The Benefits of Writing through Art in the Classroom

By Nicole Harris

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Thesis Advisor: Professor Briggs
Abstract

This project has two parts. The first part reviews research that shows art as a successful method for teaching writing in the elementary school classroom. It stresses the importance of students creating art before writing a piece of fiction or poetry. Part one covers the theories behind the writing through art process as well as telling success stories of teachers who have implemented art in their writing lessons. Part two is a lesson plan unit that applies the writing through art process when teaching fiction to third grade students. The lesson unit engages students to first create in Art Workshops and then write in Writer Workshops. The students will explore character, setting, plot and dialogue through art and then develop these short story elements in written form.
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Introduction

As I sat in the back of my mother’s third grade classroom, I felt the energy of a group of students bursting with creativity. Markers, crayons, and colored pencils covered their desks. My mother always has the children draw at the end of the day. They enjoy it. They sat diligently drawing pictures, sharing with friends, and telling stories about their pictures—stories about princesses and ninjas and monsters without any heads. They shared memories about their first baseball game or the time they lost a tooth. Visual Images were scattered around the room. One boy, Nathan, pulled my hand and led me to a clothesline of hanging pictures. He pointed to the one that he drew for my mother. I could not tell what the image was about so as a teacher in training I said, “Can you tell me something about this picture?” He described the picture as the time he turned into an alien. I laughed. He smiled. “I’m going to write a story about it one day,” he said.

Whether the instrument for expressing creative thought is a pencil or a paintbrush, art and writing have always had an affinity for one another. Both writers and artists observe the world around them and record their response to it. Faith Zajicek wrote in her journal Writing through Art, “As an Art teacher and an English teacher, I am always amazed at the similarities of thought and process inherent in both disciplines. Process is the key word for both subjects, for each is a process of exploring our own thoughts, and ideas and seeking to convey them to others” (Zajicek, 1).

It is very important for students to see the connection between art and creative writing and to utilize both processes so that students can communicate the very best of their creative ideas (Jeffus, 2). As students develop and grow in intellectual and creative thought, it is best that they
communicate their ideas by way of envisioning their writing first. This thesis demonstrates that the writing through art process enhances children’s creative writing and critical thinking abilities.
How Writing Through Art Began: Discussion of the Third Mind, Multiple Intelligences, and Ekphrasis

To begin to understand the intricate relationship of art and writing, it’s useful to look at the theories of how the human brain is organized. The neocortex of the brain is where that story begins. Taking up two thirds of the brain, the neocortex is the largest part of the brain and is devoted to language development, conscious thought, abstract thought and imagination (Looi, 2). Located on the top front part of the brain, the neocortex is made up of two main hemispheres. The right hemisphere controls the left side of the body and the left hemisphere controls the right side of the body. Signals are always crossing and communicating with each other. Each hemisphere processes or produces different types of thought. The right hemisphere has a dominant function in artistic, spatial, and musical thought and the left hemisphere has a dominant function in linear, rational and verbal thought (Looi, 3).

As humans grow and develop, they take part in activities that stimulate these hemispheres in the brain. The process of writing uses both hemispheres. Humans utilize their verbal and linear thought from the left hemisphere of the brain in order to write a clear and concise sentence. Humans use the right hemisphere of the brain in order to form a sentence with creative and meaningful content (Looi, 3).

The process of doing art comes from the right hemisphere of the brain. Art therapists have found that art activities tend to enhance the creative part or right hemisphere of the brain (Eckert, 2). Semir Zeki, a former professor of neurobiology at the University College in London published the article “Artistic Creativity and the Brain” in Science Magazine studying the relationship between cognitive abilities and the creative process. During his case, he discovered
that art benefits the brain by helping it to “think outside of the box” (Eckert, 3). Art pushes the brain to solve new problems in different ways. Greater concepts can be understood with greater ease. Art will jump over the process of linear and logical thinking (Eckert, 3).

Howard Gardener’s theory on multiple intelligences supports the theory of the arts being involved in the linguistic process. Gardener formulated a list of seven intelligences which humans use in their everyday lives. The multiple intelligences include linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, musical Intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, spatial intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence. Gardener claimed that all of these intelligences are interrelated to one another. For instance, musical intelligence runs almost parallel to linguistic intelligence. Hence, this is the reason why many musicians write music and their own lyrics. In fact, music is naturally sequential to and provides outstanding motivation for the development of a visual image. The seven intelligences rarely operate independently and tend to complement each other as people develop skills or solve problems (Smith, 5).

William Burroughs, renowned artist, poet and novelist, developed a similar theory when he discussed what he called the “Third Mind” of the brain. The “Third Mind” is a state in which something “new” or “other” emerges from a duel combination (Foster, xv). Hence, the third mind of the brain is working when two intelligences work together in order to complete a task. The most popular process which utilizes the third mind is called “ekphrasis.” The process of ekphrasis began as early as the ancient Greek era. Ekphrasis uses both writing and art to create a final written piece. Ekphrasis is the process of describing a visual work of art (Munsterberg, 1). The ancient Greeks discovered that the visual arts can aid in the linguistic process. When one uses ekphrasis, he or she writes a vivid description of a piece of artwork. In the Ancient Greek
Era, the most common visual images to write about were paintings and sculptures. The writers would take inspiration from these monumental pieces of art in order to write thought provoking poetry. In *Phaedrus*, Plato writes that when painting and poems are put together they “seem to talk to you as if they were intelligent” (Foster, xv). In the book *Third Mind: Creative Writing through Visual Art*, Tonya Foster and Karen Prevallet discuss the ekphrasis process as “listening to works of art and having a conversation with them.” As a result, the observer can produce exciting and creative responses. Hence, written creative works become “talk backs” to the visual stimulus (Foster, xv). The written work is also speaking for the visual image.

However, all of these successful writing-through-art strategies have been utilized on a fully developed brain. Could art enhance the creativity of a child learner’s writing?
Drawing and Writing Development in Children

Developmentally, children have the ability to express themselves through visual art much easier than through written words (Donley, 1). Drawing is an instinct whereas writing is learned (Donley, 1). From infancy, children will begin to draw before they ever attempt to write. According to Viktor Lowenfeld’s “Drawing Development of Children,” Children begin expressing themselves through art as early as 1 or 2. The “Scribbling Stage” usually begins at the age of two. Naturally, a child will only scribble for the kinesthetic experience but eventually the child will begin to label what the scribble means. This is the first step toward symbolic thinking or representing a drawing as a thought. They discover that a drawn symbol can stand for a real thing in the environment.

Then at the ages of three and four, the child goes through the “Pre-schematic stage” (Donley, 1). The child will be able to develop pictorial representations which are the first tangible records of a child’s thinking process. They are beginning to develop many complex symbols in order to capture their observations of the world around them. By five years old, they can tell stories within their pictures. Once the picture is complete, the child is often able to express his story.

