

Mr. Katz's Room of Visual Thinking



Andrew J. Katz

One of the greatest challenges involved with being a visual art instructor has been trying to undo the stereotypes that exist as a result of sub par art programming. I still cringe when other teachers or parents refer to my class as "Arts and Crafts," or worse, reduce my program and its content to "cutting and pasting." I realize, of course, that these are assumptions that date back to their own art class experiences. I believe that getting people to rethink and therefore better understand art programs requires advocacy, spotlighting student achievement, and renaming methods.

What's in a Name?

Lately I have been on a bit of a crusade at my school to change the name of my class from "art," to "visual thinking class." At the beginning of this school year, the teachers were introducing themselves to the student body. When it came around to me, I said my name and that I was a

visual thinking instructor. Students who knew me knowingly smiled and laughed a little, while those who had not met me looked perplexed. Later that day, I overheard some students reviewing their schedules, and one remarked "Cool, I have visual thinking on Friday this year!" I realized then, that by renaming an old standard, you are able to give it new life. As an art instructor, I can see the value in asking people to look at something with new eyes and to examine it as if they'd never seen it before.

By renaming my class, I was able to create a new face for our program. It identifies our middle-school visual art class in a more specific and substantial way. It speaks to the notion that student artists are consistently absorbing, learning, and demonstrating artistic behaviors. They are connecting with visual art as thinkers, decoders, and problem-solvers and are establishing meaningful connections to interdisciplinary concepts.

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New Dialogues

In the scope of things, I realize that renaming my class is a rather small step, but I continue to be inspired and surprised by the immediate changes in attitude that it has brought. Healthy dialogues between students and among colleagues have emerged. When other adults are asking questions and investigating what's happening in Mr. Katz's room of visual thinking, it's my chance to showcase the level of sophistication in each unit plan and how student artists are reaping the rewards of a solid visual thinking experience.

During each class period, students reinforce their critical thinking skills, cognition, and comprehension by solving meaningful art problems. The development of these skills through visual thinking will serve young artists in all aspects of their education. What a difference a name makes! ☺

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www.keyschool.org/our_program/finearts.asp