

Dancer. Devin Grimm, Photo II, grade eleven, gelatin silver print (series).



Teaching students to critically analyze what they see in the form of the written word *and* the visual image is vital for their continued growth as thinking, participating individuals in our society. Schools that work powerfully for students teach a critical study of actions, words, and images.

Visual literacy is a blending of the cognitive and the aesthetic of our thinking and understanding. It is necessary to directly merge the aesthetics with the visual understandings of our surroundings for this connection to take place. This is what I call "visual literacy." A visually literate person practices analyzation and interpretation of all visual expression surrounding them, as well as traditional artwork. A visually literate person would be

able to approach any visual expression and search for meaning.

Art educators could work toward visual literacy of the traditionally famous works, as well as understanding and interaction with calendar art, book covers, room interiors, and more. After all, each is the product of an artist in our society and each product is a form of art.

Critical Analysis

Like it or not, students learn from many types of representation, not just printed or spoken words. More often, we seem to be more a product of what we watch than what we read. The act of seeing an image in everyday life does not mean that we know what we are seeing. What we need is a critique of visual culture that is alert to the power of images

and that is capable of illuminating intentional messages to the viewer. What we need is a curriculum to assist in analyzing and evaluating what we see surrounding us in the way of imagery. Why can't art teachers facilitate such critical analysis of all visual artistic expression?

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WEB LINKS

www.ivla.org

www.museumca.org/picturethis/visual.html

k-8visual.info

Visual Literacy

IN THE ARTROOM

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Maureen Doerken's 1983 report "Classroom Combat: Teaching and Television" gave the following statistic: By graduation from high school, most students had watched 22,000 hours of television while attending school for only 11,000 hours.

What Is Visual Literacy?

What does visual literacy mean? Ours is a visual world. In many ways the graphic image has replaced the written word as the means of communication. This is especially true for our children, who have grown up watching MTV, playing video games, viewing the covers of music CDs, and using the VCR or DVD player. The infiltration of the visual in all of our lives is not contested. However, two gaps exist. What does it mean to be visually

literate in our society? And, how do we teach for visual literacy?

The commonplace distinction between types of representation is "word and image." To be literate we would assume that someone can understand and use words to communicate effectively in writing or speaking. We would assume that a literate person is able to read "words." However, what are we doing collectively in education to address an understanding of or reading of the "image"?

A Call for Visual Literacy

In the April 2000 issue of *SchoolArts*, Stuart Oring issued a "Call for Visual Literacy" to all art teachers, especially in elementary schools. Oring made his case for

direct instruction of concepts of visual communication. And, he reminded us that it is best to learn any language, even the language of visual communication, at an early age. Oring suggested the use of photography as the springboard to visual literacy.

Visual literacy implies an understanding and critical analysis of all visual imagery presented to the individual in a culture.

Art educators regularly work with students to critically analyze imagery traditionally classified as fine art. Visual literacy implies more. It implies an understanding and critical analysis of all visual imagery presented to the individual in a culture. Therefore, art educators should address an understanding of more popularly considered imagery, such as CD covers, music videos, animations, as well as the traditional art forms.



Depth of Field. Gelatin silver print by Dan Elkins, Photo I, grade twelve.