

# Image to Word – Word to Image: Improving Writing With Art

By Lori Phillips, EdD

*This lesson will build vocabulary, improve observational drawing skills, and help students “play” with words and descriptive writing.*

## Learning to Do Visual Research Through Contour Drawing

Students draw their hand. They must draw very slowly, moving their eye over the edges of their hand, as their pen documents what they see on paper.

Say: *Do not lift your pen off the paper. Your pen travels across the paper, capturing every detail of your hand.*

If a student has difficulty drawing the proportion of the fingers to the whole hand, give him or her one-on-one assistance. Touch the child’s hand and measure the segments. Show the child that he or she can draw each segment as a series of lines.

Say: *Note the relationship of the fingers. Which finger is longer?*

Later ask: *What did you have to do to draw your hand?*  
Some answers may be:

- *I concentrated (focused) on my hand.*
- *I glimpsed at the paper.*
- *I kept my marker on the paper as I drew.*
- *I looked at details.*
- *I worked on small segments of my drawing at a time.*
- *I looked at the space between my thumb and fingers.*

## Building Vocabulary

Have students brainstorm with you the nouns that name the parts of the hand (i.e., thumb, knuckle, finger, cuticle, wrist, fingernail).

Instruct students to write the nouns on their first drawing of their hand with arrows going to the parts of their hand they describe. (The students are creating a word bank for future use.)

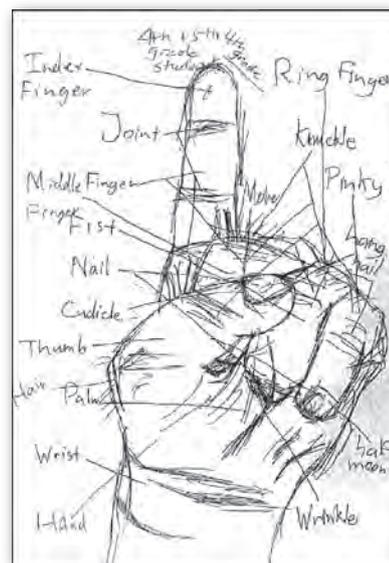
Ask students to look at their hands and brainstorm adjectives that may describe them (e.g., wrinkled, freckled, dirty).

Instruct students to write the adjectives on the bottom right side of the drawing. Then, ask students to write active

verbs using “-ing” for the fingers and hand on the left side of the drawing.

Say: *Now create a descriptive sentence about the hand. It should be as rich and detailed in words as it is in lines!*

The sentence begins with the smallest detail that can be noticed (e.g., a speck of dirt, a freckle, a wrinkle). The sentence includes an active verb and an object described with an adjective. For example, *The wrinkles (small noun) of my freckled (adjective) finger (object) curve (verb) around the dirt encrusted knuckles (small noun) of my hand (big noun)*. The sentence should start with a small noun and then move on to a big noun. For example, *the wrinkles on my finger ...* or *the cuticles on her nail ...*

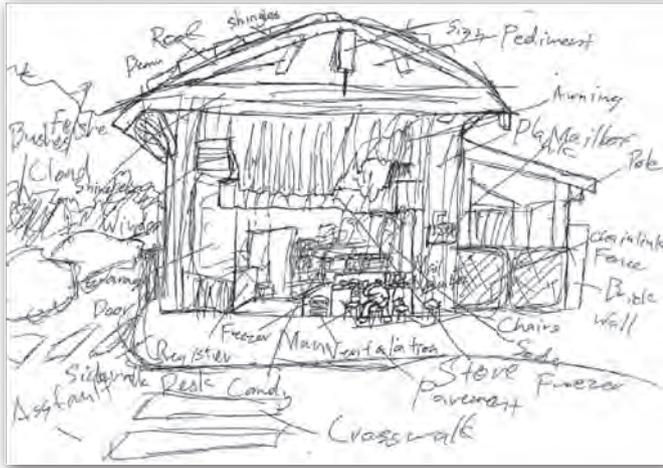


## Visual Research of the Environment

Take students outside. Have them draw something in their environment. Have them work at drawing specific landscape elements. This may include trees, the sky, or buildings. Remind students of the concept of making sketches as preparation for final work; remind them that the work they do in their sketchbook will eventually be copied onto a masterwork.

## Descriptive Writing

As before, instruct students to create a vocabulary list directly on the drawings they have made. Brainstorm words for the elements of nature and buildings they have drawn.



Students then create word banks (verbs and adjectives) on their drawings.

You may choose to create a list of “penny” (everyday) words that you prefer students not use. *Good* and *nice* are “penny” words. *Creaking* or *gyrating* are “dollar” words. Encourage students to make their writing rich and descriptive through the use of “dollar” words.

Next, have students write a description of their sketch using the model of “small to big” nouns they practiced when they wrote about the hand.

Say: *Look at your drawings and pick an element of the landscape that you want to write about. Zoom in on the smallest detail of that element that you can find. Describe the detail as part of the subject and complete your sentence using verbs and adjectives. Finally, include the object of the sentence. The subject in a sentence is the doer; the object is the receiver of the action.*

Examples of writing small to big:

- *The bell of the church reflected the brightness of the sun.*
- *The termites came out of the little creases on the walls of the house.*
- *Little dewdrops on the fresh grass traveled in the air and landed on the church wall.*
- *The trunk of the tree was stacked up straight leading to the branches.*

## Final Painting and Writing

Students draw their drawing of a building or landscape onto a piece of colored construction paper. They draw the object with chalk pastels and begin adding in color. Student should use more than one color in each area of the

object, and they must completely cover all of the paper. No construction paper may show through.

Next, students use their first two descriptive sentences to start their descriptive paragraph. They, then, add the following descriptions to those two beginning sentences:

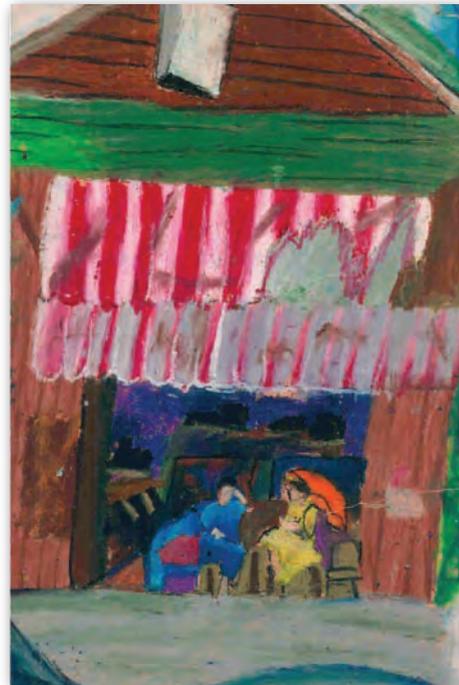
*What are the people or objects physically doing?  
What are they thinking, wondering, pondering?  
What is the very next thing that will happen?*

## Reflection

Students may read their writing to the entire class. They may also review their landscape sketches and discuss what works in their drawings.

Be alert for:

- Students using “small to big” writing descriptions.
- Students using “dollar” words to describe their elements.
- Students including action verbs as part of their descriptions.
- Students using the format for the assignment.



Artwork by Alex Johnson, Grade 5, Kailahi Waena Elementary School

- *The torn awning on the ancient snack shop waves at the children across the street.*
- *The two teachers slump against their chairs, crossing their legs as they visit.*
- *The woman in the turquoise dress wonders why her friend is using the orange umbrella.*
- *She leans toward her friend and suggests she use sun-block instead.*

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