Every now and then, we really do have breakthroughs in our understanding of literacy and literacy learning. Two of the more recent insights are “multiple literacies” and “literacy as social practice.” Instead of one literacy, there are multiple literacies (Street, 1995). In addition to language, humans have developed a variety of ways to mean (art, music, movement, etc.). This is what the humanities are all about as well as why movies have sound tracks, textbooks have pictures, and why malls select what music they play very carefully. It is also why Kress (2003) can make the case that the screen is overtaking the page in terms of its communicative potential.

The notion of multiple literacies has several important implications for how we think about literacy. Different cultural groups have different ways of making meaning. Even further, different cultural groups induct their children into literacy in different ways. Literacy means different things to different groups depending on their contexts, cultures, and schooling. Closer to home, school literacy may be very different from “everyday literacy,” or even literacy as the parents and students in your class may be thinking about it. As James Gee (2007) said, children are learning more literacy outside of school than inside. I tend to agree with him.

Instead of thinking about literacy as a commodity (something you either have or don’t have), thinking about literacy as a social practice can be revolutionary. When coupled with the notion of multiple literacies, literacy can be thought of as a particular set of social practices that a particular set of people value. In order to change anyone’s definition of literacy, the social practices that keep a particular definition of literacy in place have to change. This goes for changing school curricula, too. In order to value new forms of literacy, our social practices—what we have often called methods—need to change.

I find it generative to think of curriculum as a set of social practices and then to begin to ask questions: What kinds of social practices are in place and, as a result, what kinds of literacies are valued? Who benefits from the social practices that are currently in place? Who is put in jeopardy? How might I better prepare students to become both visually and critically literate? What social practices would I put in place to demonstrate that I value visual literacy just as much as I value print literacy?

This is not a matter of walking away from what we already know. A good language arts program for the 21st century continues to be comprised of three components: meaning making, “language” study, and inquiry-based learning, but (and this is a big but) the emphasis is different. In this article, I discuss these three components, followed by four arguments as to why I believe the arts must be included in all aspects of a critically informed literacy curriculum. I also discuss how to create a strong critical language arts program that critically positions languages as important to becoming a critically literate being.

Three Components of a Good Language Arts Program

Meaning Making

M. A. K. Halliday (1975) taught us that language did not develop because of one language user but rather because of two, and they wanted to communicate. What is true about language is also true...
about other sign systems. Sign systems are first and foremost social meaning-making processes. While Wells (1986) made this argument in relationship to language, I think it is inclusive of all sign systems: most of what we know we have learned from interacting with sign systems and being in the presence of others messing around with sign systems in an effort to mean. What this means for today’s and future classrooms is that students are going to continue to need lots and lots of opportunities to mean, not only in the form of reading and writing, but also in the form of nonprint-based literacies.

One of the ways to talk about this is through a process called transmediation (see sidebar), or the movement of meaning in one sign system to another. Moving across sign systems (from language to art, video to art, art to language, for example) has been shown to generate new ideas and new insights. Many teachers find that transmediation enlivens their reading program, while it also supports students’ comprehension. One of the strategies that supports transmediation and that I have used with students and teachers is Sketch-to-Stretch. After reading a story, students are asked to sketch what they think a text means (e.g., story, video, poem, image). Sketch does not necessarily mean pencil to paper drawings; learners can and should be encouraged to use a range of different media (like tempera, markers, and clay) to sketch and stretch their ideas.

### TRANSMEDIATION

Transmediation (Leland & Harste, 1994; Siegel, 1984, 1995; Suhor, 1984) involves taking something that you know in language and moving that knowing to another sign system such as art, music, mathematics, dance, or drama. Moving across sign systems (from language to art, for example) has been shown to generate new ideas and new insights. Many teachers find that transmediation enlivens their reading program while also supporting students’ comprehension.

**Materials & Procedures**

- A piece of literature
- Musical instruments, audiotapes of musical selections
- Scarves or other props to support interpretive dance and drama (optional)

Read the story aloud to everyone or form small groups and give each a copy to read together.

Form four groups. After reviewing the text, students discuss the messages they think the author wanted to convey. Group 1 expresses these messages through music, Group 2 expresses them through mathematics, Group 3 through interpretive dance, and Group 4 through drama.

