Multimodal Interpretations of Novels

Diane Barone[1] & Rebecca Barone[2]

[1] University of Nevada, Reno, USA

[2] Clark County School District, USA

Correspondence: Diane Barone, University of Nevada, Reno, USA. Tel: 775-225-413.

Abstract

This study explored the multimodal reading responses created by fifth graders through a qualitative design. We discovered that certain roles within literature circles such as journaler and fact finder led to multimodal response. We learned that most responses were redundant with text. In other words, both shared similar information. We learned that certain books triggered multimodal responses more than other books. When using Callow's categories for visual interpretation, we discovered that most multimodal responses were categorized as composition and a few were critical where viewers were asked to respond emotionally.

Keywords: comprehension, multimodal responses, qualitative research, intermediate students

> *Whether we have called them multimodal ensembles or not, humans have created and shared texts that include visual images, graphic designs, and written language for hundreds of years. (Serafini, 2014, p. 11)*

A multimodal ensemble is an interesting way to describe an overall composition that includes text, visuals, and perhaps graphic designs (Serafini, 2014). The term, ensemble, makes it apparent that there is more than one modality represented within a single interpretation. To make the concept of a multimodal ensemble clearer, we share an example of a one that comes from a fifth grader who wrote about an interesting word, drowsy, that he encountered while reading (see Figure 1). Within his response he shares writing through his definition of the word and an image from the Internet (Google Images) to visually represent the word's meaning. Josh understands that sharing meaning through writing is important as his writing appears first, and he also knows that an image leads to immediate understanding of the word's interpretation. Multimodal ensembles, like the sample shared, are supported within current literacy practices as they embrace knowing, seeing, and feeling as a result of engagement with multiple forms of literacy such as textual, visual, or digital experiences (Ranker, 2015).

```
I am investigating the word drowsy. The word drowsy means to

be sleepy or tired. Synonyms for drowsy are tired, exhausted,

yawning, sluggish, and dog-tired.
```
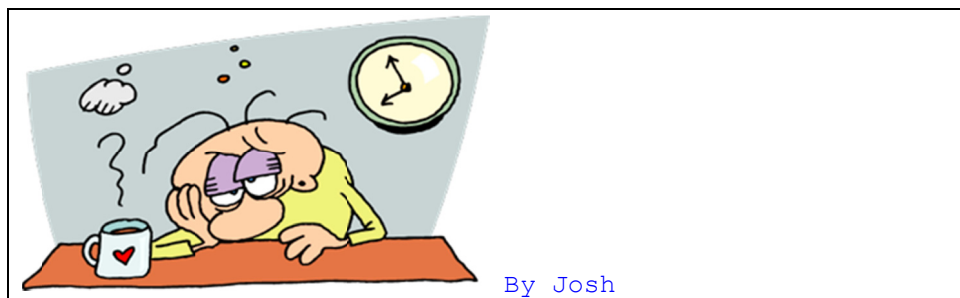

By Josh

Figure 1. A multimodal ensemble

Lankshear and Knoble (2003) suggest that the shift in what text is has changed the primary carrier of meaning, words, to now include other elements, especially images. Students consider more than alphabetic print to understand, as they must integrate image and print (Hassett & Schieble, 2007). These integrations are often seen in children's literature such as books like *Flora and Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures* (DiCamillo, 2013) and in particular in graphic novels. Handa (2004) argues that for students to understand these integrations, preference should not be given by teachers to one form or another; rather, they should be considered epistemologically interconnected. Further, Sanders and Albers (2010) suggest that the current attention centered on multimodality has redefined what it means to be literate in the twenty-first century. This expectation can prove to be difficult for teachers as their preparation programs in literacy instruction are grounded in alphabetic concepts (Hassett & Schieble, 2007). Artistic exploration has been left for specialists such as art teachers; thus, assuring a separation in these interpretations.

While there are numerous differences between text and image, a primary difference is in interpretation. For instance when reading a written text, the interpretation occurs from reading words, sentences, paragraphs, and pages; in other words, meaning develops sequentially (Callow, 2008; Kress, 1997). Unlike text interpretations, visual interpretation happens immediately upon viewing a design and spatial elements (Callow, 2008). For instance, the viewer instantly creates an interpretation and then deconstructs how this interpretation was developed. Callow (2005) offers three dimensions to help understand interpretations of visual representations. These include: Affective, where images are interpreted emotionally; Compositional where images are more finely interpreted by exploring symbols, angles, color, layout, and so on; and Critical where images are considered in how a viewer responds, such as the positioning of a character which makes the viewer notice his or her power.

With this enhanced focus on multimodality, we, a teacher and university professor, developed an exploratory inquiry that focused on the multimodal interpretations that students created in response to their reading during literature circles where students read a novel in small groups. We noticed that students often produced written and visual interpretations to their reading, although the visuals were rarely focused upon in their teacher's responding. We wondered about the visual interpretations within their responses and how they synergistically worked with their written responses. For instance, were the visuals added on to their written responses, did the visuals replicate what was written or were redundant with their written response (as seen in Figure 1), or did the visuals enhance their interpretations and offer new information to their interpretations? So our first research question was – How do students construct their multimodal ensembles and what are the connections between text and visual image? Once we explored these connections, we moved to using Callow's principles of interpretation (2008) to further refine our understandings. Our second research question explored how Callow's categories were reflected in the multimodal ensembles. Rather, than just giving the visual elements a cursory review, we decided to closely focus on visual elements and their connections to students' writing and how they conveyed meaning within multimodal ensembles. We believed this research was important in helping teachers and students appreciate and understand multimodal ensembles as they reflect current understandings of literacy practices. Additionally, by valuing both visual and textual information, the visual was not ignored as is common in instructional settings.

1. Literature Review

> *What do we see when we read? (Other than words on a page.) What do we picture in our minds? (Mendelsund, 2014, p. 7)*

Within this literature review, we first focus on multimodal literacy and its importance in classrooms. We then pay attention to the visual aspects of multimodal literacy and also consider visual and textual integrations. Finally, we explore literature circles and how they support conversation and the creation of multimodal ensembles.

1.1 Multimodal Literacy

When asking students to create responses to their reading, they have an opportunity to share their feelings, opinions, facts, and images, among other things. If ways of interpreting are left open by their teacher, interesting multimodal ensembles result.

Researchers have documented how elementary students' multimodal texts reflected various structural, organizational and genre characteristics, literary elements and techniques, content and vocabulary, and elements of visual art and design (Cairney, 1990, 1992; Dressel, 1990; Lancia, 1997). Multimodal theories suggested that meaning is created across various modes including gesture, sound, image, and so on; each mode is unique and contributes synergistically to the other when combined (Albers & Sanders, 2010; Jewitt, 2006; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

In classrooms, teachers make decisions about what students read and ways they are expected to interpret their reading (Galda & Beach, 2001). Teachers can require students to only engage cognitively with written texts where

their responses are supported solely by words. Or teachers can broaden their understandings and expectations by including image as well as text and engage students cognitively and emotionally. If teachers choose the second path, they bring in and honor visual representations as valid interpretations of text. They too, in concert with their students, learn about the language and visual expectations required to comprehend and understand image. For instance, they learn to use the language of line, value, space, and movement (Howells & Negreiros, 2012; Martens, Martens, Doyle, Loomis, & Aghalarov, 2012). Moreover, finding space for multimodal interpretations within classrooms supports forms of communication prevalent in a contemporary world.

Several academic associations have written position statements to support and nudge teachers to expand their teaching to include multimodal literacies. For instance, The National Council of Teachers of English created a position statement (www.ncte.org/positions/statements/multimodalliteracies) that included the following statement: "It is the interplay of meaning-making systems (alphabetic, oral, visual, etc.) that teachers and students should strive to study and produce. Multiple ways of knowing also include art, music, movement, and drama, which should not be considered curricular luxuries" (p. 1). Clearly, art is an important language that needs to be valued in classrooms.

