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Hey, everybody. My name is Trevor Bryan. I am an art teacher of 20 years from New Jersey. I am also the author of the book *The Art of Comprehension*. You might recognize the cover, which was illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds's author of *The Dot*. Super grateful that he's been so supportive of being on this effort to bring our education and literacy education together. This workshop is going to share the approach that I use to help kids engage artwork meaningfully and also to help foster the skills that they need for strong comprehension work in their reading that they do in ELA classrooms and social studies and science and in any other area that they're reading in.

Before I start, I just want to go over quickly a couple of reasons why using visual texts to teach comprehension skills make sense. One is that for kids who struggle with reading, who are emerging readers or who can't yet read, helping them explore visual texts using comprehension skills is a way for them to engage and foster development of their comprehension skills, which all students need to succeed academically. Pictures have proven to be extremely effective at helping kids to think about key details, finding themes, using text evidence to support their thinking, making inferences and other ELA skills that they need.

It provides a way of proving and simply stating how a good arts education can impact academic work in a very concrete, meaningful way. And lastly, I think, as an art educator, even though I do a lot of work in the ELA arena, the way that I really see all this work is basically just helping kids to engage artworks more meaningfully. Books are works of art, so it makes sense that engaging visual texts, which are also works of art, such as photographs or paintings, would help them to appreciate all forms of art because largely the thinking is basically the same in order to make meaning of the text before us, whether they're visual texts or whether they're written texts.

To start, I want to go over. And two of the tools that I use, one is the access lenses, which was illustrated also by Peter H. Reynolds, and the other one is the framework, which is a basic six-step process that I use to kind of shape my conversations that I have with students, whether we're talking about visual texts or written texts. So let's start with the access lenses first. There's nine of them. From the top they're: facial expressions, body language, action and inaction, colors, close together, far apart or distance, alone sounds or words or silence, big things and little things, zoom in and



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zoom out, and then symbols or metaphors. And I break the symbols into two categories: symbols of hope and symbols of struggle.

The first three, facial expressions, action and inaction, and colors are basically the easiest to use. They will show up again and again throughout all sorts of artwork and so they are good ones to start with, especially if you're working with striving students. All in all, however, I would encourage you to help students to think about as many lenses as possible because each lens will give a slightly different pathway into the text or a potential pathway into the text, whether it's visual or written. And so I wouldn't teach these in isolation. I would teach these altogether or at least the top six altogether. The bottom three are the most abstract but we'll get into them a little bit.

But giving kids as many pathways into a work of art or into a book I think is a really important thing because each student is going to process the information a little bit differently. They're going to engage differently and by opening it up it helps to allow all those students, some of who just think differently or express things differently, to join the conversation and by using the lenses it allows all students to understand where they are coming from and how their thoughts and their comments might fit into the larger conversation.

The next tool that I want to share with you is called the framework and as I said, it provides a basic structure of the conversations that I have with students whether we are talking about visual texts, artworks, photographs or illustrations or whether we're talking about written texts such as books or essays or short stories, poems. They are comprised of six steps, list everything you see, which is how students decode artworks, it's a pretty common art history practice of just kind of listing what's in the picture. What I also like about this step is it helps every child to join the conversation because every child can basically pick out something, a color, an eye, hair, a dress, a tree, grass, a fence whatever it is that you're looking at. They can pick something out, especially once they get used to what you're asking. And when we list anything we see it's really anything that someone could put their finger on.

The next step is to determine the mood and support your thinking with the text evidence. The reason why mood is such an effective pathway into an artwork is that as humans, it's how we connect. It's how we respond to anything. Every book, every story is basically told through moods. Narratives are built on moods and how characters are



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reacting to certain situations. And largely, every picture is built around a mood even pictures that perhaps are more abstract. As a viewer, we're going to bring a mood to them. We're going to assign a mood to them. So when we think about what the mood is and support that with the text evidence, it helps every child to also get into the picture, enter into the picture, and then be able to share their thinking. Moods are also something that all of us understand or most students understand, so it's easy language that we can use even with our youngest learners.

The next step is to think about what is causing the mood. Sometimes in pictures and paintings, if they're singular images, this is kind of difficult to do, but in this case, viewers can kind of speculate, bring their own background knowledge to what might be causing this mood. In picture books, we usually find out, from the author, if not immediately, eventually what's causing the mood. And so if the reader knows what the mood is and can support their thinking, they're in the heart of the story, their next step would be to figure out what's causing the mood.

Then so pictures work the same way. If we can figure out what the mood is and we can talk about how the author crafted that mood we're in the heart of the picture. And not only are we comprehending the picture, but then it immediately throws us into studying the craft. How is that mood created? What choices the artist make in order to show that mood? How many pieces of information did they give in order to get that mood across? So it not only helps us to understand pictures, but it helps us to explore how the images were created, and then determine a big idea, topic or theme of the picture.

