Volume 14, Number 1 Winter 2001

The New Advocate

Those Involved With Young r Literature

Whitelaw, J., & Wolf, S. A. (2001). Learning to "see beyond": Sixth-grade students' artistic perceptions of *The Giver*. *The New Advocate, 14* (1), 57-67.

Learning to "See Beyond": Sixth-Grade Students' Artistic Perceptions of The Giver

Jessica Whitelaw and Shelby A. Wolf

Jessica Whitelaw is a sixth grade reading teacher from Avon, Colorado. Shelby A. Wolf is an associate professor of education at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

> "I think it's true," he told the Chief Elder and the community. "I don't understand it yet. I don't know what it is. But sometimes I see something. And maybe it's beyond."
>
> She took her arm from his shoulders.
>
> "Jonas," she said, speaking not to him alone but to the entire community of which he was a part. "You will be trained to be our next Receiver of Memory. We thank you for your childhood" (Lowry, 1993, p. 64).

In this pivotal scene from Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, Jonas, leaving his childhood behind at 12 years of age, is chosen to become the next Receiver of Memory because of his "Capacity to See Beyond." Jonas is selected, singled out from his community—a seemingly Utopian society that has rejected choice, color, pain, and even love in order to achieve "Sameness." He begins his training with an elder citizen, the Giver, who transmits memories of the past through visual scenes. Through these experiences, Jonas comes to see his community in ways he had not seen before, and comes to perceive alternatives to "Sameness" in the possibilities of Elsewhere. Central to Jonas's evolving understanding throughout the text is the role of visual imagery.

In a related sequence of scenes in my sixth grade reading classroom in a Rocky Mountain middle school, a group of 12-year-old students and I, read and discussed *The Giver* last spring. My students were ethnically diverse (Chinese American, Mexican American, Japanese American, and Anglo American) and all were avid, even gifted readers. However, they often rushed through books in their eagerness to get on to the next chapter, the next book, the next adventure. What I wanted them to do was to slow down and to reflect upon what they had read—to stand back from the text and think deeply about what was inside.

In my own reading, I had concentrated on theorists who described literary interpretation as a dynamic and engaging experience. With the help of my university mentor and co-author, Shelby, I began with Rosenblatt's (1978; 1995) transactional theory, especially her emphasis on an aesthetic approach to reading, a stance in which the reader "focus[es] attention on the private, as well as the public, aspects of meaning" (p. 292). Together, we studied various modes of response such as drama, dance, and the visual arts. I came to believe that through these modes students could interact with texts in ways that helped them savor, build upon, and enrich their experiences. Like Buescher (1996), I felt that "recognizing . . . aesthetic ways of knowing [could] expand the richness of every student's intelligence" (p. 7).

From this wide array of response choices, I decided to focus on the visual arts, particularly for their capacity to help move students from the concrete to the abstract. Lowry's (1993) novel, *The Giver,* particularly lent itself to this approach because its powerful visual imagery encourages readers to return to and reflect upon the novel. Ultimately, I was struck with how the visual arts served to strengthen my students' capacities to see beyond, to consider alternatives to their own lives, and to view both text and life in ways that they had not seen before.

Literary Interpretation and the Visual Arts

We live in a visual world. Images surround us in our daily lives, be it in our clothing, on our walls, on television, film, billboards, computers, or in the advertising of our favorite restaurants. And we're skilled at reading these signs and symbols, interpreting the images to garner meaning. Still, these skills are often slighted in schools, and students' attention is rarely drawn to the visual arts as a tool for comprehension and interpretation. Students are expected to decode the words on the page and to perceive what the words might mean, but it is less common to have students discuss the images they are receiving.

Ultimately, I was struck with how the visual arts served to strengthen my students' capacities to see beyond, to consider alternatives to their own lives, and to view both text and life in ways that they had not seen before.

McCloud (1993) makes the distinction between perceiving words and receiving pictures: "Pictures are *received* information. We need no formal education to 'get the message.' The message is *instantaneous.* Writing is *perceived* information. It takes time and specialized knowledge to decode the abstract symbols of language" (p. 49, emphasis in the original). This distinction is critical for Jonas who receives his information through instantaneous images and then needs to attach abstract words to those images. For example, during his first session, the Giver tells Jonas that he will transmit the idea of "snow." Jonas has no idea what this odd word could mean, but when the image appears, the word begins to have meaning: "Beyond, through the swirl of what he now, somehow, perceived was the thing the old man had spoken of—snow—he could look out and down a great distance" (Lowry, 1993, p. 81). From that distance, Jonas also realizes that he's sitting on a "sled" with "runners" atop a great "hill." After the transmission of this first memory, the Giver decides to provide another, but this time he withholds the words: "I'm not going to tell you the name of it, because I want to test the receiving. You should be able to perceive the name without being told" (p. 84).

