

Picture
Book Learning
Experience
with
Molly Barker





Picture
Book
Learning
Experience

A Waterways Project
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As a result Molly Barker was
inducted as a member into
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Learning Context

Making picture books gives students new ways of thinking and approaching a subject while producing a book that can be shared.

The course is designed to allow students to find their own best methods of working.

The activities in each lesson give students tools for exploring their own knowledge and experience, while acquiring new expertise, and constructing their own story.

Students in the program were from New York City Alternative High Schools and Programs (Frederick Douglass Literacy Center and New York City Vocational Training Center).

The picture book project took place over ten 90-minute sessions, held weekly over a ten-week period.

Each participant published his or her own picture book.

The books were integrated with class work through topics and other connections to classroom lessons.

Excerpts from some of the books were published in Ten Penny Players' annual student anthology, Streams.

Students need to be willing to try new things but there is no art or writing prerequisite. The course is designed to work with students of widely varying levels of experience and those with little or no art experience.

Procedure

Each student undertook creation of a 4 to 12 page picture book. The subject was left to the student.

Each session was organized around a basic concept of storytelling, both in visual art and writing.

Each session included specific tasks taking a step toward a picture book.

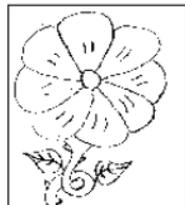
Each session gave students a drawing skill or concept, which allowed them to explore ideas non-verbally.

Students were stronger in one area or another, and they used their strengths to build up their other skills.

Students helped one another progress through the different stages of creating the books, sharing insights and examples.



Elleston Stennett



Jackie Gordon

Week 1: Symbols

The teacher, artist, or peer editor will:

Introduce picture books as an art and show students professional work in the form.

Introduce the following ideas and discuss them with the class:

Picture books use words and images to tell their stories.

Some have no words at all.

Pictures can be used to communicate and explore ideas;

Show pictographs:

Hieroglyphs

Old Chinese characters

Lead the class in this symbol drawing exercise:

List 20 or 30 words.

Allow a minute in between for students to draw a symbol representing the word.

Look at and discuss the results.

Notice that we all have the basic language we need to communicate in pictures.

Students will:

Tell a simple story in pictures (e.g., your trip to school this morning)

Tell the story verbally

Write the story.

Week 2: Self Portraits

The teacher, artist, or peer editor will:

Give an overview of the process of making the books with students.

Lead class in looking at self portraits by other artists.

Students will:

Discuss how a self-portrait communicates.

Look for clues to character in the pictures.

Draw self portraits with mirrors, using pencils on 8 1/2 x 11 paper.

Write a piece about yourself as someone else sees you, or as several people see you. What do they notice about you?

Print self portraits at the reduced size that they will appear in the final book (50%).



Dwayne Brock

Week 3: Shapes, Rhythm, Pattern

The teacher, artist, or peer editor will:

Display the self portraits on a classroom or hallway wall, using construction paper backing.

Introduce basic shape families.

Students will:

See how their work will look at the reduced size.

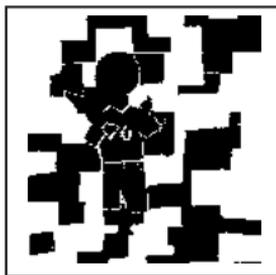
Get a taste for public presentation.

Discuss variety, repetition, rhythm, pattern.

Practice using these different qualities.

Make an abstract or representational picture using the basic shapes, either drawn or made from cut paper.

Choose a simple shape; look at it and write about all the things it could represent.



Jolean Medina

Week 4: Transformation

The teacher, artist, or peer editor will:

:

Introduce the concepts of time and transformation in books.

*Between the beginning and the end,
something changes.*

*Something happens, or something is
revealed.*

Students will:

Draw a four-panel accordion book about a transformation.

Think about key changes to get from beginning to end.

Write the story of a transformation.

Revise and edit portrait piece.



Ghnea George

Week 5: Movement

The teacher, artist, or peer editor will:

Demonstrate ways of drawing action:

jointed stick figures,
gesture drawing,
tube figures.

Students will:

Practice drawing figures engaged in different actions.

Choose one piece of writing and draw a related action (or make a new story).

Look at all their work so far to get ideas and map out a possible book on a story board.

Begin choosing which pieces they want to use in their books.

Photocopy or scan artwork to adjusted size. (Final page size will be 5 x 4 inches.)

Discuss what art is. List qualities and develop criteria for good art.



A. Mercado

Week 6: Place

The teacher, artist, or peer editor will:

Instruct students on basic ways of showing space and depth:

overlapping,
change in size of objects,
change in sharpness,
page placement,
one-point perspective.

Demonstrate the use of watercolors. Show examples of landscape art and interiors.

Students will:

Discuss memories and ideas about a place they know or imagine.

Think about what's there.
How does it feel?

What does it mean?

