

# IMAGE TO WORD – WORD TO IMAGE

## Materials Development With Heart

By Lori Phillips

Artwork: Courtesy of Gisella Guile



▷ Images created in Image to Word workshops serve as a starting point for student writing.

The room is silent as we finish reading aloud the book *I'll Love You Forever* by Robert Munsch. Next, Hawaiian storyteller Makia Malo tells of his lost love, a turtle he was forced to let go when he was 10. In small groups, teachers and students share stories of loved ones lost or loved ones shared. After viewing a painting by Mark Stock titled “The Butler In Love,” we engage in art criticism and explore questions that invite critical thinking. Only after creating meaning through read alouds, storytelling, and discussion do we move to the next stage . . . creating our own images.

Gisella Guile, a teacher at Mount Santa Rosa Elementary School in Guam, paints oil pastel figures that revolve around the

family grandmother. The brightly colored Carolinian *mwaar* (head lei) and *mestisa* (traditional Chamorro dresses) add to the sense of movement. The next step for workshop participants is to “play” with words – both in oral and written form. “By beginning with oral stories and thinking critically about concrete images and the feelings they express,” Guile explains, “children begin to see words as fun and to understand how powerful they are. This process allows my students to quickly put their visual memories and stories on paper.”

The students draw on the images they created in their paintings to initiate the writing process. According to the National Reading Panel (2000), comprehension improves through assessment and instructional strategies in storytelling, retelling, and critical thinking processes. Since our own stories and images are exciting to us and concrete enough to discuss, they are a natural stepping-stone that helps students make the transition to the abstract world of words.

Image to Word – Word to Image workshops present a materials and professional development process that strives to improve literacy while creating culturally relevant reading materials in the Pacific region. Each lesson focuses on a specific language arts standard. The session described above focused on story elements. The next session might focus on parts of speech or descriptive language. Either way, workshops help students connect the abstract world of written words with their own experiences.

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