So what is the relationship between reception and perception in literary response through the visual arts? Here, three separate but interconnecting processes are essential to understand: envisioning, composing, and interpreting.

The first process, envisioning, is often associated with comprehension. Here the reader calls on his/her bank of stored visual imagery in order to understand the words on the page. Whether the image comes from personal experience or more distanced background knowledge or is created on the spot to illustrate a character or concept, mental imagery helps the reader envision what's being said. As Keene and Zimmerman (1997) point out, good readers "take possession of the books they read by creating, being aware of, and describing their own mental images" (p. 135). As a comprehension strategy, elaborated images—rich in detail—are the most effective.

The second process, composing, involves students responding to written texts through their own art. While "envisioning" implies the images in the head, "composing" means getting these images on paper. As Anderson, Kauffman, & Short (1998) explain, "composing art involves constructing meaning through 'authoring' a piece of art" (p. 148). A variety of researchers have explored this

process, asking students to "Sketch to Stretch" (Short & Harste, 1996) or create more elaborate artistic representations (Wilhelm, 1996). Enciso (1996) developed the Symbolic Representation Interview (SRI) "which gives children a way to both talk about and depict their engagement with a story" (p. 180). One aspect of the SRI involves creating character and reader cut-outs which children "manipulate . . . to demonstrate the movement, relationships, images, and ideas they experienced" (p. 181). In this process, students make decisions in the creation of a piece of art in terms of both the ideas it represents as well as in the practical execution of the piece. As students create visual art to respond to text, they are essentially creating a new text.

The student-created art then becomes a springboard for discussion, which leads us to our third process: interpretation. Anderson, Kauffman, and Short (1998) explain that "Interpreting art involves constructing meaning through 'reading' illustrations and artwork" (p. 148). Typically, this process refers to opportunities for students to interpret illustrations in published texts—in other words, the artwork of professional children's book illustrators (Keifer, 1995; Nodelman, 1988; 1996). In this article, however, we are focussing on students involved in interpreting their own artwork as well as the artwork of other students in the class. In responding to textual images, reflection is necessary, for it is in the process of rethinking that ideas are sorted, synthesized, and thus, interpreted.

So what is the relationship between reception and perception in literary response through the visual arts? Here, three separate but interconnecting processes are essential to understand: envisioning, composing, and interpreting.

Reader response through the visual arts ultimately uses all three processes—envisioning, composing, and interpreting. A child reads a text and envisions an image, puts it to paper, and then brings it to his/her class for discussion. In seeing, creating, and talking, the three processes blur, intermingle, and cycle back and forth. Talking about a piece of art creates new images in the mind, and these in turn are taken back to the drawing board. In the next few pages, I will demonstrate how my children's discussions of *The Giver* led to images they created both in their heads and on paper, and subsequently to further discussion and interpretation.

Envisioning Utopia

> [The Giver] shook his head. "No, no," he said. "I'm not being clear. It's not my past, not my childhood that I must transmit to you."
>
> He leaned back, resting his head against the back of the upholstered chair. "It's the memory of the whole world," he said with a sigh. "Before you, before me, before the previous receiver, and generations before him.
>
> Jonas frowned. "The whole world?" he asked. "I don't understand. Do you mean not just us? Not just the community? Do you mean Elsewhere, too? . . . I thought there was only us. I thought there was only now." (Lowry, 1993, p. 78)

As the Giver begins to offer Jonas the memories of the whole world, Jonas comes to realize that there are places beyond the unvarying routines and regulations of his unique community.

Before beginning to read the novel with my students, I wanted to give them an opportunity to think about and envision different ways of organizing society. We started by looking at the word "Utopia." None of the students in the class were initially familiar with this word at all. We looked first at the dictionary definition: "an ideal place or state with perfect laws." We also explored its origins in ancient Greece where the word is said to have had a dual meaning: perfect place/no place. We then discussed the implications of this dichotomy and asked, "Could a perfect society really exist?"

This discussion led to the creation of our first visual response—our collective vision of a utopian

society, listing its potential attributes. Initially, the students acted as little lawmakers and generated ideas based primarily on laws and regulations: "no pollution," "no guns," "no trash," "no pain," "good education," "many job opportunities," and "no discrimination." But they also included more personal idealisms such as "freedom to make choices," "no pressure" and "no arguing over stupid stuff." We compiled our ideas on butcher paper to create a class "vision" of utopia that we posted in the room.

