

Transformation

Model Lesson: Altered Text

Overview

In this lesson, students experiment with putting together material in new ways by working with discarded books and transforming the meaning of the words on the page. They choose specific letters, words, or sentences and color or paint over the rest of the page, allowing the chosen words to stand out and with a new meaning. Students then alter the books, giving new form and meaning by transforming them artistically. They explore how visual art elements such as color, texture, and composition communicate meaning and mood and work with text to communicate an overall message.

Materials

- ▶ Materials for students to alter such as discarded books, articles, copies of primary sources from websites such as the Library of Congress, and so on
- ▶ art materials (paint, paper, stamps, scissors, glue, ribbon, buttons, and so on)
- ▶ *Altered Text Sample* (page 198)
- ▶ *Reflection for Altered Text* (page 200)
- ▶ *Elements of Visual Art* (page 171)

Standards

Grades K–2

- ▶ Describes how words or phrases suggest feelings or supply meaning
- ▶ Demonstrates understanding of word relationships
- ▶ Discusses and reflects with peers about choices made in creating artwork
- ▶ Explores uses of materials and tools to create works of art or design

Grades 3–5

- ▶ Determines the meaning and nuances of words and phrases
- ▶ Produces clear and coherent writing
- ▶ Creates an artist statement using art vocabulary to describe personal choices
- ▶ Creates personally satisfying artwork using a variety of artistic processes and materials

Grades 6–8

- ▶ Determines the meaning and nuances of words and phrases
- ▶ Produces clear and coherent writing
- ▶ Reflects on whether personal artwork conveys the intended meaning and revises accordingly
- ▶ Demonstrates openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods, and approaches in making works of art

Grades 9–12

- ▶ Demonstrates understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings
- ▶ Produces clear writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience
- ▶ Engages in constructive critique, then reflects on, revises, and refines works of art
- ▶ Engages in making a work of art or design without having a preconceived plan

Transformation *(cont.)*

Preparation

Familiarize yourself with the many techniques used to alter books by searching for images online that showcase altered books. Bookmark images that can be easily shared with students. Gather discarded books for students to alter. Plan ahead and ask your school and/or local librarians for books that they plan to discard. Be sure to check discarded books for appropriate content. Decide whether you will take pages out of one book and have students alter one page only, or if you would like each student to begin a long-term project of altering an entire book of their own over time. Additional ideas are provided in the Specific Grade-Level Ideas.

Procedure

1. Explain to students that they will have the opportunity to transform, or change, the meaning of a page in a book. Share *Altered Text Sample*, and images of altered text from the internet, and show students how altered texts are showcased in museums.
2. Read aloud any page from a discarded book. Discuss the meaning of the page with students.
3. Model how to give the page new meaning as you choose letters, words, or sentences on the page that combine to make a new thought or create new meaning. Underline or circle the words. They do not need to be in order on the page to create meaning.
4. Discuss the meaning of the words you have chosen. Use art materials such as paint, markers, or colored pencils to cover everything else on the page except the words. Discuss *Elements of Visual Art*.
5. Tell students that the page is now a fresh canvas. Using students' suggestions, continue to alter the page with illustration pens, paint, collaged papers, or other media to create an illustration. Explain to students that an *illustration* is "a visual explanation of a text and how the words and artwork work together to communicate a message to the reader." Make choices collaboratively to complete the artwork example.
6. Reread the complete example back to students. State that this new creation could be considered a freeform poem with an accompanying illustration. Define a *freeform poem* as "a poem that doesn't involve specific rules of format or structure."
7. Provide students with art supplies and a page (or a book) to alter. Discuss how students will repurpose the books that would have been thrown away. Have students sketch plans on a separate sheet of paper to explore a range of possible ideas, noting that artists and writers often experiment with ideas. Use the Planning Questions to help students think about potential directions for their altered texts.
8. Have students begin the process of transforming their pages. Monitor students as they work and ask how they are choosing colors, textures, and other elements of art to enhance meaning.
9. Distribute *Reflection for Altered Text* and have students consider how they are transforming the meaning of the page or book. Talk about this as a class before asking students to complete the page on their own.
10. Debrief the process with students by using the Discussion Questions.

"Assemblage is art that is made by assembling disparate elements – often everyday objects – scavenged by the artist..."
— Tate (n.d.)