I saw a child express her story within a picture when I was working a lunch break for a preschool teacher at the WOW Learning Center in New Milford. The students were at their respective centers set up for the day, “Blocks,” “Reading,” and “Art.” I sat down at the “Art Center” with a four-year-old girl named Ana. It was the first day of Preschool and I had asked her how her summer had gone. She stared at me like a deer in headlights and only three words came out of her mouth, “It was fun.” She went back to her paper and started coloring. I became frustrated with the fact that she probably wasn’t talking to me because I was not her beloved teacher. I moved on to the other centers in hopes of getting some type of social interaction. Ten
minutes later little Ana came up to me. She had drawn a picture of all of her family members. They were on top of a thick blue mass and there was a bright yellow circle at the top. There was also some type of floating brown dots on the side.

Then Ana began to talk. Pointing to her work of art, she explained how this one was her father and this one was her mother and then her sister was wearing this bathing suit. She showed me the water (blue mass at the bottom) and then explained to me how a big wave had knocked her and her older sister over and her sister’s bottoms fell off. I learned about the restaurant they went to and the chicken fingers (floating brown dots) that she ate. She even told me how the sun (big yellow circle) made her browner. I was in shock. This is the girl who wouldn’t give me more than three words ten minutes ago and was now giving me every detail about her family’s summer trip to Myrtle Beach. There were characters, setting, plot with a conflict, and even some dialogue. I began to notice this same concept with the other preschool students. They would draw a picture and depict the story that was happening within the picture. It was storytelling at its best and to think none of them would have even expressed their stories if it were not for the pictures that they drew.

When a child is about the age of six he goes through the Schematic stage. A “schema” is a child’s definite way of portraying an object. The schema represents the child’s active knowledge of the subject. For example, most children will develop a specific schema for an outdoor landscape. There will be a sun at the top and a blue line separating the blue sky from the green line of the ground. A child knows that the sky is blue above them and that the ground has green grass below them. These schemas help the child develop a better storyline because they help the child express their knowledge of the world (Donley, 2). Children at this age are just beginning to learn how to write, construct sentences and develop their phonemic awareness (Donley, 2).
Hence, when a child at this stage of development wants to create a written story, it is a child’s automatic instinct to draw a picture of their story first before writing a single word on their paper. Six year olds understand that it is much harder to formulate a written word with the correct letters, spelling and construction let alone an entire sentence with a complete thought or for that matter an entire story with a beginning middle and an end. A drawing can explain the entirety and complexity of their story all on one piece of paper.

Children at this age also begin to understand that text has a meaning as they write their names and the terms they are familiar with. After they draw their pictures, they will begin to construct phrases and labels for their drawings. Drawing plays an important role, providing a supportive scaffolding in order to construct a story (Calkins, 85). Kindergarten and First Grade teachers understand this developmental concept and will incorporate a “drawing” section within the students’ reading and writing work.

In the fall college semester of my junior year, I observed Ms. Allen’s First Grade classroom at Hayestown Avenue Elementary School in Danbury, Connecticut, during their reading and writing time. All of the students were told to read a book and then fill out the “All about My Book” sheet. The sheet consisted of a large black box with a couple lines underneath it. One boy was reading a picture book about a knight defeating a dragon. He whispered the words to himself pointing to the words and then gazing at the pictures. I gave him his sheet and asked him to write a sentence about the story he had just read. He took the sheet, grabbed his pencil and wrote the word “The.” He knew that word because it was a sight word that he practiced in the first grade. He stared at his paper and rested his hands on his forehead. He was facing some type of writer’s block. Then he took his crayons out of his desk and began drawing the action of the knight defeating the dragon. He would draw parts of his picture and then attempt to attack his sentence.
When he finished going back and forth with his drawing and writing, he created a wonderful action-packed picture with blood, a knight, and a dragon and then underneath the picture a simple sentence that said, “The nite kild the dragn.” He looked at his finished product and smiled as he pointed to his drawing. He was certainly prouder of his drawing than the frustrating sentence he had tried to construct. Hence, the drawing became a support system for his writing because he did not have the skills to easily construct a simple phrase.

Many students will move back and forth from the relief and stability of drawing to the challenge of writing. They soon begin to challenge themselves as their drawing develops. By second grade, children are in “The Gang Stage: The Age of Realism.” They want to draw more realistically and therefore create more action scenes. The more advanced their drawings become, the more advanced their writing becomes (Olson, 11). Their writing skills are developing and they are beginning to shift from drawing as a support system to drawing as a tool for self-expression.

By grade three, sentence and word construction come more naturally for the student and therefore give the student the ability to develop the content of his stories. At this point, the students’ writing is strong enough to stand alone. Students have the ability to easily story tell with their words and can now focus on becoming more creative with their characters, setting, and plot. They are ready to write a good piece of fiction. Art then becomes an outlet for creativity in a student’s written work.

I had observed Mr. Roos’ fourth grade classroom at Shelter Rock Elementary in Danbury, Connecticut during Reading/Writer’s Workshop time. They had just finished their creative writing section. Handmade books sat on the lip of the chalkboard. Looking through the newly
made novels, I had seen many of the illustrations. Some had drawn monsters while others had drawn baseball fields and flower gardens. After asking permission of the teacher, one student came up to me to show me his book. He flipped through the pages pointing to the pictures that he drew. He read a sentence from a page that said, “The detective found the monster and he was so scared.” He looked at his words and then looked at his picture. The drawing was a large black mass with eyes and teeth. The students pointed to the picture and said, “You see, the monster was big and hairy and black and he also had really sharp teeth. That’s why the detective was scared.” Why didn’t he say that then? His sentence was so simple. The teacher had explained to me that the students first had to write their stories and then in the final process they would have to write the prose in their books and could draw pictures that associated with the story. This teacher in particular found that a majority of his students were asking if they could add more to the story after they had drawn their pictures. Students were coming up with better adjectives and descriptions for their characters because they wanted their words to be as colorful as their pictures.

In this case, the students already had the tools that they needed to write a piece of fiction. Their art was merely enhancing their story. The students knew their words; it was now a matter of finding the right ones. Art can trigger this creative process.
The Benefits of Implementing Art with Creative Writing: Teachers’ Success Stories

Kathleen Walsh-Piper, art museum educator and author of *Image to Word: Art and Creative Writing*, describes the benefits of writing through art when she says, “Not only does the work of art provide a point of inspiration for the writer, but it also causes the viewer to slow down, analyze, and respond to the work and to become aware of the looking process.”

