Lyrebirds Remember Visual Literacy Activities

Lyrebirds Remember is a beautifully created wordless book, written by Susan Pulvers and illustrated by Alice Pulvers. From a visual literacy perspective, the book has high modality, that is, the images have a high level of realism. To create the images, Alice used the medium of gouache paint on water colour paper.

All of the images in the book were researched for botanical, zoological and historical accuracy. The book, when viewed alongside the David Attenborough lyrebirds video clip, provides a wonderful opportunity to discuss and teach visual literacy to students in Upper Primary and Lower Secondary classes. Students in lower primary classes would also enjoy the video, pictures and the opportunity to discuss some of the visual literacy aspects as deemed appropriate by their teacher.

The study of Lyrebirds Remember, the viewing and discussion of David Attenborough’s clip and the related visual literacy activities can be completed in Primary and Lower Secondary classrooms and will satisfy the National Curriculum - English requirements of completing work on visual literacy and multi modal texts as referenced below. This work fits into the National Curriculum literacy continuum, in particular the comprehending and composing of texts with visual knowledge, whilst also supporting word, text and grammar knowledge. The visual knowledge element of the National Curriculum document states that students should:

- understand how visual elements create meaning.

In addition, visual knowledge is recognised as one of the four organising elements of literacy, as demonstrated in the National Curriculum in the following diagram.
Lyrebirds Remember Visual Literacy Activities

Outcomes:
1. To promote discussion and critical thinking in relation to visual images.
2. To teach students how to make meaning from visual images.
3. To enhance students’ verbal and written literacy skills through discussion and written responses.

Teaching notes.
To begin with, watch the included David Attenborough clip: http://youtu.be/mSB71jNq-yQ
Following the whole class viewing, ask the following questions of the students:
1. Who created the video?
2. What is the video about?
3. What is the purpose of the video?
4. What is the main focus- sound or picture?
5. Who is the intended audience?
6. What do you think the message in the video is?
7. Did you learn anything from the video?
8. What action does the clip encourage you to take?

Following the discussion of the video clip, introduce the students to the included book, Lyrebirds Remember. Begin by showing them the title page. Ask the following questions:
1. What do you think the book will be about?
2. Do you think the book will be similar to the video that you just watched?
3. Which part of the cover page stands out most clearly for you?

Explain to the students that the focus of this page is to provide an establishing shot. It sets the scene for the book, as well as the context. Establishing shots are usually ones with a larger view of an area rather than one which focuses on too much detail. A good establishing shot image will give the viewer a clear idea of what might come next, without giving away any specifics.

When the reading of the story and the related activities are complete, ask the students:
1. What do you think the purpose of the book is?
2. Is your answer to the purpose question different from your answer before you started looking at the book and completing the activities?
3. Why do you think there are no words in the book?
4. Would the book be better or worse with text or a story added?
The lyrebird is a native Australian ground dwelling bird, found in forests in the south eastern states of Australia. They are best known for their patterned tail feathers and their highly developed ability to remember and mimic the sounds they hear. This ability is, in fact, superior to any other species in the world. Lyrebirds learn and maintain a large repertoire of sounds and songs which they pass on to succeeding generations. In this way, lyrebirds are able to keep a record of the sounds of their changing environment through history.

There are two species of Lyrebird—Albert’s Lyrebird, which is the smaller, darker species and the more common, Superb Lyrebird.

The lyrebird is named for its outer feathers which, when displayed, are shaped like a lyre. A lyre is an ancient Greek harp-like instrument. The scientific name for lyrebird is Menura or Menura novaehollandiae. The Aboriginal name for lyrebird is Bulen-bulen.

Image for activity, Page 9:
Focus: Syntax: patterns, lines and symmetry.

Questions to ask the students:
1. What is the first thing that catches your eye?
2. Why does this part of the picture stand out?
3. Where is the setting for this picture?
4. What patterns can you see?
5. What shapes do you see?
6. Are any shapes or patterns repeated throughout the picture?
7. What other birds or animals have obvious patterns?

Activity:
Make copies of this page of the book, along with lyrebird pictures by other artists (see examples below). In groups, ask the students to compare and contrast the pictures. Discuss which medium is used in the different pictures (paint, pencil, watercolour etc.) and what the differences and similarities are. Encourage the students to focus on the colours, designs and patterns.

Students do their own drawing of a lyrebird, with a focus on the outer feathers and the line, patterns and symmetry of these. Encourage the students to use techniques and ideas from the artists’ work that they’ve looked at.

Teaching Notes:
Patterns, lines and symmetry are elements of syntax in visual literacy. The presentation of patterns such as the different sections of the tail of the lyrebird in this picture provides focus, context and meaning. Meaning in visual literacy is formed by observing and thinking.