Siegel (1995) suggested that when shifting from textual to include visual understanding, there is a similar shift from transmission to inquiry-centered instruction and learning. She noted that when a student is expected to transmediate (move from one sign system to another), he or she participates in reflective thinking, thinking that is recursive as meaning is created across systems. Further, using multiple systems resulted in a generative process where students understood the differences in meaning making and the affordances and constraints within each system. Her thinking showcased how instruction and the essence of learning changed when other sign systems were included. For example, including visual understanding was not just an add-on to instruction; it changed how students and teachers engaged in understanding multimodal experiences.

1.2 Exploring the Visual within Multimodal Ensembles

Including image suggests other classroom changes. For example, Pantaleo (2010; 2012) writes about the need for time for students to slow down perceptions so that they can move beyond noticing images and move to an understanding of the images. Nikolajeva (2013) concurs in that she considers images in picturebooks contribute to emotional understanding. Students, she believes, identify basic emotions like joy or fear by studying characters' faces and expressions. From these basic emotions, students come to understand more complex emotions such as love or pride. Image, therefore, allows for development of emotional intelligence and aesthetic appreciation.

Evans (2001) writes about brain functions and how the brain is wired to respond to emotional stimuli in two dominant ways: First, a low path that responds quickly to visual stimuli and second, a high path which is slower and is in response to language. So when responding to a picture book, for instance, the brain will respond affectively to the image first, before considering the text on the page. Further, Evans explains that the visual stimulus is stronger and quicker than the verbal one. Building from this research, Nikolajeva (2014) writes, "A visual image can potentially evoke a wide range of emotions circumventing the relative precision of words" (p. 96). Additional research by Arizpe and Styles (2003) and Pantaleo (2008) confirm that even very young children respond emotionally to the images within picture books.

Strengths to comprehension and/or understanding of text within a multimodal ensemble are to value both ways of responding. The visual results in quick, emotive qualities and the text allows for slower, more cognitive-based interpretation.

1.3 Combining Text and Image

When combining narrative text, writing, and visual in multimodal responses, various understandings contribute to the response composition. For narrative understanding, students consider plot, characters, setting, theme, and so on. For writing, students contemplate how to best share their understandings through written ideas. For instance, students decide how to begin, how to frame sentences, how to construct paragraphs, and so on. In visual responses, students ponder how to create an image using color, line, texture, perspective, shape, and other elements (Author, 2011; Rose, 2012). For example, students learn to interpret color and how it affects the mood of the characters or they explore how sharp, angular lines create tension.

Drawing on the work of picturebook illustrators, Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) identified ways that image and text are connected. The first integration is symmetrical where the image and text are redundant and provide similar information. The second text/image relationship is enhancing where the image enhances the text and brings new information. Finally, the third relationship is contradictory where the image and text are counter to one another, each sharing unique information. These relationships are invented during the creative process and the combination of

visual and textual generates new meaning (Ranker, 2015; Siegel, 1995). Wolf (2004) commented that the best readers of text and image are those that go beyond the black and white of print and engage in the ambiguity of image and text – they see their readings as a reflection of the art that has been offered to them.

1.4 A Structure for Considering Multimodal Ensembles

Multimodal ensembles are created when students participate in a structure that supports conversation surrounding the reading of text grounded in multimodal responses that contribute to discussion. Zwiers and Crawford (2011) suggest that student conversations are rare in most classrooms. However, Peterson and Eeds (2007) and Keene (2008) suggest the importance for student conversation to developing comprehension and understanding of text. Others, like Raphael and McMahon (1994) have written about how to engage students in book clubs where small groups of students talk about their reading as they move through a novel.

Perhaps, Daniels (2002) has written most extensively about literature circles as a way to entice students to talk and write about books that they read in small groups. Within his structure, each student participates in a role that serves as the foundation for conversation. For example, a student might be a director where they create questions for the group to consider. Other roles could include a fact finder or word investigator. In literature circles, each role contributes unique understanding to help support the group's more complete understanding of a book.

Although students have included visual aspects within their responses as part of a literature circle, teachers in responding to their interpretations typically focused on the text or written content of the response and have ignored or cursively glanced at visual inclusions (Serafini, 2014). Similarly, when sharing picture books with students, teachers most often ignore the images and focus solely on text (Nikolajeva, 2014). Moreover, Mayall and Robinson (2009) discovered that teachers, who had access to visual literacy tools, rarely used these tools with students. Additionally, while teachers were aware of literacy standards within their state only 40% noted that standards addressed visual literacy.

Clearly, while teachers have access to materials to support visual literacy, they are not routinely doing so. Therefore, we decided to move beyond a singular focus on text and carefully explore the multimodal interpretations created by students during their response to reading within a literature circle structure. We believed this understanding was critical to support additional focus and instruction within visual literacy to encourage the development of multimodal ways of responding.

2. What We Did

We, a teacher and university partner, developed an exploratory inquiry where we wanted to discover the nuances of students' multimodal responses (Eisner, 1991; Shank, 2006). Our purpose was to describe the multimodal responses and to determine how the visual and textual elements were integrated. Moreover, we explored how students used the visual to create affective, compositional, and/or critical interpretations (Callow, 2005). Our research questions were: How do students construct their multimodal ensembles and what are the connections between text and visual image? And how are Callow's categories reflected in the multimodal ensembles?

2.1 Participants

We utilized the classrooms where Becky, the teacher, taught language arts. She team-taught with another fifth grade teacher and she provided language arts instruction to students in both classrooms with one class with her in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Becky's classes were situated within a large elementary school, approximately 1000 students from kindergarten to fifth grade.

Becky had a masters degree in literacy and was known in her district for the quality of her literacy instruction. She consistently had the highest test scores on high-stakes testing in her school and within the district. She had taught for seven years, with most of her teaching in the fourth and fifth grades.

Within her fifth grade classes were 61 students with 34 boys and 27 girls represented. The students varied in reading achievement as some were above grade level, the majority at grade level, and a few students slightly below grade level. The students varied in socioeconomic status as well with several from families with significant financial support, and the remaining students balanced with those from more typical middle class backgrounds or high-poverty backgrounds. The neighborhood surrounding the school had homes within a planned community, apartments, and public housing. The demographic profile of the school included about 11% Asian students, 24% Hispanic students, 8% Black students, 42% White students, and 12% mixed race students.

2.2 Literacy Instruction

Each day for approximately one hour, students participated in literature circles where they shared their responses and talked about the novels they were reading. Their responses could be text alone or text and image synergistically connected to each other. To accomplish this goal, Becky organized students into heterogeneous literature circle groups so they could participate in the reading, writing, drawing, and talking about a single book. The heterogeneous groups were purposeful, as Becky wanted above grade level readers to critically analyze their reading and provide leadership to the groups. The at grade level readers were able to move from literal understanding to more inferential comprehension. And the below grade level readers provided the literal or surface information needed to ground the more consequential understandings of text. By having students grouped this way, all students participated in the thinking levels expected of fifth grade students.

Student groups changed as books changed and the jobs that students were responsible for within a group also varied by genre. For instance, for historical fiction she asked students to participate in certain responsibilities such as historical fiction fact finder, summarizer, journaler, and so on (Daniels, 2002).

Becky assigned each student role carefully. Directors had to be strong readers as they developed complex questions and they had to be good managers of their groups for they made sure that each student participated. Summarizers were the least sophisticated readers in each group as their responsibility kept them grounded in text, and in particular the literal aspects of text. The other roles were assigned to the remaining students based on individual student preferences. Some of these roles were journaler where a student documented a scene and the emotions connected to it, investigator where a student discovered information about a specific word or event in the text, and passage picker where a student selected a passage and explained why it was important to consider.

