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ABSTRACT

The teaching activities presented in this compilation of columns from the journal "Live Wire" focus on integrating the arts with language. The selections describe (1) the concept of "framing" in art and in writing; (2) using folktale pantomimes as inspirations for writing; (3) using literature response sheets (samples included) to respond to the characters, scenes, or events in stories; (4) rewriting the comic strips to teach a simple type of dialogue writing; (5) and comparing, contrasting, and describing different picture versions of the same folktale in order to help students analyze what they see. (EL)

Language Everywhere--Arts

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National Council of Teachers of English

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ARTS

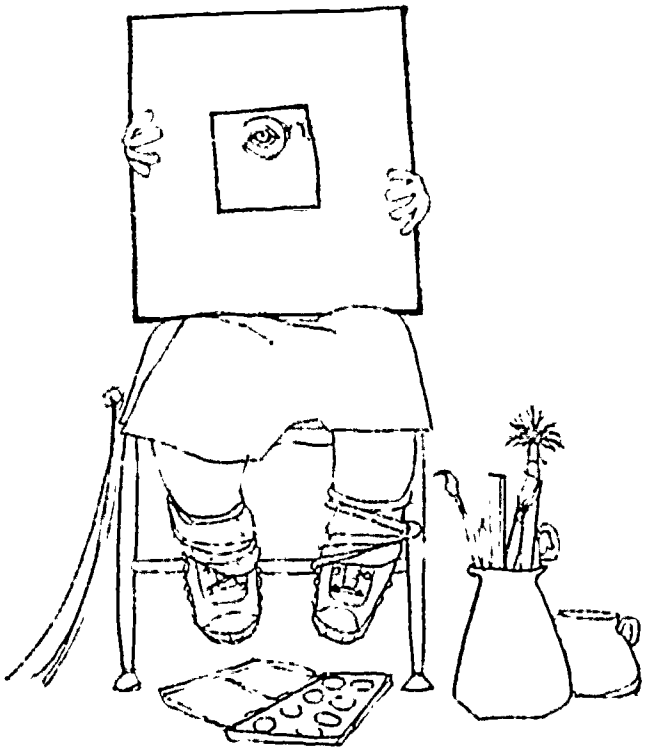
Framing

Children need to realize that when they read or write or draw, they assume a certain "point of view." They are "framing" language or art in their own unique ways.

Drawing a still life — an arrangement of inanimate objects — is a good way to begin. First, you will need frames cut from pieces of cardboard that are roughly 9 × 12 inches. In the middle of the cardboard, cut a rectangular hole about 4½ × 6 inches.

Next arrange plants, books, fruit, masks, stuffed animals, and other objects for your still life on a table in the center of the room. Have paper and chalk or other drawing materials ready for the children to use.

As you introduce the activity to your students, have them hold the frames to their eyes and move the frames around as if taking pictures of different objects: desks, windows, trees outside the room, and classmates. Talk about what happens when objects are viewed from closer or farther away, or when frames are turned vertically or horizontally.



Now have students sit in a circle around the still life. As they look at the arrangement through their frames, they should decide how much of the still life they want to draw and what parts they want to show. Each student chooses a point of view before starting to draw.

As the students draw, they should pay attention to the whole picture as well as how the different objects fit together. Share the completed drawings, looking carefully at differences in style and content in the choices each student has made. Point out how even similar points of view produce strikingly different drawings.

After students have examined the differences in art, move on to "framing" in reading and writing. To highlight this concept, use a story which clearly assumes a particular point of view. Examine together (1) the point of view of the character who tells the story, (2) how this one point of view affects the story, and (3) what would be different if another character told the story. Students could even try rewriting the story from another point of view.

A good story to use at the intermediate level is Deborah and James Howe's *Bunnicula: A Rabbit Tale of Mystery* (Atheneum, 1979). Although written from the point of view of a dog named Harold, the story could easily be rewritten from the viewpoint of Bunnicula the vampire bunny. After students have "looked" with their new "frame," share ideas aloud or exchange papers for silent reading. Ask how and why one student's writing differs from another's even if they have both chosen the point of view of the same character. Encourage students to ask each other about their choices.

