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Tips for Teachers

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Looking for a jumping off point? Carol Horst, art teacher in Tehachapi, California, leapt from a Greek vase. See where she landed.

Using the ancient idealized silhouettes of gods, goddesses, and heroes (and which of our European international schools does not have a classical collection within easy reach?), she led her students to look at how the human form was used to portray humanity in perfection. They went on to examine the silhouettes of Auguste Edouart whose 19th century work portrayed French families at their idealized best. Writing in the January 2007 edition of [School Arts](#), Horst went on to say that she and her students began looking for contemporary examples of silhouettes. Students loved the Apple iPod ads, and saw the relationship between these ‘idealized, extremely stylish young people’ and the figures on the Greek vases.

So where did Horst and her students jump? From the classical figures to Edouart to the iPod and then to creating a frieze for their school library. Students photographed each other in action poses – playing musical instruments, jumping, playing a game, engaging in ‘typical postures of a school teenager’ – before turning the results into pure black images on computer. Projecting the silhouettes onto the library wall, students worked in situ to paint a permanent frieze. “It makes our campus feel more like a place where students belong,” said Horst.

Taking it Further: Some Smashing Ideas

What else could a classical vase inspire? Teachers have asked students to illustrate a favorite Greek myth in the style of a vase. Materials needed: black and red construction paper, scissors, and glue. Reference sources such as a visit to your local museum, reproduction vases from your last trip to Athens, or illustrated books will show the kids how the ancient Greeks portrayed the form of gods and beasts.

Another project based on ancient pottery asks teachers to provide each student with a plain terracotta garden pot from the local nursery or 'home depot'. Studying the work of an ancient culture comes alive when students design a cartoon for their own pot, then paint it in appropriate acrylic colors, all based on their study of the ancients. Where desired, students can smash their pots (inside several layers of sealed plastic bags) to reassemble later in an archeological unit.

We need look no further than the poet Keats to find out how art from the ancients can inspire excellent thinking and writing.

We're Off to See the Wizard

Writing in the December 2006 issue of Voices from the Middle, Bryan Gillis, Collaboration Peer Teacher at Cordova Middle School in Phoenix, Arizona, jumps from Frank Baum's Wizard of Oz (and the sequels, films, parodies, and extenuations, such as Patrick Maguire's Wicked) to teach alliteration, similes, puns ("brave as a blizzard": *Lion*; "clever as a gizzard": *Scarecrow*), idioms, symbolism, foreshadowing, irony and paradox. "When students hear the characters sing and shout these similes," he writes, "they remember them and make contextual connections." Gillis firmly believes that new concepts should be presented through "multiple modalities", and his article makes *me* itch to read Wicked yet again. Here is a creative teacher who uses a great American icon to bring reading and writing skills alive for middle schoolers. His is a

fun article to read, especially for Oz fans, and offers many a jumping off point to teachers looking for a thrill. Voices from the Middle is published by the National Council of Teachers of English.

What books do you use to bring personal writing alive for middle school students? Answers in an email, please, to alan_heath@asl.org for inclusion in a future Tips for Teachers. But hey, who am I kidding? No one ever writes any more. I sit here alone in my ivory tower, waiting, listening to the wind in the sycamores, flipping through magazines, alert for the approach of another sixth grade class as I navigate my way around a new assessment technique. It's lonely in here!

How many middle school teachers does it take to change a lightbulb? Get somebody else to do it – they're all writing their Tips for Teachers!

Taking A Scientific Approach

It might accurately be stated that all past **Tips for Teachers** have had a slant toward the humanities and the creative arts. No prizes for guessing that the editor is not a mathematician nor a scientist. Let's put the omission right, *right now*. Neither are there prizes for guessing that this March edition of **Tips** focuses on professional periodicals. So against my nature, I have picked up the December 2006 issue of The Science Teacher just to see what's happening up in the lab. It's fascinating stuff.

Not only have I discovered that black tea soothes stress among a control group of University of London students, and that sunlight has been used to alleviate asthma symptoms in Australia, and that Canadian scientists have helped us artists understand the construction of the Mona Lisa through 3-D scans, and that eating vegetables speeds up human ability to remember (pass the cabbage, please), thus slowing down cognitive change in older adults, but I also discovered some middle school classroom activities that are just too good to be confined to the science classroom. "Conceptualizing

Nanoscale”, by Thomas Tretter, assistant professor of science education at the University of Louisville, shows how young students used plastic toys, coins, egg boxes and other found objects take some of the mystery out of ‘the emergent nanotechnology that holds much promise and excitement’. A further article by a group of US Midwest teachers, “Seeing the Unseen”, looks at learning how to use the scanning probe microscope in schools, stating that by 2015 there will be an estimated 3 million workers needed in the nanotech industry, and now is the time to start preparing. They go on to mention that Star Trek and Batman are already conversant with nanotech, and where fiction leads, fact will follow.

It’s a gorgeous spring day in London. Here I sit by a sunny window, and the ivory tower suddenly seems less lonely as I engage with some professional publications, some familiar, others definitely heretofore unknown. Perhaps you, too, are inspired to share your philosophy and insights with colleagues across the globe. Here’s how. Write a **Tip for Teachers**. It’s virtually painless. Better yet, consider writing a longer article for the ELMLE magazine, **Bridge in the Middle**. Check out the ELMLE website for every detail you will need to get started: www.elmle.org. Incentive: price reduction for all published **Bridge** authors at the Vienna conference in January 2008!

The April edition of **Tips for Teachers** is strictly for laughs. No sobriety allowed. Your ELMLE team will supply favorite jokes suitable for sharing in middle schools throughout the universe. We will have math jokes, history jokes, language jokes, art jokes. You name it, we will have it. Funny bones will be tickled. So be prepared. If you have a favorite joke that you would like to share with colleagues and middle school students, email alan_heath@asl.org.