The next day, I wanted to move my students toward an even more personal view of utopia and to provide them with a chance to think about their own lives in a more immediate way. To facilitate this, I asked each student to come up with a list of ten things that they valued in life. They worked independently in class and then ranked their list in order of importance. We then shared a few of our ideas as a class, and after discussion and rethinking, the students made modifications to their original lists. Following this reworking, each student contributed one idea to a class compilation of our values: "family," "love," "fun," "humor," "brains," "books," "kindness," "dance," "peace," and "my dog." We mounted the resulting word wall next to our Utopia chart. The two constructions acted as a focus for the unit of study, and provided something tangible to revisit as we read. I encouraged my students to go up and add new thoughts as the unit progressed, which they often did.

Over the course of the novel, students came to realize that the very qualities that define Utopia are often present only through the sacrifice of things that they value: safety at the cost of less freedom, no hunger at the cost of less choice, no pain at the cost of less love. The publicly-posted charts encouraged students to dialogue on these critical concepts and, over time, their ideas about the elements of Utopia altered as they witnessed the flaws in Jonas's "perfect" community. They realized that many of the elements of Utopia they'd listed would place the very things they valued in jeopardy. In this way, the dichotomy of the Greek definition—perfect place/no place—could be clearly seen through the visual medium of the charts.

As the students read *The Giver*, I encouraged them to record their ideas in a daily two-column response log. One side of the log marked a notable section of the text, the other was a placeholder for students' comments. They could discuss their likes and dislikes, questions, personal connections, predictions, agreements and disagreements, comments, opinions, feelings, as well as note images that came to mind as they read. Even more important, I suggested that they could use their logs to make these images into visual compositions through sketches and more complex creations. Through the medium of the journal, students could track changes in their perceptions over time, and I could write back to them and make comments to push their thinking even further. Like Jonas, their thoughts emerged in bits as they slowly began to see beyond the concrete immediacy of the text and into the larger abstract issues involved.

Seeing Color

> But suddenly Jonas noticed, following the path of the apple through the air with his eyes that the piece of fruit had—well, this was the part that he couldn't adequately understand— the apple had *changed.* Just for an instant. He had changed in mid air . . . (Lowry, 1993, p. 24)

This *change* is part of Jonas's developing awareness of his unique Capacity to See Beyond. The color red, as seen in an apple, is Jonas's first experience with color. He sees it in flashes, first in an apple, and later in blood and in the color of his friend Fiona's hair. He has no idea what this change might be; he has no words to attach to the foreign concept of color which was eliminated when his community went to the gray world of Sameness.

As my students read this scene in *The Giver*, a few began to create their first individual artistic responses. I encouraged them to think about how the novel portrayed key concepts such as color, hunger, and pain—aspects that were not a part of Jonas's world. One Anglo American student, James, (all names of students are pseudonyms) who would often choose to compose art in lieu of writing, constructed a collage based on the theme of color, portraying the scene where Jonas first saw the apple transform in midair (see Figure 1). He drew the apple first, in black and white, and then measured

carefully-drawn triangular bullets, shooting into the apple from all sides. In a casual discussion with me about the piece while in process, he explained that he would overlay these triangles with grayish blue construction paper. However, at the point where the bullet pierced the apple, he would change the construction paper color to deep red, to represent the flash of color. As Figure 1 illustrates, the resulting apple truly captures the sense of movement and color in this scene and makes the text come alive. The visual arts allowed Johnny to address a moment in the text that is critical to Jonas's understanding of his world, as well as the reader's understanding of the book. It shows that like Jonas, Johnny saw beyond the apple and into the world of color.

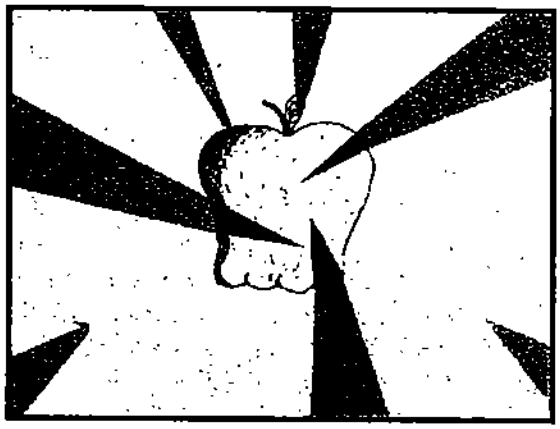

Figure 1. James' collage on the theme of color.

