

FEATURE



# MAKING INFORMATION **VISUAL**

## Seventh Grade Art Information and Visual Literacy

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Seventh grade students entering South East Junior High in Iowa City come from eight elementary feeder schools, as well as from schools around the world. Their information literacy skills and knowledge of reference sources vary, but since all seventh graders and new eighth graders are required to take one trimester of Visual Studies, all entering students are taught basic reference tools. Rachael Ayers, South East Junior High's art teacher, and teacher librarians Elizabeth Schau and Joel Shoemaker collaborated to develop the following lesson for Ms. Ayers's Visual Studies classes.

### Beginning in the Library

Students are assigned the task of making a book in one of two styles about an artist. They are to use information they will find during their library research. They need at least fifteen facts about their artist as well as visual examples of their artist's work < [http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/kqarchives/volume36/363/KQW36\\_3\\_Shoemakeretal\\_handout.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/kqarchives/volume36/363/KQW36_3_Shoemakeretal_handout.pdf) > . During the first period (42 minutes) we teach a lesson about using an encyclopedia to develop basic knowledge of an artist. We focus on how the index of the print edition of *World Book Encyclopedia* can help them locate important information that can direct them to additional research.

Initially we administer a simple, five-item pretest < [http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/kqarchives/volume36/363/KQW36\\_3\\_Shoemakeretal\\_pretest.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/kqarchives/volume36/363/KQW36_3_Shoemakeretal_pretest.pdf) > to check their understanding of the following terms: key words, guide words, main entry, volume and page number listings, and subheadings. Then we model how to locate information through the index about Claes Oldenburg, a twentieth-

century sculptor. Using enlarged color transparencies, we introduce the terms listed above, pointing out that the index will enable them to find articles beyond the main entry for this artist. The index includes facts worthy of note and the subheadings, such as "Performance Art," suggest additional key words that might be used later within other sources.



Having finished their research, students use print resources to begin creating their designs.

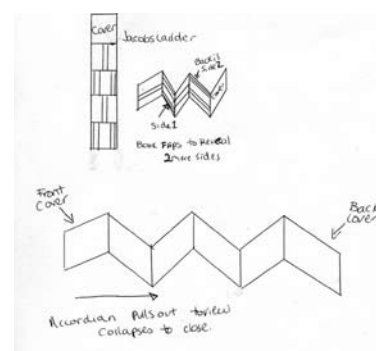
In the second part of the lesson, students use photocopies of the index and a worksheet < [http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/kqarchives/volume36/363/KQW36\\_3\\_Shoemakeretal\\_worksheet.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/kqarchives/volume36/363/KQW36_3_Shoemakeretal_worksheet.pdf) > to apply what they've learned about an index and to develop a research plan. They usually need five to ten minutes to complete the index worksheet, on which they record the key word, the main entry, the volume and page numbers, as well as at least three subheadings (with volume and page numbers). While photocopies limit their experience with guide words, it focuses them on identifying the relevant information within the page. It also allows them to ask questions specific to their own artist and clarify the research task.

The third part of our lesson involves using the information that they've found in the articles. We model

this with the main entry article on Oldenburg, identifying the important facts within the first few sentences and noting relevant details about the illustration *Two Cheeseburgers with Everything*. After they see the imbedded reference to the encyclopedia's article about Iowa's capital, where Oldenburg's *Crusoe's Umbrella* is a centerpiece at the Des Moines Civic Center, we show them how to use the "Des Moines" entry (not listed in the index for Oldenburg) to glean further information about Oldenburg. Finally, we look at the "Performance Art" article from the index to model skimming for the artist's name, then reading the information directly around it.

In the final part of the lesson, students discuss their answers to the pretest. When they have arrived at a consensus on the definitions, they make the necessary corrections to their own responses. Then they begin research on their chosen artist, referring to the elements on their index worksheet as they read the relevant articles in the encyclopedia and take notes on the provided handout < [http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/kqarchives/volume36/363/KQW36\\_3\\_Shoemakeretal\\_handout.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/kqarchives/volume36/363/KQW36_3_Shoemakeretal_handout.pdf) > .

The next day in the library, the art teacher introduces the book project



## Student's Thinking Objectives:

- Why should I use an encyclopedia's index?
- How can I be sure I've used the index effectively?
- How does using an index help me research using additional sources?

## Student's Active Objectives:

- Use an encyclopedia index to research an artist
- Use the encyclopedia information to guide additional research in other sources
- Work independently
- Practice note taking skills during research

## Vocabulary:

- Research
- Index
- Guide Words
- Main Entry
- Subheading
- Volume, page numbers

and shows examples of the types of book they will make. Students continue their research using encyclopedias but also use selected books from the nonfiction collection and issues of Scholastic's *Art and Man* magazine. When their research is complete, students turn in their notes handout and worksheet for assessment.