*The New York Times* featured an article in 2002 about an educational program that had been utilizing art as a method of creative writing since 1993. *Writing through the Arts* encourages high school students to “read” the visual arts just as they would a story or poem. Students visit museums and then bring the inspiration of the art they see to their classrooms. Students would take professional pieces of art and write poems or descriptive essays inspired by that piece. For example, Eric Raue, a ninth grader from Fox Lane High School wrote his poem “Forms” inspired by an Alexander Calder painting and was honored with many other students in the program for his exceptionally creative work.

The successful process of “reading art” and then writing a creative piece highlights the importance of observation. Creative writers can open an entirely new thought in their mind just by observing a piece of art. Hence the process of “reading art” is successful because it is an aesthetic experience. For instance, seeing color brings about emotions. Children can associate the color red with being mad or the color blue with being calm. They can also associate red with hearts and love and blue with tears and sadness. Every child is different and every piece of art can evoke different emotions and aesthetic experiences. For example, a picture of a house in a nice suburban town might evoke two different things in two children. One child might think of
his family unit and the great times he has at his house. He can possibly smell his favorite cookies his mom bakes or the fresh cut grass on the lawn. On the other hand, another child might think of how he wishes to live in a home that was so nice. He might hear that time his mother screamed at the landlord or taste the canned baked beans he had to eat for dinner because they could not afford a meal. One child may feel content viewing the picture, while the other may feel sorrow. Before viewing the piece, the student might not have thought about their lives in such detail. As they observe and process the visual image they begin to form ideas and opinions. Why not have them write about the detail?

Many teachers will utilize art as writing prompts and find that even though they have given students the same prompt, many students will have written their own unique observation of it. I have noticed that my mother, Mrs. Harris, has found this to be true in many instances of her third grade classroom at Faith Preparatory in New Milford, Connecticut. For example, she had given the students a picture taken by a professional photographer. The photograph had three chipmunks in it. One was hanging off of a tree branch and holding onto the other chipmunk that was holding onto a small flower. The third chipmunk was on the ground staring at the two chipmunks above. She told the children that they had to observe the picture and create a story based on the picture. One child turned the chipmunks into superheroes that had gotten into a jam after realizing that their superpowers weren’t that they could fly but make flowers magically appear. Another child turned the image into an elaborate chipmunk love triangle where by the end of the story; the one boy chipmunk was trying to stop the other boy chipmunk from giving the girl chipmunk the flower. Mrs. Harris was certainly impressed with the creativity that came from her third grade students after they had closely observed an image. A student went up to her after they had presented their short stories to the class and said “Wouldn’t it be cool if we took
our own pictures and created stories from them?” What if the images were their own? There
would be no boundaries. Students would not be limited to what the professional artist captured
but, they would make a picture that captured the students’ own perception. Then everything from
that perception would be further expressed in words. The process of having the students create
the art and then create the written piece would certainly be one step in further enhancing a
student’s ability to think creatively.

At the Boys and Girls Club in the inner-city of Kalamazoo, Detroit, John and Julie Moulds-
Rybicki decided to co-teach with professional photographer Mary Whalen for a special visual art
and writing integration program (Foster, 175). The students were given cameras and were let
loose to capture images on Heidelberg Street. The students were snapping images of junked cars,
toilets, tennis shoes and mirrors. Mary had helped them develop their artistic photographs and
pick the ones that spoke to them the most. Then John and Julie had them describe out loud what
they felt about their photos. When the students would say something inspiring they would
scream, “Write that down!” John said of the experience, “Even a child with remedial writing
skills can often speak a beautiful river of a sentence…We urged this group of kids to find
something in their Heidelberg Street photos that triggered their senses or some emotion up from
their heart’s core” (Foster, 176). As a result, the students’ developed written narratives, poems,
memoirs and short stories that depicted mesmerizing and captivating images.

Faith Zajicek, a High school English and Art teacher, also strongly believes in the
integration of student’s doing both art and writing in the classroom. She encourages teachers not
to categorize student’s learning into neat divisions but to expand their creative mind as a whole
(Zajicek, 1). In her journal, Writing through Art she claims, “A typical curriculum offers isolated
bits and pieces of information, rather than presenting students with a giant jigsaw puzzle that
comes together to form a wonderful picture.” For Faith’s high school students, Art class is English class and English class is Art class. She has implemented many lessons where students have to use both the writing and the art process in order to create a final product. She has her students keep a Design Journal. Students must record through art everything that they observe that arouses an emotion or idea within them: shapes, contrasting images, colors, etc. Then in English class, students will have to observe their Design journal and write about the image that inspired them, responding with a concept, or described an emotion or detailed memory. The key is the detail. Students write best when they write with detail. The image that they have personally produced provides them with the insight into detail. Art stimulates personal responses and inner reactions. Students can express these personal feelings when they create the art themselves (Zajicek, 1).

Art can help children express and make sense of feelings that are too intense for words. When the art is finished, then a child can attempt to speak about the work and eventually develop the words that best describe the image that he or she is trying to portray.

Mrs. Harris, like Zajicek, decided to have her children go through with the art process before attempting the writing process. She knew that her students had the ability to observe an image and formulate creative storytelling ideas. Her goal was to get them to tell a story that had detailed imagery conveying emotion. As a high school art teacher she attempted to pull emotions from her students by utilizing a common high school art project. In her high school painting course, students were told to pick from a basket an array of emotions and feelings such as pain, love, hate, anger, etc. Then the students would have to describe that feeling only using paint in abstract forms: line, movement, shape, contrast. For example, students were not allowed to represent the term “love” with hearts and x’s and o’s. As a result, many of her high school students have
tremendous emotional pieces, ones that when you looked at them, you felt that feeling. One student used an impressionistic style in order to convey the feeling of being “incoherent.” The piece was a blurry image with greys and blacks and a yellow light clouded over in the center.

Mrs. Harris gave this project to her little ones. For these third graders, the whole idea of going to the art room to paint during their writing lesson was intriguing for them from the start. Picking from the basket and choosing an emotion was a task they could not wait to accomplish. Once these children had their hand-picked emotion, they went right to the task of choosing their colors. In their oversized smocks, they splattered and whipped and pressed and rolled their paint filled brushes. At the same time, they were very serious as if they were in another, more intense world. They were living, breathing, contemplating and remembering that specific feeling, whether it was love or hate or pain or boredom. In fact, the child that received boredom could not stop yawning as he painted. When the paintings were finished, Mrs. Harris could not believe that her third grade students had produced such thought provoking pieces.