As students worked on their responses to the text through the visual arts, talk became increasingly important. Sometimes the talk was one-on-one, as when Johnny and I discussed his apple creation. Yet, students also interacted with one another, talking together at their tables, explaining their choices and the details of their pieces. They offered each other advice on possibilities or asked a friend whether their desired effect had been achieved. Indeed, the talk surrounding their artwork was so intriguing, I wanted to make it even more public, to offer the chance for larger group discussion and interpretation. Ultimately, talk became a dynamic and integral part of the creation process as well as in our overall reflections on the text, for it offered the chance for students to share their art as a catalyst for critical conversation.

The Weight of Analogical Thinking

> [The Giver explained,] "I received all of [the memories], when I was selected. And here in this room, all alone, I re-experience them again and again. It is how wisdom comes. And how we shape our future."
>
> He rested for a moment, breathing deeply. "I am so *weighted* by them," he said. (p. 78)

Paul Messaris (1997) points to analogical thinking as a critical element in the interpretation of visual images. His notion of creating meaning from visual information by connecting an image to real-life experience proved to be an important component of my students' reflections on their *Giver* artwork. In order for students to grapple with some of the difficult material in the novel, they had to be able to relate Jonas's distant world to their own familiar experience whether it be in their own lives, in other texts they had read, or in the world around them.

To heighten these kinds of connections, I asked students to create similes and metaphors that illustrated important words in the language of Jonas's Utopia. Words like "Elsewhere" and "Release," for example, had meanings in the context of Jonas's community that did not match my students understandings of the words. I provided students with sentence starters that I asked them to complete which included: "The Assembly of Twelves is like . . . ," "Jonas is like . . . ," "The Receiver of Memory is like . . . ," "Release is like . . .". The resulting similes were shared in small groups where each student, with the collaboration of the group, chose his/her most unique connection to represent visually in any way they thought best.

One of the illustrations that sparked the most discussion was created by Alex, an excellent reader of Chinese American heritage. For his representation, Alex chose to look closely at the early beginnings of Jonas's assignment as the Receiver of Memory, especially when the memories moved from a thrilling sled ride to more devastating scenes of hunger, pain, and war. Jonas comes to realize

that as he receives remembrances from the Giver, he alleviates some of the *weight* that the Giver carries as the sole keeper of these memories. At the same time, he realizes that he alone will have to carry these painful scenes once the Giver is gone. If Jonas is unwilling to take on the responsibility of holding these memories, they will escape into and affect the entire community.

Alex's attention to the burden the Giver carried was revealed in his illustration of Atlas carrying the world on his back (see Figure 2). His artwork demonstrates both a close and careful reading of *The Giver*, as well as his attention to our recent unit of study in Social Studies class on Greek myths. When Alex brought his drawing to the group, the following discussion ensued:

Figure 2. Alex's illustration of the burden the Giver carried.

Alex: Jonas is like Atlas having to carry the weight of the world because Jonas has to carry all of the memories of the world since the beginning of time—war, the bad things and good things, and he was never brought up with the bad things.

Jessica: Can you tell us a bit about Atlas?

Alex: Atlas is a man in Greek legend . . . I think he did something wrong and the gods said that you have to carry the weight of the world for the rest of your life...

Haley: I agree, because you're right about Jonas having to—He has to hold everything and once he's done, he's gonna feel so weighted. He's gonna feel like the world is on his shoulders and . . .

Mark: Like the Giver . . .

Jessica: What about the way the carrier of the world *feels* in this picture?

Haley: He's unhappy. It's special. But you know, still, it's exhausting and he knows he has a job to do.

Karen: I think another thing is he's bowing down to the weight of the memories—exhaustion—but still knows that he can't sit down or lay down, or apply for release [laughter] [pause]. He still knows he has stuff to do.

Jessica: How does this relate to the end of the novel?

Alex: Well, I think this relates to the end of the book cause he'd want to escape. Jonas wanted to escape, too. He didn't feel like the memories were right, but if he left, then the memories would be released on to the whole community and so . . .

Haley: Everybody would share the weight, which would make him feel better about it.

Alex: So, I think escaping was good but somewhat bad too, but now people will know the memories . . . . Atlas would want to escape holding the world—just like Jonas would want to escape from holding all the memories. The same as Atlas, he wanted to escape holding the world.

