

# DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Making History Come Alive

Plainwell Middle School, Michigan • March 2008

Topic: How to Organize Your Teaching

Practice: Abstract-Concrete Connections

### Highlights

- Teacher Matt Moorman uses a history curriculum that incorporates pictures, graphic organizers, and visual metaphors to help students understand abstract ideas.
- Visuals can be a springboard for discussion, help present complex relationships, or put learning in meaningful context.
- Incorporating visuals in instruction can help all students learn key concepts, but it is also specifically supportive of students with different learning styles.

### About the Site

Plainwell Middle School

Plainwell, MI

### Demographics

97% White

1% African American

1% Hispanic

24% Free or Reduced-price Lunch

Plainwell Community Schools began districtwide curricular initiatives in 2005 focused on improving the way teachers organize and deliver instruction. Curriculum restructuring throughout the district impacted the Plainwell Middle School's social studies department in particular through:

- A focus on research-based instructional strategies, including nonlinguistic representations of abstract concepts in vocabulary instruction, higher-order questioning techniques, and frequent review of material
- Adoption of new geography, world history, and U.S. history curriculum aligned with research-based instructional strategies at elementary and middle school grade levels
- Coordination of professional development and model lessons conducted by a lead teacher who received additional training to implement new programs at the middle school level and support adoption of the curriculum at the elementary level

## Full Transcript

One of the things I love the most about the TCI curriculum that we use here is the use of visuals. There's a lot of pictures and powerful images that engage and draw students in. And there are also the use of graphic organizers and visual metaphors that will help students chunk and organize and make sense of the content that they are learning.

You pointed out that there is this angelic woman that's holding a schoolbook and some type of line. Why did the artist put that in the picture?

Student: Well maybe I think that the schoolbook represents how—

One of my favorite images that we use is the one that represents the concept of Manifest Destiny. In this particular image or painting, explorers and settlers and homesteaders are pushing technology and development farther west from the east. On the opposite side of the painting, Native Americans and the Great Plains and wild animals are kind of being driven out. And what we have the students do is, before they learn about Manifest Destiny or even what Manifest Destiny is, they will participate in a preview activity where they will try to find as much physical evidence and artifacts out of that painting as they can and try to figure out what it's revealing, or what does it tell about what we are about to learn. We use that as a springboard to launch into introducing the concept of Manifest Destiny.

Student: These Indians are looking away because they miss their homeland that's been taken away from the

eastern developers.

If you want to incorporate the use of visuals in the classroom, there is plenty of critical resources out there that you need to have. Number one, you need to have a screen large enough to project an image for students. So, I went out, and I didn't like the size screen that I had in my classroom, so I got my principal to get me a bigger one. Also something to project images on, whether it be a digital projector or even an overhead projector—something where you can transfer digital data onto the screen. Also having the students—I have the students keep an interactive notebook where we are drawing visual metaphors so that they have pictures and non-linguistic representation to go with maybe new vocabulary or new concepts that they are taking notes in for the class. But they actually have to have that non-linguistic representation there as well.

I absolutely love the visual metaphors that we use with this program. An example is in the student notebook they're—they were supposed to learn about the final factors that drove the thirteen colonies away from Great Britain, and the visual metaphor that's used is a personified map of Great Britain with arms coming out of it, holding on to this rope. And then the rope has lassoed the thirteen colonies, which is also a map, but the rope is breaking in the middle. And off of the breaking rope are these kind of frays that are coming off of it, and attached to each fray is a textbox that represents notes the students will take on each of the final factors that led to that initial break between Great Britain and the colonies. For example, the Olive Branch Petition—the Olive Branch Petition was a letter that was written as a last ditch effort for peace between Great Britain and the colonists. That would be one of the textboxes that would connect to the unfraying rope. So, what the student will do is they will take notes on how the Olive Branch Petition being ignored by King George led that one more final step to the final break. And then they see that image burned in their mind because they can see the rope coming apart, and finally the thirteen colonies will be separated from Great Britain.

I think that the visual metaphors help the students understand the big ideas because we are all different learners—we have different learning styles. Not every kid can read the textbook one time and remember everything or listen to a lecture from a teacher. That image might make something that they are reading that they sort of understand really come together. Because through the use of that picture, "Oh I get it, I see what was happening. The rope represents the ties between those two countries and it's breaking and these are the reasons it's breaking."