The next day after teaching a lesson on similes, Mrs. Harris had given the paintings to the students. The students were to observe their feeling painting and write a simile poem or a short story with the use of similes in it. The students had to compare their emotion to something else that was similar. The students went right to work observing their art and then writing. It was the same process Lowenfeld claims that a kindergartner goes through in his developmental stage of writing with moving back and forth from the art to the paper and pencil. However, their artwork was not scaffolding their writing but inspiring it. One boy had written a love poem describing love like “a mother’s hug when I get home from school.” One girl had a Pain painting and wrote a detailed story about the time she broke her leg. She described the how the world looked “like it was blurry from all of my tears.” Her painting happened to have very sharp lines but also
purposeful smudges. Mrs. Harris had accomplished what she had set out to do, evoke emotional thought within the children. As a result, the students’ written pieces had intriguing detail with synesthetic imagery.

Mary Ann Reilly, a former middle school English Teacher from at Darrow Middle School in New York, also utilized art expression with her students to inspire the genre of poetry. Reilly used a method called “art conversations.” After reading the picture book, “The Lost Boys of Sudan,” Reilly asked her students to pair up and converse about what they had heard and seen in the book without verbally communicating. The students had to finger paint. When the pairs were done with their “conversation pieces,” Reilly asked them to observe the lines, colors, forms and movement. She asked them to take images from their art and depict in the best words possible the journey of these boys of Sudan. With paper and colorful markers in hand, the students began brainstorming descriptive words and phrases. They stood up and looked at their paintings in different angles to get a different perspective. She watched as the students studied their paintings and then their written work until they received a beautifully descriptive and thought provoking poem. In Reilly’s article, Finding the Right Words: Art Conversations and Poetry she describes the importance of art integration in her classroom:

“As students’ visual attention shifts from image to image, it is as if potential paths to new or altered meanings are realized. What interests me here is the quick thinking and categorization that happens as the learner sifts through random options, selecting and rejecting words, images, and phrases. Such perturbation aids the generation of possibilities, not certainties.” (p.105)
In 1976, Albert Einstein said:

“The words or language as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The physical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be “voluntarily” reproduced and combined.

The above-mentioned elements are, in my case, of visual and some muscular type. Conventional words or other signs have to be sought for laboriously only in a secondary stage, when the mentioned associative play is sufficiently established and can be reproduced at will” (Olson, 4).

Albert Einstein would be considered a visual learner.

Children who are visual learners will naturally process information through visual images instead of words. Like Albert Einstein, many children have problems with language. In fact, over 15 percent of children do not respond well to verbal instruction and a majority of those outside of this percentage have varying degrees of difficulty with verbal instruction (Olson, 5). Even though visual learners view the world in great detail, they are not considered as intellectuals in the classroom because the verbal learners grasp words easier and communicate more eloquently. As a result, visual learners tend to be “reluctant writers” in the classroom (Olson, 3). In order to
have the visually minded students improve in their writing abilities a teacher must guide them in “envisioning” their writing. The first step towards doing so is the visual-narrative approach.

The visual narrative approach utilizes images in order to convey a story. For example, in the professional art world, “narrative art” has historically used pictures to tell a story. In the education world, professors Brent and Marjorie Wilson founded the visual narrative drawing program in 1977 at the Edith C. Baker Elementary School in Brookline Massachusetts (Olson, 11). The Wilsons wanted to explore their belief that children have a natural tendency to tell stories with their drawings. They believed that educators should become more aware and understanding of the cognitive activity behind a child’s “private world” (Olson, 11). The professors encouraged an art curriculum comingled with the writing curriculum in order to aid students in developing their storytelling abilities. Through the implementation of this program, the Wilsons discovered that the students were developing a stronger vocabulary as well as more complex and satisfying stories. They realized that the more advanced with detail were students’ drawings, the more advanced and detailed were students’ writings. It was not just the visual learners that did exceptionally well, but the verbal learners also did well. Students who are stronger visually rely on their images in order to give a detailed story. Students who are stronger verbally rely on their words in order to give a detailed narrative picture. Hence, the Wilsons concluded that all children are visual and verbal learners because “one informs the other” (Olson, 51).

The Wilsons stress to language arts teachers that even though children may be stronger visually or verbally, all children learn in both visual and verbal modalities. By the second or third grade, children are educated with both the verbal and visual modes of learning. Hence, they can move back and forth in both domains without effort. When a child begins to have trouble with
the verbal mode, then he may move on to the visual mode in order to create more detail for the verbal mode. One informs the other. Janet Olson, author of *Envisioning Writing* gives a perfect scenario:

“A child may begin a story with words, and after writing a paragraph or two feel that he or she does not have enough detailed information to continue. At this point, the child should stop writing and draw a picture of the troublesome part of the story in order to gather more detailed information. When the student feels that this has been accomplished, then he or she can move back to the written form with more than enough data to augment and to continue what has already been written” (Olson, 51).

Then Olson gives an example of a student’s paper that conveys high abilities in both verbal and visual modes. The paper has a body of text about an eagle and within the text was an image of an eagle. The words and images overlapped each other. Olson reports that the teacher equally encouraged the student’s verbal and visual abilities (Olson, 52).

The visual mode can enhance student’s abilities in their verbal mode in ways such as reading, writing, and vocabulary. Students will develop stronger reading and writing skills if they develop images first. When a reader reads, he develops a picture in his mind of what the setting and characters look like. When he draws, it will be easier for him to express ideas, thoughts or emotions based upon the piece that he has read. Art therapist, Patricia Beiler, from Cameron Elementary School in Chicago uses this method with her forty sixth through eighth grade students. Every day, Beiler pulls a few students out of class at a time in order to help them with their literacy skills. For her assignments, artwork is based on reading. For example, her students
were told to read *The Diary of Ann Frank* and then create out of a basket and fabrics what they felt was a “safe place.” Students were able to show a “safe place” without being limited to their small ranged vocabulary. The art gave her students the confidence to speak about their pieces. They knew that the image in their minds was represented in the detail of their three-dimensional project. As they spoke about the picture to their class, Beiler found that they were discussing their descriptions eloquently with detailed vocabulary. The next step was to write what they had spoken. Their detailed and creative art influenced their detailed and creative speech which influenced their detailed and creative essays. In the article about Beiler’s class, *Art Class Helps At-risk Students Improve Reading and Writing Skills*, the school principal, Jacqueline Connelly states that Beiler’s methods have had a profound effect on the school’s standardized test scores (Beiler, 18).

Many students with disabilities have a difficult time expressing themselves in words or speech but can excel in different art forms that require spatial understanding, movement, and negotiating the world through textures. (Chin, 1) Teacher and art therapist, Ellen Holtzblatt says, “Art does more than illustrate learning. Art enhances learning. Art bypasses verbal limitations and intellectual expectations.” An important factor when using art with special education students is that there is no right or wrong way to create art. Special education students find themselves frustrated when they are corrected for their vocabulary, reading, comprehension and writing mistakes. Art gives these students a creative outlet where they can always be right. They feel equal among their peers and find that they are a part of a community rather than a special minority.