By drawing and writing with a "frame," students become more aware of how each person sees the world from a unique point of view.

Linda K. Crafton teaches at Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, Illinois. She credits Cynthia Weiss.

Folktale Pantomimes

Share a scary folktale with your students. Choose a tale that features a dragon, a troll, or a giant. After you have read or told the story, use some creative drama to help your students enter the imaginary world. Imagine, for example, that the heroine of the story was picking raspberries for her mother, who had told her not to wander off the path. Begin by asking your students to pantomime picking raspberries. They can sit right at their desks or move about the room—whatever you feel more comfortable with and they are able to handle.

Then suggest that a frog or butterfly or some other irresistible creature passes by. Your students are distracted from their berry picking, begin to follow the fascinating creature, and soon leave the path. If you prefer your students to pantomime this scene at their seats, simply ask them to follow the frog or butterfly with their eyes, head, and upper torso.

Now suggest that the creature has gone into the deep dark woods. Your students follow, pushing vines aside, stepping over fallen logs, and pulling cobwebs out of their hair. Since this is all done in pantomime, there should be no sound, and each youngster can concentrate on his or her own scene.

Finally, suggest to your students that they come upon the dragon (or troll or giant). The large beast does not see them, so they quickly hide and observe. Once again all action is in pantomime and can be done at desks if you wish.

Now that the children have pantomimed, talk about what they did (and why), what they saw, and how they felt. What distracted them? What did the woods look like? What did the dragon (or troll or giant) look like? Make a list of the words or phrases describing the beast.

Students now have the motivation and a pool of possible words and ideas to write a story about "what happened when I went into the deep dark woods," to write a news-type article describing the beast, or to write a poem about feelings upon entering the woods. This basic story-pantomime-write technique can be used with many different types of stories to produce writing rich in imagery and detail.

Carol Ann Piggins, formerly a classroom teacher, is now Director of Creative Education Associates, Racine, Wisconsin.

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Literature Response Sheets

Many times a well-written story will so involve children that they want to "respond" to the characters, scenes, or events. This means choosing their own forms of response. Some like talking, some prefer writing, others choose drawing, while still others enjoy singing or dancing.

In one part of the classroom, set up a Reading Response Corner. After students have read particular stories or books, they move to this corner to choose individual responses. One response they may choose is a printed "literature response sheet" that asks for art or a drawing to illustrate something from the book.

For example, on the handout sheet on page 5, the lens of the camera can be used to draw an event or a character. The transparent gift sack on page 6 gives space to draw a gift for one of the characters. Remind students they do not have to be artists to sketch people, places, or objects.