Initially, this lesson was developed in 2003 after the art teacher, Rachael Ayers, approached the teacher librarian, Joel Shoemaker, about

having her students do research on artists. Since every student was likely to find at least one article on an artist in an encyclopedia, Mr. Shoemaker developed an information literacy lesson to match the need. Over time this lesson has been modified and deepened. In 2006, we added the photocopies of the index pages to help students learn to use an index to complete a required part of the assignment. Ms. Ayers commented that the photocopies improved the teaching process: "In the past they would wait for an index volume, doing nothing, or start researching nonfiction books



*Students creating artwork in the style of their artists for their Accordion books.*

and forget to use the index at all. Now all students are engaged in productive learning throughout the lesson." As this collaborative project grows more tightly integrated, she has seen improvement in the quality of student research and student projects.



*Ms. Ayers shows students how to construct a Jacob's Ladder book.*

## Continuing in the Classroom

The library research component finished, students are ready to use their researched information in a creative product. The project will demonstrate what they have learned about their artists, as well as what they are learning about the visual arts. Ms. Ayers teaches a lesson on books as art objects, using information adapted for this age group from a class she has taken on bookmaking. Students learn to make a book in either a Jacob's Ladder or accordion style. Although the Jacob's Ladder style is more difficult, it is also more fun to play with. Typically, about half the students make each style.

Students are separated into two groups according to the style they choose, although at the end of the unit they present their books to the whole class. Their visual problem is to think creatively about the interaction of images and text, since they must fill their book with only six images, integrating relevant facts within the images. Each book has considerably more than six pages, so their designs cover more than one page. In fact, some students use up to four contiguous pages for a single image.

The accordion style is relatively easy to create, so Ms. Ayers begins with



*Jacob's Ladder books in progress.*



*Example of finished Jacob's Ladder book.*

this group. Students learn how to make straight, even, folds. They assemble their pages with glue and begin to sketch their design on separate sheets of paper, to be pasted into place at a later time.

Students who make the Jacob's Ladder-style books begin by assembling strips of material that will



*Examples of finished Accordion books.*

allow their books to "tumble" when finished. The bookmaking involves a

### **Student's Thinking Objectives:**

- How does learning about an artist widen my view of what art is?
- How can I be inventive and creative with new materials?
- How can I work with mistakes or use them in the composition?
- How can I use simple materials to create shape and form in three dimensional design?

### **Student's Active Objectives:**

- Discover new forms of book making
- Use a variety of sculptural and book techniques that reflect the student's level of understanding
- Demonstrate appropriate and original use of materials
- Experiment with two- and three-dimensional techniques combined in one piece.
- Demonstrate knowledge of artist's life and work by presenting their book to the class

### **Vocabulary:**

- Readability
- Hinge
- Spine
- Cover
- Collage
- Accordion
- Jacob's Ladder

series of complex steps, so students need more direct instruction from the teacher.

In summary, this collaboration between the art teacher and school librarians has wide academic benefit for our students. They develop information literacy skills such as the ability to search a basic reference source, to develop a research plan, and to extract relevant information for a need. They apply visual literacy lessons to incorporate text and images into a creative visual product. Students see that library research has practical uses beyond traditional products such as essays. Our collaborative planning, teaching, and assessment supports both the art teacher's and our key goals for entering students.



**Joel Shoemaker** is a teacher librarian at South East Junior High School Library in Iowa City, Iowa. Joel is a past

president of YALSA and is series editor for the *Teens@the Library* professional books by Neal Schuman Publishers. When he is not reading he is gardening, remodeling or motorcycling.



**Elizabeth Schau** is a teacher librarian at South East Junior High School Library in Iowa City, Iowa. Elizabeth is currently

working on efforts to increase reading and participation in the Iowa Teen Award at South East Junior High. She is the mother of William (2½) and Lucy (6 months).



**Rachael Ayers** is the Art Teacher at South East Junior High School Library in Iowa City, Iowa. Rachael is also a painter

and photographer. She recently finished a show at a local coffee house. She is the mother of Elizabeth (5) and Jack (2½).

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- by the Virginia General Assembly.
- 1920s—Agricultural classes were phased out by 1928 and the name was changed back to Chester High School.
- Basketball styles changed for the girls over the years
- In 1942 a new High School was built next to the original school and renamed Thomas Dale High School. Elementary classes were held in the old building.
- In many interviews, the drug store was remembered as a

favorite hang-out for students:

- In 1964, the existing building became known as Chester Intermediate School and a “new” Thomas Dale High School was built on the present site.
- In 2000 renovations were completed. Thomas Dale is home to over 2,500 students.

Our students are actively learning more about Chester and Thomas Dale High School every day, and the work they create will be a digital legacy for generations to come.



**Kathy Lehman**, a National Board Certified Teacher and Librarian at Thomas Dale High School, presented this

project at the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual AASL Conference in Reno, Nevada. As chairman of the high school's 100<sup>th</sup> Commencement Committee, she is busy organizing monthly events at her school which involve students, parents, staff, alumni and community leaders in this year-long celebration and digital history project.