

Teaching Writing Using Visuals

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Having just read the title of this paper you are probably wondering what visuals have to do with the teaching of writing. Wondering about things is a good place to start. To do so, means that you are beginning to question your assumptions about the way writing is taught, which is the main objective of this paper. One big assumption most English teachers have held about writing at one time or another is that writing is taught by using words --- because everybody knows writing involves using words effectively. Art teachers use visuals --- not composition teachers, or so the thinking has gone. So why do I want to use visuals to teach writing ? My answer is because teaching writing using visuals works well. Throughout this paper reasons will be given to support my assumption. Initially, two popular and diverse ways of teaching composition will be looked at, followed by an examination of the way people best learn to write. Research drawn from modern second language acquisition will be introduced to support this examination. The nature of language in general also will be considered. At this point, practical applications of my assumption in the form of curriculum considerations and specific lesson plans will be provided. Finally, you, the reader, will be given an opportunity to evaluate the lesson plans and activities included in this paper for suitability of use in your own composition classes.

Traditionally, native and non-native speakers of English have learned to write with varying degrees of facility by exposure to and practice of generally accepted models of English writing. Specific products (eg: reports, essays, etc.) are written in specified formats. This writing-for-a-product, then, is a way of teaching students writing which emphasizes the application of specific skills (eg: correct paragraph development) to the task of writing. This approach to writing, like the bottom-up reading approaches, assumes that people learn best by first mastering these specific skills and then applying and connecting them to the "whole." The "whole" in this case being "correct" written work which is (hopefully) communicating the writer's thoughts clearly.

In contrast to a product-oriented approach, the writing-as-a-process approach offers another way to teach writing. In this approach, writing is viewed not as external structures imposed (from the beginning) on the communication to obtain the proper form but rather as an extended process emphasizing creativity and communication from the start. Only after the writer has communicated his or her meaning clearly does the editing of the writing into an appropriate format become a major consideration. The top-down approach to the teaching of reading is similar to this model in that both stress working with the "whole" first, whether the whole is the general gist of a story being read or the gist of what the writer wants

to say. Once this is accomplished the reader and writer are free to analyze the story's meaning and written communication in greater detail.

By this point, it is probably becoming clear to you that I am strongly in favor of teaching writing using the writing-as-a-process approach, especially at the university level in Japan. The theme of this paper, using visuals to teach writing is (to me) a logical extension of this desire. I feel as I do because of a basic assumption I hold about the way people learn to write (and read and do other things, too!) In condensed form, my assumption is that, "most writing skills must be acquired rather than learned." This in turn, implies that learning to write is a natural developmental process. The process is marked by stages that students pass through as they become more proficient writers. Students do not learn the elements of good writing and then miraculously apply them, producing a well-written product.

The reasons I hold this assumption are three-fold. First, my own personal experiences as a writer support my assumption in that I have "become" a "writer" over time. The forms, mechanics and rhetorical styles of "good" writing drilled into my head over the years did very little to produce the "writer" I have "become." The "correct" way to write was "taught" to me, "learned" by me and was, in the short-term future, available for my use as a writer. However, in retrospect, these writing-for-a-product skills did very little to make me into a "writer." It is true that immediately after learning a form or style of writing I produced a substantial amount of written material using that particular form or style. Yet, the real progress in my writing ability occurred when I came to the place of wanting to communicate personally important information to others through the written word. The "acquired and correct" ways to write previously "learned" took on a new importance and with clear communication as my goal I began to review the appropriate forms for communicating meaning to others. Through this process my "learned" knowledge has developed into acquired writing skills enabling me to (usually) communicate what I want to say in a practical and consistent fashion.

Secondly, current research in second language acquisition (L2) writing by Krashen, among others, reinforces the conclusions I have come to. Basically, the research indicates, in the case of children at least, that children's writing skills appear in predictable stages: expressive writing skills develop first, followed by transactional and poetic writing skills (Northeast Conference p.155.) Children's writing begins simply and after a number of years becomes increasingly complex. Further, Krashen's acquisition/learning model explains why students (children or adults) who over-monitor their writing with "learned" forms, styles, etc. are less effective at writing than are students whose main focus is to communicate their ideas. Recent developments in second language literacy education also support Krashen's findings.

Lastly, the views I hold about the nature of language can also be applied to my assumption about the way people learn to write. The characteristics of language I perceive are that it is learnable, organized, communicative, creative and descriptive of reality or thought. The acquired writing skills model also assumes these same traits about language.