ESL students also benefit from art when learning language and writing skills. Creating art can help students connect with content. (Dolha, 1) Teachers can separate large pieces of text into
smaller phrases to make the reading less intimidating. Then students can determine what the piece is about by creating a visual picture with art. Eventually students will interpret a visual summary. An ESL student’s visual summary will be the foundation for him to develop a descriptive written summary. Students will succeed in expressing their ideas in English much easier if teachers utilize the visual-narrative approach (Dolha, 1).
Methods to Teaching the Writing-through-Art Process

There are many teachers who are hesitant about using art in their writing classrooms for various reasons. Because drawing began as a support system for children, they believe that students may never shift from using art as a form of support to writing on their own. Teachers do not want students to only use writing as a form of caption for their pictures. Teachers argue that students will rely too much on their drawings for their content (Calkins, 87). They do not understand that during development a child’s art, converts from being a support system for a child’s writing to a becoming a creative outlet for a child’s writing. Calkins book, The Art of Teaching Writing discusses a teacher who did not believe in the art through writing approach because he had one student who would consistently draw the Pink Panther in his stories. That particular student was gifted in drawing Pink Panther. Hence, the student only wrote about Pink Panther. The main problem concerning this student’s “Pink Panther” work is not the student, but the teacher. Teachers need to be actively involved or students will not have the confidence to expand their horizons in creativity.

At the realism stage of development, students face a “crisis of confidence” (Donato, 31). Students want to create art that appears realistic and become frustrated if their art is not up to par. Teachers need to have students realize that they do not have to be artists in order to inspire their written work. For example, when Mary O Reilly taught her “art conversations” lesson to her class she first made her own conversation piece. Her piece appeared as though a kindergartener made it. Her canvas had lines and shapes and forms and people made of sticks. On the other hand, she read her poem inspired by her art and it was emotionally captivating. She proved to her
students that it was not the image but the content of the image that gave her the ability to write such a creative piece.

Many teachers will avoid the use of art in the classroom because they are not artists themselves. One does not need to be an artist to teach writing through art. In fact, a teacher benefits from not being an artist because an artist may find himself trapped in evaluating the student’s work as a “child artist” rather than a “child learner.” Mrs. Harris, a former artist herself said, “As an artist, sometimes I have to stop myself and not evaluate the students’ artwork as an artistic piece. The artwork is only a tool to enhance their writing. When it comes to this, I have to let them freely do whatever comes to their minds so that they can open themselves to various possibilities of thought.”

One way in which teachers encourage students to create art as a writing tool is to use a method Olson terms as “honest dialogue” (Olson, 39). A teacher needs to put forth the time and effort in order to understand the narrative dimension of a student’s drawing. “Honest dialogue” is a tool that offers students the ability to express their drawing in words and gives teachers the ability to understand the perspective of the drawing (Olson, 39). At times teachers will only glance at a drawing and assume that they have understood everything that a child is trying to portray. Some teachers will even judge a student’s drawing based upon its aesthetic appeal.

Olson mentions a teacher who was showing the work of his student to other teachers. The art was very good although the teacher was showing the piece in order to convey that he wanted the student to be as expressive in his writings as he was in his drawings. On the other hand, another teacher had a special education student who was also exceptionally good at developing images of cartoon characters from memory. Despite the student’s learning disabilities, he had
written words underneath the pictures that had very meaningful content. In this case, before the student had even attempted to write, the teacher had a conversation with him. The teacher asked the student to talk about his drawings, describing the details and what those drawings made him feel like. As a result of this process of “honest dialogue,” the teacher gave this student some practice in translating the visual part of his mind into the verbal mode, which is essential for the writing through art process to be successful with children. When teachers utilize this method, they are recognizing their students as communicators as opposed to artists (Olson, 40).

The teacher who had despised the Pink Panther work of his student could have had a discussion with the student as to other reasons why this character stuck out in his mind. The student might have been attached to the character for reasons other than he can draw it exceptionally well. Even if the student only loved to draw Pink Panther because he was good at it, the “honest dialogue” could have been a tool for enlightening the student to explore other ideas. The teacher could suggest, “What if the Pink Panther was a fat, purple rhinoceros? Then what would Pink Panther do?”

The teacher can reflect on his or her student’s work and offer an art prompt that can encourage students to create an array of different characters. For example, a teacher could have a discussion with the students about superlative characters (i.e. the biggest man, the smallest woman, the fattest cat, the skinniest elephant). The art prompt would be that students would draw their own unique superlative characters on a sheet of paper. After a while students will discover that they have access to a variety of characters in their mind. They will find that they do not need to rely on drawing stereotypical characters or characters that are seen on television.
In order for a student to successfully use art as a writing tool, teachers need to be supportive. They must get involved and ask questions in order to understand the creative mind of a child. The education world is rapidly converting from a teacher-oriented classroom to a student-oriented classroom (Felder, 1). In today’s classroom, teachers are trained to be appreciative of student expression. As a result, teachers need to be facilitators, aiding students as they explore their education. Art offers a means for that exploration.

Art experiences help children develop independence within limits, and gives them the opportunity to represent their ideas on paper or in other formats. Most importantly, creative expression lets children tap into their own imagination—which is what being a child is all about.

Zero to Three: National Center for Infants Toddlers and Families
Lesson Plan Unit: Teaching Fiction through Art

For the purpose of the thesis, the lesson plan unit teaches third grade students how to write a fiction short story through art. Third grade is the developmental stage when students no longer use art as a support system for their writing but rather an inspiration for their writing. The unit will cover the basic elements of a short story: character, setting, plot and even some dialogue. The lesson plan unit will last a month to two months depending upon what the teacher can cover in a 1 to 1 ½ hour writing lesson. In the body of the unit, character is designed as a two week sub unit, setting is one week, plot two weeks and dialogue a couple of days. Also, one to two weeks can be devoted to revision, editing, and publication. The lessons mirror a typical writing lesson in the elementary public school system. They contain Mini Lessons, Writer’s Workshops, Group Work, and Writer’s Notebooks. The only difference is that this particular lesson plan unit also has Art Workshops. Every Art Workshop will always come before a Writer’s Workshop in order to stress the purpose of the thesis.
Teaching Fiction through Art: Initiation to the Unit

The teacher initiates the writing through art process to the students by reading the picture book, The Adventures of Harold and the Purple Crayon. The teacher explains to the class how Harold created an entire world by drawing it. Harold drew characters and a setting. Harold even spoke with his characters and essentially created a story plot through drawing with his purple crayon. The teacher explains to the students how they are going to create their own “made-up” or fictional stories by using their artwork. They will create their own characters, setting, plot, and dialogue. Throughout the process, all of the student’s drawings and written pieces will be saved in their Writing/Art portfolio. The pieces will be used for the final finished piece. The teacher explains that by the end of the month, they will have a finished product, an illustrated short story book. The teacher discusses with the students that they are not meant to be artists; in fact, their artwork does not have to be good. The teacher explains that Harold did not need to create a world that looked real in order to get to the next part of the story. Harold’s art helped him find the story. The teacher explains that, just like Harold, the students’ art will only be used to help them develop their stories. The art will not be graded, only the effort and the written work.