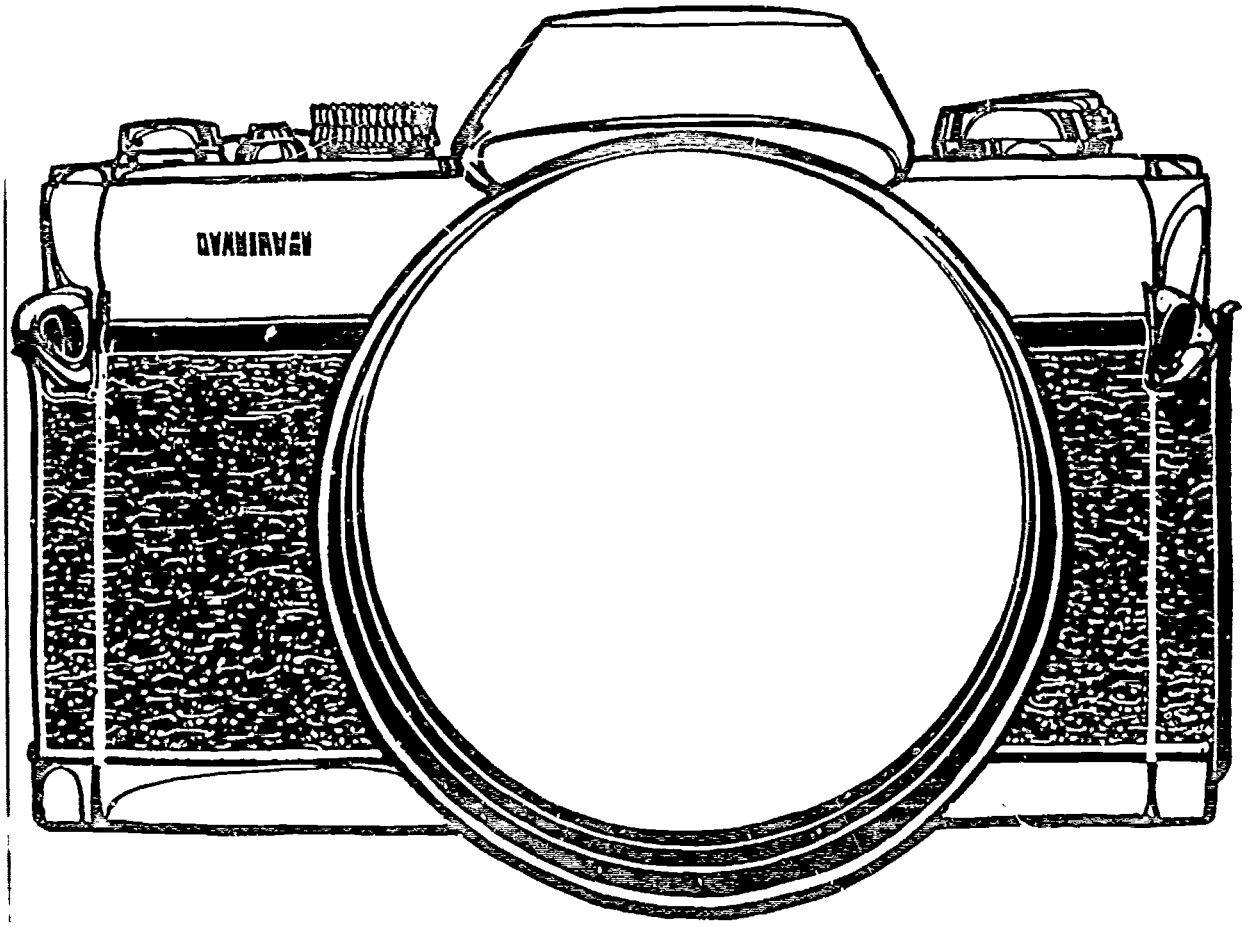
Response sheets to encourage a variety of drawings might include:

- a medal (for a main character) to be decorated in an appropriate way
- a crystal ball with space to draw a scene from one character's future
- an empty picture frame or photo album to depict a memorable scene

Encourage students to share their drawings with each other. Also, be sure to provide blank sheets so students feel free to design their own response sheets.

Arlene M. Pillar, Director, Executive Enrichment System, New York, New York

Directions: This camera gives you a close-up view of a happening or a character in the book you just read. Draw a picture of an event or character of your choice in the lens; then tell about your picture in your own words on the reverse side of this paper.



Your name _____

Date _____

Book title _____

Author _____

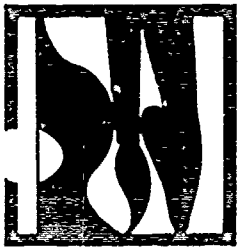
Directions: This transparent gift sack holds a special gift for one of the characters in the book you just read. Pick a character and decide what gift you'd like to give that character. Then draw the item inside the sack. On the reverse side of this paper, tell the name of the character who will receive the gift and explain why you chose this gift.

Your name _____

Date _____

Book title _____

Author _____



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Rewriting the Comics

Most students "read" the Sunday comic strips, but few pay as much attention to the words used as to the pictures. Nonetheless, you can use a few comic strips cut out from the Sunday newspaper to interest students in a simple type of dialogue writing. It involves choosing words carefully to match the pictures, to build suspense, and to provide humor.

Ask students to select and cut out one or more comic strips from the Sunday newspaper and bring them to class. Select a few, white-out the words in all the "bubbles" with typewriter correction fluid, and make copies with a photocopier. If you have access to a machine that enlarges, the larger bubbles will give students more room to write. If you like, you can use the comic strip provided on page 5. Pass out the comic strips and ask students to write in the "bubbles" their own dialogue to fit the action. The space constraints of a comic strip require students to write concisely, and the necessity to build to a punch line requires students to think carefully about the exact words used. Let them read other comic strips (with words) as examples.