There! You now have my rationale for teaching writing in a different way. Of course, as I write, I hope you too are re-examining your personal assumptions in these areas, also. Even if you disagree totally with what I am saying you will end up with a clearer idea of

what you do think.

Next, it will be helpful to consider ways how this (until now) theoretical writing-as-a-process approach can be brought to actual application within the classroom using visuals. In a real sense, the number of varied activities and materials that can be used with this assumption are infinite. Adaptations of materials or activities can be made to make them fit the specific purpose(s) of the lesson(s). All activities would, of course, be generally designed around a writing-as-a-process model, such as the one put forth by Maggie Cassidy in *On Our Way*. This model is structured in such a way as to always give the student maximal control over what he or she writes and a definite audience to write for. The specific steps that I try to use in my classes are (in order) 1) brainstorming topics in pairs, 2) sharing these topics with a partner, 3) writing a "discovery" (initial) draft and sharing it with the same partner, 4) revising the "discovery" draft and sharing the revised version with another student, 5) editing and publication of the writing.

Additionally, the writing activities I use in my classes usually have the following common characteristics: 1) they are based on student-generated topics, 2) they require substantial student-generated investment and 3) they draw ideas and materials from the world the student knows and experiences daily.

The following descriptions of and sample lesson plans for five activities created by various teachers and adapted for use in my classes will illustrate the manner in which visuals can be used to teach writing. Please refer to the related drawings and visuals printed on separate pages for each activity. Also note that all references mentioned are included in the resource bibliography.

I) **FACES :** From Visual Delights by Romo and Brinson.

OBJECTIVE : To aid students in creating dialogues.

MATERIALS : ---Situation cards, instruction cards and role cards.
---Assorted pictures
---Poster

STEPS : 1) Explain the parts of the visual to students.
2) Teacher puts up one card for each category. Also, two pictures.
3) Possible combinations are: READ ACROSS

<u>INSTRUCTION</u>	<u>SITUATION</u>	<u>ROLE</u>
A) Inviting	Party	Man/Woman
B) Inviting	First date	Man/Woman
C) Complaining/Apologizing	Cafeteria	Boss/Customer
D) Asking for information	Doctor's office	Doctor/Patient
E) Arguing	Department store	Husband/Wife



F) Asking for directions	Street	Driver/Pedestrian
G) Playing	Inside a room	Student/Student
H) Answering	Classroom	Teacher/Students

- 4) Have students make groups of 2-4.
- 5) Have each group write a conversation using the instruction, situation and roles given.
- 6) Students read their group's conversation to another group when finished.
- 7) Both groups correct each other's conversations. Checking for clear meaning.
- 8) Re-write/revise dialogues if necessary.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS :

When dialogue is in final form, each group can perform/act out their conversation for another group or the entire class.

From Visual Delights
By Romo and Brinson
Newbury House

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;">SITUATION</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 10px auto;">FIRST DATE</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; width: 150px; height: 150px; margin: 10px auto;">  </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;">INSTRUCTION</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 10px auto;">INVITING</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; width: 150px; height: 150px; margin: 10px auto;">  </div>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;">ROLE</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 10px auto;">MAN/WOMAN</div>	

II) **STORY :** From Visual Delights by Romo and Brinson.

OBJECTIVE : To aid students in creating a story using a pre-determined theme.

MATERIALS : Three panel poster.

STEPS :

- 1) Ask students to tell the story orally.
- 2) Ask students questions to elicit additional information. Example :
Why do you think he's unhappy ?
- 3) Have students write a story based on the visual. They can do this in groups or individually. Encourage variations.
- 4) Divide class into small groups. Each group tells the story and then continues it logically. Each group offers advice to the other to clarify meaning.
- 5) Re-write or revise as necessary.
- 6) Groups may want to tell their stories to the entire group/class.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS :

- 1) Have students write their stories using specific structures: Examples: present simple tense, future tense and passive tense.
- 2) Teacher can use protocol analysis, mapping (pre and post) as additional aids when teaching this lesson.