The teacher gives the students expandable portfolio dividers. The students decorate them with markers, stickers, etc. and title the portfolio “My Story Journey.” The teacher gives the students Writer’s Notebooks well as Art sketch journals for the creating art and writing process. The students will use the Art sketch journals for assignments as well as daily art journaling. The Writer’s Notebooks will be used in order to gauge the student’s progress. It will also be utilized as another communication outlet between the student and the teacher. The student’s homework assignments each day will be to write a letter to the teacher reflecting on the art and writing.
process of that day. For example, after the initiation students will be asked to write in their Writer’s Notebooks a letter to the teacher explaining their reaction to “Harold and the Purple Crayon” as well as the writing through art process.
Character (Week 1)

The goal of character (week one) is for the students to explore the physical details and appearances of their main character. By the end of week one, students will have a fully developed character observation essay.

The teacher initiates the character lesson by asking the students to search the web for pictures of a few of their favorite animated characters in books or movies. The teacher asks the students to write in their Writer’s Notebooks a list of the qualities they like best about the characters they chose.

Mini Lesson 1

The teacher shares with the students that when authors create characters, they consider the character’s physical description, thoughts and feelings, behavioral traits, and background. The teacher instructs the students to identify these characteristics in the characters they have chosen online. The teacher discusses how characters can have similar qualities and traits but they are also all different and unique. The teacher will introduce the students to the thousands of Dr. Seuss characters (Hamel, 2). The teacher posts up a few of the characters on projection or smart board and ask the students to describe them. The teacher explains how each character has the author’s style but is different in his personalities and traits. The teacher also explains that the Dr. Seuss characters are unique because they have their own exaggerated physical traits: one character is too small, while another is too fat or too tall.

Art/Writer’s Workshop

Then the teacher introduces a drawing activity. The teacher has a basket of nouns and a basket of descriptive adjectives. The students pick one from each basket and draw the character.
For example, one student might choose, a “Skinny Cow” or a “Tall Mouse.” This activity will allow the students to explore unique characters. Then the teacher gives the students a drawing prompt: “Draw as many superlative (-est) characters as you can (ex: the fattest ant, the largest baby, the fittest old man) Fill the paper.” The students fill a blank paper with as many drawings of exaggerated characters that they can produce. The students will discover that they have a wide array of unique characters stored in their minds. The teacher asks the students to choose two or three of their favorite characters and journal in a letter to the teacher why they like those characters. When they are done writing, they must choose the main characters for their story. They must draw the characters separately on another piece of paper.

Mini Lesson 2

The teacher displays on projector or smart board, a main character that the teacher drew himself. The teacher describes the physical characteristics or anatomy of his or her character. There will be lines pointing to various parts of the character’s body: eyes, nose, mouth, ears, body, arms, legs, etc. The teacher writes these categories on a separate piece of paper or on a separate document on the smart board. Together, the teacher and the students list descriptive words and phrases under the respective categories.

Writer’s Workshop

The teacher instructs the students to describe the anatomy of their own main characters using the full body drawings from the day before. They will do exactly what the teacher did, pointing out specific body parts and describing them. From the students’ anatomy descriptions, the teacher asks the students to develop a descriptive paragraph about their main character’s physical appearance.

Mini Lesson 3
The teacher displays a website, Pixar: How we do it:

http://www.pixar.com/howwedoit/index.html that shows the animation process at Pixar Studios. The teacher talks about Greg who is a sculpture animator for Pixar. The teacher discusses Greg and the Pixar Process: Drawing, Sculpting, Scanning the images onto a computer and Marionetting. The teacher asks students why sculpture helps Greg create characters such as Nemo and why sculpture could help the students develop their characters. Students write responses in Writer’s Notebooks. The teacher opens a discussion from responses and explains how sculpture is a necessary step in order for the animators to capture the characters’ dimensions and movement. The teacher also discusses the term, “idiosyncrasies,” little mannerisms (things we do unconsciously). The teacher explains how some people have idiosyncrasies when they are nervous (ex: tapping foot, pulling hair, swaying back and forth, etc.) while others might have idiosyncrasies when they are mad (pacing back and forth, twitching nose, crossing arms, hands on hips) The teacher has students give examples of idiosyncrasies from observing others as well as themselves. The teacher gives the example of Nemo whose idiosyncrasy was to flap his fin really fast and hard because his fin was too small.

Art/Writer’s Workshop

The teacher chooses an action or idiosyncrasy for his or her character to convey (ex: preparing to sit, doing a handstand, clapping hands, running, tapping foot, pulling hair, twiddling thumbs etc.) Then the teacher sculptures with clay the action of his character while saying out loud what he is thinking. The teacher might explain that the character is plump so he is creating a big belly. The teacher may also say that his character has very long legs because when he runs his
legs stretch out far. The teacher might also say that because his character is plump, his character has the idiosyncrasy of waddling from place to place.

The students pick some actions for their characters. The students sculpt the main characters from their stories and during the process explore if their characters might have any idiosyncrasies. The students write a descriptive observation essay of their characters performing some type of action in their Writer’s Notebooks.

*Mini Lesson 4*

The teacher shows students a slideshow of facial expressions from the photography book *Facial Expressions: A Visual Reference for Artists*. As the teacher goes through each slide, the students must write in the Writer’s Notebooks the best words to describe the faces. The students discuss their responses to the teacher and the rest of the class. The teacher explains how authors describe characters faces in order to convey what the character is thinking without actually saying what the character is thinking.

*Art Workshop*

The teacher gives students a template with circles on the paper and a mirror. The teacher asks students to draw a different face in each circle. As the students draw, they will find that people have many different facial expressions. As a facilitating teacher, he or she may ask questions such as “How do your eyes change when you are afraid or surprised? What happens to your eyebrows? Does your mouth change when you are angry? When do you get lines in your forehead?” The teacher encourages students to look in the mirror so that they can see the different faces that they make.
**Writer’s Workshop**

After the students draw expressions, they write the best emotion word to depict what the circle faces are portraying. (Ex: happy, sad, angry, and bored) The students choose a few of the faces that they think their character expresses in their observation essay. The students will add a couple of sentences in their observation essays pertaining to facial expression.
**Character (Week 2)**

The goal of character (week two) is for the students to explore the background, thoughts, and feelings of their character. By the end of week two, students will have a fully developed Character Sketch.

