

Visual Literacy: Mark Twain Using Images and Words

3-5 Days

ELL – High School

DESIRED RESULTS

What are the “big ideas” that drive this lesson?

- ❖ Mark Twain was one of America’s greatest writers, and it is useful to incorporate his works and literary style into the classroom, especially with English Language Learners. Using examples from Twain’s works of descriptive writing and comparing it with actual photographs to stimulate visual literacy will help ELL and students in developing their understanding of the English language.

What are the “essential questions” that students must answer in order to understand the “big ideas?”

- ❖ How can images be used in reading, writing, and speaking?
- ❖ Can images replace words?
- ❖ What is visual literacy and why is it important?
- ❖ How did Mark Twain use imagery to help in developing his writing?
- ❖ How can students use images to help in their reading, writing, and speaking process?

CORE UNDERSTANDINGS

Identify what students will know and/or be able to do:

- ❖ Students will understand how to use visual cues in the reading process, writing process, and as a speaking tool.
- ❖ Students will know how to interpret symbols, and understand that symbols can be interpreted differently by different people, perspectives, and cultures.
- ❖ Students will be able to read a rebus and create a rebus that others can read.
- ❖ Students will use sketches and drawings in their writing process when they do not know a word in English.
- ❖ Students will present an oral speech, using visual images as cues.

LIST SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT(S)

- ❖ In-class group discussions
- ❖ Students in-class description write-ups: students will use images and write a descriptive passage about the image and share with a classmate
- ❖ Mark Twain's "Rebus Letter to Livy" worksheet
- ❖ 30 second oral presentation of a story about the student, or a story that they have created

LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND “COMMON CORE” CONNECTIONS

What are the specific activities and sequence of instruction that will be used to engage students in this lesson?

1. Part I- Images as Symbolic Representation: In this activity, present students with a copy of the *Pudd'n'Head Wilson* manuscript page handout. Explain that a manuscript is the early written version of a book. Mark Twain used pictures to illustrate different types of weather in his novel. Together, read the text of the manuscript, and help the students read the images (and then their captions to see if they guessed correctly) from the manuscript page.
2. Discussion questions: Do the images look like the type of weather they represent? Could you guess the weather without reading the caption?
3. There is a saying in the English language, "A picture is worth a thousand words." What does this mean? Do you agree with this saying? Why or why not? Why do you think Mark Twain used pictures instead of words in this part of his manuscript?
4. On the next page of the handout, the students will interpret images given to them. After students have written their interpretation, share as a class or with partners. Do the interpretations vary? Does your opinion of the image change after you have heard what your classmates thought? Make the point that this happens with reading words, too -- people may read the same article or story but come away with different ideas or opinion about a topic.
5. On the last page of the handout, students will draw their own pictures to illustrate concepts given. When finished, share with the class or a partner. How do the pictures vary? Do they convey the same meaning? How did people interpret these ideas differently?
6. Closure: Where else in daily life do we see drawings or symbols that convey meaning? Why do these exist? Why not use words? What advantages can be gleaned from using images instead of words? Are there symbols that are used differently in your culture than the ones used in America (for example, road signs)?

7. Part II- Images as a Writing Tool: Using Mark Twain's "Rebus Letter to Livy" students will read and create their own rebus stories.
8. What is a rebus? Discuss the meaning of a rebus: a story that uses pictures to represent certain words.
9. Using the handout, present students with Mark Twain's rebus letter to his wife Livy and his daughters. As a class, try to decipher the meaning. Some of the older language will need to be explained, such as the nibs of six pens.
10. Were you able to figure out the puzzle? Now it is our turn to create our own rebus stories. If needed, supply students with simple topic choices (story about going to the beach, a how-to piece on how to make orange juice, etc). Rebus stories should be at least 3 sentences long.
11. When students are done their rebuses, exchange with a partner for the partner to solve. Encourage students to use this technique in their own writing across curriculum subjects.
12. If a student is writing and doesn't know the word in English, draw a picture of it on their paper in its place. When done writing, they can return to the word and learn the English translation. This can be an important tool to keep the writing flowing without interrupting the thought process to look up translation. Explain that the picture doesn't have to be a detailed work of art, it just has to serve as a reminder of the concept the student is trying to convey. After the writing is completed, then the student can look up the word and supply an English translation. The act of drawing the image and then looking it up later will help to solidify the concept in the student's mind and will aid in memorization of the vocabulary.

13. Part III- Images as a Speaking Tool: Mark Twain was a great speaker. He told humorous stories to large audiences all over the world. On January 9, 1874, Mark Twain gave a lecture to an

audience in England, telling stories from his book *Roughing It*. He used drawings of the major points of his story as cues so he would remember what he wanted to talk about. In this lesson, students will read Mark Twain's lecture notes and compare them to his text and then create their own mini-lecture using visual cues.

