put thoughts onto paper. Especially for younger children with difficulties forming words, drawing may serve as an initial way to begin producing a different form of text. The kindergarten children in Binder & Kotsopoulos’ (2011) study created quilt squares that used artifacts to

represent their personal narratives in unconventional ways. This was the participants' way to use "text" to convey understanding of themselves to others, thus utilizing meaning making and communication skills as a part of their multiple literacies. This was the first time children were able to use their voice, albeit in drawings instead of words or printed text, to share their experiences. Vicars and Senior (2013) discovered similar results with nine adolescent males who captured a moment and emotion in drawing that would, "under other circumstances, require a story of a thousand words" (p. 60). These nine students demonstrated high anxiety and lack of interest when working with reading and writing activities. The qualitative data was generated from the students' drawings and their written work to reveal a greater engagement and success rate when drawing opposed to writing.

Even with older students, fine arts may be used as a substitute for traditional text. Corrigan (2012), for example, created an activity that evaluated college students' understanding of a text by having them paint as the text was being read as a response to the reading. Students either illustrated images, metaphors, or descriptions or gave the text an abstract emotional expression that demonstrated their awareness of the text. This contemplative text required students to go back and reread the text after hearing it read aloud, closely reread it, and respond to it as a way to make meaning, all of which are criteria for a typical writing assignment after reading. Meyer (2013) used drawing as a literacy assessment tool for a reading program, stating that, "learning cannot be solely measured by words" (p. 82). Meyer's study involved forty third grade students in a classroom setting. The students were asked to draw three things: themselves as a writer, the proper learning environment, and the stages of writing. The qualitative data of these drawings gave the researchers a look into students' meaning making, as they described students' perceptions of writing, approaches to writing tasks, the overall thinking of literacy

development, and cultural insights that were not evident through more typical literacy means, particularly when working with English Language Learner students (Meyers, 2013). By drawing instead of writing, the results indicated that these students could convey their thoughts to answer the task at hand, without worrying about spelling, grammar, or sentence structure.

Another example of drawing serving as a form of text is demonstrated through the use of genres. Just as writing contains genres that may differ according to purpose and audience, drawing may act in a similar way. Drawing, like writing, differs according to audience and purpose of why students are creating something. Adoniou (2013) informally observed ten seven-year olds in a classroom setting as they were asked to draw two pictures: one of their house and one of a map of their house. The drawings were different, as one contained the outside environment of trees or sidewalks while the other focused on the position and size of bedrooms, kitchens, etc. The drawings, “served different purposes...thus were constructed quite differently...just as a writer would choose different language structures when writing a description of a house or directions for getting around the house” (Adoniou, 2013). These parallels demonstrate just how related the two sign-making actions of writing and drawing are and how fine arts themselves serve as a literacy activity.

Beyond drawing and painting, three-dimensional fine arts tasks may also be used as a form of literacy. Thirty kindergarten students in Grant et al.’s (2008) study used clay to construct depictions and character traits of their grandmothers while reading the picture book *Our Granny* by Margaret Wild in a classroom setting. Qualitative data was collected through observations, student artifacts, and interviews with the students. Different levels of meaning were explored as students used their sculpture to explain what they knew about the “characters” that their grandparents were, as evidenced by one girl giving her grandmother an odd looking jacket that

belonged to her deceased grandfather and thus making the grandmother sad. This enriched response to a simple direction such as making your grandmother from clay demonstrates a level of meaning-making that a kindergartener may not be able to express in written words using their current literacy knowledge. This caused a more personal and emphatic discussion of the text leading to an understanding of losing family members, making a much deeper message than the text first demonstrates.

Roswell and Kendrick (2013) explored the fine arts as literacy in a gender specific form, detailing how the “hidden literacies” of male students are often not represented in schools because of the non-traditional nature of these practices (ranging from video games to drawing to performances). Digital media and popular culture that match students’ motivations and interests may transform literacy instruction when teachers ask students to create written assignments, for example, that blend words with images. Males may become engaged with these different types of messages, ways of speaking, and ways of sharing and learning new information. Educators offered students the chance to design and create visual assignments opposed to written assignments and discovered that this new mode of expressing the same information benefited both the students’ morale and their success rate, as quantitatively measured by assessment results (Roswell & Kendrick, 2013). By altering the form of literacy response, these new visual modes *became* literacy.

