

A Pictographic Story

Exploring Cultural Forms of Written Communication

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Published by *K20 Center*

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Grade Level	5th – 9th Grade	**Time Frame**	60 - 90 minutes
Subject	Visual Arts	**Duration**	1-2 periods
Course	U.S. History, Visual Arts		

Essential Question

What is a pictograph and how does it compare to written words? How does your own culture influence your first experience with new information? How does a visual dictionary help make story translations more accurate?

Summary

This lesson connects cultural influences with historical media concepts. Students will use a visual dictionary of Native American pictographs to decode a story, reflect on cultural influences in learning and expression, and create their own story endings using pictographs.

Snapshot

Engage

Students will solve rebus puzzles by matching images and letters to common words, revealing the puzzles' meanings.

Explore

Using the attached handout that features a series of pictographs, students will translate the pictographs into a story.

Explain

Students will discuss the concept of pictographs, and as a class they will produce anchor charts. The students will use a visual dictionary to aid with symbol recognition and translate another passage of symbols into a story.

Extend

Students will discuss why selected images and themes were so important to the Native Americans of that time using the I Think/We Think strategy.

Evaluate

Students will create an ending to a story they have been translating using pictographs they have discovered.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Fine Arts: Visual Art (8th Grade))

CHP: Cultural and Historical Perspectives (CHP)
VA.CHP.1 : Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.
6.VA.CHP.1.1 : Analyze how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses.
6.VA.CHP.1.2 : Explore how artists and cultures used media (materials) to express themselves.

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Fine Arts: Visual Art (8th Grade))

8.VA.CHP.1.1 : Distinguish different ways art is used to represent, establish, reinforce, and reflect cultural identity.

Attachments

- I Think, We Think—A Pictographic Story - Spanish.docx
- I Think, We Think—A Pictographic Story - Spanish.pdf
- I Think, We Think—A Pictographic Story.docx
- I Think, We Think—A Pictographic Story.pdf
- Lesson Slides—A Pictographic Story.pptx
- Personal Visual Dictionary—A Pictographic Story - Spanish.docx
- Personal Visual Dictionary—A Pictographic Story - Spanish.pdf
- Personal Visual Dictionary—A Pictographic Story.docx
- Personal Visual Dictionary—A Pictographic Story.pdf
- Pictograph Story Translation—A Pictographic Story - Spanish.docx
- Pictograph Story Translation—A Pictographic Story - Spanish.pdf
- Pictograph Story Translation—A Pictographic Story.docx
- Pictograph Story Translation—A Pictographic Story.pdf
- Picture Dictionary—A Pictographic Story - Spanish.docx
- Picture Dictionary—A Pictographic Story - Spanish.pdf
- Picture Dictionary—A Pictographic Story.docx
- Picture Dictionary—A Pictographic Story.pdf

Materials

- Lesson Slides
- Pictograph Story Translation Student Handout (attached)
- Personal Visual Dictionary Student Handout (attached)
- Picture Dictionary Student Handout (attached)
- I Think, We Think Student Handout (attached)
- Drawing Materials-
  Plain Paper,
  Pencils,
  Markers (optional)

10 minutes

Engage

Explain to the class that Rebus puzzles are a unique form of word and picture puzzles that use images, letters, and symbols to represent words or phrases.

Using **Slides 2-5**, present students with some rebus puzzles and have them solve for the puzzle's meaning. You may want them to use dry erase boards or notebook paper to record their solutions.

Afterward students have solved the rebus puzzles, have the students share their solutions and facilitate a discussion about the strategies they used to solve the puzzles. Use the guiding questions on **Slide 6** to prompt the discussion.

- What visual cues did you use to decipher the puzzle?
- Did you rely more on the images, letters, or symbols?
- How did context or prior knowledge help you solve the puzzles?
- Were there any strategies that proved particularly helpful for solving Rebus puzzles?

Display **Slides 7-8** introducing the Essential Questions and Lesson Objectives.

15 minutes

Explore

Next, present students with the following challenge.

Task 1. Give each student the **Pictograph Story Translation** handout that shows a series of simple drawings. Explain to students that these images represent an early form of written communication used to tell stories. Without providing any additional information, instruct the students to translate the symbols into a story based on what they see and can logically infer. Give the students approximately 5 minutes to translate the images on the first page of the handout and write their answers in the area marked "1st attempt."

Students should have fun and be creative in crafting their stories. However, their narrative should be based on their interpretations of the images.

Next, display **Slide 9** and ask for volunteers to share their translation with the class. As the students read their translations, ask them to point to the symbols that match their story.

25 minutes

Explain

Teacher's Note

Note: You may want to include the term “pictogram” as another term used interchangeably with pictograph. Explain to students that pictographs (or pictograms) are among the earliest forms of written communication used by various cultures, including Native American tribes. Emphasize that pictographs were instrumental in preserving the oral tradition of passing down stories through the generations.

Begin by formally introducing the term "pictograph" as a symbol representing a thing or an idea.