2.3 Data

We explored students' multimodal responses from August to February. While there were a multitude of text only responses, we solely focused on the multimodal responses for this inquiry. Each week one complete set of responses was saved for analysis. In total, five hundred and thirteen responses were studied. Of this total number, one hundred and sixty-one were multimodal or 31% of the total and these were the responses considered for this study.

During the time of the study, students read the following books. Importantly not every student read all of the books, as books varied within literature circles. The exception is that all students began the year reading *Maniac Magee*, following this reading experience they all read Hiaasen novels, and then they explored historical fiction. Following are the books that were read:

- Maniac Magee (Spinelli, 1999)
- Hoot (Hiaasen, 2005)
- Chomp (Hiaasen, 2013)
- Flush (Hiaasen, 2010)
- One Crazy Summer (Williams-Garcia, 2011)
- Esperanza Rising (Ryan, 2002)
- The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg (Philbrick, 2011)
- Crispin (Avi, 2004)
- Bud, Not Buddy (Curtis, 2004)
- Elijah of Buxton (Curtis, 2009)

2.4 Data Analysis

Both Becky and I reviewed the responses multiple times to determine the connections between visual and textual ways of responding. We coded each response by how the text and visual connected. Then we moved to interpreting how students created their responses by using the categories suggested by Callow (2008). We went through each response and applied a second level of categorization based on Callow's three levels of interpretation.

3. What We Discovered

> *If fiction were linear we would learn to wait, in order to picture. But we don't wait. We begin imaging right out of the gate, immediately upon beginning a book. (Mendelsund, 2014, p. 52)*

As we examined the multimodal responses, we discovered that students either drew or used images from the Internet for the visual aspect of their response. Most often the drawn images were done with pencil with only a very few including color. Secondly, we learned that the journaler, fact finder, and historical fact finder roles resulted in the majority of the multimodal responses. Finally, we learned that the book *Maniac Magee* resulted in the most multimodal responses.

Once, we discovered the main ways that students responded, using the Internet or drawing, we explored each type separately. We separated the responses for with the Internet, students chose already created visuals and in drawing students had agency in how the visual was represented. Following are our discoveries through the separation of these media choices.

3.1 Visual Representation through Use of the Internet

We first explored the synergistic relationships between the image and text. Following these explorations, we revisited the images to more comprehensively understand the meanings that were constructed.

3.2 Synergistic Connections

Students were very comfortable finding an image from the Internet to support or replicate their text-based response. There were 97 multimodal ensembles created with Internet images. For instance, William was curious about what butterscotch Krimpets might be. He found a description of them where they are a "fluffy cake with butterscotch icing" and then he included an image of a package of Krimpets and one Krimpet close up (see Figure 1). In his use of multimodal response, both text and image are redundant. Text is used to describe and visual is used to provide an exact image of the product. His images and text were all on one page, but are interestingly separated into boxes where none of the information touched another part. His first box included information about butterscotch Krimpets, the second box provided the text from the book where the Krimpets were mentioned, and the third box was the image.

Figure 2. Multimodal response with redundant information

Another example of this redundant information between visual and textual is shown in Chayse's response. He investigated Lyle Lyle Crocodile, a book written in the sixties, by Waber. Chayse wrote about the book and why Spinelli included it in his novel. His image showed one of the pages of the book where Lyle is taking a bath. Chayse connected Hester and Lester reading the book during bath time and he chose an image of Lyle participating in a bath, rather than the cover of the book (see Figure 2). His response was different from William's in that he began his response with the visual element. Thus, readers/viewers started with the visual of Lyle in the bathtub and then moved to his written comments.

Lyle Lyle Crocodile:

Page: 43   Lyle Lyle Crocodile is a book that was made for kids. the author who wrote this book is Bernard Waber. He wrote this book in 1965 so it makes sense now because the segregation was in 1960's so I understand it in Maniac Magee now. When he was reading it to Hester and Lester in that time period. I also chose this picture because it's showing Lyle in a BATH TUB. So that's how I think Jerry came up with that stuff for the bath tub in his book. Not only that they made a song/musical of Lyle Lyle Crocodile on TV. So basically this Lyle Lyle Crocodile was a great big hit. Now you know what the noun Lyle Lyle Crocodile is. and how Jerry Spinelli made it work in to his story which is Maniac Magee in that time period 1960's.
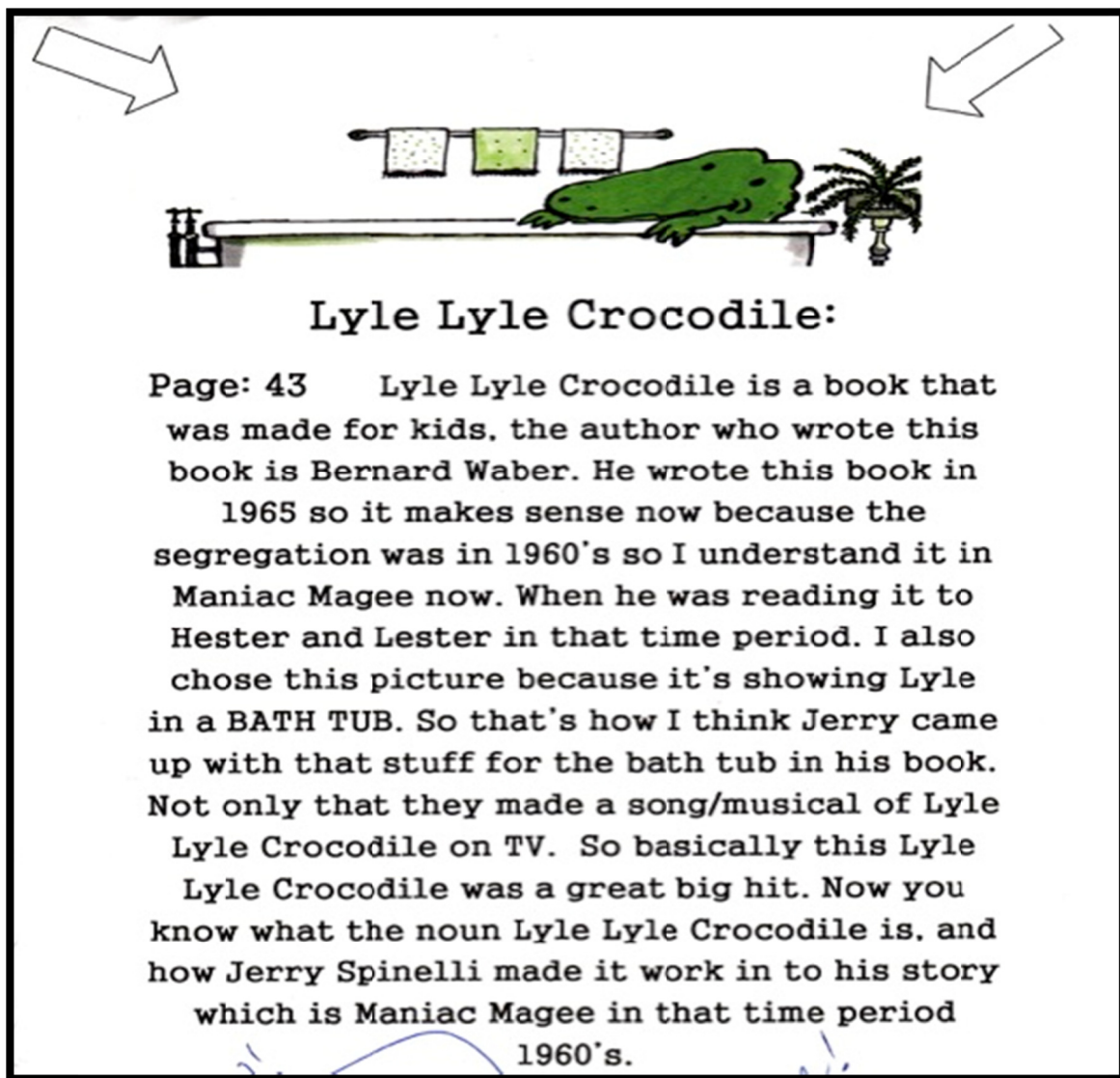
Figure 3. Multimodal response with redundancy

Some images, provided additional information not shared in writing. For instance, when Macy wanted to do more than talk about her discoveries of the Black Panther Party, she found an image of the original six Black Panthers. Her written response shown in Figure 3 provided an overview of the Black Panthers where she detailed that they had rules and points of attention. She also included information about Huey Newton, his arrest, and the movement to free him. While her image might have replicated this information by showing the list of rules or a Free Huey sign, she chose to provide an image of the original six members. Thus, her visual extended the information she shared in her

text-based response. Both image and text included different information to create meaning. Also her text was separated from her images with the text on one page and the image on another.

