



Using Navajo Contemporary Art to Teach Descriptive Writing to ELL Students

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by Irene Jones

Introduction

Joseph can often express himself verbally in vivid and animated language on any given topic of his choice. His flair for storytelling, imitating voices and acting out movements, can easily draw you into his narration of family dramas. He can quote who said what, and what that person did. In other instances, he can describe the plot of movies, including energetic animating explosions and action, with so much ease. He draws you into his narrative. If I'm not careful, he can take up the whole hour of Writing and not write a single word down. However, as soon as I tell him to write down what he just described to me, he writes this basic three word sentence: "I stayed home." When I ask him to write more, he writes another basic sentence: "I saw a movie." I even showed him how to brainstorm and write down his ideas using a graphic organizer. The whole school year, Joseph spent so much time trying to jot down details for his brainstorms, but he never managed to translate those details successfully into compelling written pieces. The saddest part of his writing issues was when the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA) was given. He really wanted to reclassify to a mainstream classroom for his fourth grade school year. Unfortunately, he did not pass. His struggles with writing throughout the school year impeded his ability to write a descriptive paragraph that was acceptable for passing. Now he has to spend another school year with me for fourth grade in my Structured English Immersion (SEI) classroom.

Unfortunately, Joseph is not the only student who struggles with his ability to write a decent paragraph of descriptive writing. Many students in my Structured English Immersion (SEI) classroom have the abilities to describe movies, and video games verbally in vivid details, but when you ask them to write it down, they just write one or two basic sentences and don't bother to add details. You have to keep asking them to add more details, but every day it's the same thing over and over again.

I had high hopes that all 5 of my third grade students would pass AZELLA. Of all 15 students in my SEI classroom, only 2 girls were reclassified into the mainstream 5th grade class. A majority of the students performed exceptionally well in Listening and Speaking, reading, and comprehension portions of AZELLA. Writing was where most students scored in basic range.

What went wrong? I taught writing the same way I've been teaching English Language Learners (ELL) for the last three years. Every year I enjoyed success by reclassifying a majority of my students into mainstream

classrooms. This year I was extremely frustrated and dejected, wondering “How do I fix this?” I had to fix it. This unit is my solution for the lack of success my students have experienced. This school year, I will start over with how I teach writing to my students. My goal is to reclassify a majority of my students. This unit is dedicated to the 13 students I failed to teach writing to.

In this unit I will utilize contemporary art to teach descriptive writing. The main objective of the descriptive writing lesson is to teach students to understand that adjectives give more information about a noun, in this case, the artwork. Furthermore, adjectives can create better sentence structure, and are able to add details to your writing piece. Eventually, I want students to transfer their new syntax sentence skills to learn to write a narrative about an art piece.

Contemporary art will be used to help develop paragraphs. The students will be given a print of a contemporary art piece and they will generate a descriptive word list (adjectives), as well as a list for other parts of a sentence using a sentence frame chart. Using the chart, students will generate sentences. With the help of the teachers, the students will organize the paragraph. The expectation is that students will connect more to contemporary art because it’s a glimpse into modern contemporary life that these students are being raised in. The contemporary art also allows writers to tap into their imagination, and use that to translate into writing. The paragraph will allow students to describe the art pieces, and interpret the meaning behind the art, with guidance from the teacher.

Rationale

The unit will focus on developing writing skills for fourth grade, Stage Three (3rd – 5th grade), English Language Learners. The ELL students in my class are considered ELL only because someone in their household is identified as a Navajo language speaker. The students themselves use English as a primary language. In retrospect, these students should probably not be labeled as English Language Learners, and should be in mainstream classes. Despite the discrepancy, the students still have to be served as English Language Learners, until they are reclassified as proficient when they take the Arizona English Language Learners Assessment. Sometimes, the parents have the choice of Opting out of the SEI program, which means that a parent can choose to have their child join a mainstream classroom.

Writing has always been a challenge to teach to Navajo students, and it is especially hard for students who are labeled as English Language Learners. The students have learned enough English to communicate effectively, and have developed basic writing skills. Their basic skills include 5 word sentences with a verb and a noun. However, the students do not want to move out of their comfort zone when it comes to writing. In this unit, English Language Learners will use art by three prominent contemporary Navajo artists to expand their writing skills beyond basic sentence syntax to more complex sentence structures, and work up to paragraphs.