Each group presents their interpretation using as few words as possible. Students in other groups try to explain what was expressed and how it connected to the book. Once these arguments have been made, members of each group talk about their interpretation of the story and how it relates to their presentation.

**Other Notes**

*Sketch to Stretch* asks students to symbolize what the story means through a sketch. (This is different from drawing a picture of a favorite scene and entails deeper thinking.) Typically students meet in small groups to talk about what the story means to them before drawing. Sketches are shared with the entire class using the procedure described above.

It is important to vary the medium to keep an edge on learning. Introducing new forms of expression like clay, collage, or puppets helps to achieve this goal. In addition, students might choose which sign system they want to use in subsequent experiences.
Figure 1 is a Sketch-to-Stretch by a student after we watched a YouTube video titled *The Power of Words* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNhYbJbgq-Y). In short, the video features a blind man sitting and listening to the passersby. Next to him is a sign, “I’m blind. Please help,” which elicits a few coins from passersby. A sighted person comes along and rewrites his sign to read, “It’s a beautiful day, but I can’t see it,” after which more and larger donations are given by passersby. The message of the video ends with “Change Your Words, Change Your World.” This video signals to me the importance of languages—written, visual, gestural—to encourage action. After viewing this video, the student in Figure 1 used languages to situate his meaning critically, and moved it into a critical literacy statement about “help” as a collective and social endeavor.

Another arts-based strategy that has proven successful over the years is “Save the Last Word for the Artist” (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1995); it prepares learners to talk and act critically through art. The visual meanings that get produced are powerful ways to talk about issues and situate learners to become social actors in the world. Figure 2 represents an engagement that I designed that invites students to make critical statements about literacy by using an artist’s technique to support their meaning making. Students watch a documentary on Harlem Renaissance painter Jacob Lawrence, *The Glory of Expression* (Freeman, 1994), and mimic his techniques in painting to create a critical statement of their own about literacy. This strategy provides space by first having participants hypothesize what they think the artist was trying to say and then hearing from the artist him- or herself. More often than not, the use of art will generate and often invigorate the discussion and the story by introducing new meanings. Dramatizing—adding music, movement, and dialogue—will do the same thing. In essence, transmediation is a powerful way to think about the complex meanings that are designed and created within, between, and among sign systems.

**“Language” Study**

I have put quotation marks around the word language to highlight that I am using the word metaphorically. I see all of the various ways we have to mean (art, music, mathematics, movement, etc.) as languages. Language study, therefore, not only includes the study of language as a sign system, but includes other sign systems as well: art, music, movement, and others.

Too often in the past, we have reduced the study of language to phonics in reading and spelling and...
grammar in the area of writing. I would argue that that approach has never been good enough, but it is even less effective when it comes to preparing 21st-century literate beings. Rather than think in terms of phonics, spelling, and grammar, I believe it is helpful to think about what kinds of literacy one needs in order to read things critically. Bill Green (in Comber & Green, 1998) calls this “instrumental literacy.” Instrumental literacy is made up of all of those proficiencies one needs in order to be able to access a text and understand what it is doing to you as a reader.

I think most of what is exciting about language falls well above the phoneme and grapheme level of text, and yet we do very little to help students understand how “language” works. Students need to be invited to become linguistic and visual detectives as well as encouraged to create texts that do different kinds of work. It is especially important that “everyday texts” be an integral part of our language arts program, as this is where literacy is occurring in the lives of our students. Gee (2007), in fact, argues that today’s youth learn more about literacy and what it means to be literate outside of school than they do in school. In school, students can learn to examine the literacies that operate on them outside of school and how they might position and reposition themselves differently in the outside world. Critical literacy, Hilary Janks says (2000, 2008, 2013), is about sign systems and power, including dominance, access, diversity, and redesign. No matter how it is said, literacy in the 21st century is not a spectator sport.

To support language learners, we (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2007, 2014) have developed strategies that acquaint them with Fairclough’s discourse analysis strategies (1989), Gee’s notion of “cultural models” (1989), and Luke and Freebody’s (1997) “Four Resources Model” (see Strategy Lessons sidebar). We begin by using such things as birthday cards and newspaper headlines before moving on to more complex texts.

