

# Image of the Week: Building a Classroom Community Through Visual Literacy

## Andrea Smith

A nonfiction routine and ritual that my students love is called "Image of the Week." Each Wednesday, an image of interest is posted in the center of a whiteboard in our classroom. The image might be a photograph, diagram, drawing, or map -- it varies each week. Student interests, topics of study, current events, or unique images are just a few of the reasons images are chosen for "Image of the Week."

### Materials:

- Dry erase markers in varied colors
- Sticky notes
- Supplies to hang images (tape, mini-magnets, or pushpins depending on your display)

I leave a selection of dry erase markers on the whiteboard's ledge for students to use as they post observations, questions, and "wonders" about the weekly image. Students can also attach sticky notes if they prefer. In addition to the room display, the image is also posted using Notebook on my Smartboard, and students' comments are included there as well.

What does the routine "Image of the Week" look like? During their morning arrival, transitions, discovery times and throughout the week, children post observations and questions about the image.

We have expectations for the postings. If you post a question, write with the green marker. The kids decided that green is like a growing plant just like their questions that grow ideas. If you are posting an opinion, for example, "This photo is cool," you need to attach evidence with a complete statement like "This close-up photo of a sunflower is cool because it shows the spiral pattern made by the seeds."

### Introducing Image of the Week

Taking time to react and respond to visual images may be a new experience for many students, so supportive experiences are built into this routine. At the beginning of the year, I spend at least a week modeling how I would interact with an interesting image. I ask students to observe what I am doing and saying and why certain strategies were helpful.

After a week or two, depending on the group and when the class seems ready, students practice this routine; they work in pairs and talk with their partners about their ideas, observations and questions about images. On the first day, I give copies of the photos to each pair and have them comment on the image together. I gather the posted comments and add them to the image. During the next Image session, student teams review the image and read the compiled comments. Students can add additional observations to the collected ideas. Children learn a great deal when they can read and reflect on what their peers have posted about the image.

The "Image of the Week" display includes charts that support children's thinking as they observe the latest image and react to the weekly image. There are three main charts that we develop: an observation chart, a question/wonder chart, and an opinion chart. Each chart is a growing list of thoughtful comment and question stems to support students as they post comments. Here are examples of the charts:

### Observations:

- *I see . . .*

- *I noticed . . .*
- *I observed . . .*
- *I think . . .*
- *If you took this apart . . .*

#### Wonders and Questions:

- *How did the photographer . . . ?*
- *Why is . . . ?*
- *I wonder . . .*
- *What is happening . . . ?*
- *Where is . . .*
- *Who would . . .*
- *When? Season? Location? Habitat? Time period?*

#### Opinions:

- *I love . . .*
- *I like . . .*
- *I do not like . . .*
- *I hate . . .*
- *I am excited about . . .*
- *I am disgusted . . .*
- *I bet . . .*

The charts are dynamic and reflect students' growth over the year as they sharpen their visual literacy skills.

### **Are They Ready?**

Once students feel more comfortable with the process, they are guided to react and post comments on the "Image of the Week" board during arrival time, workshops, and discovery time. I keep a checklist of which students have responded, and which kids are still warming up to the routine. I will encourage less confident kids to pair up with a friend so conversations can occur and shy students gain the confidence to share their observations. I also quote interesting posts during morning meeting to draw attention to the Image Board so that it remains a dynamic part of our classroom. I encourage my principal to visit with students and engage in conversations supporting this routine. Principals enjoy getting to know students and this routine elevates the level of conversation, allowing a building principal to know more about students, their thinking processes and students' unique personalities.

Once students have a week to react and respond to the images, we use their posts during our Wordless Wednesday activities. We talk about the posts, sort the posts into observation, question, and opinion categories, and ask the person who selected the image to explain why he/she selected this particular image. When we finish our discussions, students write a final reaction to the image with a "quick write" paragraph response. I use these weekly wrap-up reactions to track how students are applying editing skills, conventions, organizational skills, and word choice strategies. Finally, we unveil the new picture, change our "Image of the Week" display, and begin the process all over again at the start of a new week.



### **Andrea Smith**

*For the past 26 years, Andrea Smith has learned with children in Texas, Colorado, and Indiana before finally landing in Ohio. Her 3rd and 4th graders spark a new energy for teaching and she is grateful to spend each school day with so many fascinating learners. When she isn't working on school projects or exploring the world with her husband and daughter, Andrea is writing a book for Choice Literacy about nonfiction routines that inspire children.*

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