One of the goals of an English Language Development teacher is for students to become proficient listening and speaking, reading, and writing so they can be reclassified into mainstream classrooms. In order for a student to become proficient, they must pass the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA). The one weakness that prevents students from passing AZELLA is their inability to write. The standard for a student to be considered proficient in writing at stage III (3rd -5th grade) is to show competency in Writing

based on the knowledge, skills, and abilities specified in the Performance Indicators at the High Intermediate level. The English Language Development Proficiency standards indicate that the student has to access grade-level academic content including selecting accurate specific words to express ideas, produce two or more paragraphs including introduction, supporting details, and concluding statement. At the same time, students have to use various sentence constructs that include correct grammar and parts of speech, and show competency in subject verb agreement.

The purpose of the unit is for students to develop writing skills, especially on syntax and sentence structures. The plan is for students to use Navajo artists as inspiration to improve sentence structures and developing paragraphs. The integration of Art and writing will develop student interest in art as well as development of vocabulary, especially the use of adjectives.

Demographics

Kayenta is small community in Northern Navajo Reservation in the state of Arizona, near the Four Corners and Monument Valley (Utah). The community has a population of 5,189 people with 92% Native American. The town boasts three hotels, two family-owned restaurants, numerous fast food restaurants, one grocery store, and several churches with their own denominations. The community also has two schools: Kayenta Community School and Kayenta Unified School District.

Kayenta Unified is a k-12 district that serves over 2000 students from the Kayenta and other communities within a 45-mile radius. Approximately 95% of the student population is Native American. Within the school district, there are three schools, Kayenta Elementary School, Kayenta Middle School, and Monument Valley High School.

Kayenta Elementary School is a k-4 school with 4 teachers in each grade level, and three Structured English Instruction classes. Each teacher in an SEI classroom is responsible for a different stage in English Language Development. English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards is divided into 5 stages, with each stage focusing foundational linguistic knowledge and skills necessary to reach English proficiency. Stage I is equivalent to Kindergarten. Students in first grade and second grade who classify as English language Learners are placed in a Stage II SEI classroom. Students who are in grades 3-5 are placed in Stage III SEI classroom. Since my school is a K-4 school, I was assigned Stage III SEI classroom, which means I have to teach a combined third and fourth grade students with varying degree of English Language. ELP Standards correlate with the Arizona College and Career Readiness Standards to acquire English proficiency in order to reclassify a student into mainstream classroom.

In Arizona, schools use the Primary Home Language Other Than English Home Language Survey to identify potential English Language Learners. Once students are identified, they take Arizona English Language Learners Assessment for placement. Once they are placed, they take the assessment once a year until they achieve proficiency. Even after proficiency, the students are placed back in a mainstream classroom the following school year, but are monitored for 2 years.

Navajo

The Navajo reservation sprawls across northern Arizona, northwest New Mexico, and southeastern Utah to cover 25,000 square miles. The Navajo nation is the second largest federally recognized tribe in the United States. As of 2015, there are 300,460 enrolled tribal members. The Navajo Nation is a sovereign nation, meaning that they constitute an independent government. Navajo and English are the languages used on the reservation. Today, Navajos are all over the world, whether going to college, traveling, serving in the military or serving as ambassador for Native cultures through their expressions of artistic pieces.

To celebrate Native American artists is to understand that these individuals work to preserve, reaffirm, and pass on cultural knowledge and practices through their artistic presentations. These artists have to have knowledge of materials in their local environment, traditional practices, the stories, and symbols that were passed on to them. Key cultural knowledge gives their artistic creations meaning and cultural identity. Despite their difficult historical circumstances due to American Colonization, artists have persevered through adaptations and incorporations of art from other cultures. The reason for their success is their ability to make the art they adopted and adapted their own.

There are several museums in surrounding areas whose specialty is in promoting Native American art. These museums include the Heard Museum of Phoenix, Arizona, Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, Arizona, and Museum of Northern Arizona in Flagstaff, Arizona. These museums welcome visitors, especially school-sponsored trips. The students get to explore the multiple displays of Native American Artists.

Art in Navajo culture is very important and visible in our community. Many Navajo artists use their culture as an inspiration. The students are exposed to the culture every day but often do not see it as inspiration to create an art form or to tell a story. It's important for students to recognize that artists tell a story through their artwork.