Discuss ways of depicting space and point of view.

How does point of view change the meaning of a picture?

Use watercolors to draw a place they know or imagine.

Write about the place.

Continue work on story boards.

Think about settings.

Revise written drafts.

Week 7: Observation

The teacher, artist, or peer editor will:

Introduce theme of observation as a tool for art and writing.

Close observation of the outside world brings new ideas into mind.

Students will:

Draw from observation of plants or other objects inside and outside the classroom.

*Look closely and with new eyes.
Listen to their minds while they draw.
Reflect and write on the experience.*

The teacher, artist, or peer editor will

Ask

What did you notice about yourself, your drawing, your subject, and other students?

What problems did you need to solve?

Hand out letter size paper cut in half to be 5.5 x 8 1/2 inches. (Folded in half this will be the size of a book.)

Students will:

Fold three pieces of paper together to be an 8-page book plus cover.

Begin layout:

Use scissors and glue sticks to place photocopied artwork and typed text in place.

Look over the work completed and continue work on story boards.

Set final goals.

Continue writing revisions.

Begin typing any completed written work.

(Books may be scanned and laid out on computer if the school is so equipped.)

Week 8: Balance and Contrast

The teacher, artist, or peer editor will:

Introduce concept and use of negative space.

Contrasting elements provide interest and drama in art. The artist decides what weight to give different elements.

Show examples of professional work:

Escher

Drooker

Muafangejo

Demonstrate use of scratchboard.

Students will:

Do negative space exercise using letters, their names, or book title.

Choose a page from their story boards to work on which will make good use of this medium.

Complete at least one scratchboard picture (5 x 4).

Do final writing revisions.

Do title and cover design.

Typeset the rest of the text.

Week 9: Wrap Up

At this point everybody will have different things they need to finish.

Students will:

Look at books and determine what needs to be completed for the last session.

Complete drawings.

Write any last minute revisions.
Complete cover and final layout:

Ready the book to be photocopied.

Week 10: Book Party

*This is the time to celebrate
and share the books.*

The teacher, artist, or peer editor will:

Invite other members of the school and parents to a public reading.

Present the students with copies of their books.

Record the event with video, audio recorders, and/or cameras.

Students will:

Interview their fellow authors about their books and the experience of making them.

Trade books with one another.

Make a display of all the books.

Write book reviews and first-person accounts of the experience.

Write reflections on what they learned by doing the project.



Ghnea George

Molly Barker's Reflection:

From this experience I have learned about the students' lives and histories, and the factors that have landed them where they are. I learned more about what the different obstacles were to writing, and how to recognize them. It's difficult because students revealed their problems in such different ways. I had one student who constantly disrupted the class, breaking pencils into tiny pieces and throwing them, making lewd comments, and imitating everything I said in a sing-song sarcastic voice. Finally I realized that he couldn't read and would try and upset any situation in which he'd be asked to read or write. He was amazed when I showed him a graphic novel, a thick book with no words. After that I was able to get him to calm down and work by removing the pressure to write.

After drawing out a simple, complete narrative, he wrote the story. When he got his printed book back, he read it aloud as if discovering something to be proud of.

In peer reviews these picture books received thoughtful, enthusiastically positive responses. People were moved by the students' stories and thoughts. It seemed to me evidence of the students' mastery of the art form that strangers could look at them and get so much out of them.

In peer review sessions I got some ideas from teachers on how to encourage rewrites and editing. There have been other practical suggestions, such as using a digital camera as another image-making tool. Someone suggested incorporating a written reflection into each session.

I learned that although sometimes I feel like much of the evidence of student learning is in classroom interactions and students' preparatory work, the final books themselves are quite rich with information accessible to other people.



Student Assessment

Student work was assessed on how far the student pushed himself or herself to find new ways of working and solving problems. At a minimum, the student had to participate in all areas of the project.

The average student completed a picture book using all the necessary components.

The above average student demonstrated an expansion of his or her thinking and integration of new skills to complete a picture book in which all the components are inter-related.

The teacher shared assessment criteria with the class near the beginning of the project. During the fifth session, criteria for quality were identified again in a class discussion.

Peer assessment was integrated into the classroom work. Oral assessment from both peers and teachers was a continuous and integrated part of classroom work, and was probably the most significant form of assessment in this project. The teacher met with each student individually during each class to identify areas that needed more work.

A visual learner with more confidence in his drawing than verbal abilities talked about his drawings described the characters' world, and his own world. For weeks he had just sat with pencil in hand when asked to write. Finally after developing a relationship with him through teaching drawing, the teacher asked him to write about his experience in this art class. At the end of the period he shyly handed in his paragraph,

saying: “I don’t know what to say. I feel dumb when I write. I can express myself better in drawing than in writing or music or anything else. It’s an escape from everything. I feel that when people see what I draw, see my work, they can see who I am, what I do.” In his final reflection he wrote, “I like to draw because it’s a way to get away from my problems. Drawing is one of my ways to express myself, escape from everything. It’s like going to my own world — wherever you look is art, anything you touch is art, and whatever you feel is art.”

