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A Picture's Worth 1000 Words: Decoding Intercultural Symbols



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Subjects

- Arts & Humanities
--Language Arts
- Social Studies
--Geography
--Regions/Cultures

Grade

- Pre K
- K-2
- 3-5
- 6-8

Brief Description

In this interdisciplinary lesson, K-8 students try to interpret what a set of pictographs --pictures that symbolize a word or concept -- really mean. They then "write" a few sentences using their own pictograph system.

Objectives

- Students will:
- interpret a set of pictographs, defining what each image means.
 - create their own set of symbols as an alphabet.
 - write using their own symbolic alphabet.

Keywords

cultures, pictographs

Materials Needed

- teacher access to the Internet (student access optional)
- ability to display teacher's monitor to the class (LCD projector or TV)
- drawing program or crayons/coloring pencils and paper

- printer (optional)

Lesson Plan

This lesson is adaptable for most students in grades K-8 and can fit within either a language arts class (focusing on communication) or a social studies lesson with a multicultural focus.

Are pictures really worth 1000 words? Begin the lesson by showing students a pictograph. (To find one, check out such sites as [Indian Pictographs](#), [National Park Service Pictographs](#), or [Pictographs on Parade](#).) Ask students what the pictograph "says." Ask them how they know what it means. Then share with students that they'll be looking at a set of pictographs and trying to decide what each means. Explain that when they're finished, they'll then get a chance to create their own language using pictures.

Either walk students through the next steps using your computer and projector or TV, or have students complete the steps on their own classroom computers or laptops.

- Go [Picton Survey](#) and click the white arrow to continue.
- Complete the survey, filling in your age, gender, country, and first name.

If, as the teacher, you're concerned about student's safety, you can fill in a generic demographic of your class (female, 9) and give a fictitious name. Or you can encourage students to use fictitious names. See [Keeping Kids Safe Online](#) for more information.

- Complete the survey, identifying what each "picton" (symbol) means to you.

You can either choose to have students complete the survey or use this activity for class discussion purposes.

Be sure to click "If you've tried the following Pictons, please click here for other Pictons" button to see more symbols.

- You'll see many symbols that seem to communicate the same concept -- talk, sleep, eat. Think about what makes one symbol better than another for the same idea? What about a symbol confuses you or makes it easier to understand? How would you draw that symbol differently? Are any pictons funny to you? Why? What are they supposed to symbolize and why doesn't it mean what it's supposed to mean to you?

List any design principles that your class discovers while viewing these pictons. They might include simplicity, color, exaggeration, lack of details (or lots of details?), and so on. If you are teaching this within social studies, you might also ask students: Are cultural differences apparent in the picton? If you were going to create a symbol that any child in the world could understand, what would you include or not include."

Next, ask students to write something using only symbols. You might want to give younger students a specific sentence to represent, such as, "I love pizza" or "I want to sleep." For those in grades 3-8, you might allow

students to compose their own messages, simply offering them a guideline on the number of sentences to include.

Depending on computer resources and skills, you can have students compose their messages using clip art in Word or AppleWorks, use the computer to draw their own symbols, or simply use coloring pencils or crayons.

When each student has completed his or her message, review each to ensure it's class appropriate, and then display the messages around the room. Have students walk around with paper and pen and write down what each message means. Ask students not to discuss the messages or ask for clarification from the writer or another student.

Invite students to share their interpretations of the messages. You might even give prizes to the clearest message or the silliest message or.

As you're wrapping up the lesson, be sure to return to the question "What makes one symbol better than another and why?"

Assessment

Students will be assessed based on their:

- understanding of the concept that symbols can communicate like words can.
- participation in group discussions or individual computer work.
- creation of a message using symbols.
- participation in group evaluation of classroom messages.

Lesson Plan Source

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National Standards

LANGUAGE ARTS: English

GRADES K - 12

[NL-ENG.K-12.2](#) Reading for Understanding

[NL-ENG.K-12.9](#) Multicultural Understanding

[NL-ENG.K-12.10](#) Applying Non-English Perspectives

[NL-ENG.K-12.12](#) Applying Language Skills

SOCIAL SCIENCES: Geography

GRADES K - 12

[NSS-G.K-12.5](#) Environment and Society

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Julie Galea ·
Lecturer at MCAST

This is a very good idea and can also be used to incorporate art in the language lesson. Awesome!

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