

Picture Notes:

Recalling Stories with Contextual Clues and Drawing

Dr. Joseph D. Di Lella

Eastern New Mexico University

Joseph.DiLella@enmu.edu

Proceedings of the CATESOL State Conference, 2006

Introduction:**Helping ELL Students Master Oral Storytelling & the Written Text**

Is there an easy way to encourage meaningful note taking in today's ELL classroom? With *Picture Notes*, even the earliest of readers – especially second language students – will retain information about story flow, critical events, characters, relationships, etc., in the classroom setting. Once a teacher learns to appreciate the usefulness of this technique, the results are noticeable on tests and quizzes. In the long term, *Picture Note* taking creates engaged ELL students for both fiction and non-fiction readers.

Stop that Right Now – Note taking as a Serious Endeavor

As a child, did you ever doodle in class while taking notes? I'm not talking about flying unicorns, puffy clouds or cartoon characters – I'm referring to drawings that truly tied into the class lesson. Hold those hands high, fellow teachers. I don't see too many affirmatives. Like me, you were taught in the traditional way. Therefore, I beg the question: is tradition the best and *only* way to teach ELL students?

I am a native language speaker of English, which was fortunate, because my ninth grade history teacher asked us to take copious, detailed notes during class films. For Mr. Johnson, note-taking (featuring important educational

themes, key points, dates, names, etc.) proved to him his students paid attention to movies instead of passing notes or preparing spit wads to throw at the small, white screen. If I had been an ELL student, I likely would have failed. Instead, I earned A's for film critiques.

What of native language speakers who didn't take the task to heart? When I was younger, I loved one rebellious artist who drew Johnson's head as a Frankenstein bust. Today, I do not condone such frivolity in my ELL students; though I have learned that drawing can be a true learning experience in the K-12 classroom.

Different Learning Styles Demand Different Learning Techniques

In today's schools, teachers more easily embrace the notion that students have different learning styles. Determining whether Little Johnny or Diminutive Jane is an audio, visual or tactile or a kinesthetic learner goes a long way in deciding the best method for helping them recall specific information for upcoming tests. When teaching CLD kids, identifying such a characteristic is imperative.

Picture Notes: Demonstrating Picture Notes to the Class

Let's get down to basics.

As a teacher, you need to teach, model and practice the strategy. Your first objective is to teach younger children (grades 2-6) how to identify characters. For

example, you might ask your students to name their favorite movie. For follow-up questions, ask about where the movie took place, and the roles of the actors. Next, ask them to tell you important plot points of the tale. Whether it's *Finding Nemo* or *Ice Age: the Meltdown*, students should easily give you appropriate answers.

After you explain that movies are simply stories in celluloid, ask your ELL or native speakers to address a popular story. For our purpose, let's choose "Goldilocks and the Three Bears". Give two students a piece of chalk, send them to the board and ask them how to draw the main characters. The conversation may go:

Teacher: How should we draw Goldilocks?

Student: With big, curly hair, a dress and red shoes.

Teacher: How about the three bears?

Student: The Papa bear is bigger than the other two.

Teacher: How do we distinguish between the three?

Student: Size?

How would these characters look?

Popularizing an Old Yarn: Goldilocks Goes to Las Vegas

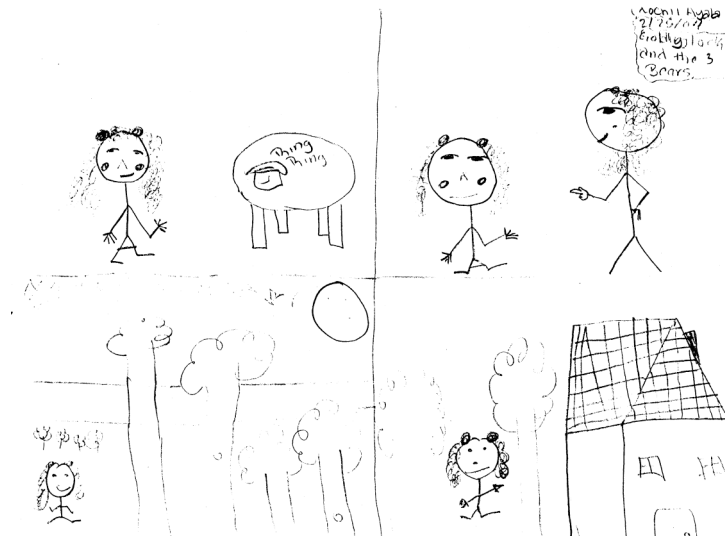
One afternoon while teaching an ELL reading recovery class, I asked my 7th graders to draw *Picture Notes* on the traditional fable. I changed the setting of the story and a few critical incidents to peak the interest of the ELL students.