History of Native American Art

Many forms of art have always been part of our Navajo culture. Many arts have strong ties to tribal cultures and nature. Rock art in the form of pictograph and petroglyphs have been part of our culture, whether it was left by Anasazi or left by our ancestors. Our ancestors used petroglyphs as a form of communication way before modern writing systems were developed. Some of these rock arts can still be found in remote canyons on the reservations. Eventually, Navajos developed their artistic skills in many types of medium, including textiles (weaving), sculptures, paintings, pottery making and jewelry making. More recently, some Navajos have developed their artistic skills in filmmaking, and graphic-art imaginings that are strongly influenced by comic book animation. Navajo and Native American art is constantly evolving, growing and changing, but the one constant is that it shows that Native cultures are still alive today.

Before the Common Era

Many Native American Art dates back to before the Common Era in the form of cave paintings and cave carvings. Petroglyphs found in Nevada predate the Common Era, along with a red zig-zag found on a Bison

skull in Oklahoma. Numerous abstract designs, including some with repeating dots and arches, were found in northwestern Nevada, are believed to be the oldest known petroglyphs. Other early art also includes a well-dated pictograph of a painted herringbone in the Mojave Desert. Around Louisiana, mound complexes have been discovered, as well as stone work, flint knapping, earthenware, and effigy, conical, and platform mounds. In Utah and Nevada, art included porcupine quills that were used as binding agents. Porcupine quillwork is an art form of textile embellishment.

Common Era

At the beginning of the Common Era, ceramics, shell graving, textiles, woodcarving, and stonework were some common artwork featured by Mississippi cultures. In Ohio, the Great Serpent Mound was built around 1070. Around this era, the art of woodcarving by the Calusa culture thrived in Florida. Around the same time period, the pueblos taught the Navajos the techniques required to weave.

19th century

In the 19th century, modern traditional Native American art began to flourish, especially with the decline of the fur trade. Many Native Americans began to develop skills in painting, quillwork, embroidery, and beadwork. More Native Americans developed artistic skills, which allowed them to enjoy fame. Included were realist oil painter Zachery Vincent, and illustrator David Cusick. David, along with his brother, who was a watercolor painter, established the early Iroquois Realist Style of paintings. David was also able to publish an early, possibly the first, account of Native American History and myth called *David Cusick's Sketches of Ancient American History of the Six Nations*. The first known Navajo silversmith was Atsidi Sani.

Around this time, ledger art became more prominent among Plains tribes. The women of the Plains Indians traditionally drew or painted narratives on paper, cloth or animal skins. Ledger art flourished with the increased supply of ledger books, pencils, ink, crayons, and watercolor through traders and agent. The new tools allowed the artist to add more details. Some of the most famous ledger artists were Plains Indians who were imprisoned at Ft. Marion, Florida. As part of their Western Education, the prisoners were provided with paper, colored pencils, and water colors. When the prisoners were eventually released, most of them went home. However, some moved to the east coast to pursue a career as ledger artists.

The resurrection of Hopi pottery by Nampeyo and her husband. Nmpeyo used ancient techniques for making pottery. Her techniques were inspired by sherds found at 15th -century Sikyatki ruins. Navajo weavers also established more elaborate designs such as the eye-dazzler pattern with Germantown yarns.

20th Century

This century provided a quick advancement of Native American art and artists. Programs in schools, post-secondary schools for artists, openings of museums dedicated to Native artists, and Indian markets showcasing Native American artists were established. The earliest art programs include the Carlisle Indian schools Native American art program, and photography classes. New Mexico became the center for the pueblo Painting movement. In 1922, the museum of New Mexico sponsored the first Santa Fe Indian Market. In 1958, the Heard Museum Guild of Phoenix, Arizona held its first Annual Indian Fair and Market. Ottawa, San Francisco, Pawhuska (OK), and New York opened up museums that showcased Native American artists. One museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico was especially dedicated to Native American contemporary artists.

A major milestone in the history of Native American art was when laws and regulations were passed to protect

Native American art toward the end of the 20th century. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act states that any federally funded institution or agency, including federally funded museums, has to return cultural items to respective tribes. Cultural items include bones, funeral items, sacred items, and objects of cultural patrimony excavated on federal or tribal lands. The Indian Arts and Crafts act prohibits anyone from falsely claiming and misrepresenting that an artwork was produced by a Native American in Indian Markets.

