



WORDS AND IMAGES

This project was developed under the direction of Dena Cavazos, art teacher, by students of Lincolnway Central High School for the Contemporary Community Curriculum Initiative 2000.



“A picture is worth a thousand words” as the saying goes. However, they also say “The pen is mightier than the sword.” Words are powerful; images are potent. Each is a form of communication that requires us to use our critical thinking abilities. Both forms of expression can manipulate the way we think and feel.

Combined images and words can change the meaning of one another--subtly or radically. In contemporary art practices, artists often deliberately create dissonance between words and images--fulfilling the artists' role of shaking up expectations, creating a gap in the smooth transmission of conventional perceptions and ideology.

The Words and Images project was inspired by the often insipid inspirational posters that seem to be ubiquitous in contemporary schools and offices. The students enjoyed skewering the over serious and over sincere tone of these posters--kitsch text/image pieces in which the picture usually acts only as an obvious illustration of the pedantic concept being proffered.

This project is not about representing a pre-conceived idea of how things are or should be. The project begins with students taking photographs at home and around the school of things that appeal to them aesthetically. After reviewing standard inspirational messages and studying the art of artists who make use of words in their artwork, the students play with words and images, as they do so observing the way context changes and generates meaning.

What results occur when pairing a text with various images? Is the initial intent altered, substituted, or enhanced? Does the visual implication endure?



DISCUSSION

Begin by discussing the power of words. In what formats can you notice the power of a word? Are words more potent when spoken or written?

Discuss the potency of visual images. How is this different from the power of words? Discuss the phrase, “A picture is worth a thousands words.” Debate whether a word or picture holds more power. Talk about multiple intelligences. Ask students to consider whether they have a propensity for visual or audio learning.

WORDS

Handout papers with motivational, powerful, interesting, and creative quotes. Do the students have strong positive or negative reactions to any of the sayings? Do any of the quotes touch the students personally?

IMAGES

Show students images that are thought provoking. This could include traditional and contemporary artwork as well as illustrations and photographs from the advertising and content sections of magazines.

IMAGES & WORDS

Explain that many contemporary artists combine words and pictures. Explain how content is created through the non-literal pairings of images and text. Show examples of artwork by Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer. Discuss the messages and implications of various works.

CREATE PRELIMINARY STUDIES

Give students a sheet listing some of Jenny Holzer’s truisms. (See Artist Chapter for the Words and Images project on the Spiral Art Education Website.) Students should cut out at least four truisms that they find interesting. Then they search through magazines to find at least four pictures they find appealing, purely for aesthetic qualities. Next, they will juxtapose a truism with an image. They consider the new text/image artwork and consider whether the meaning of the text shifts or is enhanced when juxtaposed with the image.

Questions to consider: How does the artwork take on a new meaning when the word and image are brought together? Does it change the meaning from something positive to negative? From something definitive to something ambiguous? From something didactic and closed to something open and thought provoking?

WRITE

Students will work in groups of three or four. Now students are ready to write their own truisms. The truism should relate to their personal lives and issues. Ask students to think about discoveries they have made or lessons they have learned in their own lives at school, home, and work. Each student should write at least five truisms. Share truisms with other members of the group.

PHOTOGRAPH

Each group will receive a disposable throwaway camera. (This project could also be done with digital cameras.) Every day a member in the group will take the camera home. Each student will be able to take about five pictures. Don’t put too many restrictions on the images they choose to shoot. Suggest taking pictures of various subjects such as landscapes, posed portraits, candid photographs of everyday actions, or objects they find aesthetically pleasing.



CREATING NEW ARTWORK

Once their pictures are developed or printed out, students start juxtaposing their phrases with images--finding ways to alter the perception of both the image and the words once they are unified into a single piece of artwork. Each group must generate as many works as possible, sharing phrases and images with each other.

PROCESS

Each group will choose the two most successful pieces and create an 8"x10" enlargement.

Depending on time and resource availability, there are two ways to complete this. One way would be to enlarge the photograph on the Xerox machine. Type up and print out a phrase in a word-processing program. Paste the two together and re-xerox to create a single fused image/text.

An alternative would be to scan the image and to then use Adobe Photoshop or another image manipulation program to adjust and enlarge the scale to 8"x10." Newer versions of Photoshop include a text function so words can be added within that program. Otherwise, use a page design program such as Aldus PageMaker, Adobe Illustrator, or Quark to create a page in which to combine the image and text. Print out. This method makes it possible to create image/text pieces in full color.

Consider having large-scale color or black and white copies done at Kinko's.

Consider making two copies of each artwork--one in color and the other in black and white. This opens the door for a discussion on how the perception of the artwork may change based on the use of color.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Students will write a paragraph regarding their artworks. They should write about what they were trying to express or allude to in each piece. Do they feel they were successful in conveying that message? What feedback did they receive from other groups?

CLOSURE

Exhibit artwork in a display case accompanied by artists' statements.

Ask teachers and staff to display the "inspirational posters" in their classrooms. After a week or so, have art students interview the "poster hosts" about responses they received about the artworks.

The final, often humorous, pieces make use of unexpected, unplanned juxtapositions that cause viewers to pause to consider their experiences and expectations in light of new, often quirky, concepts.



MATERIALS & EQUIPMENT

for Words and Images

a variety of magazines

glue sticks

rubber cement

white paper

scissors

disposable cameras (or digital cameras)

computer with photo and word processing programs (optional)