In this discussion, I was struck with how the talk switched back and forth between Jonas and Atlas. The word "he" was used almost interchangeably to refer to either character when talking about "carrying the weight," for the students didn't seem to feel it necessary to distinguish who they were referring to every time. As I drew the students' attention back to Alex's illustration to look at the details in the face, they recognized the emotional

"exhaustion" Jonas felt, as well as his personal desire to "escape" the responsibility. But then they debated what would happen to the community if Jonas did leave. If the community had to share the weight, how would they adjust? Mark began this part of the discussion by providing a hypothetical extension:

Mark: I think, *maybe* if this book went on that Jonas's community might vote to get out Sameness because after they see some of the great memories that were there they might think, "I want to EXPERIENCE snow for myself" and not just through the memories that are floating around."

Alex: How could they? They've already changed it! They've already gotten rid of hills, cars. They're controlled!

Mark: I think they can get it BACK!!!

Haley: It's *hard* because . . .

Alex: How do you get snow back?

Haley: I mean . . that's a good point, [Mark], because people would WANT that and after they get all the memories, the people decided to go to Sameness because they didn't know anything else. And now that these memories are showing them about other things in life, people are gonna go, "Hey, that's not fair! We didn't get a chance to see that and we– We WANT that!"

A noticeable shift occurred when Mark considered the *what if.* If the book went on, the people might rally for change, pointing to the return of choice, the return of freedom, and the lessening of control. With the comment "I think they can get it BACK!!!", Mark's optimism shows the extent to which the book *lives* and is open for interpretation beyond the existing pages. However, Alex's more realistic, but slightly sarcastic argument countered Mark's proposal: "How could they? How do you get snow back?" The boys' heated discussion demonstrates their absolute engagement in the text, as they disputed the "what ifs." In addition, comments like, "it's hard because . . ." and "maybe . . ." emphasize the complexity of the issues being discussed as well as transformations in thinking as the group interacts, formulating new ideas. Finally, Haley's summation appropriately ended the discussion with emphasis on the word WANT. Her phrase, "We WANT that!", mirrors the notion that many students in the class had developed. They felt that a society of "Sameness" was lacking, and believed that if Jonas's community could see what they were missing, they would feel it too. They were beginning to see the painful truth in the Greek idea of Utopia as perfect place/no place.

But how would the community learn to see what they had not taken in before? Even in my students' conversation, they only briefly looked at Alex's art. I had to draw their attention to the facial expression, and their discussion included no comments about Atlas' awkward position—his bent back and awkward grip, the size of the world on his shoulders. Thus, I felt that if my students were going to go even deeper in their analysis, they had to know more about art.

Training for the Larger View

> "I am not actually as old as I look," he told Jonas. "This job has aged me. I know I look as if I should be scheduled for release very soon. But actually I have a good deal of time left . . . . When I became a Twelve, I was selected, as you were . . . I came to this very room to begin my training (Lowry, 1993, p. 76).

Similar to the way Jonas received training from the Giver to fine tune his own capacity to see beyond, I felt that my students could benefit from more instruction in the elements of art in order to hone their own visual skills. To enhance the depth and quality of response, we needed to build a shared language for dialogue and a common framework for interpretations, which we did by examining line, shape/form, value, texture, space, and color. Anderson (1995) notes that "these design elements build style and illustration much the same as story elements build genre in literature" (p. 307). Drawing students' attention to the connection between visual and printed language may help them develop an awareness of multiple forms of literacy, different languages for interpretation, and expression of information.

With a common language in place, we then looked at Molly Bang's (1991) *Picture this: Perception and composition.* Recalling the elements of art

previously discussed, we studied the author's choices according to color, shape, line, value, and positioning. We concentrated on Bang's process of *reworking*, making changes and adapting the results to craft her illustrations. I emphasized the simplicity of Bang's visual representation as well as the achieved power in this simplicity. I then asked my students to create their own cut-paper creations (Enciso, 1996) based upon their interpretive ideas from *The Giver*. I wanted them to pay particularly close attention to the elements of art we had discussed, as well as how they positioned their shapes on the page, reminding them of the power of overall simplicity. After completing their construction paper illustrations, the students composed an accompanying paragraph explaining their artistic choices.

This activity allowed students the opportunity to represent any scene that they found personally memorable. One critical scene that held considerable emotional impact for many students occurred when Jonas witnesses a Ceremony of Release. Throughout the novel, Jonas perceives release as a relatively benign exit from the community—something that happens routinely for the old or for those who break community rules. It also occurs for very young children who fail to thrive in community life. In fact, in Jonas's own family they are caring for an infant, Gabriel, who may be scheduled for release if he doesn't learn to be less fretful at night. Jonas has secretly been calming Gabriel by transmitting peaceful memories of sailboat rides. Still, in Jonas's mind, if Gabriel is released, it will simply mean a life lived Elsewhere.