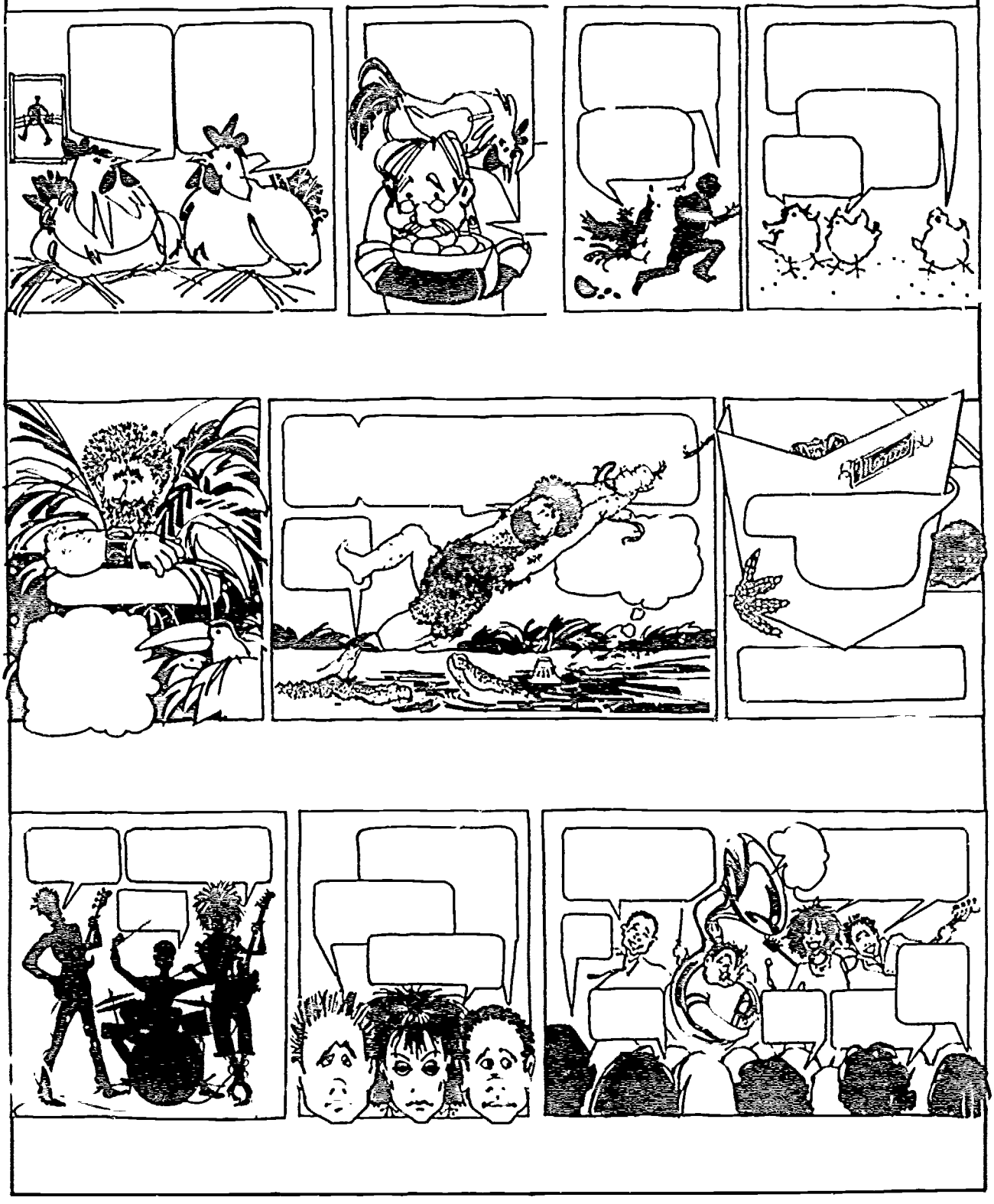
After students have finished writing their dialogues, collect the cartoon strips and write an identifying number on each. Post the cartoons on the bulletin board and have students read their classmates' creations. Ask students what makes some of the sequences better than others. If the discussion lags, ask questions such as. What makes it hard to write a comic strip? When you can only use a few words, how does that change the way you write? What happens if you get too wordy? How can you make the reader wonder what is going to happen?

