

Lisa Donovan - Visualization as a Drama Strategy for Integration Transcript

- Hi, I'm Lisa Donovan. I'm a Professor of Arts Management and Arts Integration at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. And I'm also co-editor and co-author of a book series on arts integration published by Shell Education, and also the co-author of a book called "Teacher As Curator" that looks at assessment and the opportunities of documentation in arts-integrated learning published by Teachers College Press. Today, I'm going to introduce a strategy from one of my books from the Shell Arts Integration series, "Integrating The Arts Into Language Arts," with co-author Jen Bogart. In this workshop will explore visualization, a compelling drama strategy that engages students in a sensory exploration of content. We'll also consider how the arts can be used as important strategies for assessment where you don't need to leave the process of learning to collect evidence of student learning. In visualization, students imagine a moment as it unfolds by listening to a sensory description read aloud. Sometimes called mental movie, guided imagery, or guided tour, a dramatic visualization invites students into the world of a text, a character, a moment, or a setting. You can use this strategy to build background knowledge and experience, to share information and foster emotional connections, increasing interest in and connection to a topic of study. There are a variety of ways to use visualization in the classroom. For example, you can read a text or tell a story using vivid details to portray a character who moves through a scene. Students use visualization to experience the character's perspective and explore the setting with the sites and sensory details as if moving through it themselves. Ideally, the text is written using the second person, or you form, and includes rich sensory details to invite students into a particular experience or situation. This can serve as a pre-writing or pre-reading activity to engage students more deeply with content. Visualization can be used across grade levels. I'll be sharing both elementary and middle school examples today. The first example is inspired by the book, "Owl Moon" by Jane Yolen. The book centers around a father and his child going on a night hike to find an owl. In this visualization, you'll take the role and perspective of the owl. I created this visualization to spark an interest in owls and their habits, and it sparked additional research so that I could get the details just right. You can write and share visualizations with your students to invite curiosity, create background knowledge, and deepen connections with a text or experience. You can also have students write their own visualizations. Let's consider how you might guide your students in writing their own visualization. Start by introducing and discussing the elements of drama. It's important to introduce the vocabulary of the art form you're teaching in arts integration. You can download a reference sheet with this workshop detailing a list of drama elements developed as part of our arts integration series. In writing the visualization you're about to experience, I made intentional choices about the elements I would put to use. Roles refers to the characters in a drama. In the example of the "Owl Moon" visualization, I include the suggestion of characters from the book "Owl Moon" in the distance. I chose not to depict the actual sequence of events in the book, but rather focused on a brief

encounter where the owl sees the father and child in the distance and responds to their call. Tension refers to dramatic tension or opposition that emerges from a conflict or struggle. I take time in this visualization to set the stage of how the owl exists in the woods. Listening, flying on silent wings. I create a moment of tension when the owl senses and catches prey and it's released as we imagine the owl flying up to the sky. Time refers to the pacing of how action moves as the drama unfolds. In the visualization, I play with pacing that feels relaxed and patient leading up to the quick movement of the owl pouncing at the end. Changing the pacing can add to dramatic tension. Situation refers to the circumstances that frame the drama and identify what's happening and what the problem is. In the visualization, the situation is set up in the night woods. The listening and watching of an owl and how it interacts with its habitat. Space refers to where the drama unfolds. In a visualization, the drama unfolds in our mind's eye. So a sense of space can be created in the visualization such as how the owl flies, how it's situated on a branch above the woods, and so on. In preparing to write this visualization, I had to conduct research to figure out what I didn't know about owls. I drew from a variety of sources. I found useful facts about owls from the story, and in addition, my research. From Audubon's resource, "The Silent Flight of Owls," I discovered that owls have large wings relative to their body mass, which let them fly unusually slowly. The structure of their feathers serves as a silencer, comb-like serrations on the leading edge of wing feathers break up the turbulent air that typically creates a swishing sound. Those smaller streams of air are further dampened by velvety texture unique to owl feathers, and by a soft fringe on a wing's trailing edge. I won't be quoting the research directly in the visualization, but these ideas about the structure of an owl's wing inform how I describe the owl's flight. In order to make the visualization work well, I had to learn about how owls fly so silently, the structure of their wings, the characteristics of their feathers. I had to find out about their feet and how they're structured to grip onto branches. I wondered if they're called claws or feet. I had to learn about how their eyes work to provide them with night vision and how they call to each other to attract a mate. From an assessment point of view, I can collect my students' experiences and impressions from how they actively listen to the visualization, what they notice, and the connections they make. Or if they're creating their own visualization, I can draw conclusions about their understandings from the writing and how they've integrated research. I can frame my debriefing questions to draw out students insights about owls, how they move through the woods, how they see, how they call mates. I can also draw out insights that link back to the book. Why does the owl come to the father and his child? Why do the father and child wait to go out on a quiet moon-lit night to locate the owl? You can imagine the many ways I can frame this visualization to teach out science as well as ELA connections. What might you learn about the owl from reading the text? Where might you need additional research? When sharing your visualization, play with the tone of your voice to communicate emotion and set the stage for the visualization. Your willingness to be dramatic will intrigue students and help them feel comfortable in taking their own dramatic risks. Before sharing your visualization, introduce students to the idea of this drama strategy. Explain that visualization is a drama strategy that uses voice and rich language to create a sensory scene through the imagination. Invite students to find a comfortable place to relax and step into their imaginations. They can close their eyes if it's comfortable, or they