Dine History of Art

Just like other Native American artists, Navajo artists are known for their strong connections to the rich culture and ties to nature. Respect for nature is an important part of the Navajo culture. Because of the strong ties to nature, Navajos always attend their artwork with songs and prayers. The most interesting part about traditional Navajo art is that it has been woven into Navajo Oral history, especially Navajo rug weaving. According to Navajo Oral History, Spider Woman gifted the Navajos with the art of weaving.

Every aspect of art is thought through and carefully produced. Within the last two decades, art that Navajos mostly identify with or associate with such as jewelry, rugs, pottery, and baskets were considered artifacts. Because of the label, the “artifacts” were housed in ethnographic museums. Today, there is high demand to acquire Native American and Navajo art so it can be displayed by curators in art museums.

Navajos are known for their ornate silver and turquoise jewelry. However, the art of the silversmith is not indigenous to Navajos. Working in silver was an art adopted by Navajos from the Mexicans around the 1800’s. The first Navajo silversmith was Atsidi Sani (Old Silversmith) who learned the craft from a Mexican named Naakai Tsosi (Thin Mexican). The silversmiths adapted the art by creating some unique designs utilizing new techniques with traditional designs. The art of creating turquoise and silver jewelry is still prominent on the reservation. Squash blossom became a trademark for turquoise and silver jewelry design.

Navajos believe that Spider Woman, a deity in Navajo Oral history, taught the Navajos the art of weaving. When the first loom was created, the cords ran between the earth and the sky. The weaving tools consisted of sunlight, lightning, white shells, and crystal. However, the history of Navajo rug weaving, according to Western society, was another art that was adopted by the Navajos from the Pueblos between 1000 A.D. and the 17th Century. The Navajos learned weaving from the Pueblos when they migrated into the four corners area where the Pueblos resided. Originally, the rugs were woven as blankets using cotton. Cotton was obtained by through the local trade routes with the Spanish people. Eventually, the Navajos started using wool after the introduction of sheep. Navajos learned to spindle wool from the sheep into yarn to use in weaving rugs. Because of tedious work of spindling yarn from wool, and the time it took to weave a rug, the rugs were very rare and sought after blankets. The original rugs were known as chief blankets because only prominent figures in Navajo and other Native cultures could afford them. The chief blankets had minimal patterns, and horizontal stripes. Eventually, Navajo rug designs evolved with the introduction of commercially dyed wool that was transported from Germantown, Pennsylvania. The transport of commercially dyed wool became easier after the expansion of the Santa Fe Trail and railroad. The demand for Navajo rugs increased between 1890 and 1910. European-American merchants and traders started having influences on the patterns. For example, the traders encouraged Navajo weavers to incorporate Caucasus patterns and motifs. Eventually, the Navajo weavers started creating distinct designs and styles. The “Two Gray Hills” style was predominately black and white with traditional patterns. “Teec Nos Pos” style is very colorful and very extensive patterns. “Ganado” style is mostly red patterns with black and white. Crystal, Wide Ruins, Chinle, Klagetoh, and Red Mesa are other patterns. Today, many Navajos still practice the art of weaving.

Contemporary Art

What is Native American contemporary art? What constitutes Native American contemporary art? It's more than the traditional art people associate with Native American arts because people tend to want to see and to grab on to what they understand about Native American cultures and life, but that is not reality. What they want to see is the traditional art including beads, silver, turquoise, pottery, and rugs. But, in many instances, Navajo contemporary art includes sculptures, paintings, and performing arts that challenge the perceptions and notions of what Native American art "should" be. Furthermore, contemporary artists consider themselves storytellers and information holders. Although Native American art may be considered progressive, most artists draw from their indigenous past or frame their work through modern Native American realities. The art is conveyed in the form of poetic expressions, visual metaphors, wit, and mystery that investigate deeper meaning of what it means to be indigenous in the modern era. Contemporary art is meant to bring positive change and thinking that help us understand indigenous cultures in the 21st century. The artists defy labels by covering complex issues.

Three Contemporary Navajo Artists

In my unit, I will spotlight one of the most established artists: Shonto Begay from Kayenta, AZ. What makes Shonto Begay unique is that he is an author, poet, illustrator, fine artist, and above all, he is a born storyteller. His specialty is large, vibrant, true to life and surrealistic acrylic paintings. As a professional artist, he has had over 50 art shows in various galleries and museums across the United States.