14. Using the handout, students will view Mark Twain's lecture notes, done in drawings and symbols. Explain that as a person speaks, it is easy to rely heavily on notes and just read the notes. By using pictures, Mark Twain reminds himself of the ideas he wants to cover, without getting trapped into reading his notes aloud to his audience.
15. For advanced ESL students: As a class, read the passage, "A Genuine Mexican Plug" (Chapter 24 of *Roughing It*). As it is read, stop periodically to explain terms and have students summarize the passage. Discuss how the narrator was persuaded into buying the horse. Was the horse a good investment? Why or why not?
16. For Intermediate ESL students, the teacher may read the passage, stopping periodically to explain, or even tell the story verbally (modeling effective speaking behaviors to the class).
17. In Mark Twain's lecture notes, the picture of the horse symbolizes this story. There is a "3" written on the horse, can anyone think of why? What happened three times in the story? The "3" is there to remind Mark Twain to tell the audience that the horse bucked him off three times.
18. Students will create their own lecture notes and present a short (up to 30 second) oral presentation. If needed, give students the choice of topic ideas like "my last vacation" or "my happiest day" or "an embarrassing story." Students will tell the class their story verbally, using picture cues as notes. Model an example first. The presentations should be short -- only a few seconds. Presentations may be given the following day in class, allowing the student time to practice. Teachers may also want to provide rehearsal time for students to practice their speeches with a partner.

Suggested Common Core Connections:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.6](#) Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. (See grades 9–10 Language standards 1 and 3 [here](#) for specific expectations.)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2d](#) Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

MATERIALS AND ATTACHMENTS

- ❖ *Puddn'Head Wilson* manuscript page handout.
- ❖ Mark Twain's "Rebus Letter to Livy" worksheet
- ❖ "A Genuine Mexican Plug" Chapter 24 of *Roughing It*
- ❖ Paper, Pen, Pencil

SUGGESTED LESSON EXTENSIONS TO ENHANCE STUDENT LEARNING

This could either follow a discussion or use this as a writing prompt for your students:

- ❖ How did the picture cues help you? In your own school experience, do you learn better when you see images along with the teacher's lecture? Think about PowerPoint presentations – are they are most successful when accompanied by images and just a few short notes, just like Mark Twain's lecture notes? Use the various activities that you

have gone over in this past unit as examples of why you would prefer using imagery or not.

Mark Twain's Lecture Notes

QuickTime[®] and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Lecture Notes Translation:

The picture of the lake represents Lake Tahoe.

The man with guns represents a story about a duel (a gun fight).

The horse represents a story about "the Genuine Mexican Plug."

The picture below the horse represents a story about a dusty place.

The next image is of Mono Lake.

Below that is sagebrush, a plant that grows in the desert.

The picture of hay is to remind Mark Twain to talk about the expense of buying hay.

The next picture represents the Nevada lake.

The bottom picture shows a wind storm.

The top picture in the next column is of an escaped tarantula (a big spider).

The next picture is of a rabbit that lives in the desert.

Below that is a coyote.

Below the coyote is a sage hen, another desert animal.

Then there is a reference to the lack of rain.

The picture of the man represents the American Indians who lived in the area.

The image of the mountain represents Mount Davidson, the mountain in the town where Mark Twain lived.

The bottom picture represents a story about two men having a duel (a gun fight).

Mark Twain's full stories about each of these events or topics can be read in the book *Roughing It*.

Now you will create your own visual lecture notes.

Mark Twain's "Puddn'Head Wilson" Manuscript

Mark Twain used drawings to represent different types of weather in his novel "Puddn'Head Wilson."

The text says:

"To save the space usually devoted to explanations of the state of the weather in books of this kind, the author has leave to substitute a simple system of weather-signs. The hieroglyph at the head of each chapter will instantly convey to the reader's mind a perfect comprehension of the kind of weather which is going to prevail below. The signs and their meanings here follow"

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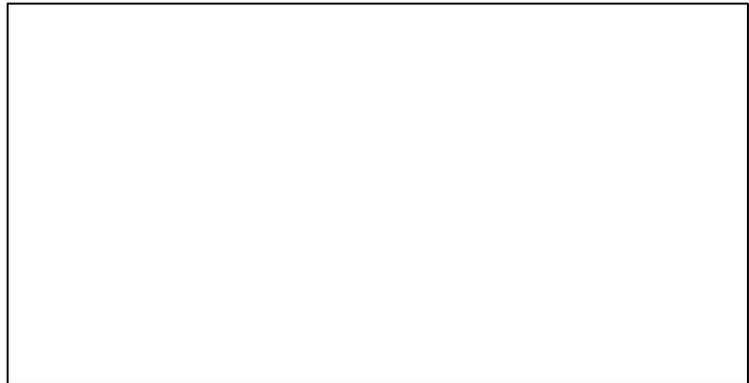
Detail of manuscript

QuickTime[®] and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Anger



Friendship



Hard Work



Community



ESL Visual Literacy Unit Outline:

This is a semester long unit on Visual Literacy, the ability to "read" or take meaning from an image, similar to that of reading the written word. As students expose themselves to images as well as written language, the ability to interpret and process information presented as an image will accomplish the same goals as traditional reading instruction. The process of visually reading images helps the student work through the same levels of comprehension, interpretation, inferencing, and synthesizing as reading written print, even though the student may still be acquiring more advanced vocabulary in the English language.