We also introduce students to Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) grammar of visual design. Students learn how to deconstruct visual images by parsing pictures into quadrants for purposes of identifying what is new information as opposed to what is given, assumed, or taken-for-granted. Students become aware of focal points and how artists get pictures to do the work they want by directing the eye using vectors and color. We have found that while students learn much by studying commercial ads, they learn even more about the grammar of visual design by creating counter ads for the ads they have studied.

By providing space for students to explore and create through a number of engagements, we emphasize the use of languages and the study of languages to encourage deeper and critical understandings of how languages work on us to act, believe, and reproduce culture. These influences, of course, have the potential to serve some more than others.

**Inquiry-Based Learning**

We can be sure that there continue to be critical issues of concern that we’re attempting to address—poverty, homelessness, pollution, over-utilization of our natural resources . . . the list goes on. However, there are no magic answers to these problems, nor is it likely that such problems will be solved simply or single-handedly; we need to study these complex issues, and support learning that is collaborative and generative. Given this “reading” of our times, it should surprise no one that I am an advocate of inquiry-based collaborative learning (Harste, 1990, 1993).

What I want to see in curriculum is lots and lots of opportunities for students to explore their own inquiry questions using reading, writing, and other sign systems as tools and toys for learning. For today’s students and those in the future, I want to produce learners who know how to use art, music, drama, etc., to reposition themselves, gather information, change perspectives, re-theorize issues, and take thoughtful new social action.

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## STRATEGY LESSONS

### Language at Work

Norman Fairclough’s discourse analysis strategies (1989) are a way for students to begin to pay attention to language, the work it does in the world, and how it can shape our perceptions. This is best done a few times as a whole class and then students can break up in partners and small groups to do this analysis.

#### Materials and Procedures

Newspaper headlines on a common issue (“Gaddafi Strikes at Rebels,” “Rebels Are Attacked,” “Gaddafi Is Dangerous,” “War Erupts in the Middle East,” “May Peace Reign,” “Peace Might Come after Talks,” “Followers Bowed as Gaddafi Passed”)

**Examining words:**

- What formal or polite language is used? *(May Peace Reign)*
- How is respect for status or position shown? *(Gaddafi as opposed to Rebels; Followers Bowed as Gaddafi Passed)*
- Do words express positive or negative values to readers? *(Gaddafi is dangerous; Rebels signals nonconformists)*

**Examining grammatical features:**

- How are grammatical forms used to express certain messages?
  - Active voice (taking responsibility): *(Gaddafi Strikes at Rebels)*
  - Passive voice (concealing responsibility): *(War Erupts)*
- How are conditionals used—may, might, should, could, can, can’t, ought? *(Peace Might Come after Talks—the key agents needed to create the state of peace are not named or being considered)*

**What types of agency predominate?**

- Direct Action: *(Gaddafi Strikes at Rebels)—an agent acts on something*
- Non-directed Action: *(Rebels Are Attacked)—they just happened to be there with no part in this action*

**What attributions are given agents?:** *(Gaddafi is Dangerous)*

**Is agency unclear?:** *(War Erupts)—no agent; it just happened*

**Is the agent an inanimate object?:** *(War, Peace)*

**What is the authority of one character in relation to other?:** *(Gaddafi is singled out as a leader; the Rebels as a mass of nonconformists)*

### Discourse Analysis for Kids

Jim Gee’s discourse analysis strategies (1999) can be simplified and used with all students. It’s a way for students to begin to pay attention to language, the work it does in the world, and how it can shape perception. This is best done a few times as a whole class and then students can work in small groups to do an analysis. We start with a greeting card because it has brief text; we then move to picturebooks and poems.

#### Materials and Procedures

Greeting cards for a particular holiday (Valentine’s Day, Halloween, Birthdays). Cards that are designed specifically for boys, for girls, or that respond to a topic of interest like Barbie, NASCAR, etc. work especially well.