Figure 4. Multimodal response without redundancy

Finally, some students chose the Internet to provide a more interpretive visual component. Sydney decided to investigate the word, blunder. She included the sentence from the book where the word appeared, a definition, and then a description where she used the word in student-friendly ways as she described the students as "stumbling" or blundering into Finsterwald's backyard. Her images, though, showed a stick figure stumbling over a rock and a cartoon character stumbling down stairs. Both visual images provided a more interpretive view of blundering, as they were more interpretive, than they were close-to-text interpretations (see Figure 4). Her images were on the same page as her written comments, and she moved beyond one visual interpretation to include two images.
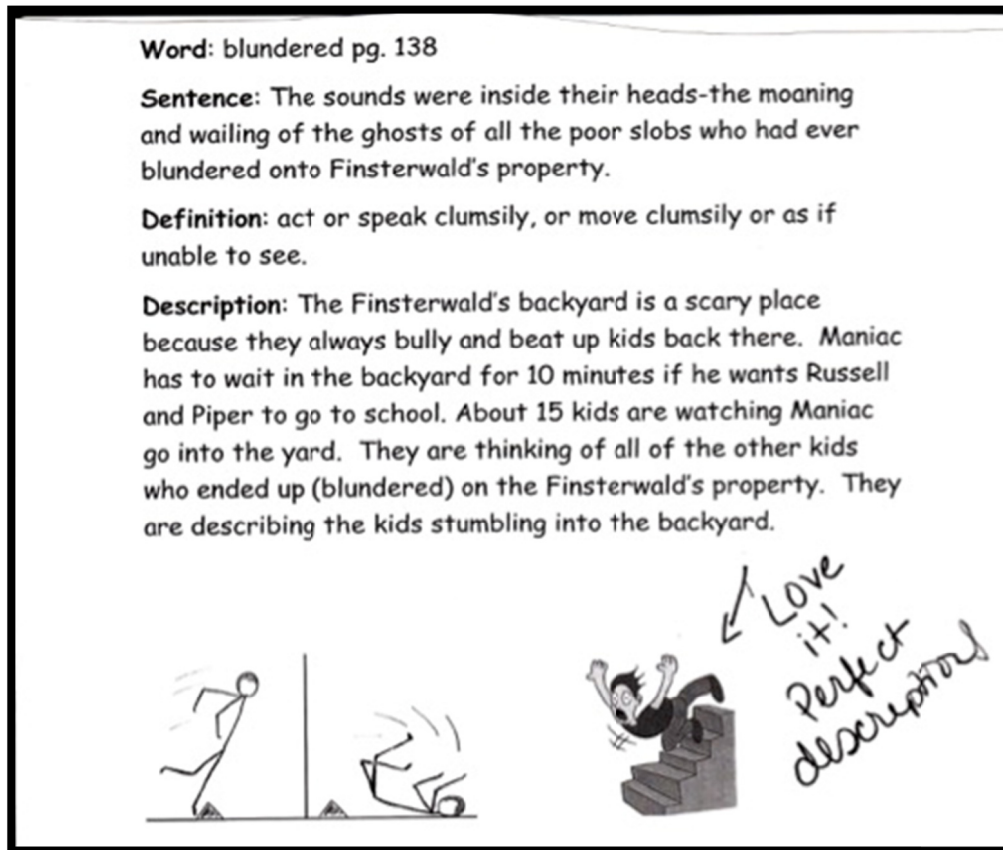
Figure 5. Multimodal response with an interpretive visual component

When considering the way students integrated images with their writing, most gave preference to images that were redundant with text. These redundant elements made sense as students were providing necessary information to others within their groups. A minority of students chose Internet images that provided additional information or were more interpretive. They more creatively used both text and image to share ideas about the books they were reading.

3.3 Making Meaning within the Visual – Internet Images

Within the Internet visual responses, most were exact images of objects, but their placement was interesting when considering the entire response. Most of the multimodal responses were grouped within the composition category suggested by Callow (2005). For instance, in Figure 1, the student created a collage where each piece was separated. However, even within this collage, the visual was the smallest and at the bottom of the page. Most readers/viewers would consider the image last as they began with the two text boxes and then shifted focus to the bottom of the collection. Similarly, in Figure 4, the images were placed at the bottom of the page so that the reader/viewer considered the text first.

Unlike these multimodal constructions, in Figure 2, the visual was placed at the top, in a position of prominence. The image guided a reader/viewer to the text. Additionally, the image of Lyle appeared to be looking out at the reader/viewer and thus, served to entice the person in. And if perhaps, the reader/viewer started with the text, the student included arrows to guide the reader to the visual first. This student was making sure that whoever interacted with this multimodal creation began with the visual.

Figure 3 indicated that this student represented the power of image or Callow's (2005) third category of critical and the first category of emotional as this image evoked fear in the viewer or perhaps compassion. She decided that the Black Panthers were important to understand and she focused on them. Her image did not just share the Black Panthers though. She selected a photo where the members of the Black Panthers were looking directly at the viewer, indicating their power. They were also gazing at the viewer and enticing him or her in; rather, than glancing away. In

picturebooks when a character looks out to the reader, it is called demand, where they insist that the viewer interact with him or her (Painter, Martin, & Unsworth, 2014).

3.4 Visual Representation through Drawing

There were 64 multimodal responses that were composed with a drawing and text. Similar to the Internet images that students used, the majority of the drawings were realistic and redundant with text.

