

ACTIVITY 4 – WORDLESS NARRATIVE



Description: Students create a storyboard or visual narrative that does not contain text. The exercise has wide application, whether in having students block a scene from a work of drama, visually relate the progress of a character’s story from a work of fiction, or visually represent the story of a particular historical moment. The exercise is similar to Activity 3: Visual Note-Taking, but the student is not permitted to use words in order to communicate his or her ideas.

Skills: Critical Thinking, Navigation Skills, Making Connections

Purpose: By the end of the activity, students should perceive the challenges of communicating without words, translating the written or verbal into the visual, and developing a narrative that is comprehensible to their audience when said narrative must be interpreted in the absence of explanation. The aim of the exercise is to develop the student’s communication skills and transliteracy: the ability to demonstrate literacy across a range of platforms or mediums of expression by making meaningful connections between them.

Critical Thinking Questions:

- What is my visual narrative forced to leave out for the sake of economy?
- Do I gain anything from not being able to represent every moment of what I am trying to depict?
- Would someone looking at my visual narrative be able to understand it? If they had a question, what would their question be?
- Is there something that I now understand about what I'm representing that I didn't understand before I drew it?
- Is there something about the way in which I drew or represented this visual narrative that says something about how I feel towards the subject?

Making Connections:

- Am I better able to represent my narrative in pictures or in words? Why?
- Is there any illustration that would benefit from having some clarifying text associated with it?
- In each panel, is it easier for me to show my audience what I mean with a picture or would it be easier to simply explain it?
- What is the usefulness of being able to communicate in images alone as opposed to words alone or words and images?
- Is there a way for me to better understand how I can translate my ability to write to my ability to visually represent ideas and vice versa?

How Can Visual Narrative Foster Inquiry in This Activity?

As in the previous activity, students will have a dizzying range of questions that they will have to ask themselves at the outset of the activity: "How do I represent this scene from a play or short story without needing pages and pages of illustration?" or "How can I best capture the most important features of a historical battle in a way that a person examining it can understand?" My inspiration for this activity comes from Hogarth's "A Rake's Progress," which Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics* cites, along with hieroglyphics, cave art, etc. as a forerunner to the comics of today. I've always been impressed by the fact that little or no text (other than the naming of the individual paintings), the audience has little difficulty perceiving what is happening to the rake. As our global village shrinks and our students are immersed even further into a principally visual culture, being able to communicate with the visual takes on an increasing importance.

Recommended Read for the Teacher



Understanding Comics, by Scott McCloud

This is the de facto Bible for understanding the fine art of visual narrative. In *Understanding Comics*, McCloud shows us that comics are a genre worthy of consideration, with a fascinating history that can be traced back to our own pre-history. Like the great Will Eisner, McCloud is generally considered to be among the most important writers about comics from within the tradition.