Use examples of comic strips to illustrate the points discussed (simple language, building to the punch line, etc.). Since most students read some form of comic strip, it's easy to start a discussion of the writing involved, and students are surprised to realize that such a simple form of writing needs to be carefully thought out.

Many students in the class may wish to draw their own comic strips with their own dialogue.

Kathryn Hagerman, Winans Elementary School, Lansing, Michigan

Write Your Own Comic Strip



Talking about Pictures

About 80 percent of the information we process comes to us through our eyes. We are surrounded by pictures, yet we don't necessarily know how to look at, understand, or respond to them. One simple way to help students to analyze what they see is to have them compare, contrast, and describe different picture versions of the same folktale. Many fairy tales are available in several versions, so check your school library for appropriate tales to select.

I start with two editions of *Peter and the Wolf*, one illustrated by Erna Voigt (Godine, 1980) and the other illustrated by Charles Mikolaycak (Viking Press, 1982). I read both books to the class and then reread them so students can take a second look at the pictures. Encourage students to talk about the characters, the scenery, the details, the action, and the colors. They might ask each other questions such as, 'What are the people's expressions like in this picture? How do they look different from the people in the other book? Does the background look the same? What colors are used the most in each book? Why? On the chalkboard we compile a list of similarities and differences that the students find in the two books, like these comments.

Peter and the Wolf, illustrated by Erna Voigt

- shows instruments on each page; other book doesn't
- pictures seem more like a story, done in cartoon style

Peter and the Wolf, illustrated by Charles Mikolaycak

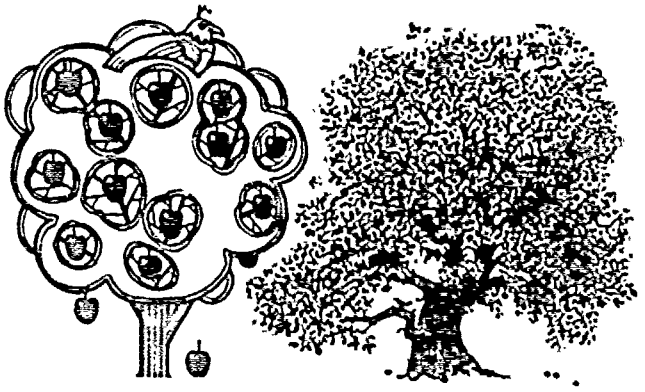
- boy is lying on a stone wall; in other book he's standing behind a wooden fence
- grandfather looks meaner; boy looks braver, clothes are poorer

In addition to comments about the illustrations, students will probably identify similarities and differences in the language used in the stories. Later, you can focus on other paired tales in which the language is of more interest than the visuals, or follow up the group activity with individual conferences in which the student dictates comments to you. Following the initial group presentation, make the books available on the classroom writing table so children can study them at their leisure. Children can choose one of the two to discuss with each other or with you.

After seeing two versions of the Hans Christian Anderson tale *The Nightingale*, one illustrated by Nancy Burkert (Harper and Row, 1965) and the other illustrated by Fluvio Testa (Crowell, 1974), children dictated the following:

Burkert version: I like the detail and the light colors. The pictures look real. The setting goes back and makes it look better. The people look Chinese. The real bird looks better than the artificial bird. The artificial bird is made of rubies and diamonds.

Testa version: I don't like the pictures because they look more like cartoon pictures than the book. I don't like the pictures because they don't look very real. I do like the pictures of the fake bird because it looks like a chicken.



Using individual dictation with younger children gives them the freedom of fluency. You can encourage older children to write their own responses. Whether writing or dictating, students learn to use words to describe what they see and to make comparisons.

John Warren Stewig, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

December 1984