### **Fine Arts With Literacy**

Several other studies utilized specific fine arts lessons as *part* of a literacy lesson to evaluate the impact of arts integration as it informs and shapes children’s literacy understanding, acquisition, and maintenance. One of the major areas where the fine arts serve as a companion to

literacy is in the area of writing, such as during the emergent writer stage. I discussed earlier how drawing served as a form of writing yet drawing is also an excellent component to use alongside writing, both as a construction support and a comprehension support. Young writers will, “shift meanings across multiple modes before they master formal writing,” (Mills, 2011, p. 56) making writing, talking, and drawing mutually transformative progressions. When they move this understanding from a more flexible and personal system (drawing) to a more closed system defined by standard rules (writing), children translate the same cognitive skills as they move ideas from one system to another (Mackenzie & Veresov, 2013).

Multiple studies support this connection between writing and drawing. Soundy, Guha, and Qiu’s Picture Power project (2007) allowed twenty-four kindergarten children to act as “moderators” of their drawings and linked language with their drawings as the initial step to emergent writing. This practice became a comprehension strategy to record the children’s understandings after being read a series of picture books circled around the same theme. The goal of this project was to determine if artwork could inform teachers about what students understood about literacy. The drawings not only incorporated elements and vocabulary from the stories, but also allowed students to make connections to the other texts and to their own lives. Students became more apt to write with the drawing before them, even if the writing wasn’t completely in standard English. Zimmerman’s study (2012) relates to this work by discovering the use of drawing as a scaffold for struggling students to organize and communicate their knowledge, helping them sort what they actually do know. The participants in this study included 14 fourth grade students in a classroom setting. The emergent writers used their drawings to provide a brief (only a few sentences) but detailed reflection. This qualitative data suggested that drawing assisted these students in writing their knowledge since the students did not need to

worry about spelling or mechanics but just the basic facts. The information gathered from drawing may assist educators in helping link what students are struggling with to what they already know as a way of strengthening their literacy problem-solving.

Not only emergent readers, but even more experienced literacy learners can engage in literacy using the fine arts as a support. One of Aboniou's (2013) studies, for example, examined the effects of drawing before writing to evaluate the quality of the final writing piece. The researcher's own class of ten eight year old children was selected for this study, with each student having various levels of English language skills. After performing an experimental study on comparing students who drew before writing and those who did not draw before writing using a combination of analytic and writing-trait-based scoring methods, the data suggested that drawing before writing improved writing pieces such as explanations or procedures. Students in the treatment group ended up writing longer pieces with longer sentences and more content-specific vocabulary. Details in the drawings correlated to details in the writing, making the drawings memory prompts that helped cement an idea in the child's thinking. Drawing became a useful planning tool to writing as children worked through the entire "structure" of their responses and embellished their drawings with details before applying the messages and ideas to their writing pieces. Further studies combined literacy activities with fine art activities. Hughes et al. (2011) completed two case studies using graphic novels as both reading material and as a project where students created their own graphic novels. The juxtaposition of words and images make graphic novels appear simpler than reading a text-only novel, yet the stories are, "just as complex, thought-provoking...[and require] skills in multiliteracies that students are required to develop and continually evolve" (Hughes et. al, 2011, 603). The participants in this study included 12 adolescents aged 15 to 17. Using artifacts from the classroom setting, interviews,

and field journals, an in-depth qualitative analysis of learning through graphic novel creation was conducted. After reading various graphic novels, students retold their own stories in graphic novel form, requiring them to use the literacy skills of selecting the main ideas, vocabulary, and dialogue that will give the same theme or message of their story as a full text novel would. The study found that even reluctant readers and writers were more motivated and willing to engage in reading and/or creating text to make meaning, make connections, and share their stories. A different study by Driessnack and Gallo (2013) required forty children ages 7 through 10 to draw their knowledge of basic genetic concepts and then use these drawings to explain their ideas in words. This process is known as visualization, where an internal idea takes a visual appearance. After the students drew the insides of their bodies, researchers could then engage in a conversational interview with the children, extracting more detailed information from children than when being asked to write their understanding. The arts-based activity allowed children to use the paper as a “transitional space” where their complicated thoughts could be created in a concrete form (Driessnack & Gallo, 2013). This process of visualization as a brainstorm for writing also benefits students learning English, as often they can draw their ideas better than writing them in standard English. By having these students draw what they are trying to say, educators can assist these students in learning ways to write what they draw. Wessels & Herrera’s 2014 study involved creating storyboards as a prewriting plan with six middle school struggling readers. The study resulted in students being less anxious, frustrated, and more effective at beginning the writing process when they followed a visual plan, based on qualitative data of interviews, artifacts, and researcher observations. The culmination of text and images helped the struggling readers and writers in both these studies to get their message across and to get a better idea of the text by using two sign systems to gather information.