Excerpts From Students' Reflections

When I first started this class, I didn't know what it was going to be about. I started on an art project. It was to make a book. It was fun. It made you think about a lot. My book is based on my future. What I like about my book is that it's going to make me do more. I want to reach my goal in life. I learned a lot from this art class. I would like to do it again some time.

— Karen

What I liked best about my book is that it's about what I do best, graffiti and the obstacles I have to go through just to gain my goal, "fame".

— Nelson

The class is to create pictures, write about the pictures, what each picture means for each person. What I like in the book is what I wrote in my book about my computer. I liked it because it's real, everything I said in my book. And I like the title of the book. I like the cover. It's very nice.

— Evelyn

I want to thank everyone from the Waterways Project. I really appreciate all the faith you all have in us, and the chance you gave us to show you our talent. Trust me when I say we are going to do our best or at least try. And especially thank Molly for being patient and giving us ideas and helping us; and the teacher, Jack, who has all my respect. In a short time I have learned a lot from him. Again thank you for making all these dreams possible.

— Felix

Life is a maze of different emotions. Some are good, and some are bad. Art puts some of those emotions on paper, so they can express themselves through the pencil or pen.

— Javier

Writing is the most important stress release because when you're writing there's nobody in your business. It's more isolated from others. That's why most people get diaries. Drawing is more feeling, expressing yourself with the pen, pencil, and colors.

— Kevin

The work that I do in this class was fun because it helped me challenge my feeling in life. It also helped me to do something new and challenging in this class. It was interesting to learn how to draw on a new, different level.

— Luis

At first I was mad because I thought I couldn't do it. But when I started I felt good because I could see that I could do it. It felt good trying to draw. It wasn't perfect, but it was something. It made me stay and draw more trees.

— Veronica

To draw something you have to find features that attract you, and you stare at it without looking at the paper, try to visualize that with your hand. It seems hard but you have to try, it takes a little time. But once you get the hang of it, and practice and practice one day you can make a lot of money just drawing people and it's something that you love to do.

— Eli

Art is a mystery, but I like it because you always wonder what your finishing touch is going to be. We have worked on several types of projects, but I liked the black boards we used. That was fun but hard to work with, so I just played with it for a while until I found something and that worked great. We learned how to make men in different poses. That was cool but I like to draw a lot of trees and write a lot. Being an artist is a lot of fun and you can do it too. Just pick up a pencil and paper, anything can happen.

— Anthony

Materials and Resources

Photocopier

Paper cutter

Letter size paper

Legal size paper

Long arm stapler

Sketch paper

Pencils

Erasers

Ink

Pens

Watercolors

Brushes

Scratchboards

Scrapers

Scissors

Glue sticks

Construction paper

Camcorder

Refreshments for book party

Suggested Reading

The Natural Way to Draw by Kimon Nicolaides;

Drawing for Older Children and Teens, by Mona Brookes;

Draw Squad, by Mark Kistler;

Drawing on the Artist Within by Betty Edwards

Picture Books by Art Spiegelman, William Blake, Eric Drooker, Molly Barker, Franz Masereel, John Muafangejo, Kenneth Patchen, Edward Gorey, and collaborators such as Ntozake Shange and Romare Bearden, Philip Guston and various poets, Robert Creeley and various artists.

New York City's Alternative Schools

The high schools addressed the needs of a transient student population, composed frequently of students in crisis. The students found themselves outside of the traditional school system due to recent immigration, institutionalization, depressed academic skills, disability, substance abuse, pregnancy, an unsuccessful high school placement, or choice.

Vocational Training Center was a program where students opted to enroll at a site where they were given 90 minutes of classroom instruction and spent the rest of the school day engaged in on site experiential learning.

The Frederick Douglass Literacy Center served high school students who tested below third grade in standardized reading tests.

Students entered alternative programs from diverse streams, and did not share common school experiences. Their teachers were sensitive to a wide range of student backgrounds, and encouraged students to share information in supportive *Family Group* settings.

This course was developed as a way to extend Ten Penny Players/Waterways poetry chapbooks in a different direction. It also provided a supportive structure for participants to plan and complete a self-contained project with a tangible end product. The project gave students a new way of expressing themselves and a time and place

to develop their own ideas about their own experience. Students were asked to present their own thoughts on their own subject, and to refine and present them formally. Students used their strengths to build up skills in areas of weakness.

For example, one student had a facility with words but lacked confidence to create visual images. One exercise started with a word given by the artist. He then drew a symbol of the word. Adding more of his own words or words suggested by the artist he integrated the whole into a visual narrative.

Two visual learners with minimal literacy skills found story boarding provided structure for narratives that would tell their stories. They were then able to write their stories.



photographs by Jack Giordano