Visual taken from Visual Delights

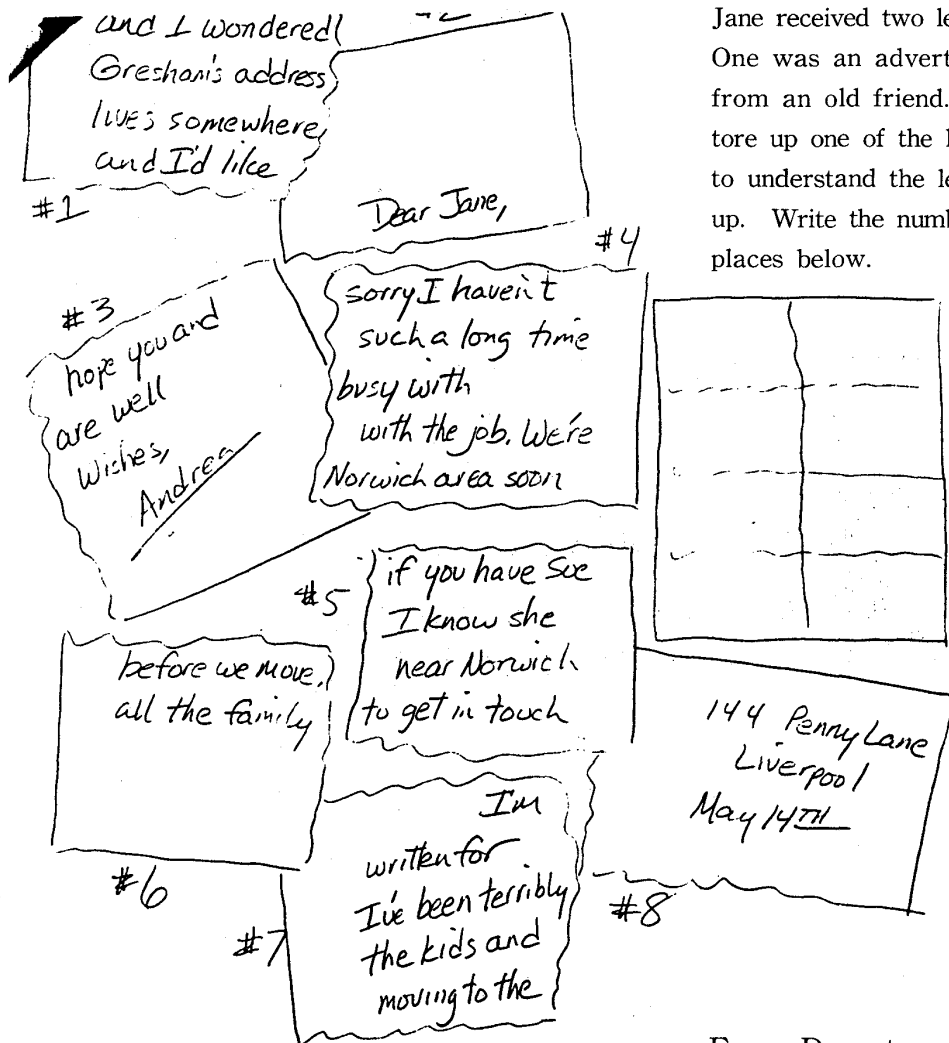
III) JIGSAW : From Departures In Reading A & B by Peter Viney.

OBJECTIVE : To aid students in writing letters.

MATERIALS : Poster

- STEPS :
- 1) Explain the visual to the students.
 - 2) Ask students to try to put the letter back together again. Don't write on the poster. Check results as a class.
 - 3) Have students write their own letter on any subject. They can work in groups or do it individually. Tell them to use unlined paper. Finally, tell them to tear the letter into evenly-sized squares and mix the pieces up.
 - 4) Give the squares to another student or group to reconstruct. Do all letters from the different groups.

#1 #2 #3 #4 #5 #6 #7 #8



JIGSAW

Jane received two letters this morning: One was an advertisement, one was from an old friend. She accidentally tore up one of the letters. Help Jane to understand the letter that she tore up. Write the numbers in the correct places below.

From Departures In Reading.
By Peter Viney Oxford Press.