Transformation *(cont.)*

Planning Questions

- ▶ What theme will you explore in your page or book? Why?
- ▶ Which words or phrases on the page(s) stand out to you?
- ▶ How will you alter the meaning of a page or pages?
- ▶ What choices will you experiment with in terms of the elements of art (color, shape, space, line, form, texture, and value), and which art materials will you use to achieve your desired effect?

“Altered books go further than just drawings as they can be composed of a variety of art media, such as photos, collage, symbols, and repeating patterns, allowing their creators to stretch their imagination and creativity.”

—Natasha Anne Toth (2015, 21)

Discussion Questions

- ▶ Discuss the dual roles of author and artist you played in the creation of your altered book.
- ▶ What choices did you make in both roles?
- ▶ How were they similar and different?
- ▶ What new meaning did you give to the page or book?
- ▶ Which artistic techniques produced the most interesting results? Why?
- ▶ What is communicated by the composition of the pages?
- ▶ What did you learn during the process of creating your altered page or book?

Transformation *(cont.)*

Specific Grade-Level Ideas

Grades K–2

Locate discarded books with large print. Have students look for sight words. For example, they can create an altered page all about the word *and*. Students can also create alphabet books, exploring words that begin with specific letters by locating words and images throughout the book that begin with that letter and transform the page accordingly.

Explore a particular theme that students can research through image, text, and found materials.

Have them select ideas they want to explore further by composing pages in a book. Students could work on single pages that get re-bound in an altered class book.

Grades 3–5

Have students share their work in a “silent celebration.” Have each student place one of their altered book pages on a desk next to a blank sheet of paper for student comments. The blank sheet of paper should have two columns: Viewer’s Name and Viewer’s Comments. Ask students to move from desk to desk, viewing the altered pages and writing comments. Before the celebration, brainstorm ideas for comments as a class, such as commenting about how a particular color may make them feel or the artist’s choice of words. Remind students that this is a celebration and a time to give positive feedback only, not a time for constructive feedback or criticism. After the celebration, allow time for students to talk with their peers about the work they viewed.