His art pieces build bridges through the arts and cultural stories. He finds value and meaning in ordinary life and shared experiences. Some pieces portray sentimental and homey life. Others are a little darker and can invoke feelings of uneasiness, yet he does not want to portray his culture and people as victims. He wants his art to start a dialogue between artist and viewer. When he does speaking events, he shares his personal experiences as a way to celebrate Navajo history. He draws upon his culture to create his artwork.

I will also focus on Ryan Singer, a contemporary artist who specializes in "vibrant pop art on contemporary and historical Native American and popular culture." He credits his uncle, painter Ed Singer, and pop-culture as inspiration for his art. His interest in art was further expanded by studying western arts, Shonto Begay, Bahe Whitehorne, and Salvador Dali. His art is influenced by pop culture and elements of Navajo culture. Singer was always fascinated by his uncle's abilities by pushing boundaries of traditional realist art. He often distorted figures and incorporating cartoon-like elements into his artwork. Since he was a toddler, he was constantly surrounded by pop-culture in the form of comic book heroes, science fiction classic horror movies, heavy-metal album covers, and toys he used to play with as a child. Although these items are not Navajo - they still serve as a reminder of his childhood. His artwork symbolizes the many stages in understanding his identity and place in the world as a Native American and American.

Two of Singer's most notable art pieces are *Wagon Burner* and *Sheep is Good Food*. *Wagon-Burner* depicts a burning covered wagon behind a yellow sign. His most famous work is *Sheep is Good Food*, which is a tribute to Andy Warhol's iconic Campbell Soup can. *Sheep is Good Food* takes the iconic soup can screen print with a Navajo twist. The can of soup is turned into a can of mutton stew. Instead of the Campbell soup seal, Singer replaced it with a sheep being lassoed. The importance of this artwork is that Campbell Soup and mutton

represents survival in the world today where many Navajos live below poverty level. When funding becomes scarce, Navajos can always rely on their sheep to provide mutton or purchase inexpensive cans of soup.

Singer cofounded Native Artists for Hope, which was organized in response to an outbreak of youth suicide in a small community on the reservation. He and other artists contribute to the community to offer mentoring, workshops and provide the youth empowerment through artistic expressions. His other projects include serving as art juror, art handler, graphic designer, and mentor.

Finally, I will include in my unit Navajo painter and print maker Ronald Chee. Although he did not grow up on the Navajo Reservation surrounded by Navajo culture, he is able to make connections to his culture. He specializes in monotype print making because it allows for him to modify his work as his work progresses. Because he lives in an urban environment in Costa Mesa, California, he is able to utilize materials that make his Contemporary art unique. He is best known for relating current events to traditional Native American subject matter in his art.

When Chee was only 2 years old, he was given up by his parents to be raised in a church-sponsored-institute for Navajo children. The purpose of his home was to prevent him from learning and practicing his culture. It wasn't until his Junior year in high school that a foster family from Texas allowed him to explore his Navajo culture. In 1987, he was finally able to reconnect with his biological family. Once he made connections with his origins, he was able to reconnect with his culture.

Most of Chee's work explores the spiritual world of Ye'ii, Navajo sacred spiritual deity. Chee learned the concept of Ye'ii by participating in traditional sweat lodges and oral teachings. The Navajos believe that people are connected to all living beings in spiritual and physical worlds. The Ye'ii represents the environment that we must share and preserve with the animals. In his most of his artwork, Chee interprets the Ye'ii as abstract imprints of the environment.

Writing

The first rule of thumb is to avoid, if at all possible, writing about something you simply don't like or don't understand.⁶

Since this writing unit will be presented at the beginning of the school year, the first part of the unit will focus on sentence syntax and sentence structure. A major part of developing students' writing will depend on their knowledge of basic grammar skills. According to the Arizona State English Proficiency Standards, students need to know the basic grammar skills, such as being knowledgeable with the 8 parts of speech: nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, preposition, conjunctions, and interjections. Adjectives modify a noun or pronoun, and answer which one, what kind, and how many. Articles, comparative, superlative, and age describe which one. Different kinds of adjectives include colors, sizes, and shapes. Numbers describe how many.

Many students come to fourth grade with basic sentence writing skills. As basic as they may be, I need to keep in mind that the students come to my classroom with some skills that can be built on. This will be the

opportunity to develop their syntax and sentence structures. Basic grammar skills include the ability to write a simple sentence with an article, a noun, and a verb. Students will be introduced to adjectives as a vocabulary development. *Large, big, small, and soft* are all the adjectives the students know. The goal is for students to use content adjectives that are relevant to the object they are describing. Writing also requires students to be knowledgeable about syntax order (English word order rules).