Another way to use the fine arts as literacy is to use the artwork to gather a response. Woodruff (2012) describes how, “responding to art is similar to responding to literature...as one asks similar analytical questions [to convey meaning]” (p. 6). Students are able to gather literary elements of tone, theme, mood, metaphors, and more when analyzing a piece of art as the springboard. These same skills can be applied from art to text as students learn to develop these skills from known visual stimuli to unknown written text. Artwork is used as a component to accompany foundational literacy skills and as a scaffold to move students from describing something in actual space to describing something using text.

In summary, each of the studies described contribute the idea that moving beyond written text and using the fine arts as (or as a companion to) literacy not only allows for meaning-making, but also for having children rethink the meaning of literacy. The connection between the fine arts and literacy is not only feasible in today’s classrooms but also effective. Whether the arts are intertwined with literacy activities or used as a form of literacy, the successes of using the arts with literacy demonstrate that the use is an area that is worth educators’ time and consideration when planning to meet as many diverse learners as possible.

### **Methods of Curriculum Design**

After analyzing and synthesizing existing literature on infusing the arts with literacy, I was able to study curriculum design (Boschman, McKenney, & Voogt, 2014; Gross, Latham & Armstrong, 2012) to compile a literacy and fine arts based curriculum that involved co-constructed meaning through higher level engagement with complex texts and Common Core



standards. With an inquiry mindset, each lesson contains an arts-based framework that allows for individual student inquiry while supporting Common Core Standards.

When developing the lessons, I considered several different aspects of a well-balanced literacy lesson. Each lesson revolves around a specific theme or complex text, ranging from the novel *Esperanza Rising*, analysis of graphic novels, informational text vocabulary, among other areas. Each theme also has suggestions on how to use the central idea and procedures of the lessons as a way to apply them to other texts or ideas, providing educators with options to use whole or select parts of lessons. Once the theme of the lesson was determined, the next step involved creating “I Can” specific learning targets for each lesson as a way to drive the lesson’s focus. These “I Can” statements are designed to give both teachers and students a clear and concise objective for the lesson. Each “I Can” statement was then matched to a measureable assessment for the lesson to determine student understanding. After an outline of a theme, “I Can” statement, and measureable assessment was determined, the body of the lesson was written to create a balanced literacy lesson.

The lessons reflect a balanced literacy approach, meaning they contain a variety of literacy experiences such as independent reading, read aloud, partner reading, etc. They also employ a majority of multiple literacies, from reading, speaking, listening, viewing, and (with a heavy emphasis) creating. Each lesson’s goal is to appeal to different types of literacy learners and to stretch and scaffold the skills of certain areas that students are struggling in.

When drafting lessons, the setting of the classroom was often taken into consideration. Different lessons required different settings, ranging from desks to open work space areas. Related to this area are the materials needed for each lesson. With each lesson being an arts-based lesson, materials need to be gathered for students to use. These material needs may be

difficult for some teachers to prepare for, so alternate materials and ideas are available in each lesson as a way to help all educators be able to teach each lesson.

With regards to trustworthiness of the project, the Common Core Standards are the highlight of the literacy educational stage right now. Since the first wave of test results are now accessible, teachers are scrambling for new ways to both engage their students and to reach the success rates seen before the new standards' adoption. Currently, research exists on the benefits of including the fine arts with literacy, yet little of this research makes connections to the Common Core. Each of these lessons began with an idea and Common Core Standard(s) in mind, and then included an aspect of fine arts. Due to the uniqueness of this project, all of the lessons created address the specific research questions discussed in this project, along with a fine arts focus and relevant Common Core ELA Standards.