Themes are really basically what the mood is. An easy way to think about themes is what's the mood and what's causing the mood, or what could be causing the mood? And that's basically your theme. So when we see a picture of someone who is isolated or sad, that's what the artist wants you to think about. Isolation and sadness. It sounds very simple, but it's a good way of getting kids to think about themes and bigger ideas.

Think about symbols or metaphors. So within pictures, what's causing the mood can also be symbolic. We can think of that as a symbol, not in a symbol in the sense of art history, but in a symbol of it representing something else. And then the last step is to make a text-to-text, text-to-world or text-to-self connection. This is a common literacy



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practice. Making connections is the basis of creativity. It also allows viewers to bring their background knowledge to the picture, share ideas. And when students and other viewers share a strong link text-to-text connections, text-to-world connections or texts-to-self connections it helps us all to think about the pictures a little bit more deeply and a little bit more meaningfully and a little bit from different angles and different perspectives.

Okay, so the picture that I want to go through the framework and the access lenses with you is a picture that was done by my good friend, Kyle Stevenson. This picture was made for a little story that's in the back of my book and we really thought about the access lenses in creating it, so it's a good one to use with your students to get them used to both the framework and the access lenses. If we look at the image and list everything we see, right, we can see colors, we can see hands, hair, eyes, arms, feet, shoes, backs, heads, students. All right? I usually try and get kids to list about 20 things. Twenty things is a decent number to make sure that kids are looking at everything in the picture and then determine the mood and support your thinking with the text evidence.

So if we look at this little picture of this girl, sitting in the back, we can tell the mood based on her facial expressions, her body language, right? She's looking down, she's frowning, her body language is she's hunched over and she's sitting on her hands. The colors separate her from the rest of the group. She's far away from everyone where everyone else is close together. She looks isolated or alone. The other kids are perhaps making sounds or noises or want to speak. She is staying perfectly silent and does not want to speak.

The big thing would be perhaps her anxiety or her fear. The big thing could also be that kind of wall of students that sits in front of her, or the magnitude of the activity that they're doing. We could zoom in on her eyes. We can zoom in on our sitting on our hands to help us. We could also zoom out on basically the whole picture that shows us how isolated that she is and then the symbols of hope and symbols of struggle. So for her, this activity, this classroom discussion that they're having would perhaps be a symbol of frustration or isolation for her. Maybe even a symbol of fear, right? There're no symbols of hope that we see in the picture. As the story goes on, what will be introduced to a symbol of hope for her?



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Most stories have a symbol of hope, so just like most stories have kind of symbols of struggle. So talking about these things are a really good way of helping kids to develop the language and the thinking that they need to not only understand pictures but also to understand stories. Think about what is causing the mood, right? Thinking about what's causing the mood is really symbolic, so as a way of thinking about symbols. So when we say that the classroom discussion in the story happens to be reading is causing that mood or being asked questions, we could think about those things as representing struggle or anxiety for her, representing isolation to her, representing her just feeling different, right? So we could think about that as a symbolic conversation, determine a big idea, topic or theme of the picture.

Something that we wanted kids to think about was feeling isolated, struggling, feeling alone, feeling shy, feeling like you don't belong or that you don't have a voice. These would all be kind of themes that we could state it into a longer theme that when we aren't confident in joining the classroom conversation, it can make us feel isolated, all right, would be a very simple way of expressing the theme. So we have a mood and what's causing the mood. Think about symbols, right? We talked about that a little bit. Symbol of struggle, symbol of anxiety, fear, right. Whatever that classroom represents to that girl, what's causing that mood could be seen as symbolic and then making a text-to-text or text-to-world or a text-to-self connection. There're some students who are going to feel this way. They're going to be able to make a very definite text-to-self connection. They might know other students who feel that way. They might've felt that way, perhaps not at reading, but at gym class or trying out for a sports team or going to a birthday party where they didn't know anyone. So there're lots of ways to make connections.

Just going through this little exercise with the students with this one picture, introducing them to the access lenses. Getting them used to the framework will not only help your students to be able to talk about art more meaningfully, more thoughtfully and more personally, but it will also support the academic skills that they need for success. Could not be happier that you joined me today. Please reach out if you ever have any questions. You can reach me through Twitter @trevorabryan, through Gmail at trevorabryan@gmail.com. I have a YouTube channel for The Art of comprehension that shows some videos, or you can reach me through the blog, fourclockfaculty.com. Thanks so much for being here today. Enjoy the rest of the sessions.