Policy into Practice

What Is Image Reading, and How Can It Lead to Deeper Thinking?

Tanny McGregor
Curriculum Supervisor
West Clermont Local Schools

Look around you. Chances are there are images in your line of vision, and that is the norm for you, all day, every day. You see advertisements, photographs, paintings, drawings, infographics, logos, book jackets, CD covers, Instagram and Twitter pics, just to name a few. Your students are no different. Their entire lives have been filled with images; in fact, they don't know a world without them. Louise Story (2007), a reporter for the *New York Times*, writes that the blank space should be added to the endangered list. She cites a statistic from the market research firm Yankelovich, reporting that a person living in an urban area is exposed to up to 5,000 "messages" per day. Most of these messages include images designed to get our attention.
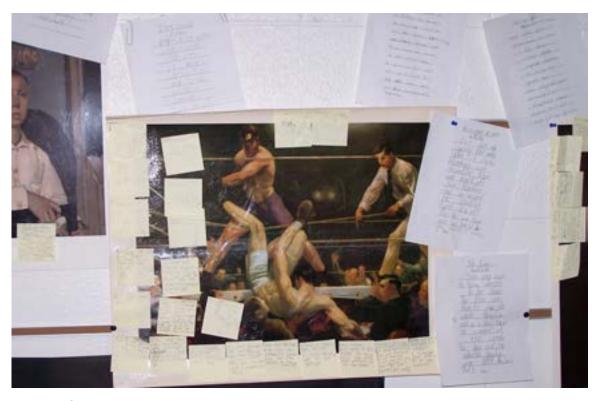
As educators, our first reaction to these ubiquitous images could be negative. We might think, "Our kids are bombarded with media!" and "No wonder we're so distracted!" There are many ways to use the myriad of images that abound, however, to our instructional advantage. You know what they say: if you can't beat 'em, join 'em! So let's explore how to "read" an image, and identify a few simple ways to use the images around us to deepen the thinking of our students.

Policy into Practice is a series of briefs created to support the efforts of districts to achieve the Ohio Third Grade Reading Guarantee. Each brief will focus on a question about literacy teaching and learning and provide a response to the question, implications for teaching, questions for further discussion, and suggested readings. *Policy into Practice* briefs are intended to support conversations among educators leading to quality instruction and increasing literacy achievement.

Learn to dwell: The close reading of an image

We hear a lot about close reading these days: making text thinking-intensive, rereading, and supporting our claims with textual evidence. If we extend our definition of "text" to include images, we can find even more opportunities to engage our students in these practices. In order to merge our thinking with an image, though, we have to be willing to slow down, to dwell in the image for a while, to look and look again. Sometimes that is harder than it seems! It is often our tendency to view an image quickly and move on, just as we sometimes speed through a text. Yet if we want our students to learn to view an image, not just for the surface value, but also for the less obvious meaning that lies just beneath, we must dwell in an image together.

Harvard University's Project Zero (n.d.) developed a simple, three-part thinking protocol called "See. Think. Wonder." It can be quite helpful when we're encouraging our students to slow down and dwell in an image. First, ask kids what they see. Let them state the obvious. Second, ask what they think about what they see. This is the place for inferences and connections, a deeper kind of thinking. Third, ask students to share what they wonder about the image, valuing their curiosity without trying to answer the questions posed. Practicing this thinking protocol can provide a time where we, along with our students, can make ourselves slow down and really look at an image. When it comes to reading images, we have to make time to dwell.
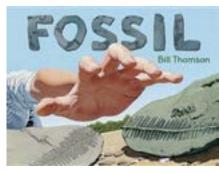

Display an image a week

Many of us include a poem of the week, a quotation of the week, or a problem of the week in our instructional schedules. Why not display an image of the week? Just designate a spot in your classroom where an image can be posted, and make pens and sticky notes available alongside. Encourage your students to view the image and jot down their thinking. Inferences, connections, and questions will be made visible as students plaster the perimeter of the image with their sticky notes. Consider using art reproductions, calendar pictures, photographs, and product packaging.
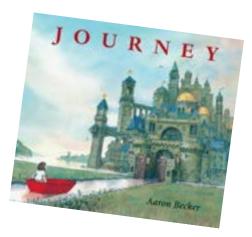
Think through wordless books