**Examining words:**

- What formal or polite language is used? *(May Peace Reign)*
- How is respect for status or position shown? *(Gaddafi as opposed to Rebels; Followers Bowed as Gaddafi Passed)*
- Do words express positive or negative values to readers? *(Gaddafi is dangerous; Rebels signals nonconformists)*

**Examining grammatical features:**

- How are grammatical forms used to express certain messages?
  - Active voice (taking responsibility): *(Gaddafi Strikes at Rebels)*
  - Passive voice (concealing responsibility): *(War Erupts)*
  - Conditionals used—may, might, should, could, can, can’t, ought? *(Peace Might Come after Talks—the key agents needed to create the state of peace are not named or being considered)*

**What types of agency predominate?**

- Direct Action: *(Gaddafi Strikes at Rebels)—an agent acts on something*
- Non-directed Action: *(Rebels Are Attacked)—they just happened to be there with no part in this action*
Examine the card’s discourses by looking at the situated meanings, social languages, and cultural models together:

What is this card trying to make you think?
How does this thinking match with your own thinking?

Other Notes
Once students have become proficient in analyzing greeting cards, we move on to examining the discourses in children’s literature. Picturebooks are a good place to start because of their length and the careful use of language.

Becoming a Text Analyst
Allan Luke and Peter Freebody (1997) believe that readers need to go beyond being proficient code breakers, meaning makers, and text users and also become text analysts. Text analysts not only gain personal and social meanings from texts but also examine how the text is trying to position them.

Materials and Procedures
Any work of children’s or adult literature can be used. (There are a number of questions that can be asked of any text being read.)

Curriculum has historically been organized around the disciplines. Students move through the school day by going from English to social studies to science to any number of other disciplinary studies. Donald Graves (1994) called this “the cha-cha-cha curriculum.” Students tick off subjects like they are on a checklist: “I’ve taken science; done with that.” Even in college, they say, “I’ve taken women’s studies; done with that.” Rather than invite students to use earth science or gender as a lens to examine their world, we have inadvertently reinforced the notion that they are “done with that.” This is why, in part, the redesign of curriculum begins with reflexivity—the self-reflective interrogation and critique of what it is we have been doing. Rest assured, we all have had our hand in the cookie jar.

Don’t get me wrong. I think the disciplines are important. But they are only important in relationship to the inquiry questions of learners. It is for this reason that I want curriculum to begin with what is on students’ minds; with what makes them itch; with what questions they have. Disciplines can and should be introduced as perspectives that students can take in unpacking and understanding issues. The same is true of the arts. Curricular invitations to explore what something looks like in art or music (say “Indianapolis,” for example) can be absolutely illuminating.

As part of a summer institute that I teach, inservice teachers study how to make content area studies critical. This past summer, we invited Ryan Kerr to talk about his book, On Growin’ Up (2010). After reading the book and listening to the author,
students working in groups were asked to have a written conversation about the book on a big piece of paper (see Fig. 3). Students began by jotting down their first reactions. To bring closure to the first part of this lesson, students were also asked to use the “big pages” we had placed on their tables to record themes, passages, and questions they had about the book. One group was so motivated, they conducted their own Internet search of groups being targeted worldwide and shared this information with the group. Afterwards, students created a gallery of their big pages and then returned to discuss how other groups had responded in comparison to how their own group had responded.

Next, students were invited to think about times when they had been marginalized and to respond by creating their own 4- to 6-page “growing up” book in the style that Ryan Kerr had used. An appealing alternative, although it never occurred to us at the time, would have been to have students respond in art on top of or using the very pages of the touchstone text itself (Simon, 2014). To culminate our study, students created an art gallery featuring their work, celebrating what they had learned about “group think” and minority targeting and inviting the viewing public to keep vigil.

**Four Arguments for Inclusion of Art in Curriculum**

As an artist and a literacy scholar (including studying my own artistic process), I want to make four arguments for the inclusion of art in every aspect of the school curriculum. First, art encourages learners to see more differently, more aesthetically, more emotionally, more parsimoniously. White (2011) argues that “artists assimilate a whole range of psychological, aesthetic, political, and emotional data points, and they then make forms to organize and give meaning to them” (p. 2). Art renders back to us not simply what we see, but how we react to what we see and what we know as a consequence of that seeing.

