

Visual Puns

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Composite Imagery (Substitution and Visual Punnery)

A Five-Day Lesson Plan

Day 1. Puns

Definitions:

Pun: A play on words, usually the assignment of different meanings to similarly sounding words or phrases, with humorous intent.

Visual Pun: A drawing, cartoon, photograph, etc. depicting objects arranged so that the names of the objects or a description of their placement suggests a play on words.

Examples: Hot Dog (a dog in the sun), Fast Food, Pie in the Sky, Little Brother

Exercises:

1. Encourage students to think of as many puns as they can, and list these on the board.

2. Describe a picture that would illustrate one or several of these puns. (A dog in the sun, etc.) Draw one or more of these examples for the class.

3. Have each student create a line sketch of a simple pun from the list.

Day 2. Shapes

Purpose: To enable students to recognize common geometric shapes in different contexts.

Exercises:

1. List common geometric shapes (circle, square, triangle, rectangle), and draw each shape on the board or projector. Discuss and list real-world objects that have these shapes. (e.g. Circle: pizza, tire, checker, coin, etc.)

2. Have students draw each shape at the top of a sheet of paper, then write down as many objects as they can think of that conform to the shape.

Students should spend the remainder of the period examining the classroom, or looking through magazines, newspapers, etc. to find examples of different shapes. These should be added to their shape lists.

Day 3. Shape Drawing

Purpose: To help students use common shapes to construct complex objects.

Exercise:

1. The Teacher should provide an example (photograph, drawing, or model) of a complex object (e.g. a train, cathedral, grandfather clock) and point out the individual geometric shapes that make up the details of the object. (Circles for wheels, rectangles for bricks, etc.) This example should then be rendered as a line drawing, using only basic shapes.

2. Students should select a subject containing a variety of basic shapes, and create a line drawing composed entirely of geometric figures. Shading and texture are unimportant in this exercise.

Day 4. Substitutional Imagery - Collage

Purpose: An opportunity for students to practice identifying and selecting basic shapes in print media, and reassemble them into a collage rendering.

1. Using their previous Shape Drawings as a guide, students should cut out pictures from magazines, catalogues, etc., and, substituting for the original geometric shapes, paste these together into an approximation of their original subjects. (Many of these cutout pieces will not be exactly the right size or configuration to fit the subject. No matter. The goal here is to reinforce the process of shape recognition – and to make students aware that the real world does not always fit the artist’s vision.)

Bonus: Students may attempt to limit their shape selections to items that collectively or individually create one or more visual puns.

Day 5. Composite Drawing

Purpose: Practice drawing basic shapes such as those identified in print media, and assemble them into a collage-type composite drawing.

1. Again using the Shape Drawings and Collages as guides, students may now draw their selected subjects as a collection of appropriately shaped items (rather than simple line shapes), substituting for the original geometric aspects of their chosen subjects. Emphasis should be on shape, not technical ability. Line representations are fine; it should be noted, however, that the subject should at least be recognizable – and the drawing should look more like the chosen subject than the collage.

Bonus: Students may attempt to limit their shape selections to items that collectively or individually create one or more visual puns.

Resources

The following definitions are copied from a web site – original URL has been lost. They are shown here for study.

Visual Puns: Visual pun is the use of symbols to suggest two or more meanings or different associations. Visual puns combine two or more symbols (picture and/or text) to form a new meaning. The viewer must mentally elaborate on the visual stimulus to interpret the message –

Visual Puns: Creating an artwork in which several visual forms which look alike (thinking by appearance in the right hemisphere) are connected and combined so as to bring out two or more possible meaningful ideas in a humorous way. Because of the obviously separate nature of the two forms being humorously combined, visual puns are a lower form of visual metaphor.

Visual Satire: Art forms that use bi-association in an intentional way to make visual "look alike" comparisons between unlike objects to make meaningful exposures of vices, follies, stupidity, abuses, or hidden character. A more sophisticated form of bi-association than visual puns, works of visual satire imply that serious purpose is intended, even when it is communicated in a humorous way. Caricature is a form of visual satire.

Bi-association: The mixture in one human mind of visual physiognomies from two contexts or categories of objects that are normally considered separate categories by the literal processes of the mind. The thinking process that is the functional basis for metaphoric thinking. This is a term coined by the author Arthur

Koestler in his book "[The Act of Creation](#)." Koestler invented this term to distinguish the type of analogical thinking that leads to the acts of great creativity from the more pedestrian associative (purely logical) thinking, with which we are so familiar in our everyday lives.