**Mini Lesson 5**

The teacher explains that in order to fully understand a character, an author must know his characters’ past, present, and future. The teacher posts pictures of different bedrooms. In each bedroom the students find objects or clues that give a hint to the owner’s past, present or future. For example, a basketball might show that the person plays the sport currently, but a dusty teddy bear might indicate that the person used to have a bond with the old toy.

**Art/Writer’s Workshop**

Students draw the bedrooms of their main characters. In the bedroom, the students should incorporate objects of the characters, past, present and future. Students choose some of the objects that they have drawn and write a small paragraph about the objects’ significance to the characters.

**Mini Lesson 6**

The teacher initiates describing character emotion by introducing the story of Mona Lisa. The teacher shows a picture of the Mona Lisa painting and asks students about the emotion in her face. The teacher explains to the students the story behind Mona Lisa’s face: Mona Lisa had recently lost a child through death. Leonardo Da Vinci worked very hard to get her to smile, and she would only give a half smile. The teacher explains to the students that they must find the story behind their character’s face.

**Art Workshop 7**
The teacher instructs the students to choose an emotion and paint the emotion in abstract forms. First, the teacher will choose an emotion and show students her creative process. As the teacher paints, she will narrate out loud what she is thinking about the emotion and why she is using certain abstract forms. Through the teacher’s example, students will have the confidence to connect to their own emotion as well as understand that they must only use abstract forms.

*Writer’s Workshop*

After the students paint, the teacher asks them to write a paragraph about a time when their characters might have felt that emotion. This time, students are writing about their character’s internal description instead of physical description. Students can write about memories, colors, visual scenes, or even situations that will descriptively depict that character’s emotion. While writing, students will view their painting and facial expressions piece in order to inspire the writing process.

*Mini Lesson 8*

The teacher creates a Facebook page for Spongebob Squarepants or any other popular character that the students are watching at the time. The teacher instructs the students to view Spongebob’s page and find details about him. Students must fill out all of the blanks from the character sketch template the teacher gives them. When every student is finished exploring, the teacher explains that a character sketch is similar to a Facebook profile. When an author creates a character, he must explore many details about the character in order to understand the character fully. Authors create dynamic characters when they develop character sketches or profiles. Explain to the students that a majority of their character sketch for their main characters is
already done. They know their characters: physical appearances, past, present, future and emotional reactions. The next project should only enhance any other details that might be important for the development of their characters.

Art Workshop

Students create an “All About My Character Collage,” The teacher provides newspapers, magazines, and internet access for printing images. Students cut and paste images onto a large paper in order to form a visual representation of their main dynamic character.

Writer’s Workshop

The teacher instructs the students to fill out the Character Sketch List Template for their main character. The collage should help them discover the details for the template. Then the teacher asks the students to devise a character sketch for their main character using the following: Observation essay, Bedroom Objects Essay, and Character Emotion Essay.
Setting

During the Setting Week, students will choose their main settings for their story. They will learn that a setting is the time, place, and environment of the story. They will also learn the importance of using detailed and figurative language when describing the setting in their story.

Mini Lesson 9

The teacher introduces setting to the students by reading the book “All the Places to Love.” The book is about a boy who describes the places around him. Before reading the book, the students must write in their Writer’s Notebooks what they think the book is about by looking at the illustration on the cover. After the teacher reads, he asks students if their descriptions were close to the actual story and if the illustrations helped them to describe the story better. The teacher explains that the boy described the settings well because he loved the setting and knew the setting very well. The teacher discusses with students the places that he loves and draws on the board everything that he loves about that place. While the teacher draws, he talks about why he is drawing certain things. He also explains that he should determine the time, place and the environment of his setting. The teacher then takes out a large postcard and posts it on the board or smart board. The teacher writes a letter to his students as though he is a character in the midst of his setting. The teacher describes the time, place, and environment of his setting in a paragraph as he looks at his artwork.

Art/Writer’s Workshop

The teacher instructs the students to draw a place that their characters love or know very well. The students must pretend that they are their characters and write a paragraph in their
postcard about the setting. They should incorporate the time, place, and environment of that setting.

Mini Lesson 10

In a previous homework assignment, students will have already sketched in their Art Journals specific things that they noticed in the environments they encountered away from school. Then, the teacher instructs the students, in their Writer’s Notebooks, to describe the things they sketched and the importance of those things to that environment. Teacher instructs students to write a letter to the teacher about what they thought about these specific things and if they had ever noticed them before.

The teacher shows various travel brochures. The teacher explains that a travel brochure gives colorful images and detailed adjectives in order to entice the traveler to want to go there. The teacher separates the students into groups. The teacher instructs students to circle all the enticing words and pictures that they can find. The groups discuss with each other and journal why they felt as though these words helped the images and vice versa.

Art/Writer’s Workshop

The students create their own travel brochures of their setting using graphic design artwork. Their brochures will depict the detail of the environments in their stories. First, the students should draw all of the places that the characters “visit” in the story. Then the teacher uploads drawing into computers. The students pick the best layout to depict their setting. The students must choose the best colorful words to describe the places in the story. The teacher notes to the students that not all of the places that they feature in their travel brochure will end up in their story, but some places might help in discovering more character background or a better grasp of the plot of their story.
Mini lesson 11

The teacher explains that in order to describe a setting well, one can use figurative language. The teacher explains that a metaphor describes one thing by comparing it to another and a simile is the same but uses the word “like.” The teacher shows examples of similes and metaphors in the picture book “All the Places to Love.” For example, the teacher could use the phrase: “Trout look like jewels in the sunlight.”

The teacher asks students to look at the illustrated image that depicts the phrase. Can trout look like jewels? The teacher asks students to journal in Writer’s Notebooks what else the trout could convey.

The teacher pairs the students. The teacher gives the students five images found in a setting (sun, playground, bed, stove, castle etc.). One student holds up an image. The other student writes in his Writer’s Notebook as many metaphors he can think of that describes that image. The students switch. After the timed activity, they discuss their metaphors with each other, explaining why they chose them.

Art Workshop

The teacher gives the students a shoebox as well as other various materials in order to create a diorama. In the diorama, the students will visually depict the main setting of their story. The teacher asks students to think about specific, tangible objects in their main setting. Once again, the teacher facilitates the process by asking the students questions such as, “What can you pick up in your setting? Does anything smell? Does anything create light?” Utilizing different materials in order to create other things in the environment will allow the students to explore the world of figurative language as well as synesthetic imagery. For example, a student could have an outside environment and choose to make clouds out of cotton balls. Hence, when the student
goes to describe the setting, he may describe the clouds to be like soft cotton balls. Also, a student could use a sock to make a bed blanket and describe the character’s bedroom as unclean and smelling like old socks.