Guide a class discussion about how our present-day culture shapes our interpretation of everything we encounter, including how we interpret historical artifacts. Tell students that the symbols (pictographs) examined in the introduction represent ideas from an earlier culture. Without specific knowledge of that culture, we can only interpret the symbols based on our present-day experiences and ideas.

What are some modern symbols that we generally interpret the same way?

Example of student responses: Stop signs, bathroom signs, no cell phones notifications, stop lights, etc....

Task 2. Distribute the **Picture Dictionary** handout to each student and ask them to examine the pictographs along with their intended meanings. Show **Slide 10.**

Instruct students to revisit the first group of symbols on the handout and use the visual dictionary to write their new translation in the area marked "2nd attempt." This activity should take less than 5 minutes.

Afterward, have students share their new translations with an Elbow Partner. Prompt a discussion by asking why they think the two versions were different. Depending on students' responses, clarify that the second translation is more aligned with the historical cultural frame of reference due to their new knowledge from the visual picture dictionary.

Teacher's Note

The intended translation to the pictograph story is as follows: ***** On a clear, summer day, the bear went to the lake and saw there were no fish! This made the bear sad, so the bear went to the mountains to ask the eagle for help.*****

Display **Slide 11**. Guide the discussion to the next part of the lesson by asking the class, “***Why would the bear ask the eagle for help?*"**

Display **Slide 12** Have students turn to the second page of their handout. Here they will find that the story from the previous page continues. Instruct students to translate this next part of the story, using the Personal Visual Dictionary. This should take about 5 minutes; then review the appropriate translation with the class.

Teacher's Note

Students may notice that some symbols used in the story do not appear in the visual dictionary. ***This is done intentionally*** to illustrate the idea that not every symbol encountered will be previously identified. However, the students can draw conclusions to their meaning based on the relevant symbols they ***are*** able to identify.

The intended translation to the 2nd part of the pictograph story is as follows:

***** Eagle flew over the river and over the lake. He searched all day, and when the moon came up, he returned to the mountains and told the bear that he too saw no fish. This was a bad omen. Suddenly, a wise man appeared... *****

20 minutes

Extend

Next, to help students understand why these images were so important to the Native Americans of that time use the I Think/We Thinkstrategy to have students critically think about the themes the images represent.

Give each student a copy of the I think/ We think handout. Students first think and record their individual thoughts (I Think) about the themes they notice in the **Personal Visual Dictionary** and how these ideas are important to Native American culture. Then, they share their thoughts collectively in pairs or teams and record their common understanding in the "We think" column.

Show **Slide 13** to guide their discussion.

Teacher's Note

The ultimate goal is for your students to build their understanding of cultural influences by examining how these themes are depicted in the images. For example, they might consider how images of hunting and gathering food reflect the importance of sustenance and survival in Native American culture. Similarly, images of animals may represent spiritual beliefs or the role of animals in their daily lives.

Optional Activity:

Now, in contrast, have students think about ideas that are important to each of them in modern times. For example: where to find animals to hunt or what season to harvest is not as important for most people now as using transportation, going to school, or texting your friends.

Have students build a personal visual dictionary that they could use to depict an event in their lives (handout attached). When they have completed their dictionaries, have them use them to write a story about their lives. Share in small groups. Have students take turns interpreting each other's stories.

15 minutes

Evaluate

Please refer back to the initial handout in which the students have translated two passages of pictographs, the beginning of a story, and the middle. To conclude this lesson, ask your students to create an ending to the story by using the pictographs from the visual dictionary. The ending should be thematically similar to the story already translated and reflect on the cultures represented by the pictographs. The students should use only a series of pictographs and not any words or letters.

Display **Slide 14.** You may suggest that they write out their ending ideas first and then find the appropriate pictographs to draw.

Show **Slide 15** to assist students who may struggle with story development. Provide lead-in questions such as *"What knowledge could the wise man have that would make the fish return to the lake?" or "Does the wise man tell the bear and eagle to do something specific, or does he take action himself?"*

The students could also be asked to complete a brief written Exit Ticket describing what they learned in this lesson:

- How can visual communication convey information without writing?
- How much does culture shape our communication?
- How could we interpret new ideas using our own time and place of reference?

Assessing Student Learning

When the lesson is completed, the students' worksheets can be graded on a 10-point scale as a formal means of assessment:

- Part 1: First translation attempt = 2 points
- Part 1: Second translation attempt = 2 points
- Part 2: Translation = 2 points
- Part 3: Pictographic story conclusion = 4 points

Opportunities for Advanced Learners

Option 1. Have students use a set of modern symbols or emojis and ask them to create their own pictographic story using these symbols. Encourage creativity and imagination as they invent characters, settings, and plotlines based solely on these modern symbols.

Option 2. Have students investigate the unique cultural practices of a specific Native American tribe and present their findings in a creative way.

Option 3. Research the historical significance of a chosen Native American tribe's traditional art forms and discuss how they have evolved over time.

Resources

- Education.com . (n.d.). Native American pictographs. https://www.education.com/activity/article/native-american-pictographs/
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Bell ringers and exit tickets. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/125
- K20 Center. (n.d.). I think, we think. Strategy. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/141