3.5 Synergistic Connections

In Figure 5, Melati wrote about Maniac teaching Grayson how to read. She goes beyond the simple teaching of reading though to include information about how she interpreted that Maniac believed that Blacks and Whites "should be equal." She also shared other events from the book to support her belief that Maniac thought people of different races were equal. Her drawing came at the end of her response and it showed Maniac and Grayson involved in a reading lesson. In this example, the image shared one part of her response, the part about the reading lesson. Similarly, Figure 6 showed another redundant drawing in that it was a sketch of a house and a cottonmouth moccasin snake. This image was interesting, as the student included a close-up of the snake that was situated on the front steps. It resembled the image support often offered to students in nonfiction texts.
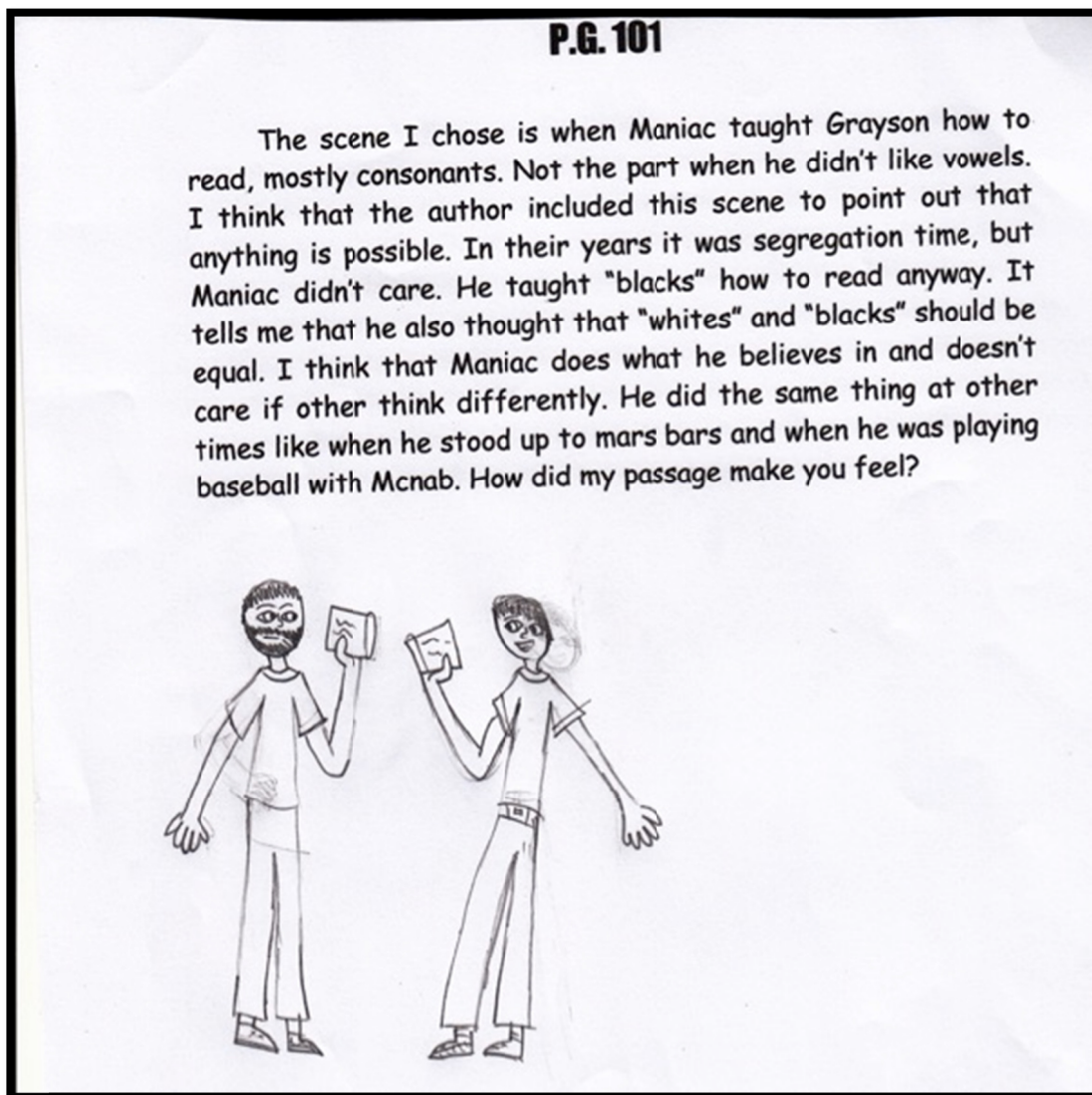

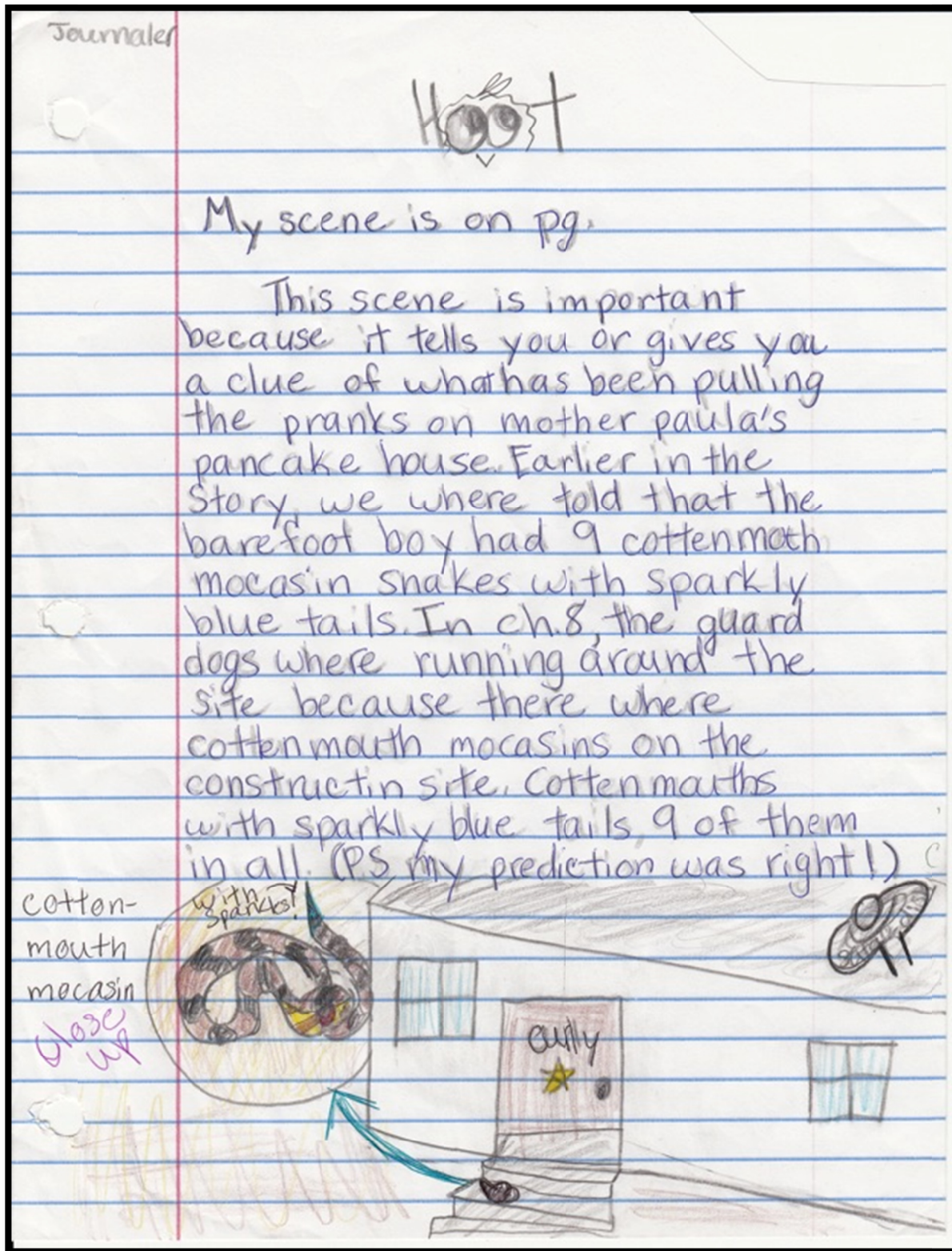Figure 6. Multimodal response with synergistic connections

