Teaching Demonstration: Visual Literacy
Using Photos Effectively in the Classroom
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“A picture is worth a thousand words.”
To
“Brevity is a virtue!”
-Robert Duffey, Mentor teacher

Entering my first year of teaching journalism at the high school, I am searching for meaningful lessons to teach to my students.

The most important skill of any journalist is to tell the story. Essentially, that is what we will be doing in Yearbook Production. We will be telling the story of Harper Creek High School, 2004-2005. My challenge, then, is to make sure that students understand the power of the story behind each photo they place on a permanent page, a page of history.

My goal at the end of this demonstration/classroom lesson is for students to understand the job of caption writing. The old cliché says “A picture is worth 1,000 words,” and that may be true, but in journalism, “Brevity is a virtue.” By knowing how to write captions, students are analyzing all the information taken from one photo and selecting important details to relay their message in two or three sentences.

During this lesson, students will be accomplishing many things:

First, students will free write on the photo. Essentially, this is the prewriting stage or brainstorming period. Getting everything down on paper, the 5 W’s and the H, and any other information the writer knows is part of this free writing stage.

Next, students will research the photo, interview the people in the photo, and ask questions to those directly related. This is similar to the editing stage. The writer will add and delete from his or her free writing draft based on the research.

Then, students will analyze the information that best represents the event displayed in the photo and selectively choose words that construct the meaning of the photo and effectively communicates the story to the audience. This is the final copy stage.

Students will also be working collaboratively with classmates/colleagues throughout demonstration. This technique is building a life skill, a sense of community.

Students will find ownership in story telling through visual literacy activity.
Visual Literacy
Using Photos Effectively

- Start with a brief introduction of demonstration. What I am doing and why I am doing this?

- Present Slide Show. For each slide/photo write as much as you can about the story. What is going on here? Where and when was the photo taken? Why was the photo taken? What story is being told? (3 minutes per photo)

- With the photo and caption you have at your seat, try to imagine the story being told in each one. Jot down some ideas. What story is being told here?

- Now, get up, walk around, share with colleagues, and find the correct caption to accompany your photo.

- Share photos and captions with large group.

- Discussion on captions and photos. How do know that you have the right photo and caption? What information can we find in a caption?

- Briefly explain how captions are written.

- Write captions to power point photos with summer partners. Remember, short, sweet, and to the point.

- Compare Caption Writing. Facilitator chooses one photo, and each partner group will write their caption for that photo on a piece of computer paper. As a class we will choose the best caption. What caption captures the essence of the photo story?

- Reinforce idea that Brevity is a Virtue! Our story went from a paragraph or two, to one or two sentences.

- Time? Let’s do another Compare Caption Writing activity.
Caption Do’s and Don’ts

Every photo needs a caption. However, make sure the caption is doing its job. The caption brings new information about the story to the reader. Remember that captions are usually the first thing read in any publication. Make the caption count.

Do…
1. grab the attention of the reader in first words
2. first sentence in present tense, second sentence in past tense
3. include 5 W’s and H
4. use lively, colorful verbs
5. use strong, visual nouns
6. keep captions factual
7. identify all people pictured, first and last name
8. use complete sentences
9. give the reader new information not seen in the photo
10. include meaningful quotes

Don’t…
1. don’t begin caption with a name or an article
2. don’t state the obvious
3. don’t use “During” “Pictured above” “Shown above”
4. don’t use jokes or “gag” captions
5. don’t comment, question, or talk to the picture

Reminiscing childhood play dates and tree forts, Nicole Lerg and Rachel Patzwaldt meet for the first time at the Red Cedar Writing Project Welcome Dinner. Pizza, chips, and soda pop was served at dinner to ease participants into the eating rituals of summer.