Resources:
Brett Whiteley: The Lyrebird
John Gould: Lyrebird
Faye Doherty: Elusive Lyrebird
William Barak(aboriginal artist): Lyrebird
Neil Savage: Lyrebird
Ellen Draper: Lyrebird
Thomas Davies: Menura Superba
Ken Taylor: Lyrebird as Firebird
Focus: Visual Semantics: context, culture, history.

Questions to ask the students
1. What is the first thing to catch your eye in this picture?
2. What do you think the orange colour represents?
3. What new colours have been introduced on this page?
4. What do you think is happening in the background?
5. What sounds might the lyrebird be making in this picture?

Activity:
The Aboriginal name for lyrebird is Bulen-bulen. Explain to the students how the Australian Aborigines told Dreamtime stories to explain why and how Australian landforms and animals were created. Read some Dreamtime stories to the students such as The Rainbow Serpent and Tiddilick the Frog. Discuss the narrative framework (orientation, complication, series of events, resolution).

Ask the students to write their own Dreamtime story explaining why and/or how the lyrebird is able to remember and mimic other animals and sounds. Have the students illustrate their Dreamtime stories using the colours from this page of the book.

Teaching Notes:
The elements of context, culture and history reflect visual semantics in visual literacy. These elements are presented as symbols whose meaning is interpreted by their existence in certain contexts. In this picture, the orange glow in the background represents the presence of Indigenous Australians and acknowledges their place in the history of Australia. One aspect of Aboriginal culture includes having a close connection with the natural surroundings. The orange glow of the campfire in this picture places the Australian Aborigines and the lyrebirds in the bush surroundings, in context together.
**Focus:** Context, culture and history. The use of colour.

**Questions** to ask the students:

1. What is the first image you see in this picture?
2. What colours are used to draw your eye to this?
3. What is happening in this picture?
4. Are the lyrebirds showing any emotion? What emotions are they and why would they be showing them?
5. What does this picture tell you about Australian history?

**Activity:**

Following the question and answer discussion, redirect the students to look at the picture and ask them which colours are dominant. Following this, point out the flag in the picture and discuss the use of contrasting colour and how this becomes a focal point which directs the eye to that section of the picture.

In pairs, ask the students to list the sounds the lyrebirds might hear in this picture. Ask them to list these in two groups- natural sounds and introduced/new sounds. Students can do an internet search of sounds made in an Australian rainforest and sounds made on a tall ship to assist them. As a whole class, discuss the arrival of the boat and how this might impact the environment for the lyrebirds.

**Teaching Notes:**

Context, culture and history: The emphasis in this picture is on the arrival of the Europeans to Australia and how this will have changed the lyrebirds environment. This is shown by the addition of the British flag and the tall ship. Symbols such as these, when placed in context in a picture, can provide information without text and also give greater meaning to illustrations.

The use of colour: The use of cool colours such as the dominant browns and greens in this picture represent harmony and peace in nature. Hot colours like the red in the British flag are in contrast to this and provide the message of a potential disruption to this peace and harmony.
Focus: Position and movement.

Questions to ask the students:
1. Where is the viewer positioned in this picture?
2. Where do your eyes go when looking at the picture?
3. How is the space used on the page?
4. Is the space open, busy, empty, cluttered?

Activity:
Distribute copies of the picture to the students and ask them to draw a picture of themselves somewhere in the scene, and in another place, but looking in the same direction—towards the background of the image. Ask the students to list what they would see and then have them attempt to draw this on a separate piece of paper. Have the students share their pictures and talk about the differences. Discuss how the position of the viewer in a picture makes a huge difference to what is seen and how this can change the message. Follow up by looking at other pictures and discussing how different the view would be if they were taken or drawn from another position.

Teaching Notes:
The position of the viewer can provide a variety of perspectives and give different meanings to a picture. In this picture, the viewer is positioned in the front, bottom section of the page. In visual literacy, this position provides a sense of depth. In addition, the wide road, sweeping up through the scene draws the viewer’s eye along the path and towards the dense forest in the background. The contrast between the foreground filled with the establishment of man’s presence and the natural environment in the background is telling the story of man’s impact and intrusion on the natural environment.
Focus: Observing and describing. Foreground and background.

Activity:
To begin with, show the picture to only half of the class. Give them three minutes to look closely and carefully at the picture without discussion. After this, give the students five minutes to write a brief description of the picture, without looking at it. Explain that no personal thoughts or opinions are needed, just simple descriptions of objects, their colour, size, shape and positioning on the page.