Though wordless books are often underutilized, they are a ready-to-use source of meaningful images held together by story. Sometimes this genre is difficult to locate in the library or bookstore since these books are not usually shelved together. Knowledgeable librarians and booksellers will be able to pull titles for you, however, so don't hesitate to ask! The images in wordless books these days provide us with gorgeous pictures, brimming with meaning. They also level the playing field when it comes to the readers in your classroom, since there is no text to get in the way. Question your way through a wordless book, or tell your own story on the way through. Make inferences about what the images do not show, and identify meaningful connections as the story unfolds. There are endless possibilities here for practicing comprehension strategies and for doing close reading of sequenced images. Need ideas for a few current wordless titles? Try these:
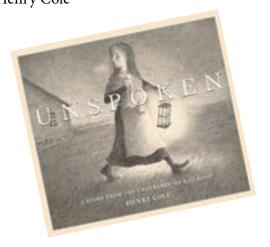

Bluebird by Bob Staake
Fossil by Bill Thomson
Journey by Aaron Becker
The Lion & The Mouse by Jerry Pinkney
The Secret Box by Barbara Lehman
Unspoken: A Story from the Underground Railroad by Henry Cole

Read book jackets: The merging of images and text

William Albert Allard, a photographer for *National Geographic*, once said that "words and pictures can work together to communicate more powerfully than either alone." Your students can discover this for themselves as they focus on book jackets (or covers). Easy to find, easy to store, easy to share, collections of book jackets can usually be found in the librarian's closet or in one of your classroom cabinets. Pair up your students, and let them do some investigative work, viewing the images and reading the accompanying text. After dwelling for a while, students will have thinking to share, with their partners and with the class.

Ask younger students:

- What do you think this book would be about? What clues are in the pictures and text?

- How do these images make you feel? Why?

- Might this book be real or make-believe (fiction or nonfiction, literary or information text)? Let's point to the parts of the images or text that lead us to think that way.

Ask older students:

- To which genre do you think this book belongs? What is your evidence for that?

- What mood or tone do you think the author would convey in this book? Why do you say so?

- What would the author have to do to write this book? How do you know?

Increase your awareness, and don't forget to dwell

No matter where you find images, and no matter how you choose to use them in your classroom, it's important to remember that reading images can help our students practice the very comprehension strategies they will need when reading text. When we are aware of the power of images and learn to dwell in them, we quickly recognize that they are not just peripheral to our instruction. Image reading can be a way to provide the time and space necessary for higher-level thinking.

Questions for further discussion

- What images do my students view on a daily basis?

- How will I build in time to dwell upon images with my students?

- Where can I find images that will foster rich discussion and deep thinking?

Suggested readings

Frey, N., & Fisher, D. (2008). *Teaching visual literacy: Using comic books, graphic novels, anime, cartoons, and more to develop comprehension and thinking skills.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Kajder, S. (2006). *Bringing the outside in: Visual ways to engage reluctant readers.* Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Keene, E., et al. (2011). *Comprehension going forward: Where we are and what's next.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

McGregor, Tanny. (2007). *Comprehension connections: Bridges to strategic reading.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

McGregor, Tanny. (2013). *Genre connections: Lessons to launch literary and nonfiction text.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

References

Project Zero. (n.d.). See. Think. Wonder. *Visible Thinking.* Harvard University, accessed November 30, 2013, http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking_html_files/03_ThinkingRoutines/03c_Core_routines/SeeThinkWonder/SeeThinkWonder_Routine.html.

Story, Louise. (2007, January 15). Anywhere the eye can see, it's likely to see an ad. *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/15/business/media/15everywhere.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&.

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