

Reading the Visual
Dr. Frank Serafini
Associate Professor - Arizona State University
www.frankserafini.com

How Have the Texts We Read in School Changed?: A Shifting Landscape

- There has been an ongoing shift from Print-Based Texts containing primarily written language to Digitally-Based and Multimodal Texts.
- Written text is governed by the logic of time or temporal sequence, whereas, visual image is governed by the logic of spatiality, composition, and simultaneity.
- Printed text is often subordinate to visual images as the primary mode that readers draw upon to construct meaning.
- The blending of visual images, design elements and written language presents readers with new challenges, and requires a new set of competencies and practices.

Multimodal Texts

- Multimodal Texts combine more than one mode for representing and communicating ideas.
- Different modes (semiotic resources) do different things, in different ways.
- Multimodal texts utilize a variety of modes including visual images, design elements, and written language.

Interpretive Repertoire

- A set of interpretive competencies or social practices for producing, designing, disseminating, and interpreting visual images and multimodal texts.
- Concerned with three (3) different contexts for interpretation: the sites of production, the multimodal text or visual image itself, and the sites of distribution and reception.

Possible Theoretical Perspectives

Art History and Criticism
Media and Cultural Studies
Visual Grammar
Semiotics and Social Semiotics
Picturebook Theories
Visual Discourse Analysis
Multimodal Analysis
Visual Ethnography
Multimodal Interaction Analysis

Developing Interpretive Repertoires

- Calling students' attention to aspects of multimodal texts that often go unnoticed
- Discussing HOW images and design elements work, as much as WHAT is included
- Moving beyond what is noticed to what it might mean within the covers of the book and in the world beyond the book

Three Interpretive Perspectives

1. Art Movements and Styles
2. Visual Grammar: Perspective, Composition, Viewer Interactions, Interpersonal Distance
3. Multimodal Design: Borders, Typography, Endpages, Interplay

Art Movements

Realism - Folk Art - Modern Art - Surrealism

Visual Grammar: Perspective

Point of view for viewer and actors in an image – where viewers are positioned.

Has socially determined meaning potentials.

Provides viewer with their “window on the world.”

Creates involvement or detachment, and suggests power structures.

Questions to Ask

Where are the characters located?

Are objects or people above, below or straight on?

Where are you positioned as the viewer?

How does your position as viewer affect your interpretations?

Visual Grammar: Composition

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How elements of an image relate to one another.

How elements are integrated into meaningful wholes.

Size and position may suggest how an image is to be viewed and possible meaning potentials.

Creates navigational “paths” for the viewer

Questions to Ask

Where are the objects or characters positioned?

What is foregrounded and backgrounded

How big are certain elements?

How does the composition affect the meaning potential of the image?

Visual Grammar: Viewer Interactions

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How is the viewer being asked to interact with the characters in the image?

Demand - requires active response to characters in an image.

Offer - placed in voyeuristic position, viewers look at what characters are looking at.

Questions to Ask

Which characters are looking at you? How does this affect your relationship with the character? What is being asked of you as the viewer?

Which characters are looking away from you? What are you being asked to consider?

How would the image change if the characters looked at you or not?

Visual Grammar: Interpersonal Distance

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The social distance suggested by an image as to how close or far away you are positioned from the characters.

Creates intimacy and closeness with characters or suggests an informal, distanced relationship.

Can provide us with perspectives we rarely have in real life (close ups).

Questions to Ask

Which characters are portrayed close-up and which ones are from a greater distance?

How does distance affect the meaning potentials of an image?

Which characters seem more powerful because of their position and distance?

Multimodal Design: Borders

Windows into Illustrations

Boundary between Reality and Imagination

Sets Images Apart from Text

Thick Borders or Faded Edges

Breaking Borders "Call for Interaction"

Multimodal Design: Typography

Bold vs. Timid

Modern vs. Classic

Playful vs. Serious

Font as Story Element

Multimodal Design: Endpages

Connections to Theme

Narrative Elements

Multimodal Design: Interplay of Text & Illustrations

Symmetrical - images parallel the information provided in the text and vica versa

Enhancing - illustrations enhance the text and vica versa

Counterpoint - images provide information that is contradicted by the text and vica versa

Text-Image Interplay

You can't tell a reader to look at the picture for clues to reading words in a counterpoint text.

Both Symmetrical AND Enhancing texts should be part of primary classrooms.

Avoid Picture Walks - they treat the illustrations as prompts for reading texts rather than as a system of meaning.

Some Final Thoughts

Intentionality: Deliberate choices are made by artists, graphic designers, publishers, therefore than can be interpreted.

Visual Images and Design Elements are a System of Meaning.

Multimodal Texts require interpretive strategies beyond those used with printed text alone.

Professional Resources

Reading the Visual – Serafini

<http://store.tpress.com/0807754714.shtml>

Reading Contemporary Picture Books - Lewis

Looking at Pictures in Picture Books - Doonan

Postmodern Picturebooks – Sipe and Pantaleo

How Picturebooks Work – Nikolajeva and Scott

Reading Images – Kress & van Leeuwen

Picture This – Bang

Literacy in the New Media Age – Kress

Practices of Looking – Sturken and Cartwright

Handbook of Visual Analysis – van Leeuwen & Jewitt

Visual Methodologies - Rose