However, the Giver encourages Jonas to see release for what it truly is, and arranges for him to witness the ceremony on his television monitor. Jonas is initially pleased to see that the release of an infant (who is not achieving the required rate of growth) will be performed by his father, an assigned Nurturer. However, his feelings of comfort soon turn to shock as he discovers that his father is injecting the baby with fatal liquid from a syringe. The motionless baby reminds Jonas of the faces of still and bloodied soldiers he has seen in the more frightening memories of Elsewhere.

Though this scene was disturbing for many of my students, it was particularly so for Yesenia, who chose "release" as the topic for her cut paper illustration. Yesenia is a recent immigrant to the United States from Mexico and has been speaking English for only a year, yet her command of the language is astonishing, and she is eager to ask questions that will ensure accurate comprehension. She approached me about this scene to make sure that she was interpreting it correctly, that they really were killing a baby.

In Figure 3, Yesenia's portrayal is strikingly simple in its design, yet so powerful in its stark message, and her explanation of color and shape choices captures the essence of the scene:

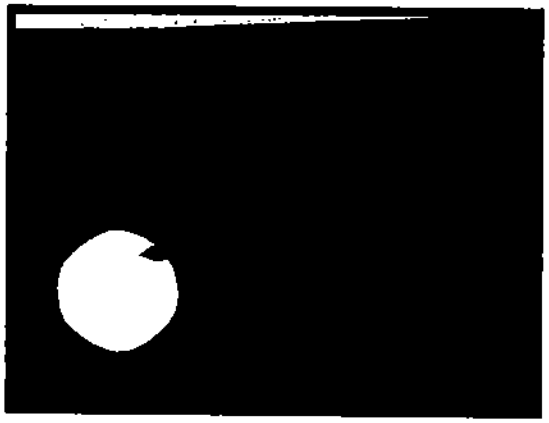

Figure 3. Yesenia's interpretation of "release" in a cut paper illustration.

> In my picture, I made Jonas's father baby blue because he's very gentle. He's also round because he's a dad. The baby is white because he's kind of a little angel, and he's round because he's fat and chubby. The top brown piece is the bed. It's perfect and hard. It's probably not very soft. That's why it's rectangular and perfect. The other brown shape is the table. It's also very perfect, like the bed. And it is brown because it's hard. The red represents the needle and it's red because it represents blood. I put the needle in it's forehead because that's where they put the shot. The background is black because it's sort of scary and evil.

Expression through symbol was a powerful way for Yesenia to portray this disturbing subject. In her choice of color and shape she was able to intimate the softer aspects of the scene—the angelic baby, the gentle father. But the "hard", "rectangu-

lar", and "perfect" qualities of the table and bed combined with the "blood" of the "red needle" unveils the true nature of what Jonas's father is doing. He's killing a baby in a ceremony that's euphemistically called *release*.

Many students in the class were moved by this critical scene. Not only was it visually and emotionally disturbing for them, but it was devastating for Jonas. And it is at this point in the novel that the storyline plummets to its absolute low. Jonas's reaction is one of shock and anger. He feels that he has been betrayed by his family and by his community. Yet the story does not end here, for Jonas is about to receive another blow. His father casually announces that Gabriel, the infant they have cared for and Jonas has come to love, has been scheduled for release. That night Jonas steals food and leaves, both major transgressions to community life. Even more seriously, he takes Gabriel with him. As the novel moves towards closure, the boys' journey is long and their lives are at risk many times. Still, at the very end they have made their way through driving snow and sit at the top of a hill on a sled looking down on the safety and warmth in Elsewhere below.

Jonas's ultimate rejection of a life of Sameness is the direct result of his coming to know through visual imagery. The slow development of his vision is played out in the changes in his feelings over time. In order to help my own students understand what this development looked like, I asked them to chart Jonas's emotional changes over time in the form of a line graph. Moving through the course of the novel, students identified specific emotions at particular moments in the text and charted them sequentially according to highs and lows on the graph. Although there were varying interpretations along the way, most graphs showed release as the ultimate low (see Figure 4). Students were able to see, through this visual aid, that Jonas's witness of the Release Ceremony was the crucial turning point in the novel—the event, especially in its potential connection to Gabriel, that caused him to take action and leave his community. Where students differed, however, was in seeing the ending as a positive or a negative outcome. Some saw him reaching Elsewhere, a few did not.