Figure 7. Multimodal response with image similar to nonfiction text

Other responses moved beyond redundancy. In Figure 7, Vanessa offered her group information about the word, deciphered. She was attempting to make meaning of this word from the text and she did it by providing an example

of figuring something difficult out. She used the examples of puzzles where she had a character say – "This puzzle is easy." Her multimodal response was different from the other examples, as she did not present an image from the text; rather, she shared an image of a common situation the students could relate to so that they could understand the word.
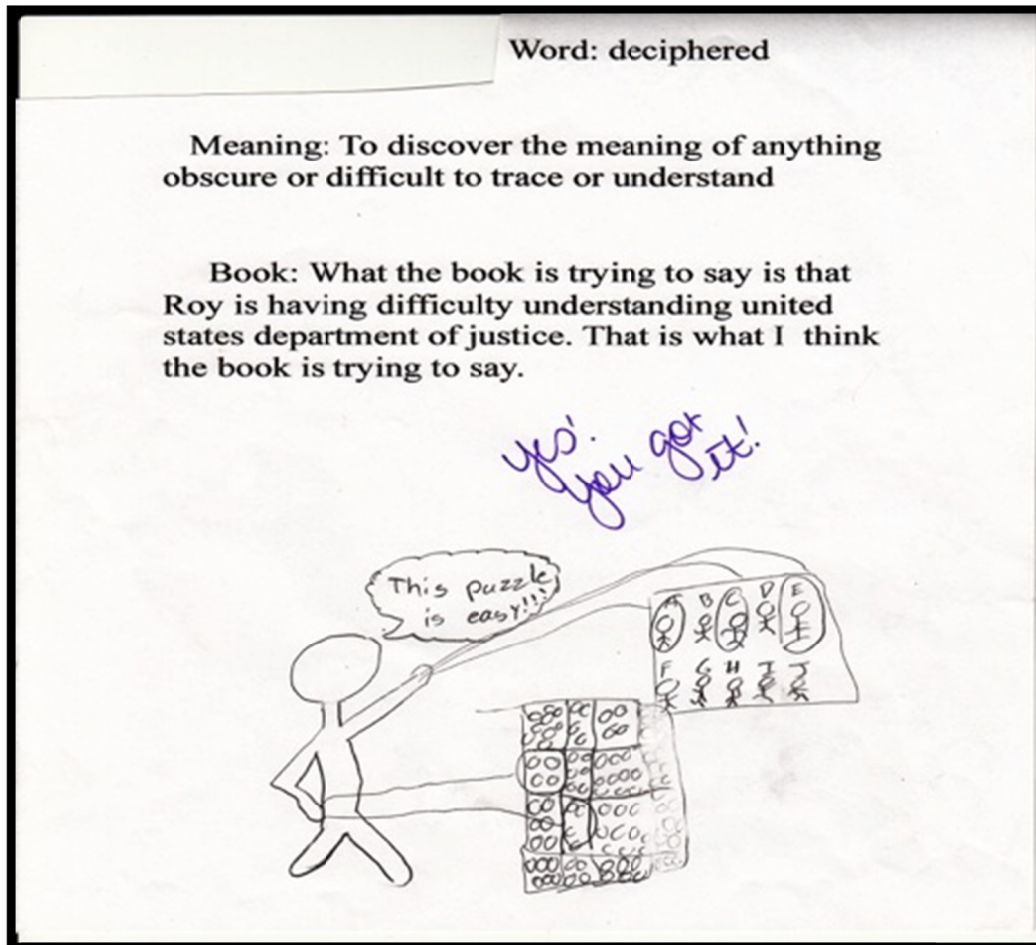

Figure 8. Multimodal response with common situation

The final two examples moved even further away from sharing redundant information. In Figure 8, Mark created a visual representation of the town and how it was segregated. He placed Maniac at the top of the image with him breaking the line that was a representation for segregation. Then he created stick figure representations of the people who lived on each side with their defining characteristic, their skin color being identified. Additionally, in this response the image was dominant as it was placed at the top of the page.
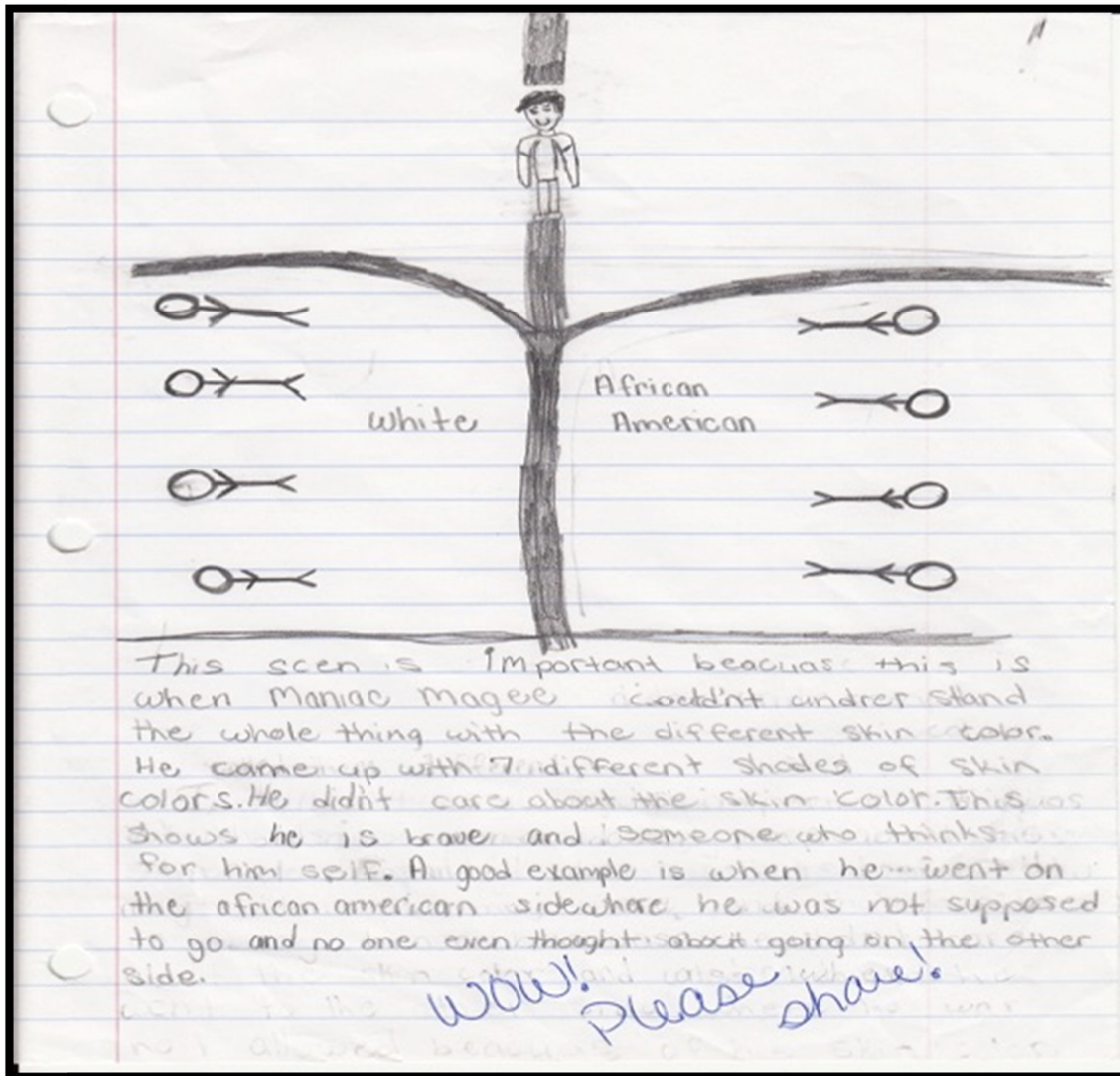
Figure 9. Multimodal response showing segregation