Have students pair up with another student who did not see the picture. Students read their description to their partner who then tries to recreate the drawing based on these descriptions. As a class, display the pictures and discuss the results. Discuss which features of the picture were re-created most often and most correctly and which were most often forgotten. Also discuss whether descriptive words were used more often and if being given extra detail was more or less helpful.

Questions to ask the students:
1. Which images are in the foreground of the picture?
2. Which images are in the background of the picture?

Activity:
Give the students copies of the picture and ask them to cut them roughly in half, horizontally just above the top of the chair. Point out how foreground pictures are larger – representing their closeness and background pictures are smaller – indicating distance.

Teaching Notes:
Observation and description are data gathering exercises. This requires the observer to look closely and carefully and for detail, which in turn allows the learner to establish the internal content of the image. Observing and describing should not involve personal ideas or opinions, it is a task for gathering information only. In visual literacy, observing and describing gives students the opportunity to use their previous experiences, knowledge and imagination to understand visual images being presented to them.

A distinct division between the foreground and background in an image allows for the illusion of space and distance. A good artist is able to make these distinctions while allowing for a sense of reality, whilst an effective visual learner can use the identification of these sections of an image to understand distance and space within the context of a particular setting.
**Focus:** Foreground and background. Lines and vectors.

**Questions** to ask the students:
1. What can you see in the foreground of the picture?
2. What can you see in the background?
3. What action is taking place in the picture?
4. What noises do you think the lyrebird might be making?
5. Are there any clear lines in the picture?

**Activity:**
Display a picture of the Australian $100 note. Ask the students to describe what they see. Ask the students to make coin rubbings of the Australian 10 cent piece. As a class, brainstorm current places of interest in Australia. Give the students blank one hundred dollar note or ten cent piece templates and ask them to design new backgrounds with the lyrebird in place in each scenario. The new backgrounds should reflect current places of interest in Australia. After the new notes and coins have been drawn, ask the students to make a list of the sounds that the lyrebird might hear and mimic in each background setting.

**Teaching Notes:**
The dominant image in a picture is usually placed in the foreground, and most often it is also the largest image. In this picture, whilst the majority of the action is taking place in the background, the focus and message is still around the lyrebird and the impact this action is having on it and its environment.

Lines, whether straight, curved, horizontal or vertical, imply motion and suggest direction. Diagonal or slanting lines imply change. They can lead the eye both to and away from the subject. In this picture, the diagonal lines from the piles of logs behind the lyrebird lead us from the lyrebird to the action of the trucks and the logging. The inclusion of the vertical line of the tree on the left of the picture also draws the eye towards the background of the page, indicating depth. Lines and vectors are effective tools used by authors and illustrators to lead and direct the viewer’s eye.
Focus: Framing, understanding images.

Questions to ask the students:
1. What patterns do you see in the image?
2. Is there motion in this picture?
3. What do the objects tell you about where this picture is set?
4. What sounds might the lyrebirds be making in this setting?

Activity:
As a class, go through each page in the book and look carefully at the frame around each page. Ask the students to describe each frame. Discuss why each one is different and what it might mean.

As a class, go to the Spellodrome blog: http://www.3plearning.com/spellodrome/
Scroll down to the Lyrebirds section in the blog. Read through any contributions to the following questions and add your own class’ thoughts.

Blog questions are:
1. What is the purpose of the frame in each picture?
2. Do any of the frames match or add meaning to the main picture?
3. If you could design a new frame for one of the pages, what would it look like and why would you choose that pattern?
4. Are there any frames within the pictures? What is being framed and why would that be?

Teaching Notes:
Framing in visual literacy provides the composition for an image or scene. A picture, image or scene will be framed by actual boundaries, whether these are physical or literal representations as in the images of lyrebirds or just by the edge of the page or screen. Frames act as boundaries that enclose the objects within it but they also serve to reveal the image to the viewer in a particular way. Discussion of what could lie outside the frame of an image and how this might change the context and meaning of what is seen is useful for viewers when understanding images and making meaning from them.

In addition, framing can occur within an image, where particular lines, vectors or images can be placed in a certain way so as to highlight aspects of the image. Creators of images are able to use framing to direct the viewer’s gaze and focus.
Focus: Lines, shapes, angles and direction.

Questions to ask the students:
1. What type of lines are dominant in this picture?
2. How do the lines in the picture direct your eyes?
3. Do you see any patterns?
4. Are the objects in this picture mostly soft shapes or are they hard and angular?
5. Where is the lyrebird?
6. How is its shape different from other shapes in the picture?