There are 4 Components:

1. Hieroglyphics and Pictograms: Stories in Images from Ancient Cultures

In this section, the pictograms of Native American cultures and hieroglyphic writings of Egyptian cultures will be explored to illustrate ways that ancient cultures developed written language and told stories through images. Students will analyze samples of these images and even create their own stories, names, or descriptions through pictures.

2. Norman Rockwell: Images about a Culture

Using the book *Norman Rockwell's Portrait of America* by Victorian Crenson as the text, students will view the images of Norman Rockwell as a window into one perspective of American culture. Rockwell's images offer a story of Americana that ESL students will discover through the "reading" of his visual art, as they first form opinions based on the image and then read the passage included in the text. Students will also have many opportunities to write from the images.

3. Mark Twain: Using Images in the Writing Process

This section of the unit illustrates how students, as authors and readers, can use visual literacy in their own reading, writing, and speaking, by using examples from one of America's most prolific and important writers, Mark Twain. Primary sources will be used to model the usage of visual images in the reading process, writing process, and in oral speaking.

4. Graphic novels: Images as Novels, with a focus on *Hugo Cabret*

The culminating section of the unit will focus on the novel *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* by Brian Selznick. The 500-page novel is largely told through illustrations with minimal text. In this section, students will explore history and technology through the text, as well as studying how literary elements like character development and foreshadowing can be communicated through a story told in images.

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What are the “big ideas” that drive this lesson?

- ❖ As Mark Twain was one of America’s greatest writers, it is great to incorporate his works and styles into the classroom, especially for English language learners. In this lesson, many of Mark Twain’s different styles of writing are learned and can help with ELL students. Using Twain’s work with descriptive writing and comparing this with actual photographs and visual literacy will be able to help students in developing their understanding of the English language.

What are the “essential questions” that students must answer in order to understand the “big ideas”?

- ❖ How can images be used in reading, writing, and speaking?
- ❖ Can images replace words?
- ❖ What is visual literacy and why is it important?
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LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND “COMMON CORE” CONNECTIONS

What are the specific activities and sequence of instruction that will be used to engage students in this lesson?

Procedure:

a. **Images as Symbolic Representation**

In this activity, present students with a copy of the *Puddn'Head Wilson* manuscript page handout. Explain that a manuscript is the early written version of a book. Mark Twain used pictures to illustrate different types of weather in his novel. Together, read the text of the manuscript, and help the students read the images (and then their captions to see if they guessed correctly) from the manuscript page.

Discussion questions:

Do the images look like the type of weather they represent? Could you guess the weather without reading the caption?

There is a saying in the English language, "A picture is worth a thousand words." What does this mean? Do you agree with this saying? Why or why not?

Why do you think Mark Twain used pictures instead of words in this part of his manuscript?

On the next page of the handout, the students will interpret images given to them. After students have written their interpretation, share as a class or with partners. Do the interpretations vary? Does your opinion of the image change after you have heard what your classmates thought? Make the point that this happens with reading words, too -- people may read the same article or story but come away with different ideas or opinion about a topic.

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Closure: Where else in daily life do we see drawings or symbols that convey meaning? Why do these exist? Why not use words? What advantages can be gleaned from using images instead of words? Are there symbols that are used differently in your culture than the ones used in America (for example, road signs)?

b. **Images as a Writing Tool**

Using Mark Twain's "Rebus Letter to Livy" students will read and create their own rebus stories.

What is a rebus? Discuss the meaning of a rebus: a story that uses pictures to represent certain words.

Using the handout, present students with Mark Twain's rebus letter to his wife Livy and his daughters. As a class, try to decipher the meaning. Some of the older language will need to be explained, such as the nibs of six pens.

Were you able to figure out the puzzle? Now it is our turn to create our own rebus stories. If needed, supply students with simple topic choices (story about going to the beach, a how-to piece on how to make orange juice, etc). Rebus stories should be at least 3 sentences long.

When students are done their rebuses, exchange with a partner for the partner to solve.

Encourage students to use this technique in their own writing across curriculum subjects. If a student is writing and doesn't know the word in English, draw a picture of it on their paper in its place. When done writing, they can return to the word and learn the English translation. This can be an important tool to keep the writing flowing without interrupting the thought process to look up translation. Explain that the picture doesn't have to be a detailed work of art, it just has to serve as a reminder of the concept the student is trying to convey. After the writing is completed, then the student can look up the word and supply an English translation. The act of drawing the image and then looking it up later will help to solidify the concept in the student's mind and will aid in memorization of the vocabulary.

c. **Images as a Speaking Tool**

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Suggested Common Core Connections:

Speaking & Listening: Grades 9-10

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. (See grades 9–10 Language standards 1 and 3 [here](#) for specific expectations.)

Writing: Grades 9-10

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2d Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

MATERIALS AND ATTACHMENTS

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