



Foreword

Reading this book, I was struck by the simple notion that, as teachers, we can make learning really hard. Certainly we don't mean to, but by narrowing the experiences students have to those that are text-related, rather than creating a rich palette of learning opportunities that engage all students, we make school an impossible place for learners with different styles to succeed. School-learning becomes an isolated activity made up of reading text, interpreting text, creating text. Although this activity may be fine for strong readers and writers—in other words, the traditionally “good student”—it's not okay for others. What about the special education student who's hungry to read but says she can't make pictures in her mind as she goes? What about the second-language student who does not hear English in his head or see the images clearly as he writes? Or what about the wonderfully average student who is simply swamped by the amount of text she must consume in an average day?

It's not okay for us to limit these students by expecting them to learn and show evidence of that learning only through standard text-based reading and writing. And contrary to current practice, it doesn't serve the high-achieving students well either. Their text-bound world of learning is far too narrow to prepare them for the broad spectrum of tasks they will undertake once they leave school, even if they are the traditional, successful achievers.

By relying on text as the primary tool for learning, we ignore the true way many of our students gather and process information. Over the years, we've honed our teaching skills and learned how to differentiate instruction for students needing more time, simpler text, and collaboration. But as Essley, Rief, and Rocci state so clearly in this practical, user-friendly book, there is far more to differentiation than that. Drawing, talking, using storyboards, and thinking aloud, for example, provide students with alternative ways to express what they think and what they know.

The authors show, through many examples and case studies, how learning becomes easier for students when they are taught how to storyboard, or lay out the details of what they want to say in pictures on index cards taped to a storyboard template so they can add, delete, and move them around. Learning to use storyboards, the authors tell us, helps students “stalled by text” to understand what they read and create original works.

I was struck by Linda Rief's account of students who had floundered until Essley visited the classroom and provided strategies for drawing as thinking. These were students who had been nurtured, supported, and honored and who had the benefit of the best practices in language arts. Yet there were still some students who struggled until they learned to storyboard and draw to show what they knew.



I wanted to stand up and cheer when I read about Amy Rocci's third-grade class, where students transition from learning how to read to reading comfortably in order to learn, and how she used storyboarding successfully with struggling readers and writers.

But most of all, I became a believer when I read Essley's compassionate exploration of the problems his own son, Andy, faced as he tried to master learning in a text-centered classroom. Essley taught Andy how to storyboard and make pictures in his mind and on paper, and the achievements of both father and son are inspiring. The strategies that helped Andy succeed and thrive should be embraced by all teachers, for every teacher has students like Andy, who deserve every opportunity to learn and should receive the accolades so often reserved for the more traditional student.

From this book, I take away important thinking. We have to widen the path to learning for students—all students—by adding new techniques to our repertoire. We must arm ourselves with the tools used so effectively in the talented and gifted classrooms: varied teaching and learning strategies designed to engage and inspire the learner. To differentiate reading instruction truly means so much more than putting a different book in the hand of a struggling reader. To differentiate writing instruction truly means so much more than handing students a graphic organizer to show them how to structure their five-paragraph essays. The learning choices we offer students must tap into more than reading and writing continuous text as the sole means of gathering and providing ideas and information. We must teach students how to think. By encouraging students to draw what they think and talk about how their ideas are developing, we give them tools that will serve them well throughout school and life. As Essley reminds us, there is "a big cohort of us out there—school survivors—who discover how easily we can learn after we leave school."

As you enter the world of storyboarding, you will find strategies that you can use right away. In this text are suggestions for how to introduce the technique to your students, step-by-step plans to support you along the way, and examples from real classrooms of what the technique looks like in action. You can dive into storyboarding equipped with all the tools you need. And not to worry: If you don't consider yourself an artist, stick figures will do just fine. Thank goodness!

You are in for a refreshing approach to teaching and learning as you read *Visual Tools for Differentiating Reading and Writing Instruction*. I hope the ideas inspire you to try storyboarding to help all students gain their rightful place in the literacy circle.

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