Activity:
As a class, make a list of the objects in the picture which are constructed mostly of straight lines (eg clothes line, fence, house, chimney, table, chair, windows, car grill, tree and branches, painting in the house). Ask each student to select one of these objects and redraw it but make the lines curved or squiggly. Have them cut out their picture and reconstruct the original image with these new looking versions of those items. Discuss the difference between the original and the new version.

Teaching Notes:
Syntax involves the setting up of building blocks to create an image. Visual syntax includes the use of line, shape, direction, arrangement, scale, balance and more. In this picture, the dominant use of sharp angles and straight lines serves several purposes. The straight lines direct the eye across the page and up and down the image, resulting in the viewer looking in all directions and taking in all of the detail in the picture. The use of these straight, square and angular lines also gives a feeling of being in a structured environment and informs the viewer that this is an organised, urban setting.
**Focus:** Colour and position.

**Questions** to ask the students:
1. Which did each of them list first?
2. Which items were listed most often by everyone?

Explain that with the time constraint, the eye will be drawn to the most dominant pictures. Discuss why they are dominant—position, size, colour?

**Activity:**
Photocopy and distribute the picture of a pair of glasses or binoculars for each student. Ask the students to write down all of the things they can see in the picture, in the glasses frame. Encourage the students to look for abstract, smaller and difficult to find images as well. Time this activity—give the students only two minutes to make their list. Ask the students to share their responses. Display the glasses in the classroom together.

**Teaching Notes:**
Artists and authors use colour to represent different feelings, emotions and thoughts. Different tones and depths of colour can also be used to highlight, enhance or support images. The following is a basic overview of what different colours may represent:

- **Blue:** coolness, peace and harmony
- **Red:** heat, danger, urgency. It is often used to draw the viewer’s eye towards an image.
- **Yellow:** happiness
- **Orange:** warmth, non-threatening
- **Green:** growth, natural things
- **Grey:** bleakness
- **Purple:** royalty, love
- **Black:** formality, evil, sadness
- **White:** purity, clear and clean
- **Brown:** stable and natural

In addition, the position of an item within an image represents its relevance and importance to the overall meaning. The eye is naturally drawn to the centre of an image. Artists and authors then use lines, vectors and colour to draw the eye away and toward certain images. In this picture, the eye is drawn to the lawn mower due to its red colour and then to the child’s play fort due to the vector of the slippery dip and the blue colour, which is in contrast to the continuing browns and greens.
Focus: Technology.

Questions to ask the students:
1. What is the main object in the picture?
2. How do you know it is the main object?
3. Where in the picture are there drawings with small or fine details?
4. How does this picture relate to the David Attenborough video?

Activity:
Point out the detail in the image of the camera to the students. Ask the students which part of this whole picture a photographer might want to take shots of.
Ask the students to do an internet search of Australian rainforests. Using an app such as Lino, Over, Kanvas or Pinterest to support their work (or Microsoft Powerpoint or Apple’s Pages if apps unavailable), ask the students to create their own collage of pictures of rainforests, and to include a lyrebird within the collage. Share these on line with the class or school community.

Teaching Notes:
Students are increasingly accessing technology for their learning and understanding of the world around them. In reference to visual literacy, this can include the actual creation of images, videos and wikis as well as developing responses to these and most often this will now include the sharing of this information. Whilst students are increasingly bombarded with visual literacy, having them use the technology they are so comfortable with to create their own work—followed by sharing, discussing and interpreting it, is essential for developing visual literacy skills in the digital age.
Focus: The visual semantics of symbols.

Questions to ask the students:
1. Have the images changed from the beginning, through the middle and at the end of the book? If so, explain how.
2. What are the dominant colours in this image, and throughout the book?
3. Are there any repeated images or patterns throughout the book?
4. What symbol can you see displayed in this picture?

Activity:
Ask the students to create a mind map, flow chart or timeline displaying each of the sounds the lyrebirds hear in the book. Explain that these can either be from clear images or assumed ones based on the pictures and their settings.

Ask the students to use the google images search engine to find out what the symbol on the wall in the picture represents. Following this, ask them to also search for the following logos: The Australian film commission, the curtains on stage at the Victorian state theatre, a version of the one shilling stamp from the early 1900’s.

As a class, discuss why these organisations, along with the National Parks and Wildlife service may have chosen the lyrebird for their logo. What does it symbolise?

Ask the students to select a native Australian animal which they would use as a symbol to represent themselves. Ask the students to draw this animal and list the attributes beside it that symbolise their own character and identity.

Teaching Notes:
In certain contexts, visual semantics can include the interpretation of signs and symbols. This can include social interaction with those images. Sometimes signs or symbols are used in place of words to give added meaning and context to a picture. The viewer should take care to understand the placement of a symbol or sign and take note to interpret its inclusion and message.