To become a good descriptive writer, a student must learn about the materials, processes, and tools for writing. Language is the material of writing. A student must master grammar and syntax to become successful in writing. In this unit, students will be writing about Native American art, so they will also need to incorporate the visual part of writing. Incorporating the visual part of writing requires a student to change their way of thinking about writing, but they need to keep their audience in mind while writing. Students need to be able to organize new knowledge in their minds in accordance with how they perceive and view reality. (Richardson)

Why write about art? Writing about art clarifies our response to the work. Was it interesting? Was it exciting? Was it frustrating? Why did we feel about the artwork like this?

Before any of my fourth graders can answer any of these questions, they need to be presented with artwork that is familiar or easy to understand such as still life or a landscape art. These types of work are excellent for beginning writers, and students will most likely gravitate towards them because they are so simple. However, because it is so basic in their application, it might not have enough content to have any analytical response.⁶

In my unit I will select art from Shonto Begay. First of all, the artworks are vibrant. Secondly, his art is an interpretation of Navajo culture. These are two things students need to show interest in artwork. Because it is about their culture, their ability to generate words that describe the art will grow quickly.

When writing a descriptive paper about art, there are advantages to comparing two or more art pieces. First, it allows the writer to explore new ideas and new perceptions as the writer examines the art pieces side by side, especially if they are related in some ways. Other advantages are that a writer is able to compare the quality or effect that would otherwise be hard to see if you are only focusing on one art piece. Same conclusions can be reached by comparing two or more arts that are similar styles of the same time or era. Sometimes, comparative writing allows the writer to see the development and progression of the artists.⁶

Ryan Singer's "Sheep is Good Food" and Andy Warhol's "Campbell's Condensed Tomato Soup" are two examples of arts I will use to teach descriptive writing. Comparing and contrasting two pop artists from two different generations and different cultures depicting the same subject matter will help students with perspective. There is a lot of room for conversations and discussion in this unit.

Descriptive writing will eventually transition to narrative writing. Narrative writing at fourth grade include creating a story with characters and setting. Elements of beginning narrative writing utilizes beginning, middle, and ending as the plot format.

Eventually, I want students to be able to use contemporary art at a medium to create a narrative piece. In this section, I want to use art that has a message. The narrative may be simple but the idea is for students to slowly study the art and voice their impressions. The challenging part would be to use the message to write a narrative that relates to the art piece.

Resources

Mystery Canyon Passage, Acrylic on Canvas, is by Shonto Begay. It will be one of the work pieces used as an introductory art piece for descriptive writing.

"Duck or Rabbit?" An Ambiguous image that gives the impression that it could be an image of a duck or it could be an image of a rabbit, depending on perception. Before the compare and contrast activity, I will introduce Ambiguous image as an introduction and help define perception.

"Campbell's Condensed Tomato Soup" by Andy Warhol is a pop art piece that is part of a series that expresses Warhol's views on modern culture. This art will be used with the compare and contrast writing activity.

"Sheep is Good Food" by Ryan Singer is a pop art piece that serves as a tribute to Andy Warhol. This art will be used with the compare and contrast writing activity. The inspiration allowed Singer to create a can of mutton stew rather than a can of soup. Mutton is a cultural diet of the Navajo people since the introduction of mutton.

"Casino Money" by Ronald Chee, Dine Artist, is a contemporary art that offers a glimpse of Native American casinos and gambling addiction. This art will be used as a transition from descriptive writing to narrative writing. Descriptive writing teaches the students to write using more adjectives to describe what they see in the artwork. Narrative writing allows more high level thinking. It allows students to delve deeper into the artwork. It allows students to interpret meaning by asking themselves; what does that image mean? What does it represent? What is happening here? Using their own experiences, students will interpret an artwork.

Visit The Museum of Northern Arizona in Flagstaff, Arizona. The Museum of Northern Arizona offers enriching workshops and programs for classes and students of all age groups. The workshops and student program curriculum guides that target academic standards for the state of Arizona. In addition, the museum offers workshops and student programs. In one workshop, students learn about the importance of pottery in Prehistoric Native cultures. Students participate in creating their own prehistoric ceramic pot in accordance to the demonstration of traditional techniques of pottery making and decorations. Another workshop that is offered is Rock Art workshop. The students learn about the meaning and cultural implications of petroglyphs and pictographs. Finally, the Goat in the Rug workshop teaches students about the process of making traditional rug making (textile).

