

VISUAL JOURNALS:

SKETCHBOOKS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

ART AND LANGUAGE ARTS
GRADES: 9-12

BASED ON

Glenn Ligon (American, b.1882, d.1967)

Untitled (I Am An Invisible Man), 1993

Museum Purchase: Bequest of Mr. And Mrs. Walter J. Wichgar, 2000.255

OBJECTIVES

- Students will discuss Ligon's *Untitled (I Am An Invisible Man)* in the context of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.
- Students will explore concept of a visual journal and sketchbook.
- Students will plan and produce a visual journal in sketchbook form, incorporating quotes from works read over the course of the semester

CONCEPT

"[I want to] make language into a physical thing, something that has real weight and force to it."
-- Glenn Ligon

"Visual journaling is a way to record life's experiences, feelings, emotional reactions, or one's own inner voice visually and verbally. Sometimes words alone fail to describe what we feel inside. Visual journaling is a creative way to respond to an internal, very personal situation in traditional sketchbooks, or through non-traditional works of art that include both text and imagery." -- Michael Bell

According to Michael Bell's (visualjournaling.com), "Visual journaling has existed throughout history as a process of reflective thinking, and as a record of image making." From Leonardo da Vinci to Thomas Edison to Stephen Hawking, great thinkers have recorded their ideas utilizing varieties of visual journaling techniques. What do all of these journals have in common? The ability to explore thought processes as ideas and thoughts are recorded and impressions are sketched. There's power in the printed word. There's even more power for some students when a graphic is attached to the printed word.

As an activity in an English/language arts classroom, visual journaling has a multiplicity of possibilities. Using a sketchbook and reading assignments, students can produce sketchbook journals, which incorporate quotes from novels with visual representations of those quotes. The result is a broader, richer understanding of what the author's words mean, as well as the ability to remember the words from the text. Furthermore, visual journaling becomes an effective way to encourage students to make connections through self-exploration of the text and visual communication. According to Bell, "Teachers need to understand that during this process, the experiences gained are not only valuable in helping students establish connections to the art-making process, but also towards literacy [reading and writing]." Considering that not all students learn in the same way on the same day, activities like visual journals can effectively and authentically work in realizing the goal of literacy in the language arts classroom.

VOCABULARY

Modern/contemporary art
Pop Art
Minimalism
Conceptual Art

Appropriation Art
gesso
stenciling

CLASS EXPERIENCE

Visual journal
Words associated with book design (end pages, tip-in pages, title page, etc.)

Words associated with the types of possible artwork (collage, montage, etc.)

MATERIALS

Untitled (I Am An Invisible Man)

Novels and plays / books
A variety of papers
Adhesives
Markers, chalk, pen/ink

Sketchbook or notebook with empty pages
Paint
Brushes
Computer (for text or images for collage)

Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison

Old magazines
Leftovers from scrapbook supplies
Rubber stamps
Ink pads

PROCEDURE

- View and discuss Glenn Ligon's *Untitled (I Am An Invisible Man)*.
- Students will employ a visual sketchbook/journal format to share their thoughts and feelings through a combination of art and text.
- Each student will select quotes (text) from works read in class and then illustrate each quote through artwork of his/her own choosing. A minimum of two quotes per novel/play and one quote per short story/essay must be included. [Each student will be working throughout the semester on a journal that can be used for a review of major quotes from major works, culminating in a review for the AP test in May. This can be easily adapted to ANY type of language arts class at any grade level.]
- All journals must include the opening of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, as well as a visual response to Glenn Ligon's *Untitled (I Am An Invisible Man)*.

WEB RESOURCES

http://firstclass.plainfield.k12.in.us/~Laurie_Gatlin/sketch/ArtJournal.htm
www.mbellart.com
www.visualjournaling.com
<http://www.kporterfield.com/journal/Illuminations.html>
<http://www.broadartfoundation.org/collection/ligon.html>
www.artlex.com/ArtLex/.html
www.harlemlive.org/artsculture/museums/GlennLigon/
www.walkerart.org/programs/vaexhibligon.html

NATIONAL STANDARDS

Art Connections

Standard 1. Understands connections among the various art forms and other disciplines.

Visual Arts

Standard 3. Knows a range of subject matter, symbols, and potential ideas in the visual arts.

Standard 5. Understands the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others

Language Arts

Standard 1. Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me! Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination - indeed, everything and anything except me. Nor is my invisibility exactly a matter of a biochemical accident to my optical cells. That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar shape of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact.

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