### **Lesson Compilation**

The next section includes the twelve fine-arts based, Common Core ELA lessons created throughout this project. Each lesson begins with an overview and objective for the lesson, learning targets, materials, and lesson length. After this initial information, the Common Core Standards addressed through the lesson are listed, followed by the lesson itself. Each lesson concludes with assessment and modification sections, as a way to make the most of the lesson and to tailor it to meet the individualized needs of students.

**Lesson Table of Contents****Lesson 1: Close Read Flipbook**

Overview: Students will annotate nonfiction text by using a self-created flipbook. The text will be closely read three times. Through drawings, students will visually represent their understanding with each reading of the text through drawings.

**Lesson 2: Comparing Characters Sketchpad**

Overview: Using a complex text that focuses on two central characters, students will chronicle the characters' thoughts, actions, and words through drawing in a dual-page sketchpad. After reading the text, students will then compare the characters' development, personalities, and how the different characters responded to the same situation.

**Lesson 3: Finding Theme: Symbolism in Clay**

Overview: Students will close read (read and analyze three times) a complex text then work in groups to analyze a passage of text to determine its theme. Students will then sculpt a symbol from clay to represent the theme of the passage. The class will then come together, share their sculptures, and determine an overall theme for the text.

**Lesson 4: Graphic Novel Text Translation**

Overview: Students will translate a section of text (from a novel or short story) into a graphic novel. Students will summarize the text and determine which elements of the text are necessary for telling the story in graphic novel form.

**Lesson 5: Idiom Cubes**

Overview: Students will understand commonly used idioms by creating cubed drawings and phrases to compare and contrast the idiom with the literal translation.

**Lesson 6: Main Idea Roses**

Overview: Students will construct a rose using a main idea stem as the base and petals as supporting text evidence.

**Lesson 7: Opinion Writing Through Famous Art**

Overview: Students will construct an opinion writing piece using a famous work of art as a springboard. Students will learn the difference between writing facts and opinions.

**Lesson 8: Poetry Painting**

Overview: Students will respond to a poem through painting. Students will portray the theme, tone, or mood of a poem through expressive painting. Students will then use their paintings to create a written reflection of their understanding of the poem.

### **Lesson 9: Point of View Sequencing**

Overview: Students will analyze events through different characters' point of view using drawings on colored index cards. Students will organize these events sequentially to retell the story.

### **Lesson 10: Nonfiction Text Structures Research Quilt**

Overview: Students will identify different nonfiction text structures by creating a quilt square illustrating the unique features of each structure. Each student will create five different squares, one for each text structure (description, sequence/order, compare/contrast, cause & effect, problem & solution). Students will write a sample paragraph on the back of each quilt square to illustrate the type of text structure described on the front. Information for the sample paragraphs will be gathered through online research.

### **Lesson 11: Text Features Collage**

Overview: Students will search through magazines, newspapers, and other teacher-selected texts to identify nonfiction text features to create class collages. Students will cut and glue the text features onto posters with different headings related to text features.

### **Lesson 12: Fingerprint Opinion Poem**

Overview: Students will state an opinion by writing a creative poem unique to themselves. Students will support their opinions with facts and details. Students will emphasize words of their poems by using different visual techniques.

\*Only one of the lessons is included in this document to preserve the author's publication rights

## Comparing Characters Sketchpad

### Fifth-Grade English Language Arts

<b>Lesson Overview/ Objective</b>	Using a complex text that focuses on two central characters, students will chronicle the characters' thoughts, actions, and words through drawing in a dual-page sketchpad. After reading the text, students will then compare the characters' development, personalities, and how the different characters responded to the same situation.
<b>Learning Targets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can close read a complex piece of text.</li> <li>• I can visually represent my ideas.</li> <li>• I can record a character's thoughts, actions, and words.</li> <li>• I can compare and contrast two characters.</li> </ul>
<b>Materials</b>	Complex text (see recommendations below), sketchpad worksheets, drawing utensils
<b>Lesson Length</b>	Throughout the course of a complex text (whether novel or short story)
<b>Theory</b>	Fine Arts as Literacy: Adoniou, 2013; Driessnack & Gallo, 2013; Mackenzie & Veresov, 2013

Highlighted boxes indicate the standards met within this lesson.