As an artist, I firmly believe in the value of close observation, in slowing down to take note of our world. Drawing, sculpting, or putting together a collage are more than tools for rendering and capturing likenesses. These processes transform perception and thought into images and teach us how both to see and to think with our eyes. While art is
interested in elaborating, art invites, if not demands, the removal of excess. Art, like poetry, has the power to sum up, to capture what is new long after the event itself (Fredrich, 1996).

Second, art affords critical expression, the questioning of taken-for-granted values. While art is often associated with aesthetics, the advancement of art as a discipline acccents talking back. I have found that my best works of art are transgressive; that is, they speak back to what has simply been assumed or taken for granted. In “Casting a Long Shadow,” for example (see Fig. 4), graffiti is positioned as a beautiful form of expression, reminding me of a message I saw painted on a brick wall in Toronto that read: “Billboards for the Rich; Spray Cans for the Poor.”

Third, art affords abduction—the exploration of possibility, creativity, and imagination. According to Deely (2004), there are three forms of logic: Induction, which is reaching conclusions based on a series of individual observations; Deduction, which is hypothesizing a conclusion based on a theory; and Abduction, which is the jumping to conclusions intuitively without an explicit set of arguments to follow. Art highlights abduction—the jumping to a new conclusion without any clear path as to how the abductor got there. Because abduction supports intuition, it is the only form of logic that allows newness into the system. Abduction means the focus of art is on insight, whereas in induction and deduction, the focus is on the logical conclusion of facts, data, and information.

Fourth, art affords agency—the ability to impose a different order on experience. Halliday (1975) tells us that it is person-to-person interactions that allow us to develop a personality. Alone we are just a person. Through interaction with others, we come to see how we are alike as well as how we are different. Art allows us to explore who we are, how we are different, what makes us unique, what contributions we might make to the ongoing conversation, even if our contribution differs drastically from current thought. It is this difference that endows us with personality and imprints the art we produce with a unique signature.

**What is Critical about the Arts in Curriculum?**

Across this writing, I have emphasized what comprises a strong language arts program, and the importance of art as a way to communicate. I now turn to what is critical about the arts in curriculum, an intentional play on words. At once, this subheading signals that the arts position curriculum as a way to learn to read texts and the world critically through our understanding of languages, and it also identifies the critical importance of the arts in curriculum. I have always said, “In order to be literate, you have to see yourself in literacy,” not just in reading and writing, but in all meaning-making experiences. I believe that languages should be a part of a critical curriculum, and just as we ask our students to learn to read and write, so too should we ask them to understand how other languages work when designing, creating, and interpreting texts. We need to open up what constitutes writing and reading and begin to reimagine these...
experiences as ways to change the social practices around language arts curriculum and learning.

**Writing**

As I see it, art should be seen as an integral part of the writing process. Writing, like art, is about a search for voice. I maintain that if you can get students to write “what is on their minds,” the rest may not take care of itself, but you will have come a long way toward creating a potentially great literacy program. It starts, of course, with students being free to say or illustrate what is on their mind after reading a text, and to say it in different ways. My experience says that if you have a restrictive reading environment, you have a restrictive writing environment. There is not a separate part of the brain that handles writing, another that handles reading, and a third that handles art. Together the sign systems create a communication potential that language learners must freely move within and across in an effort to mean in writing, reading, and in all communicative events and practices that occur in the classroom. The figures in this article show the significance of meaning making when it is reimagined, extended, and written visually.

To make our writing programs critical, we first need to free children up to write, and then we need to follow through by inviting them to unpack what they have written in terms of the social, historical, and cultural factors that have been at play to position their voices in certain ways. While no one can write from nowhere, similarly no writing is innocent. We grow by interrogating and understanding our own positionality.

In our work with teachers in Toronto, we asked them to bring a cultural artifact that was important to them. Regardless of what teachers brought in—a teapot, a fine writing pen, a beaded coin purse—we asked teachers to explore the historical, political, and cultural significance of the object by answering these questions: What significance does this object have to you? How does this object relate to your identity as a person and as a culture? How does possession of this object position you in relationship to other groups, historically as well as in the present? Teachers wrote in response to these questions as well as used dramatic play to share their conclusions and insights. The owner of the fine writing pen, for example, began to see her artifact as coinciding with the values of the culture in which she found herself, and with it, access to privileges that other immigrant groups did not have.