In my story, Goldilocks lives in a make believe barrio of Las Vegas. After the sick grandmother calls, Goldilocks

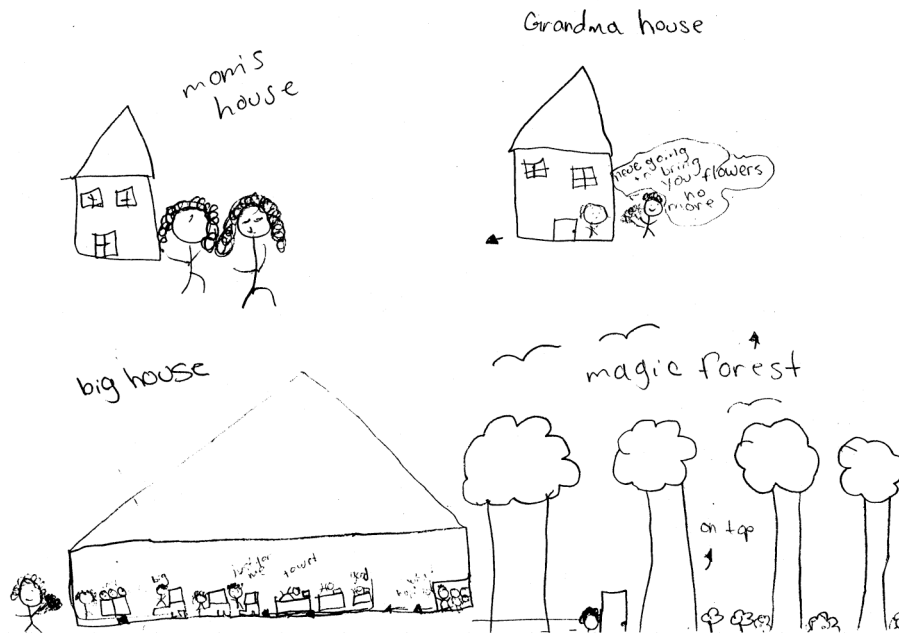
agrees to take a bouquet of flowers to her home. Along her way, she encounters a magical passageway in a dangerous alley near a casino. Goldilocks takes the route in hopes of finding safety and a shortcut to grandmother's place. Instead she finds herself in a forest that leads to the home of the absent Mr. Bear and Family. Eventually, she's caught by the trio after finishing off their extra large pepperoni pizza, exploding the television after watching an especially hard rocking MTV video, and eventually bursting the waterbed of Mr. and Mrs. Bear.

Here are a few examples (showing various stages of the story) by three students using *Picture Notes*.

Sample One: Beginning of Story
(Leaving for Grandma's house)



Sample Two: Middle of Story
(Goldilocks goes through Magic Forest,
stumbles upon the Three Bears cottage)



Sample Three: End of Story
(Goldilocks goes inside Bear's house,
eats, sits in chair and sleeps in bed
before discovered by the Bear Family)



Each student had his/her strengths in describing the story in a detailed account. Several did fine representations of the beginning; many even had solid middle portions of the tale. Only one ELL student had the

beginning, middle and end in a format that could easily be recalled for a test or quiz.

Conclusions

For ELL students or even native speakers, *Picture Notes* is a learning strategy that may be used for any subject or assignment that requires memorization. This strategy may be used for fiction and non-fiction works in almost any subject area. Ultimately, such note taking is usually replaced by traditional writing. Still, until cursive writing is mastered, or the language of choice understood, *Picture Notes* is the best way to gradually introduce the ELL student into the world of academia.