#### Reading: Literature

RL.5.1	RL.5.6
RL.5.2	RL.5.7

#### Reading: Informational Text

RI.5.1	RI.5.6
RI.5.2	RI.5.7
RI.5.3	RI.5.8
RI.5.4	RI.5.9
RI.5.5	RI.5.10

#### Reading: Foundational Skills

RF.5.3
RF.5.4

RL.5.3	RL.5.8
RL.5.4	RL.5.9
RL.5.5	RL.5.1 0

**Writing**

W.5.1	W.5.6
W.5.2	W.5.7
W.5.3	W.5.8
W.5.4	W.5.9
W.5.5	W.5.10

**Speaking and Listening**

SL.5.1	SL.5.4
SL.5.2	SL.5.5
SL.5.3	SL.5.6

**Language**

L.5.1	L.5.4
L.5.2	L.5.5
L.5.3	L.5.6

1. Choose a complex text that focuses on two main characters. For this lesson sample, the text *Freak the Mighty* by Rodman Philbrick was chosen. The two main characters in the text, Max and Freak, experience a great adventure together, while also developing themselves individually throughout the process.
2. Introduce the character sketchpad worksheets to the students. Explain how each student will receive two sketchpads, one for one character and one for the second character. After each chapter (or section read, depending upon your text) students will draw a thought, action, emotion, or event that each character was involved in. This drawing goes on the left side of the sketchpad. On the right side, students write the text evidence that their drawing comes from (with the proper citation or page number).
3. This sketchpad lesson takes place throughout an entire reading unit, in this example, during the course of reading *Freak the Mighty*. This lesson can accompany many other lessons surrounding the text and should not be used as the sole component to the text (the teacher can add comprehension activities, etc.)
4. After the complex text is finished, students are to begin comparing and contrasting the two characters using their sketchpads, considering the following questions:
  - How did the characters change throughout the text? What specific events or emotions detail this change?
  - Did the characters respond differently to the same event? How so?
  - The teacher may ask a series of different questions pertaining to different events in the story. For example, in *Freak the Mighty*, how did both Freak and

Max respond to the Fourth of July party? Use your character sketchpads to compare the characters' experiences.

<b>Assessment</b>	Teachers can assess the character sketchpads for student effort, selection of details from the text, and recognition of character development. Teachers may also ask students to respond in writing to the prompts that compare the two questions as an assessment for the activity.
<b>Modifications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Text Selected</li> <li>• Length of time for completion of character sketchpad (whether it be full text, certain chapters, etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>Complex Texts with Two Main Characters</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Thank You, Jackie Robinson</i>, Barbara Cohen (1997)</li> <li>• <i>Freak the Mighty</i>, Rodman Philbrick (1993)</li> <li>• <i>Bridge to Terabithia</i>, Katherine Paterson (1977)</li> <li>• <i>From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler</i>, E.L. Konigsburg (1967)</li> <li>• <i>The Egypt Game</i>, Zilpha Keatley Snyder (1967)</li> </ul>

Name _____	<b>Character</b>
<b>Sketchpad</b>	
Title of Text: _____	
Character: _____	
<b>SKETCHES</b>	<b>TEXT EVIDENCE</b> (include page numbers)

### **Lesson Summary**

The previous twelve fine-arts based lessons are tools for educators to teach Common Core ELA standards through non-traditional means. This curriculum will be used in two ways: the lessons will be taught to my fifth-grade students and the lessons will be shared with other educators in the hopes the lessons and their ideas will be applied. Within my classroom, I have taught several of the lessons and witnessed the overall goal of the curriculum itself: students are



thinking creatively through literary activities. Students are focusing on the purpose of each lesson and not on laboring over the physical drawing, painting, or creating activities. I hope to continue to teach these lessons and record ways to improve the lessons to increase student understanding. Regarding the second goal of this curriculum, the lessons will be shared at an upcoming professional development opportunity. Teachers will be encouraged to use the lessons as they are and notice their impact while also will be challenged to include an element of the fine arts in a future lesson they teach. By increasing awareness of the benefits and examples of including the fine arts with literacy, teachers may be more apt to consider this new area of instruction in their own classrooms. Developing this curriculum has also increased my own awareness as I teach on a daily basis, as I think of new ways to include fine art elements into my lessons as a way to differentiate instruction. Further lessons will continue to be developed as I teach and hear from other educators about the lessons' successes and areas for improvement. This project and the accompanying lessons will continue to be an inspiration to both myself and other educators in the hopes that more and more students will reach new levels of literacy understanding through the arts.

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