Visual Merging: Term coined by NAB to specify a level of bi-association where the separate objects with their associated physiognomic qualities are being merged toward the level of hidden metaphoric expressions (disguised symbolism). The objects at the visual merging level are, however, still identifiable as separate objects being referred to visually.

Suggestions from Getty TeacherArtExchange List Members

Fun with Words <http://www.fun-with-words.com/> (warning site has pop-up ads)

In [American Artist Magazine](#) (1993) there was a [great article](#) on visual puns by Scott Moore – A Getty ArtsEdNet Talk list member used to do a surrealism/collage lesson with middle school students based on this article.

Children's books to look at are by Fred Gwynne (Herman Munster) - [The King Who Rained](#), [A Chocolate Moose for Dinner](#), [A Little Pigeon Toad](#) -Check with your language arts teacher for lists of idioms, metaphors, compound words -

[Design Synectics](#) has a list on page 19...

- Watch Dog
- Fan Club
- Second Hand Store
- Water Closet
- Strong Box
- Photo Bug
- Bookworm
- Loud Tie
- Toothpick
- Gatorade
- Handcuffs
- Horse radish
- Fireman
- Wisdom Tooth
- Mail Man
- Boxing Match
- Book Worm
- Butterfly
- Moth Ball
- Garden Hose
- Horse Fly
- Eye Ball
- Handball
- Football

Another artist translated the word "dog"-- a sculpture made from watches called "watch dog," "hot dog," "dog gone," "dog days of summer."

One of the paintings is titled "Star Gazing" - he started with the word star, wrote down related phrases (shooting star, starry eyed etc...) until he thought of star gazing - changed it to star 'grazing' and the scene is a herd of cows among a star cookie cutter, rolling pin and a sky with the stars cut out like cookie dough - the cows are star grazing - several good examples -

Roukes book - [Humor In Art](#) has wonderful examples - and an algorithm or formula for designing puns -

From Sharon Kennedy: Some of my students are working on projects inspired by the book [From Ordinary to Extraordinary](#) by Ken Vieth. One created a drawing that's a visual pun, though neither she nor I realized it until after she'd completed it.

List from Chesterfield School (Web page no longer active)

Fruit Punch
Deviled Eggs
Flower Bulb
Jack Frost
Dreadlock
Fire Drill
Dragon Fly
Dr. Pepper
Money Order
Star Fish
Serial Killer
Foot ball

- Rafal Olbinski <http://www.patinae.com/artists/rafal-olbinski/>
- [Graphic Visual Puns](#) (word puzzles)- might inspire a text/lettering design lesson
- [Lesson for Robert Arneson](#) (Archive)
- M.C. Escher - Picture and biography
<http://www.gandanet.com.hk/roygrubb/sl&str3.html>
<http://www.insite.com.br/bio/rodrigo/text/escher.html>
- Visual Puns by Don Stewart <http://www.dsart.com/> - (Archive) Composite images
- DMOZ's pun links: <http://dmoz.org/Recreation/Humor/Wordplay/Puns/>

Lesson Plans

- [IAD Lesson Plan by Don Stewart - with Bird and Fish Puns](#)
- [Lesson Plan from Adobe using Photoshop](#) (Archive)
- [Lesson plan for Robert Arneson](#) (Archive - Ceramic sculptor - noted for his visual puns)

- [IAD Lesson Plan - paper mache Visual Puns](#)
- [Humor in Art: Giuseppe Arcimboldo](#) (Archive) from North Texas Institute for Educators on the Visual Arts- [Unit of study - more lessons](#) (Archive)

Camouflage Visual Puns

Bev Doolittle's camouflage paintings were the first use of this term. The image of another entity, such as a horse and rider, lies within a natural landscape. Seeing pictures in clouds is the kind of visual play that spawns this kind of pun. See one of her paintings, "[The Forest has Eyes](#)"

Reading an image – some basic questions to ask when viewing images:

<http://www.englishcompanion.com/room82/readimages.html> (Archive)

Thomas Nast – political cartoon

<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/harp/1112.html>

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?ID=255 (Archive - lesson plan for political cartoons – What Portraits Reveal)

See the political cartoons on [Daryl Cagle's site](#).

Visual Puns/Oxymorons from Anne Carman-Hendel

I have been interested in the thread about visual puns. It occurred to me that oxymorons would also be good source of ideas---those seemingly incongruous words that are used together like 'jumbo shrimp,' 'working vacation,' and 'pretty ugly.'

I located the following web sites that have gobs of oxymorons in case someone like me was still intrigued by this idea.

<http://www.ethanwiner.com/oxymoron.html>

<http://www.topskills.com/oxymorons.htm>

[\[Photoshop lesson plan page\]](#)

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