**Reading**

In reading, we must continue to have “grand conversations” (Peterson & Eeds, 1990) across all sorts of texts including literature, image, music, drama, and so on. Discussions around texts, for example, are cultural practices that an important segment of our society values and that we, as English language arts educators, are mandated to pass on to future generations. Most likely, these are literature discussions, as literature is valued in our society. Yet, these same discussions are left unsaid in many classrooms when children bring objects and music, or produce art and dramas in response to a topic. Nonetheless, it is now obvious that we need to expand the canon so that all participants can see themselves in literature, not as “other” but as the main character, and to see how image, music, drama, and so on also present characters and traits through which readers and viewers see themselves.

This is why the use of literature, art, music, drama, and so on must be centered on multicultural artists; we can then use these texts to raise important social issues, the key to making reading relevant (Leland, Lewison, & Harste, 2013). I think it is important that students understand that they have not read a book or a text until they have had a conversation about it with someone else, emphasizing Halliday’s (1975) point about the development of language and the desire to communicate. I also think it is important that students walk away feeling some social obligation to share their growing insights with the rest of the world. For this to become a regular part of curriculum,
I am obligated as a teacher to set certain social practices in place.

To exemplify grand conversations across texts, let me describe our classroom approach to picturebooks. When we discuss picturebooks, we pay special attention to the images that the illustrator has created. Although this is not a novel idea, discussing in depth both the art and the written text as languages is. A favorite of mine (which really gets the conversation going) is *I’m Glad I’m a Boy! I’m Glad I’m a Girl!* by Whitney Darrow (1970). Students read the written text alongside the illustrations, carefully noting the juxtaposition of image/words to engage in discussions about gender, literacy, picturebooks, illustrations, and so on.

This allows us to extend the conversation to visual texts. Advertisements, commercials, and public service announcements (among others) need to be “read” as well as interrogated. By having students collect advertisements from teen magazines as well as from the magazines their parents typically read, larger systems of meaning are often exposed. Teachers in Toronto found that McDonalds advertised their green salads in parent magazines but in teen magazines, their Big Mac sandwiches have the slogan, “Have you had your hands on any buns lately?”

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**GRAMMAR OF VISUAL DESIGN**

**Visual Literacy**

Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) grammar of visual design is intended to assist viewers in understanding ways to analyze art, photography, and advertisements. Viewers learn to identify the ideal and the real, the now and the new, the use of color, and the work that vectors and gaze can do in a graphic image.

**Materials & Procedures**

Use any two pieces of art including text book images, posters, or professional photography.

1. Ask students to look at the photo and mentally divide it into quadrants. Tell them:
   a. The top half of the picture is called the “ideal.”
   b. The bottom half of the picture is called the “real.”
   c. The left hand two quadrants are called the “here & now.”
   d. The right hand two quadrants are called the “new.”
2. With this framework in mind, ask students to analyze the art and to share what they think is being said.
3. Ask students to identify:
   a. The “center,” or the place where the eye falls when someone first looks at the picture.
   b. The “vectors” (often called lines or alignments) that carry the eye up, down, or sideways across the picture. Typically “vectors” go from “the real” to “the ideal” or from “the here & now” to “the new.”
   c. The “colors” being used. Colors are often used to set moods.
   d. The “gaze.” In pictures or photographs containing characters, the direction of the gaze often creates a vector that moves the eye from one point to another. A gaze upward and off the page may suggest the future (an idealized perfect state); a gaze downwards anchors the picture in “the real” or “the here & now.”
   e. Any “exaggerations”—items drawn out of proportion to the rest of the items in the picture.
4. With this additional information in mind, ask student to revise as well as share their new interpretation of the piece of art being analyzed.
5. To support students in further gaining confidence in analyzing visual texts, have them select a second piece of art to first “read” and then share with the class what they think the art is trying to say.
6. As a culminating activity, students can be asked to make suggestions as to how the text they have been studying might be redesigned to be more effective as a visual text.
Social Practices
While what materials we read is an issue, even more of an issue is what social practices we institute around our discussion of texts. I like to think of these social practices in terms of opening up new spaces in the classroom for having some critical conversations as well as much-needed new conversations. We need to teach in such a way that students enjoy a range of texts, but at the same time come to see that languages are never innocent. Whose story is this? What would this story be like if it had been written by someone very different from the current author? What is this image showing us? How are we implicated in these images? What is being taken for granted? What other ways are there to think about what is being discussed?

