

Using Conflict to Design Visual Stories

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In their 2014 NAEA presentation Jason Ohler and Bernajean Porter discussed the story arc, comprised of problem/conflict, transform and resolution. Using these ideas presenters designed a thematic unit focused on conflict as a way to design narratives in both visual and verbal forms. An introductory exercise in a museum setting asked students to design short dialogues based on conflict between figures seen in visual art. Following a storytelling presentation about an historical conflict, students designed their own storyboards starting with an historical photograph. After analyzing the photographs, students shot their own photos to complete their story arcs. A final exercise applied these ideas to the design of graphic novels. Students focused on some conflict in their lives and created characters or symbols to represent these conflicting forces. Their graphic novels were then comprised of the presentation of the two characters in conflict and the transformation that brought about resolution.

Resources:

Renee Hobbs, "Expanding the Concept of Literacy," in Robert Kubey, ed. *Media Literacy in the Information Age. Current Perspectives. Vol. 6* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publications, 1997.

Jason B. Ohler, *Digital Storytelling in the Classroom. New Media Pathways to Literacy, Learning, and Creativity.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2013.

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics.* New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

Pippa White, One's Company <http://www.pippawhite1co.com/biography.htm>

Instructions for Activity - Talking Pictures:

Working in groups of 2:

Option A: Choose one art work and become the voices of two of the characters in the art work and improvise a dialogue in which these characters are in conflict.

OR

Option B: Each person chooses a different artwork and a character from their work. Become the voice of the character in your art work and improvise a dialogue in which these characters are in conflict.

Questions to think about:

How might the personalities or emotional states of these characters conflict?

How might the social or cultural circumstances of these characters conflict?

Might there be any age or gender conflicts?

Instructions for Activity - Photographs in Sequence:

Your group has been given an historical photograph.

This is going to become one image in a four-part sequence that tells a story.

Brainstorm ideas about what is happening in the photograph.

Who are these people? What are they doing and why? What might have happened before? What might happen next? Does your story represent a personal or social conflict? Will that conflict be resolved in your story?

You are going to be using a smart phone to take three other photographs to complete the story. The members of your group will become the characters and your group leader will take the photographs.

Your original image can be placed at any point in the four-part sequence. You will create the other three photographs in the same format (vertical or horizontal).

You have been given a few materials that can become props for your photographs. Photographs will be printed out before next session.

Storyboarding:

Use the double stick tape to affix your photographs to the foam core in the order you have decided upon to tell your story. Create labels to identify the time sequence.

How much time has elapsed between each image? Create a label to title your story.

Create dialogue or thought bubbles if you would like to add the characters' voices or thoughts to your story. Create captions if you think this use of text would enhance your story.

Instructions for Activity - Stories in a Museum (or Classroom):

Choose one work around which you can design a story. You are going to choose other images in the museum to complete your story making sure to include the elements below: The setting of your story.

Characters in your story.

Actions or plot elements in your story.

Objects or symbols that appear in your story.

Besides your original work you should make use of at least four other images.

(You may want to discuss different genres of stories before this activity and have students pick one - i.e. mystery, science fiction, romance, historical drama, etc.)

Instructions for Activity - Graphic Novels: Creating a Personal Narrative:

Think of some conflict within your inner life. This may have to do with ethnic identity, gender roles, life and/or professional roles, etc. Identify two aspects of your inner life that are in conflict in some way. Create two characters or symbols to represent these two aspects. You have been given 5 sheets of paper to create a graphic novel. You will be using cut paper and pens to create your images. Remember what you have learned about the qualities of narrative, such as sequencing, setting, plot, and character. How will you arrange your images?