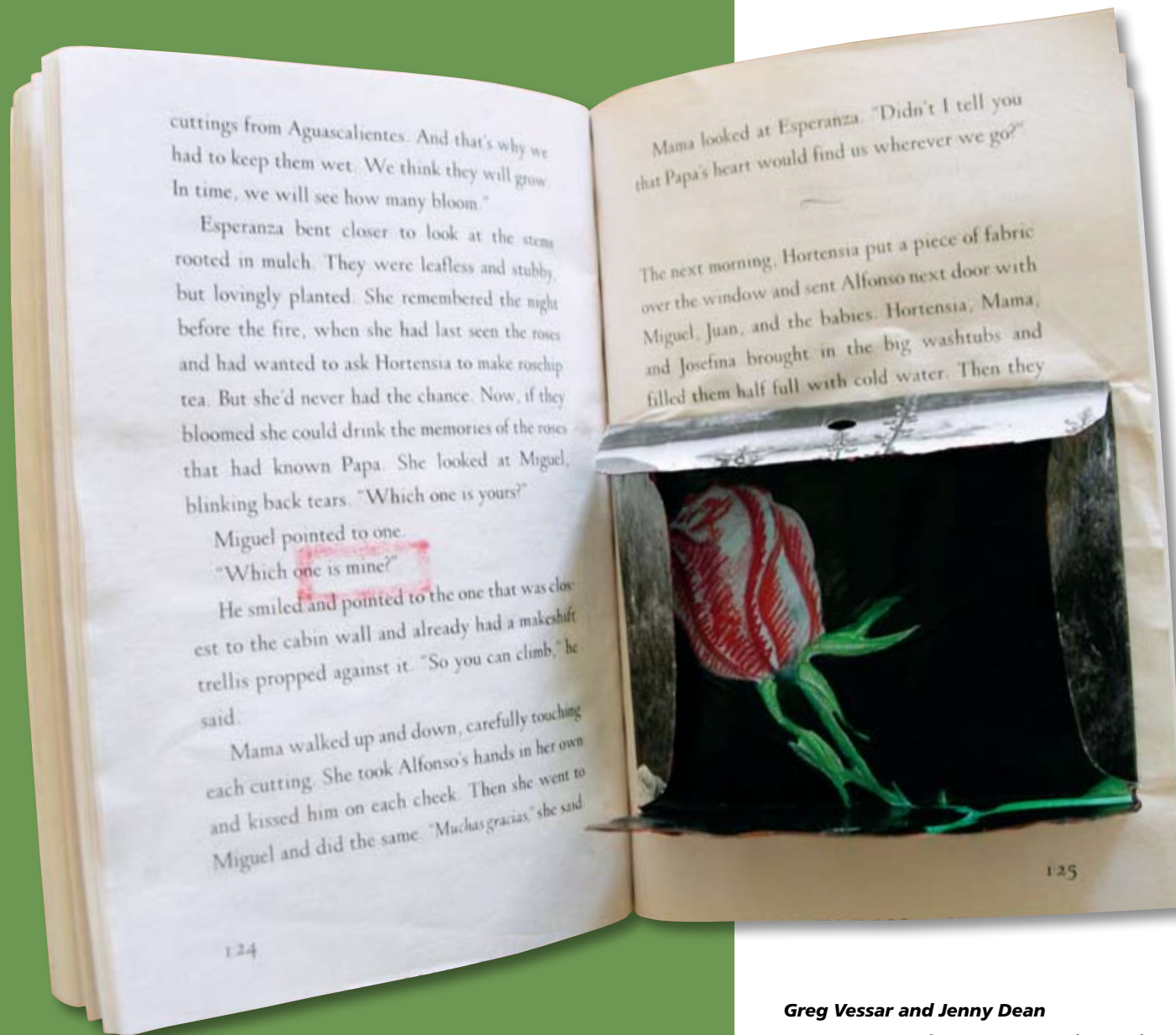


Jeannie, grade six.



# Trading PAGES

## Greg Vessar and Jenny Dean

**P**icture this: An art teacher and a language arts teacher linger around after an absolutely typical and deadly faculty meeting. One of them innocently says, "I wish we had more time to collaborate together on a cross-curricular project." After several hallway conversations and a plethora of e-mails, an idea is born, and the two teachers decide to combine art and visual literacy with reading and writing using altered book techniques.

This altered book project enriched novel study in the language arts classroom, and it did even more with reluctant readers in our sixth-grade Teacher Advisory Period (TAP).

## A Whole New Mind

Our pedagogy for this lesson was influenced by *A Whole New Mind* by Daniel Pink. His book explains the "six high-concept, high-touch senses that will help develop a whole new mind that our day and age demand." Pink claims that the MFA is the new MBA, so our job as educators is to keep our students current with the times and to educate them for their future.

## Esperanza Rising

We tested our idea with *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan. This novel is rich with cultural experiences and the transformation of a young, spoiled girl into a caring, young adult. The character's experiences evoked sympathy with our sixth graders, one of Pink's aptitudes. After some experimentation, we ended up with a four-step process for implementing our plan: look, plan, create, and share.

## Look

We began by telling students, "Today we are going to learn about story and art elements by altering a book." We shared models of altered books to give students a visual idea of what they would be creating. This was when the real classroom conversations began.

Before students began reading *Esperanza Rising*, we reviewed selected elements of a story (setting, character, conflict, etc.), elements of art (color, value, line, shape, etc.), and different methods of alteration (highlight words/phrases, collage, envelopes, letters, paint, colored pencils/markers, decorative papers).

Next, we divided the book into thirds so a section at a time could be read and then altered. While reading, students looked for and circled important words and passages that described setting, characters, and conflict. In regard to character, we asked them to underline physical characteristics as well as personality traits.

## Plan

Students began with a form that had two "plan" sheets on it. They were required to design a plan A and a plan B for each of the three altered book pages they created. Too often, students are tempted to settle with their first idea, so we made it a requirement for all students to have two plans.

## Create

It is important to leave the circled words and phrases visible to enhance the alteration

and give it deeper, clearer meaning. When students finished having fun in their books, they sealed the pages with découpage glue. It goes on as a white film, but dries clear.

## Share

Once the novel and alterations were finished, students presented their work to classmates, parents, teachers, and administrators. Presentations included summarizing favorite parts of the novel and an explanation of the altered pages, how they chose what to alter, the story element they focused

on, and the art techniques used. By presenting, students implemented Pink's aptitude of symphony—showcasing a relationship between the two seemingly unrelated subjects of art and language arts.

## Results

Using altered books to enrich novel study turned a rich, but one-dimensional unit into a multilayered collaboration of visual art and language arts that was unique, fun, educational, and meaningful. This lesson was taught to struggling learners, as well as gifted students. Daily we were asked, "Are we going to work in our books today?" That in and of itself is a victory. ☺

*Greg Vessar has taught art all over the world and currently resides in Fairfield, California. Jenny Dean currently teaches art at an elementary school in Tucson, Arizona.*

## NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students compare the characteristics of works in two or more art forms that share similar subject matter, historical periods, or cultural context.*

## WEB LINK

[www.altered-book.com](http://www.altered-book.com)



Nat, grade six.