**Writer’s Workshop**

Just like in the image to metaphor/simile game played earlier, the students look at their dioramas and setting sketches and list as many metaphors as they can to describe the images in their settings. Then students revisit their descriptive setting postcards and travel brochures and add in metaphors or similes to enhance their setting. The students use their postcards, travel brochures, and diorama in order to write a developed Setting Sketch.
**Plot**

Students will discover the beginning and end of their stories. They will discover the main conflict in their story. They will also develop an outline that depicts the main plot elements of their story: Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, and Resolution. Students will also utilize all of their character, setting, and plot projects in order to write the first draft of their stories.

**Mini Lesson 12**

The teacher shows the short film “Scrat: Gone Nutty” to the students. The teacher discusses the importance of knowing how a story is going to start and how a story is going to end. The teacher explains how in the beginning, Scrat wanted the nut and in the end Scrat did not get the nut. The teacher explains that the best way to discover the beginning and end of a story is to think of the characters goal or purpose in the story. The teacher puts a picture of Scrat on the projector or smart board. The teacher asks students to think of Scrats goal or purpose. Scrat’s goal is to get the nut. Hence, in the beginning the character had a goal and in the end the character can either gain the goal or not gain the goal or find something else in the process.

**Art Workshop**

The teacher gives the students a template with three large thinking bubbles. The bubble in the middle will have the caption “What do I want?” The bubble on the left will have the caption “What will I do to get what I want?” The bubble on the right will have the caption “What will happen to me and will I get what I want?” The teacher explains that Scrat will have an image of a
nut in the center bubble, an image of him chasing the nut in the left bubble, and an image of him hurting himself and without a nut in the right bubble.

*Writer’s Workshop*

After creating their main character’s goal, beginning, and end images, the teacher instructs the students to write a simple rough beginning scene and end scene for their stories.

*Mini Lesson 13*

The teacher explains that a character may have trouble gaining a goal because there can be conflict in the story. The teacher asks the students to identify the conflicts in Scrat’s story. The teacher discusses that a conflict is either character vs. character, character vs. self, character vs. nature, or character vs. society. The teacher shows images that depict these conflicts and discusses specific instances where Scrat faces these conflicts.

*Art Workshop I*

The students are given a template divided into the four sections of conflict. The students draw scenes in which their main character is battling another character, self, nature, or society. The students choose which conflict scene would best fit the beginning and end of their stories. The students write a few simple sentences explaining the conflict in their story.

*Art Workshop II*

The teacher instructs the students to paint a contrasting image piece. The teacher models first how to create a contrasting image. One half of the paper conveys certain colors and forms; and the other half of the paper conveys the opposite colors and forms. The teacher explains that the “opposite” depends on whatever the student thinks is opposite in the conflict of the story. For example, the teacher might do a contrasting piece on the story of “Scrat: Gone Nuts.” The conflict would be Scrat versus nature. On one side the teacher might paint brown streaks to indicate Scrat’s brown fur and his speed. On the other side, the teacher might paint large white
objects surrounded by black to indicate the avalanche that falls on Scrat and keeps him blind from finding the acorn. As students paint, they may discover emotions within the conflict or more colorful words to depict the conflict.

Writers Workshop

While looking at their conflict drawings and paintings, students write a descriptive and emotional conflict scene in their Writer’s Notebooks.

Mini Lesson 14

The teacher teaches the “Story Hill: Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, and Resolution” using the visual story of Jack and Jill on projection or smart board. The teacher stresses how the Story Hill is important because it can act like an outline for the plot of their stories. The teacher pairs the students into groups and asks the students to find the Story Hill of “Scrat: Gone Nuts.” After, the teacher and students discuss their findings.

Art Workshop

The teacher instructs students to draw a large “hill” that represents the characters goal in the story. For example, Scrat’s hill would be a nut and Jack and Jill’s hill would be a pail of water. On a separate piece of paper the students draw a scene from their own developing story that depicts each Story Hill element. The teacher will instruct the students to cut out their scenes
and paste them on their Story Hills. The finished product should look like a visual timeline in the form of a hill.

*Writer’s Workshop I*

Students write their action scenes with detailed descriptions.

*Writer’s Workshop II*

Utilizing all of their portfolio work, Students begin to write the first draft of their story. By this time the students should have a strong grasp of the characters, setting, and plot of their story. Some of their scenes will already have been written from previous lessons. As they write they can draw. Students continue to go work in the back and forth process of drawing and writing story scenes.
**Dialogue (optional)**

As the students progress with their stories, the teacher may want to introduce dialogue to them. Learning dialogue is not mandatory at the third grade level, but the teacher may decide to introduce dialogue to those who have already finished their stories or have an interest in adding dialogue in their stories. With this lesson, students will learn the difference between ping pong dialogue and descriptive dialogue.

**Mini Lesson 15**

The teacher passes out the Sunday Comics and has students choose their favorite comic strips. The teacher asks students to write in their Writer’s Notebooks why they like the comic they chose. The teacher has the students practice writing the conversation of the comic strip in quotations. The teacher instructs that when a new character speaks the quotation goes on another line.

The teacher pairs the students. The teacher gives them a ping pong ball. One student says a line of dialogue and passes it to the next student to say the next line of dialogue. The students will discover that the dialogue rapidly ping pongs back and forth because there is no description.

The teacher reads an excerpt/strip from one of the comic book series, “The Adventures of Captain Underpants.” The teacher shows the comic strip on the board and has the students think of descriptive words that they can use to describe the conversation. Hence, the students will eventually create descriptive dialogue for “The Adventures of Captain Underpants.”

**Art Workshop**

Using their story, the students choose a few scenes to put dialogue in and create the images for their comic frames.
Writer’s Workshop

The students write the dialogue of their story in the blank bubbles. Just like they did with “Captain Underpants,” The students look at the comic frames and write descriptions within the dialogue. The students compare and decide if they want ping pong dialogue or descriptive dialogue in certain scenes.
Closure of the Unit

The teacher spends about a week or two focusing on revision and publication with the students. After, the teacher has the students write a letter to the teacher about their experience with the writing-through-art process. Students must include both negative and positive comments about the unit. They should be encouraged to write anything that they would change in the lesson. The teacher gives the students their writing and art portfolios and has them reflect upon their journey to creating a work of fiction. The teacher will also have the students read their books to the class as well as classes in lower grade levels. By doing so, the teacher communicates to the students that their creative expression is important and admired.
Works Cited


<http://www.primate.wisc.edu/people/hamel/seuss.html>.


