Pixton Practices Handout
Visual Media Literacy

For Use With Pixton PowerUp Webinar

Best Practice #1: Analyze Visual Media and Multimodal Communication

Prep

Choose a diverse selection of visual media from different cultural and historical contexts. These can include comics, advertisements, or films. Focus on how visual storytelling is utilized and how gestures, facial expressions, and non-verbal cues communicate meaning. Emphasize how these cues can vary across media types and cultures, helping students understand the importance of visual context in communication.

Activity

Ask students to select a piece of visual media for analysis. Their task is to break down the non-verbal cues used, such as gestures and facial expressions, and explain how these elements convey meaning. Then, students use Pixton's comic maker to recreate or adapt the visual media, modifying or adding non-verbal elements to enhance or change the story.

PowerUp Variations

Imparting New Life: for a more advanced analysis, have students select a piece of historical imagery that conveys little or no emotion through gesture or facial expression. Their task is to recreate the imagery by making it more communicative, using gestures, expressions, or other non-verbal cues to convey the intended meaning more clearly. The comparison should focus on how the added non-verbal communication influences the overall message and clarity of the image.

Time Travel Transformation: For a deeper exploration of historical context, ask students to select a piece of visual media from a specific time period (e.g., Victorian-era artwork, 1920s advertisements, or 1980s television). Their task is to analyze how non-verbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, reflect the social norms and values of that era. Students then

recreate the media with modern non-verbal cues that reflect current cultural attitudes, comparing how shifts in time influence the way we communicate visually. This encourages a critical understanding of how visual communication evolves over time.

Differentiation

Scaffold Analysis: Provide worksheets with key terms and definitions about non-verbal cues to assist in analysis.

Simplify Choices: Offer students visual media options that use clear and familiar non-verbal communication. This can be done with more samples, or supplement with your own using Pixton's Story Starters or examples from the Lesson Ideas resources.

Advanced Challenge: Encourage students to incorporate cross-cultural symbols and analyze how gaps in the narrative (omitted information) affect interpretation.

Best Practice #2: Visual Narratives Without Text and Gaps in Comics

Prep

Introduce the concept of wordless storytelling. Show examples of wordless comics, picture books, or short films (e.g., *Flotsam* by David Wiesner). Students can create their own comics or you can prepare Pixton Story Starters with blank speech, shout, thought, or whisper bubbles for students to use either when crafting their own visual stories or by using the Remixing tool. Students can choose a real or literary character to save time, rather than creating new ones from scratch.

Activity

Using Pixton's comic maker, have students create short, wordless comics. Their challenge is to focus on narrative structure and the gaps or gutters between panels, encouraging viewers to infer what happens in between the panels. Students should think critically about what is implied but not shown, using visual elements to bridge these gaps.

PowerUp Variations

Testing Inferences: Have students swap their wordless comics with a partner, who will interpret the story by making inferences based solely on the visuals and the gaps between scenes. This exchange allows students to explore different interpretations of their visual storytelling.

Differentiation

Structured Templates: Provide pre-designed templates using Pixton Story Starters to guide students in focusing more specifically on inference-making, or give them the option to use the "Retell _____ with Visual Prompts" Story Starters.

Advanced Creativity: Challenge advanced students to experiment with abstract visuals or deliberately omit information in the gutters to push viewers' inference skills.

Support for Struggling Students: Offer fewer panels and clearer non-verbal cues to aid comprehension.

Best Practice #3: Decode Visual and Multimodal Messages

Prep

Select persuasive media, such as advertisements, social media posts, or propaganda, that combines both images and text. Analyze how the visual elements and the text work together to create complex messages. Discuss the persuasive techniques used, such as the interplay of visual and textual cues.

Activity

Students will analyze a persuasive media piece, identifying the various visual, non-verbal, and textual techniques used. Then, using Pixton's Comic Maker, students will create a visual campaign on a topic of their choice. The task is to create two versions: one that relies on images alone and another that incorporates both images and text to convey the message.

PowerUp Variations

Fill in the Implicit: Challenge students to create one version of their campaign that deliberately leaves out certain details in the visuals, forcing the audience to infer the missing information. Compare this with a second version that includes all details, discussing the effectiveness of each approach.

Differentiation

Sentence Starters: Provide prompts to help students analyze non-verbal cues and missing information in media.

Visual Aids: Offer examples of media with deliberate omissions to deepen students' understanding.

Advanced Challenge: Lead a discussion on the ethical implications of omitting information in visual campaigns and how it can influence viewer interpretation.

Associated Research

Aljalabneh, A. A. (2024). Visual media literacy: Educational strategies to combat image and video disinformation on social media. *Frontiers in Communication*, *9*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2024.1490798

Bock, M. A. (2023). Visual media literacy and ethics: Images as affordances in the digital public sphere. *First Monday*, *28*(7). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v28i7.13233

Cabrera, P., Castillo, L., González, P., Quiñónez, A., & Ochoa, C. (2021). The impact of using *Pixton* for teaching grammar and vocabulary in the EFL Ecuadorian context. *Teaching English with Technology*, *18*(1), 53–76. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1170640.pdf

Matusiak, K. K., Heinbach, C., Harper, A., & Bovee, M. (2019). Visual literacy in practice: Use of images in students' academic work. *College & Research Libraries*, *80*(1), 123–139. https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.80.1.123