The final example, Figure 9, was one of the few where a student used color. Jesse represented Maniac and Mars Bar. Although Maniac was the central character in this novel, Jesse showed us his back. He allowed Mars Bar to be the center of attention in this image as he was looking directly at Maniac with the candy bar in his hand. When coupled with the text, this student understood the complexity of this story where characters were complicated in their actions and beliefs. He knew that Spinelli included this scene for it showed taboos, such as sharing candy between members of different races.
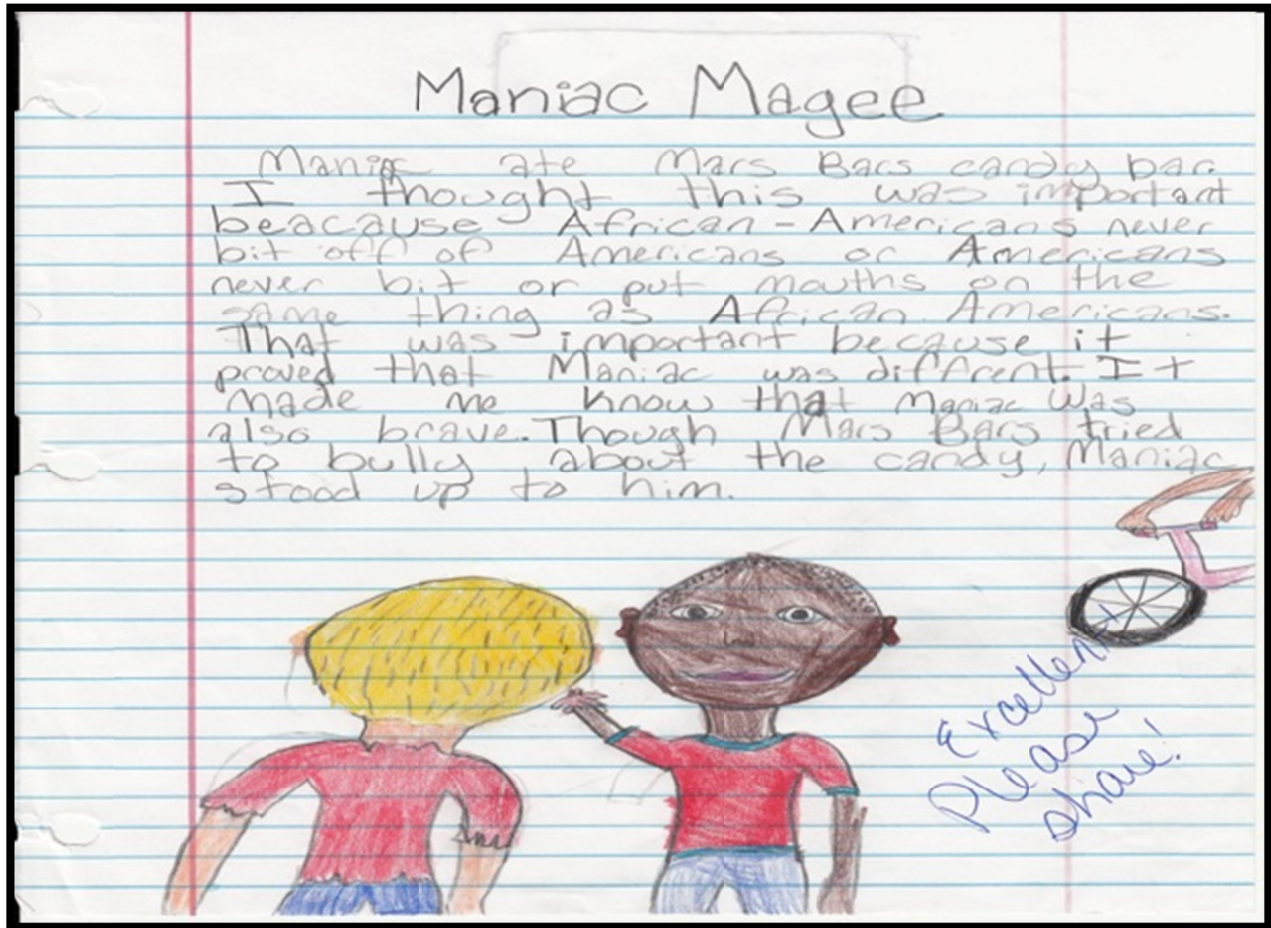
Figure 10. Multimodal response showing character positioning

The drawings were particularly interesting as students totally created their images or had agency in what was represented. Even with this freedom in creation, they often strived to create redundant supporting images of text.

3.6 Making Meaning within the Visual

When considering Callow's categories (2005), most of these shared images fell into the second category of composition. Placement within the multimodal composition was important with the image placed at the bottom of the composition; thus, honoring the text as the dominant aspect. Composition was also interesting in Figure 6 where the student created a call-out with closer detail of the snake, imitating the visual support in nonfiction texts.

The last two figures (8 and 9) clearly utilized all of Callow's categories. When viewing Figure 8, emotion was elicited by the clear representation of separation. When viewing the image critically, this student placed Maniac in a power position. He was the character who could break the color line barrier. He had already done so in the space that he occupied. The last figure was particularly intriguing as the use of color added to the complexity of the image. Mars Bar was the dominant figure with his face forward and his color enhanced with the use of dark brown. This student tried to be accurate in his drawing of an African-American character as even his hairstyle was possible for a person of color. Interestingly, he made Maniac as white as could be. He even gave him blonde hair. The positioning of the characters also supported the power differential in this scene, as Mars Bar was dominant in size, his arms were active, and he faced the audience. Maniac, even though he was the main character, was smaller in stature, had his back shown, and his arms seemed static and at his side. He may be emotionally involved in this scene but his body was motionless; suggesting that his emotion was internal.

When considering both Internet and drawn image, more of the drawn images included multiple categories as described by Callow. Drawing, as a student choice, more frequently appeared when students wanted emotional or critical responses to their images.

4. What We Learned

Throughout our exploration of multimodal responses, we were guided by the writing of Mendelsund (2014). His book is filled with multimodal compositions as he shared the influence of image when reading. His writing helped us value the images that students included in their reading responses. Moreover, Serafini (2014) documented that teachers rarely paid attention to visual images and focused on text. We took up his challenge and shifted our focus to responses that were multimodal. By shifting our lens, we learned how students used visual image to support or extend the meaning shared in their writing. We honored contemporary views of literacy that include image as shared by Lankshear and Knoble (2003), Hassett and Schieble (2007, and Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), among others. The new positioning with a focus on visual representations opened up a richer, more complex understanding of how students interpret text, one that is important for teachers to honor. These complex understandings support students as experts as they bring in knowledge taken from their highly visual world to the interpretation of text.

4.1 Understanding Multimodal Responses

Importantly, in this exploration, we did not guide students to include image, we just examined compositions where they included image. We learned that certain roles within literature circles drive students to include image more that others. The journaler and fact finder expectations most often resulted in multimodal compositions. Students were using the visual to more fully explain what they found lacking in text. Therefore, most of these compositions included redundancy between image and text where one supported the other in providing detail about an event, word, or person. This redundancy should not be seen as a limitation in response, but rather an intrinsic understanding by students to fill in the gaps within text.

However, not all responses were so focused on sharing or explaining details revealed in text. Other students used the visual aspect to share issues of power or emotion, similar to the findings of Nikolajeva (2013) and the categories of Callow (2005, 2008). Images of segregation, the Black Panthers, and Maniac and Mars Bar represented these emotional, power-laden images.

We discovered students' creativity in our close exploration of multimodal responses. Students built connections between two sign systems, visual and textual, that had not existed before. These connections allowed for interpretation of text in new ways, ways that often evoked emotion or power relationships (Cairney, 1992; Jewitt, 2006; Siegel, 1995). And these ways of interpretation moved beyond a reliance of alphabetic print and were in fact, a hybrid, where visual interpretations were critical to a complete meaning.

Finally, we found that certain books triggered students to engage in multimodal responses more often than others. Students offered image and textual responses more often to *Maniac Magee*. We wondered why books like *One Crazy Summer* did not also result in multimodal responses more often. The connections between a book and multimodal response are an area for further exploration. Until research supports teachers in choosing books, teachers will want to observe which books result in engaged student conversation and multimodal responses to support this exemplary instruction with future classes.