can soften their gaze or lower their eyes, making it easier to focus inward. If you are comfortable, close your eyes and put yourself in the role of a student. Notice all you experience as you look around in your mind's eye and notice how your imagination sparks your senses. And now the visualization. Imagine you're gliding through the woods on buoyant wings. The wind slides through your feathers silently. The angle of your wing bends slightly as you bank a turn. You study the landscape of your home as you soar. Trees are silhouetted against the snow below you. The white bright moon creates long silver shadows. You fly over the frozen pond. All is still as you move toward a favorite perch. Your legs unfurl in slow motion as you approach. You pump your wings back to slow your flight, and stop for a moment mid air, then gently catch the branch. Your talons wrapping tightly as you steady your weight. Your beak opens and closes tasting the night air. No wind. You watch. Your eyes are wide, blinking slowly. You begin a slow rotation of your head to scan the landscape moving all the way left, then all the way right. You can turn your gaze to scan all that's before you and all that's in back. Slowly, slowly. In the distance, you see two shapes cut through the night at the edge of the woods. You listen. They are far from you, but you can detect the crunch of snow as they walk. Their breath a muffled sound. They turn towards each other. You watch until they are no longer visible. You hear an animal yelping in the meadow beyond the woods. You hear a long, low wail from the tracks beyond the farm. A familiar call comes to you from across the woods. You feel the urge to respond rise in your throat. You call back in a raspy clear voice, . You listen. Call again. Time goes by. You sense the movement and listen until you're sure. A tiny scratching scraping beneath the snow. You drop from the branch silently stealthily. In an instant, you hit the snow, talons grasping. Patience is rewarded. You pump your wings, rising up to the sky with your prize against the early light of dawn. Take a breath and release. And when you're ready, open your eyes. Jot some notes cataloging what you saw, heard, felt, and experienced. What did you notice as you imagined the text? What did you see, feel, taste, hear, smell? What emotions did you experience? What memories did it bring? What insights do you have as a result of this experience? What connections did you make to the text? How did the language evoke sensory connections? Debriefing with students after they've experienced the visualization helps to draw out insights for the group and is a powerful formative assessment. Invite students to share their experiences with visualization, noticing individual and sensory connections and insights. Discuss unique interpretations of the experience. Design discussion questions to draw out evidence of learning right after experiencing the visualization. Note that our discussion can serve as formative assessment, collecting evidence of learning and connections. If you engage your students in writing their visualizations, you can draw out evidence of learning by having them share their choices, both artistic, and in this case, scientific content integrated into their visualization. You can invite peer review as part of your assessment strategies. And of course the visualization itself can serve as assessment evidence, showing learning and understanding of drama and science concepts. Choose an area of your curriculum and create a visualization together with input from students. For example, it could be based on a scene in a book and be written in the second person, or you form, so that students focus on entering the world of the text. You could draw a descriptive material out of a book, a painting, a choreographed dance, music, photograph, and so on to serve as a descriptive narration of

what's unfolding. For older grades, invites students to create visualizations to read to the class and the visualization itself can serve as a summative assessment. Let's explore another example and approach. Imagine asking middle school students to write a visualization of the life of plankton. Moving from studying plankton to experiencing what it would be like to be plankton through the writing and sharing of a visualization. Students can read "Ocean Sunlight" by Molly Bang and Penny Chisholm. Google Book notes, "in this timely book, award-winner Molly Bang uses her signature poetic language and dazzling illustrate to introduce this oceanic world. From tiny aquatic plants to the biggest whale or fish, Bang presents a moving living picture of the miraculous balance sustaining each life cycle and food chain deep within our wondrous oceans." I began reviewing "Ocean Sunlight," noting key ideas from the book that felt important to integrate. This spurred me on to do additional research on plankton. How they live and what they contribute to the life of the ocean and food chains. Again, I invite you to close your eyes or soften your gaze. And as you listen, tension to what you see in your mind's eye and what you experience in the visualization, "The Life of Plankton." Imagine you are floating in the ocean. The water surrounds you. Bubbles churn and tumble around you, pushing you gently. Drawn this sway and that in the foam. The water is soothing. It holds you and a million others like you. You are tiny, microscopic. A single cell organism drifting, drifting, drifting along with the current. You are plant. You are transparent. You are one of hundreds, millions of other plankton. Your name is Greek, meaning drifter or wanderer. You come in a variety of shapes and sizes, vibrant colors so bright, they dazzle. Phosphorescent. You cluster and gather with the others. The water teems with you. Your structure, spikes and curves, distribute your weight and prevent you from sinking. You are buoyant. Notice the sunlight piercing through the top layer of the sea, moving through the transparent panes of your body, activating your green factory, your chloroplasts pump, pump, and respond to the demands of the light, bright rays shimmering down through the water. As you float, you absorb carbon dioxide from tiny pockets of air, synthesize and release, sending oxygen bubbles up, up, up to the surface. You watch as these break, sharing resources with the air. You continue to drift, moving to and fro, up and down. You replicate again and again, doubling, quadrupling. You are exponential. Strength in numbers. We've gone from experiencing the world from a bird's eye view of an owl that adds nuance to a text we've been reading, to imagining where microscopic beings in the ocean. Here's an example of how a visualization can invite students to engage with the unseen processes of science. The possibilities are endless. I hope you'll consider adding this to your repertoire of arts-integrated strategies. You can download additional resources with this workshop, specific grade level ideas, the sample visualizations I've shared, the sample lesson description from our book, "Integrating The Arts In Language Arts." Thanks for watching.