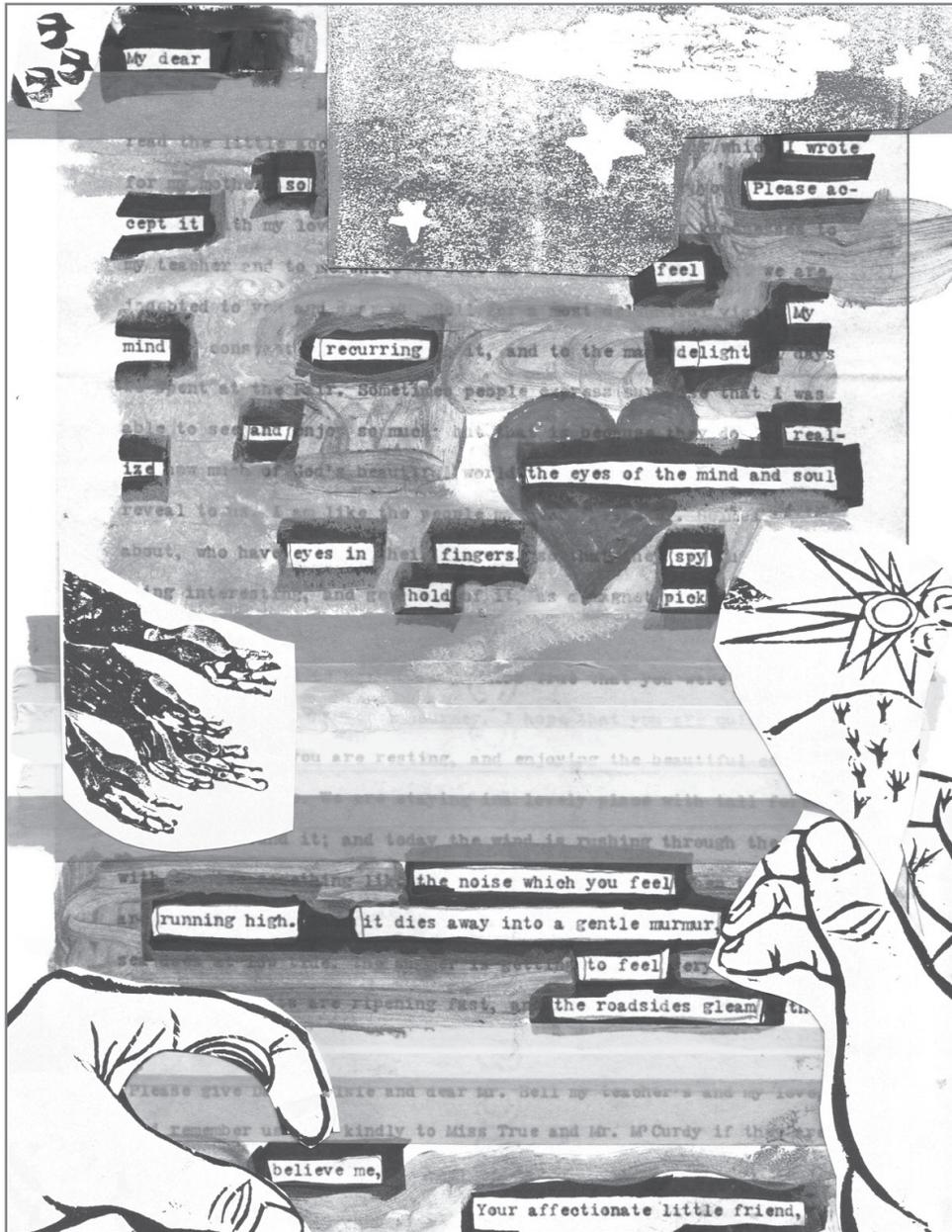
Grades 6–8

Students can identify a theme for their altered books and design pages based on this topic. Students also can choose one or more writing pieces from their writing folders and incorporate excerpts into the altered book. As students think about composing a page, they should consider where to place text, what size the text should be, and how images can connect to, expand on, or contrast with the text. Ask students to consider their multiple roles as author, artist, and graphic designer as they construct their books. Explore unifying themes for the book such as mythology.

Grades 9–12

In addition to the ideas for grades 6–8, students can go through the first few steps of choosing words and blocking out the other surrounding text. Then students can make a photocopy of the page and give it to a partner. Both partners can create artwork around the same selected text as they see fit, each working on their own page. Afterward, the partners compare and contrast the artworks to see how the words were interpreted in similar or contrasting manners, and discuss their choices. Students also can choose to intentionally illustrate the text using abstract imagery, which will encourage stronger reliance on how elements of art and principles of design combine to intentionally communicate meaning.

Altered Text Sample



Artwork with Helen Keller's 1893 Letter by Christine Flood. Used by permission.

Altered Text Sample *(cont.)*

Artist's Statement and Poem by Christine Flood

I was really moved by the way Helen explained her experience in this letter. I started by reading through the letter and with a pencil circling my favorite words that spoke to what she was trying to say, like “eyes in her fingers” and “the noise which you feel.” Once I had some words picked that spoke to my emotions, I then went back through and started composing a poem by choosing other words. My next step was to make my choices more permanent by using a bold marker to surround the words and make them stand out. Here is the poem I chose:

My Dear

I wrote so please accept it
 feel my mind recurring delight
 and realize the eye of the mind and soul,
 eyes in fingers
 spy
 hold
 pick
 the noise which you feel
 running high.
 it dies away into a gentle murmur
 to feel the roadside gleam.
 believe me,
 your affectionate
 little friend,
Helen Keller.
August twentieth, eighteen hundred and ninety-three.

The feelings that overcame me in reading the letter was of happiness, joy, and hope so I wanted to express that in my art choices. I started blocking out text with colorful washi tape. Then I found images of sky, sun, birds and most importantly hands. I wanted to focus on natural elements that one could hear and feel, not just see. I collaged them over and around text. I wanted to help Helen convey the message that her fingers were not just used to feel physical objects, but were used to feel emotions, feel time, feel life. Her hands let her see the world and she wanted to share this beautiful discovery. I finished blocking out text with paint and oil pastels, experimenting with different brushstrokes and layering of colors and textures.

View the primary source letter at: www.loc.gov/resource/magbell.12400303/?sp=1

Name: _____ Date: _____

Reflection for Altered Text

Directions: Consider the meaning of the pages before and after you transform a book. Record your ideas on the chart.

Before

What was the meaning on the page before you transformed it?

Transformation Process

What artistic choices did you make to transform the meaning?

After

What is the meaning of the page now?