5. Unanswered Questions

Now after our exploration of multimodal compositions, we are left with unanswered questions. As teachers, does it make sense to just allow students to create multimodal responses when they determine it is appropriate? Should students have direct instruction in visual elements so that students can more thoughtfully create images? Would having such instruction result in a developmental progression similar to learning to read where early multimodal responses might include visual elements that were not used effectively but given time students would become more proficient in using elements successfully? Although there are no clear answers, each question's response by a teacher will lead to very different instructional implications for students.

Moving beyond responses to reading, wouldn't it benefit teachers and students alike to explore media to see how products, people, messages, and so forth are conveyed? This exploration, while not tied so closely to visual elements, would allow students to understand the power of synergistic compositions. Teachers and students would discover how viewers are led to the emotional responses they feel after viewing, for instance. These interpretations might then lead to more interpretive multimodal responses created by students. Although in this instructional sequence, the connections between media and responses are not as closely linked. Additionally, these explorations require time and

a shift in teachers' beliefs that visual interpretation, a part of new literacies, is worthy of instructional support and classroom time (Hassettt & Schieble, 2007).

Finally, beyond the questions and issues of instructional support, we learned that multimodal compositions are complex. Students create text and image that are inextricably linked; having one without the other limits the full interpretation of text. We learned to appreciate the multimodal compositions, rather than skimming the visual to focus on text. Perhaps, just letting students know of the impact their visual representations have is sufficient to honor their work. We believe that this honoring of and recognition of the visual is a first step, however. We trust that students should be surrounded with conversation from their peers and teachers to more fully investigate the power and synergy between the visual and textual so that all appreciate the power and rich interpretive opportunities of such constructions.

References

Albers, P., & Sanders, J. (2010). *Literacies, the arts and multimodality*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Arizpe, E., & Styles, M. (2003). *Children reading pictures: Interpreting visual texts*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Cairney, T. (1992). Fostering and building students' intertextual histories. *Language Arts, 69*(7), 502-507.

Callow, J. (2005). Literacy and the visual: Broadening our vision. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique, 4*(1), 6-19.

Callow, J. (2008). Show me: Principles for assessing students' visual literacy. *The Reading Teacher, 61*, 616-626.

Daniels, H. (2002). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in Book clubs and reading groups*. ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Dressel, J.H. (1990). The effects of listening to and discussing different qualities of children's literature on the narrative writing of fifth graders. *Research in the Teaching of English, 24*, 397-444.

Eisner, E. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practices*. New York: Macmillan.

Evans, J. (2009). (Ed.). *Talking beyond the page*. London: Routledge.

Galda, L., & Beach, R. (2001). Response to literature as a cultural activity. *Reading Research Quarterly, 36,* 64-73.

Handa, C. (2004). Introduction to part one. In C. Handa (Ed.), *Visual rhetoric in a digital world: A sourcebook* (pp. i-v). Boston: Bedford.

Hassett, D., & Schieble, M. (2007). Finding space and time for the visual in K-12 literacy instruction. *The English Journal, 97*, 62-68.

Howells, R., & Negreiros, J. (2012). *Visual culture* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Jewitt, C. (2006). *Technology, literacy, and learning: A multimodal approach*. London, England: Routledge.

Keene, E. (2008). *To understand: New horizon in reading comprehension*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Kress, G. (1997). Visual and verbal modes of representation in electronically mediated communication: The potentials of new forms of text. In I. Snyder (Ed.), *Page to screen: Taking literacy into the electronic era* (pp. 53-79). St. Leonards, NSW, Australia; Allen & Unwin.

Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age*. New York: Cengage Learning.

Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: the modes and media of contemporary communication*. London, England: Arnold.

Lancia, P. (1997). Literary borrowing: The effects of literature on children's writing. *The Reading Teacher, 50,* 470-475.

Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2003). *New literacies: Changing knowledge and classroom learning*. Philadelphia: Open UP.

Martens, P., Martens, R., Doyle, M., Loomis, J., & Aghalarov, S. (2012). Learning from picturebooks: Reading and writing multimodally in first grade. *The Reading Teacher, 66*, 285-294.

Mayall, H., & Robinson, R. (2009). Investigating visual literacy integration: Lida's legacy? *TechTrends, 53*(2), 48-49.

Mendelsund, P. (2014). *What we see when we read*. New York: Vintage Books.

Nikolajeva, M. (2013). Picturebooks and emotional literacy. *The Reading Teacher, 67*, 249-254.

Nikolajeva, M. (2014). *Reading for learning: Cognitive approaches to children's literature*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Nikolajeva, M., & Scott, C. (2006). *How picturebooks work*. New York: Routledge.

Painter, C., Martin, J., & Unsworth, L. (2014). *Reading visual narratives: Image analysis of children's picture books*. Sheffield, England: equinox.

Pantaleo, S. (2005). Young children engage with the metafictive in picture books. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, 28*(1), 19-37.

Pantaleo, S. (2010). Developing narrative competence through reading and writing metafictive texts. *Literacy Research and Instruction, 49*(3), 264-281.

Pantaleo, S. (2012). Exploring grade 7 students' response to Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree*. *Children's Literature in Education, 43,* 51-71.

Peterson, R., & Eeds, M. (2007). *Grand conversations: Literature groups in action*. New York: Scholastic.

Ranker, J. (2015). Redesigning the everyday: Recognizing creativity in student writing and multimodal composing. *Language Arts, 92*, 359-365.

Raphael, T., & McMahon, S. (1994). Book Club: An alternative framework for reading instruction. *The Reading Teacher, 48*, 102-116.

Sanders, J., & Albers, P. (2010). Multimodal literacies: An introduction. In P. Albers & J. Sanders (Eds.), *Literacies, the arts and multimodality* (pp. 1-25). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Serafini, F. (2014). *Reading the visual: An introduction to teaching multimodal literacy*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Shank, G. (2006). *Qualitative research: A personal skills approach* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Short, K., & Harste, J. (1996). *Creating classrooms for authors and inquirers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Siegel, M. (1995). More than words: The generative power of transmediation for learning. *Canadian Journal of Education, 20*, 455-475.

Whitin, P. (2005). The interplay of text, talk, and visual representation in expanding literary interpretation. *Research in the Teaching of English, 39*, 365-397.

Whitin, P. (2009). Tech-to-stretch: Expanding possibilities for literature response. *The Reading Teacher, 62*, 408-418.

Wilhelm, J. D. (1995). Reading is seeing: Using visual response to improve the literary reading of reluctant readers. *Journal of Reading Behavior, 27*, 467-503.

Wolf, S. (2004). *Interpreting literature with children*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Zwiers, J., & Crawford, M. (2011). *Academic conversations: Classroom talk that fosters critical thinking and content understandings*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Children's Literature References

Avi. (2004). *Crispin: The cross of lead*. New York: Disney-Hyperion.

Curtis, C. (2004). *Bud, not buddy*. New York: Scholastic.

Curtis, C. (2009). *Elijah of Buxton*. New York: Scholastic.

DiCamillo, K. (2013). *Flora & Ulysses: The illuminated adventures*. New York: Candlewick Press.

Hiaasen, C. (2005). *Hoot*. New York: Yearling.

Hiaasen, C. (2010). *Flush*. New York: Yearling.

Hiaasen, C. (2013). *Chomp*. New York: Yearling.

Philbrick, R. (2011). *The mostly true adventures of Homer P. Figg*. New York: Scholastic.

Ryan, P. (2002). *Esperanza rising*. New York: Scholastic.

Spinelli, J. (1999). *Maniac Magee*. New York: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

Williams-Garcia, R. (2011). *One crazy summer*. New York: Amistad.