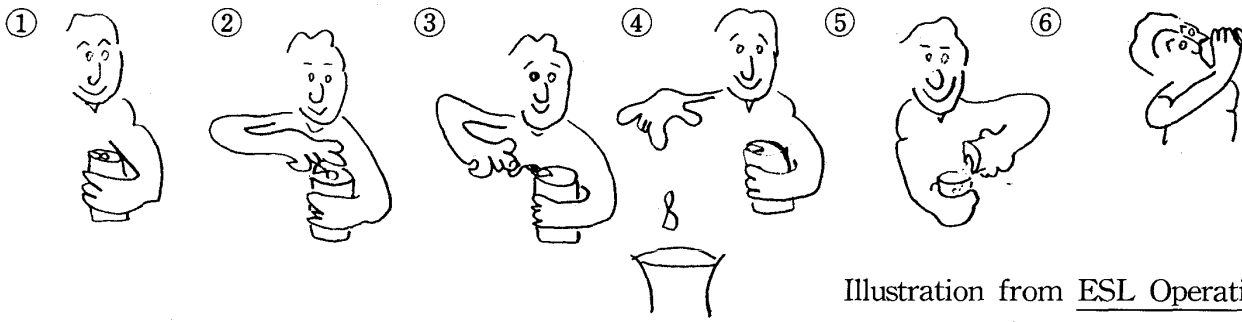


Illustration from ESL Operations.
by Nelson + Winters Newbury
House.

IV) OPENING A PULL-TOP CAN : From ESL OPERATIONS. by Nelson and Winters.

OBJECTIVE : To aid students in creating original versions of an ESL operation.

MATERIALS : --- One unopened pull-top can of soda for each student or group of students in class.
--- Poster

- STEPS :**
- 1) Let students look at the visual for a few minutes.
 - 2) Teacher models the operation orally (using a can) to introduce the vocabulary in context.
 - 3) Ask students to make groups and write the operation. They can do this in groups or individually. Encourage variations.
 - 4) Each group reads their operation to another group, checking for clear meaning.
 - 5) Re-write or revise as necessary.
 - 6) Groups may want to read their operations to the entire group/class.

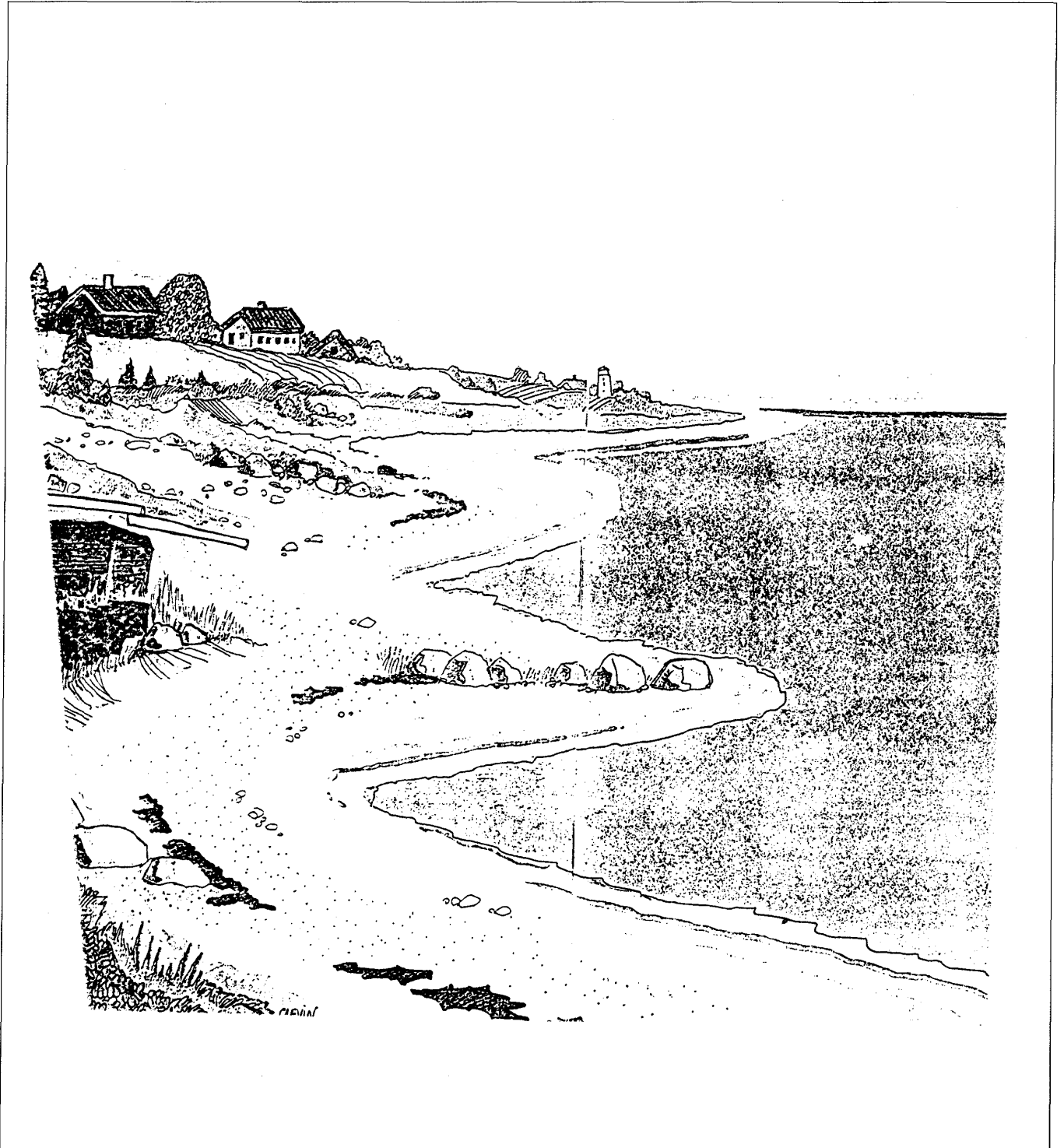
V) THE BEACH : TPR UNISSETS by James Asher