Strategies

Word Explosion

Word Explosion is a strategy for brainstorming that can be used at the beginning of a writing activity. It is meant to clear your mind. In this strategy, you start with one word or concept. The concept activates additional words, especially adjectives that will help modify the noun to create a better description. In the beginning, students will be taught about adjectives as an important integral part of a sentence. With guidance, students will use Word explosion to brainstorm for adjectives.

Activate Prior Knowledge

In this strategy, students will be asked to study that art. Students will be asked what they already know about the art piece. Maybe they recognize something in the story. The idea is to teach students to ask themselves, what do I already know about this? For example, Begay's work is about the culture of the students. Many are still exposed to the culture or experience the events depicted in the art. Because Begay's art activates prior knowledge, I want to use his work at the beginning of this unit.

Field Trip

The grand finale for the unit is for students to visit a museum, specifically the Museum of Northern Arizona. This particular museum displays various artists from the around the Colorado Plateau, many of whom are Navajo artists. Currently, Navajo Artist Tony Abeyta, Navajo artist who is a contemporary painter, has his work on display until the end of September. The exhibit includes paintings, drawings, and mixed media pieces and jewelry. With their new abilities to use adjectives to write a descriptive and narrative piece on art, I expect students to discuss Abeyta's work. Because Abeyta's work is contemporary, I want to students to spend most of their time at this exhibit. Did the art send a message to them? Did it create an interest, did it confuse them, and if so, why?

It would be a great opportunity for students to see various arts from Native American Artists on display.

Activities

Descriptive Writing

Descriptive Writing describes a person, place, or thing by creating a better mental image. I will explain that it tells how someone or something looks, acts or feels. Adjectives and adverbs play an important role in creating the picture in the reader's mind. Good descriptive paragraphs take into account the five senses: smell, taste, touch, sound and sight. A descriptive paragraph includes a topic sentence that introduces the main idea. In this curriculum, the students will be introduced to an artwork. The paragraph also has supporting sentences. The supporting sentences give facts and details. The details of the artwork come from answering the questions who, what, where, when, and how. In a closing paragraph of a descriptive writing, the student restates the topic sentence, and a writer's opinion.

I will show students *Mystery Canyon Passage*, Acrylic on Canvas, by Shonto Begay. With guidance, I will ask students, what do you see? What do you think it feels like being in that canyon? With guided questions, I will help student create a list of descriptive words, mainly adjectives. I will explain to the students that an adjective describes a noun or pronoun. It tells what kind, how many, or which one. For this activity, the students will be encourage to use their five senses to tell describe what they see, what they might hear, or what they might feel. After that, I will guide students how to use a descriptive writing format to write a paragraph.

Narrative Writing

In fourth grade students are expected to write a narrative writing piece. According to the Arizona State

College and Career Proficiency Standards, students are expected to:

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques to add descriptive details, and clear event sequences. The students are expected to introduce a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally. They need to use dialogue and description to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations and manage the sequence of events. They need to include details to convey experiences and events precisely. Finally, they need to provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events.

In the image “Casino”, there are two Native Americans facing a slot machine. The image itself has many details and colors. However, the image is familiar in many Native American communities. Children as young as my fourth graders are familiar with casinos and slot machines. They may not understand the idea of gambling, but I want them to be able to interpret the painting. I want them to be able to answer who, what, when, where, why, and how. In the narrative I want them to be able to explain what the image conveys in their mind. Most children associate casinos with hotel rooms, swimming, or some type of entertainment specifically for children. Some offer game rooms, and rides. I want them to write a narrative about their experiences.

Compare and Contrast

Comparing and contrasting two or more characters within a fictional text is another skill that Fourth Grade ELL students are expected to acquire. This demand requires students to use higher level thinking. The students with the aid of a Venn diagram will compare and contrast the images of Andy Warhol’s iconic painting of Campbell Soup can with Ryan Singer’s *Sheep is Good Food*. The written portion will compare how Campbell soup would compare to a can of mutton stew. We will explore what the soups might taste like, feel like, smell like, or look like if they had them in front of them. The higher-level thinking will allow students to make inferences while comparing and contrasting the two art pieces.

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