The considerable amount of information that can be represented in a seemingly simple visual makes character emotion graphs an effective tool for demonstrating students' comprehension and interpretation of text. The naming and graphing of specific emotions requires a close analysis of text, particularly when students revisit the book to locate appropriate vocabulary to represent Jonas's feelings. In addition, in a time when art is sometimes dismissed in schools, graphs like these present powerful arguments that the representation of visual information can also include logical-mathematical modes of thinking including sequencing skills as well as analysis and synthesis of information.

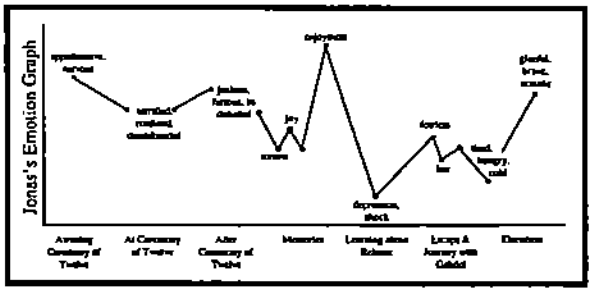

Figure 4. A student's chart of Jonas's emotional changes in the form of a line.

Even though all the students completed graphs of the emotional plot line, several felt the need to return to their paper cut out work to summarize the novel. Mark, an Anglo American student, was eager to illustrate his positive outlook on the novel's outcome. He was the student who had faith in the community to adjust to the memories, exclaiming "I think they can get it BACK!!!" Tying together a variety of elements in *The Giver*, Mark's paper cutout was a symbolic representation of the culminating scene of the novel, as Jonas and Gabriel leave their community and struggle against, fear, cold, hunger, and fatigue on the journey to Elsewhere (see Figure 5). In his written explanation, Mark revealed:

> In my symbolic representation, many of the symbols stand for more than one thought. The red oval at the bottom of my picture represents a bicycle being ridden by the purple triangle, Jonas, and the pink triangle, Gabriel. The red oval signifies sturdiness and being strong enough to handle the task of

a long journey. Purple usually means wisdom and courage, two of Jonas's traits, and pink stands for calmness and babies. The black triangles symbolize the trees in the forest that Jonas rides through. These objects also represent the obstacles in Jonas's path to Elsewhere. The yellow squares going across the screen symbolize the shining path to freedom. In the upper right hand corner, the shiny rectangle (which Mark illustrated with a piece of tin foil) stands for Jonas's final destination, a city in Elsewhere. The brightness of the paper shows the importance of the object to Jonas. Finally, the colorful rectangles at the top of the picture represent life out of Sameness which is unpredictable and full of great dreams and expectations.

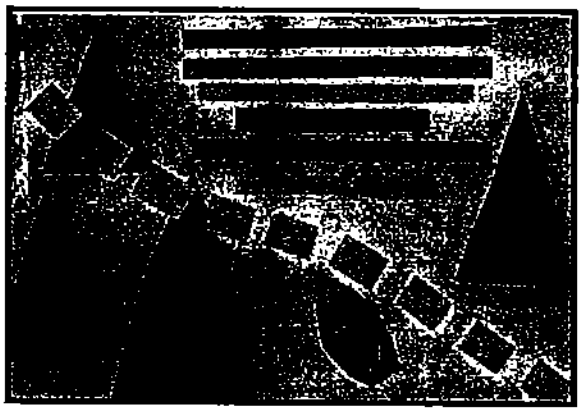

Figure 5. Mark's cut paper illustration of the final scenes of the novel

Mark's interpretation is multi-layered and complex. By transferring his knowledge from the more common written sign into symbol, he was able to have his shapes stand for more than one idea, something he could not have done with words alone. For example, black triangles represent trees on the journey to Elsewhere as well as obstacles in Jonas's path. Siegel (1995) explains, "transmediation, the act of translating meanings from one sign system to another, increases students' opportunities to engage in generative and reflective thinking because learners must invent a connection between the two sign systems, as the connection does not exist a priori" (p. 455).

Mark also added the element of texture to his paper cut-out. In addition to the construction paper I provided, Mark found a piece of shiny tin foil to use at the top of his creation, reflecting his positive outlook on the end of the novel. The switch in medium, moving from the colored paper to the sheen of the foil, suggests that Jonas will reach Elsewhere and that it is a desirable place to reach. Even Mark's use of the construction paper was uniquely symbolic—the yellow squares for the "the shining path to freedom" and the colorful rectangles for "life out of Sameness which is unpredictable and full of great dreams and expectations." Thus, the medium allowed Mark the license to expand on the meaning of the text and create an image that captured the hope ahead.