Discussions of this sort represent a new set of practices around what it means to be a reader, writer, and producer of text. Today’s students and those in the future are going to have to be able to interrogate texts for purposes of understanding how authors and artists position readers. To be literate is to be able to elect what identity one wants to take on. Our goal needs to be to create agents rather than consumers of text.

Conclusion
If asked to critique education, I would argue that too often in the past, our English language arts curricula have focused on meaning making with a half hour of phonics thrown in for good measure. For the most part, studying language and other sign systems in terms of the work they do and how they do it has been left out, as has providing daily opportunities to inquire into problems of personal and social relevance to learners. No wonder, then, that students learn more about literacy on the streets than they do in the classroom. This has to change. The real question that each of us has to ask is, “What kind of literate being should inhabit the 21st century?” Asked differently, “What kinds of lives do we want to live and what kind of people do we want to be?” For my

INTO THE CLASSROOM WITH READWRITETHINK

Embedding Multiple “Languages” into Your Teaching
This article encourages us to think of languages in other ways, including art, music, movement and more. The following resources from ReadWriteThink.org share ways to include those languages in your lesson plans and teaching ideas.

“America the Beautiful”: Using Music and Art to Develop Vocabulary
This lesson uses music and art in a vocabulary study of unfamiliar words from the song “America the Beautiful,” increasing students’ vocabulary while also increasing their knowledge of US geography. A discussion to activate students’ prior knowledge about sights and scenery throughout the United States is followed by a read-aloud and an introduction to the song “America the Beautiful,” which is then sung in each session of the lesson. Students learn the meanings of the song’s words through shared reading and the use of context clues and images. Students then use photographs, illustrations, and descriptive language to create a mural shaped like the United States. Finally, through pictures and words, students reflect on what they have learned. This lesson is appropriate and adaptable for any patriotic event or holiday, and many of the vocabulary strategies are adaptable for other texts or word lists, as well.

http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/americathebeautifulusingmusic-1147.html

Introducing Basic Media Literacy Skills with Greeting Cards
This lesson is a starting point for introducing younger writers to media literacy. In this lesson, students examine elements of holidays/events, invent their own original holiday, and examine and create holiday/event cards based on those chosen. Through reflection, students realize that good communication doesn’t just “happen”;

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part, I want critically literate beings who know how language and other sign systems work and can use them to make meaning and reposition themselves in the world in a more democratically thoughtful and equitable manner. Infusing the curriculum with art as seamlessly as possible, I believe, is a first, but critical, step.

Notes
1. An earlier version of this article was published in 2013 [Voices from the Middle, 10(3), 8–13].

References

it is purposely constructed to achieve a particular effect. This lesson is most appropriate for younger writers, and can give a boost to students who lack confidence in their writing. It could also be easily adapted for use with English language learners by focusing on holidays in their own cultures.

http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/introducing-basic-media-literacy-30781.html

Let the Show Begin! Literary Talent Show

Children love to put on skits for friends and family. They also enjoy sharing their favorite songs, poems, and stories. In this activity, children incorporate these loves into a talent show, complete with costumes, props, and programs for the audience.


On a Musical Note: Exploring Reading Strategies by Creating a Soundtrack

No matter where you teach, students are likely to listen to music. Their tastes may vary widely—pop, rap, country, classic, jazz, R & B. Regardless of their preferences, they each bring a rich knowledge of musical tunes and lyrics to the classroom. This lesson takes advantage of that interest by asking students to create a soundtrack for a novel that they have read. Students begin by analyzing how specific songs might fit with a familiar story. Students then create their own soundtracks for the movie version of their chosen novel. They select songs that match the text and fit specific events in the story. Finally, students share their projects with the class and assess their work using a rubric.


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