OBJECTIVE : To aid students in writing creative stories, dialogues and reports around the given theme.

MATERIALS : One TPR Uniset for each group of students (2-4 in one group)

- STEPS :**
- 1) Teacher performs standard TPR lesson for students to introduce vocabulary. Teacher can tell a story, read a report about the picture or give isolated pieces of information to students one sentence at a time.
 - A) Teacher says sentence etc.
 - B) Teacher models sentence by placing appropriate plastic piece(s) on picture.

- C) Students copy model.
- 2) Each group of students then makes their own unique sentences, dialogues etc.
 - 3) Each group reads their sentences to another group. Both groups work on their sentences to make the meaning as clear as possible.
 - 4) When finished, each group "teaches" a different group who has not seen or heard their "creation".

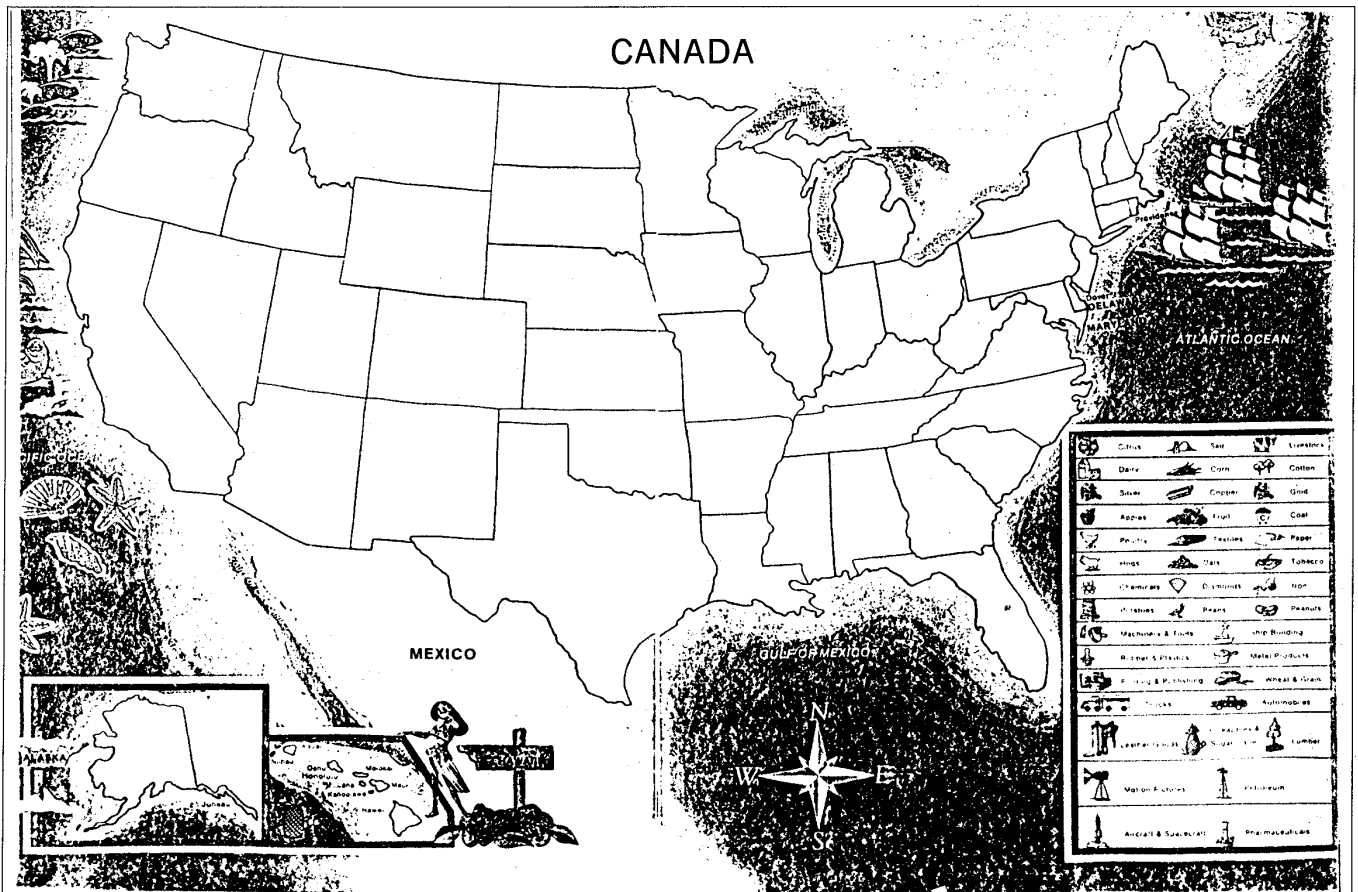


VI) THE U. S. A. TPR UNISSETS by James Asher

OBJECTIVE : To aid students in writing creative stories, dialogues and reports around the given theme.

MATERIALS : One TPR Uniset for each group of students (2-4 in one group).

- STEPS :**
- 1) Teacher performs standard TPR lesson for students to introduce vocabulary. Teacher can tell a story, read a report about the picture or give isolated pieces of information to students one sentence at a time.
 - A) Teacher says sentence.
 - B) Teacher models sentence by placing appropriate plastic piece(s) on picture.
 - C) Students copy model.
 - 2) Each group of students then makes their own unique sentences, dialogues etc.
 - 3) Each group reads their sentences to another group. Both groups work on their sentences to make the meaning as clear as possible.
 - 4) When finished, each group "teaches" a different group who has not seen or heard their "creation".



Removable stickers for use with The U. S. A. map.



Having examined these sample lesson plans you are now in a position to evaluate for yourself whether or not the writing-as-a-process model and visuals like these (or any at all) can be used in your writing classes. To facilitate this evaluation I have provided the following form to aid in your decision-making process. As you review each sample