Recognizing the Possibilities in Art

> He forced his eyes open as they went downward, downward, sliding, and all at once he could see lights, and he recognized them now. He knew they were shining through the windows of the rooms, that they were the red, blue, and yellow lights that twinkled from trees in places where families created and kept memories, where they celebrated love. (Lowry, 1993, p. 179)

Jonas begins this culminating scene atop a hill, looking down. He is forcing his eyes to open to possibilities that he has not seen before, to images of Elsewhere that he recognizes now for the first time. Throughout this unit of study surrounding Lois Lowry's (1993) thought-provoking book, *The Giver*, I tried to provide my sixth-grade students with opportunities to stop and reflect about the meaning of texts and to arrive at a destination they may not have reached without *recognizing* the power of the visual arts. The arts allowed students to see beyond the words on the page, to encompass a larger vision through which they could consider the deeper issues in the text—issues of freedom and control, perfect place/no place, love and lack there of.

The three processes of envisioning, composing, and interpreting cycled back and forth, and ultimately led my students to powerful discussions, as well as a depth of literary response that they had not previously revealed. Though smart and gifted, in the past they had tended to rush through books.

But the arts slowed them down, and in this decrease in pace they listened to, argued, and consulted with one another. In addition, by drawing attention to the elements of art, students were able to more ably imagine the possibilities for visual responses. In this way, the group's own Capacity to See Beyond was extended and enhanced. As Eisner (cited in Buescher, 1986) reminds us:

> We are not born with sight; we are born with the capacity to see. Education and socialization, acculturation, and maturation, over time, provide ways of converting capacity into *ability*. There is quite a difference between looking and seeing, between listening and hearing, between touching and feeling. What we should want to do over the course of our lifetime is to increasingly refine each of these abilities to whatever degree we and our culture can make possible. (p. 8)

As the novel ends, Jonas is enlightened by his Capacity to See Beyond—a capacity that ultimately leads him to Elsewhere, a place of celebration filled with red, blue, and yellow lights. For my group of sixth grade students, refining their sense of the elements of shape, line, color, form, and texture made envisioning, composing, and interpreting not only possible, but a part of their day-to-day activity. These processes, in turn, led them into the world of *The Giver* and enabled them to celebrate literary interpretation through the visual arts.

References

Anderson, C. (1995). The role of picture book illustration in visual literacy. *The New Advocate, 8* (4), 305–312.

Anderson, C., Kauffman, G., & Short, K. G. (1998). Now I think like an artist: Responding to picture books. In J. Evans (Ed.), *What's in the picture? Responding to illustrations in picture books* (pp. 146–165). London: Paul Capman.

Bang, M. (1991). *Picture this: Perception and composition.* Boston: Little Brown.

Buescher, T. (1996). Appreciating children's aesthetic ways of knowing: An interview with Elliot Eisner. *The Journal for the Education for the Gifted, 10* (1), 7–15.

Enciso, P. (1996). Why engagement in reading matters to Molly. *Reading and Writing Quarterly: Overcoming Learning Difficulties, 12,* 171–194.

Keene, E. O., & Zimmermann, S. (1997). *Mosaic of thought: Teaching comprehension in a reader's workshop.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Kiefer, Barbara Z. (1995). *The potential of picturebooks: From visual literacy to aesthetic understanding.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Merrill, an imprint of Prentice Hall.

Lowry, L. (1993). *The giver.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Messaris, P. (1997). Visual intelligence and analogical thinking. In J. Flood, D. Lapp, & S. B. Heath (Eds.), *A handbook for literacy educators: Research on teaching the communicative and visual arts* (pp. 48–54). New York: Macmillan.

McCloud, S. (1994). *Understanding comics: The invisible art.* New York: HarperCollins.

Moore, D. M., & Dwyer, F. M. (1994). *Visual literacy: A spectrum of visual learning.* NJ: Educational Technology Publications.

Nodelman, P. (1988). *Words about pictures: The narrative art of children's picture books.* Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

Nodelman, Perry. (1996). *The pleasures of children's literature.* New York: Longman.

Rosenblatt, L.M. (1995). *Literature as exploration.* New York: The Modern Language Association of America.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Short, K. G., & Harste, J. with Burke, C. (1996). *Creating classrooms for authors and inquirers.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Siegel, M. 1995). More than words: The generative power of transmediation for learning. *Canadian Journal of Education, 20* (4), 455–475.

Wilhelm, J. D. (1996). Reading *is* seeing: Using visual response to improve the literary reading of reluctant readers. *Journal of Reading Behavior, 27* (4), 467–503.