activity, determine if you could use the visual "as is" in your classes. If not, could it be modified for use in your classes? Possible modifications might include adjusting the vocabulary level of the language used or the theme of the activity. Give reasons why you chose the response you did. Mark your opinion in the appropriate box on the form. Also, answer the questions on the form related to the teaching of writing in as much detail as is feasible.

WRITING VISUALS EVALUATION FORM

ACTIVITY	USE "AS IS"	ADAPTABLE	NOT ADAPTABLE	REASON(S)
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FACES

STORY

JIGSAW

OPERATIONS

THE BEACH

THE U.S.A.

QUESTIONS ON THE TEACHING OF WRITING

- 1) What is your central assumption about the way people learn in general?
- 2) What is your central assumption about the nature of language?
- 3) Give at least three reasons to support your assumption about the way people learn to write. Draw from your personal experiences as a student and an educator, as well as, research in the field of writing.
- 4) If your approach to the teaching of writing is different than the one contained in this paper, list the general steps students work through as they write.
- 5) Create or adapt three to five writing activities and write sample lesson plans for them based on your approach to the teaching of writing. Try them out in your classes.

Undoubtedly, objections can and probably will be raised that the use of a visual/writing -as-a-process approach to teach composition in certain advanced academic situations is inappropriate. As real as the objections are, I believe in the relevance of this approach even for advanced learners. In these instances, the judicious use of the writing process in conjunction with visuals can provide students with key writing strategies necessary for consistently communicating their thoughts to others.

Finally, as I stated earlier, my objective in writing this paper was to stimulate new thought about the way writing is taught. Regardless of your conclusions I hope I was successful.

**RESOURCE BIBLIOGRAPHY
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WRITING USING VISUALS**

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