

## Learning Portfolio

The **Maryland State Library** monitors the certification of Maryland public librarians and public library associates.

Each public librarian and library associate are required to earn 90 continuing education units (CEUs) to renew their certification every five 5 years. To renew their certification, each public librarian/public library associate must submit a record of their earned continuing education units.

**If a learning portfolio will be used to gain CEUs, please complete this form and attach it to the Official Record of Earned Continuing Education Units (CEUs).**

### ***Part I – Learning Portfolio Plan***

Name of Learner: **Jane D Conlon**

Topic:

*Provide a short description of what you want to learn about and how you plan to use it in your work.*

I want to learn more about cultural diversity represented in picture book illustrations, specifically illustrations noted for artistic merit. I plan to explore a variety of illustrators and their work, then apply that knowledge to enhance my children's classes and make more effective recommendations to customers.

Start and Completion Dates:

*When will you begin your learning? When do you anticipate completing your learning?*

Start Date: January 27, 2018

Expected Completion Date: Before April 30, 2018

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Goal:

*Why do you want to learn this? Please be clear about what learning need you are addressing. How does it fit into your current job/professional development? If there is a particular competency you are addressing, please state it.*

As a children's instructor, I want my choice of class materials to represent a wide range of experiences. I also want to choose titles with illustrations that exemplify artistry. Children should be able to identify with the story or learn about alternatives from a diverse range of examples. Choosing the "best" illustrations possible, lends authenticity, sincerity, and excitement to that experience. I can do this by expanding my knowledge of what makes an "artistic" picture book illustration, illustrators, and how their work relates to specific cultural experiences. This promotes our inclusive educational mission: Public education for all, and our role as a "cultural center".

As a children's research specialist, I want to make precise recommendations to customers and expand my knowledge of recommendations to make. I currently possess the ability to conduct an interview with the customer, interpret his or her needs, and recommend materials based on their text. What I need to do is expand my knowledge of what makes an "artistic" picture book illustration, illustrators, and how their work relates to specific cultural experiences so that I can meet a customer's need with its graphical elements in addition to its text elements. Making more recommendations may increase borrowing.

Learning Objectives:

*Define what you want to learn in measurable terms that demonstrate what you will learn. (Begin each objective with an active verb like discuss, apply, design, develop, demonstrate, conclude. Please include a quantity or quality measurement. For example, "Demonstrate five sign language sentences correctly using American Sign Language". For more verbs, see:*

*<http://www.clemson.edu/assessment/assessmentpractices/referencematerials/documents/Blooms%20Taxonomy%20Action%20Verbs.pdf>*

Describe the qualities of a picture book illustration that exemplifies "artistry".

Appraise an "artistic" picture book illustration for its value as a reflection of or window into a cultural experience.

Identify at least ten picture books in the HCLS collection that exemplify artistry and illustrate a specific cultural experience.

Select at least three of those titles for use in children's classes.

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Select at least three of those titles to recommend to customers.

Anticipated Number of Contact Hours:

*Estimate how long you think learning about this topic will take. A minimum of 1 hour and a maximum of 10 hours can be counted towards CEUs. The total number of actual hours will be obtained from the Learning Portfolio Resources and Activities Log in Part 2.*

Estimated Hours:                        10                            

Resources and Activities:

*List the resources and activities you plan to utilize. Be as specific as possible. It is okay to discover different **resources and activities** to use as you work through the portfolio process. You will document these on the Learning Portfolio Resources and Activities Log in Part 2.*

Read

- Aronson, Marc. Slippery Slopes and Proliferating Prizes. Horn Book. May/June 200. {And letters to the editor.}
- Banta, Gratia. Reading Pictures: Searching for Excellence in Picture Books. Children and Libraries. Winter 2004. pp. 30 - 34.
- Bisho, Rudine Simms. Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors.: Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom. Vol. 6, No. 3. Summer 1990.
- Brown, Marcia. Lotus Seeds: Children, Pictures and Books, Chapter 1. Scribner's. 1986.
- Creany, Anne Drolett, Richard A. Couch, and Edward J. Caropreso. Representation of Culture in Children's Picture Books. Visual Literacy in the Digital Age: Selected Readings from the Annual Conference of the International Visual Literacy Association (25th, Rochester, NY, October 13-17, 1993.)
- [Other readings, interviews, or learning activities may be substituted with approval from the Professional Development Instructor.]

Review the illustrations on display and the accompanying interpretive information at the Beyond Words exhibit at McDaniel College.

Choose at least ten of the books featured in the exhibit and owned by HCLS. Read the entire book. Determine

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what qualities make this book "artistic" and what qualities make the book a good example of multicultural picture book art. [If necessary, another title by a featured illustrator may be substituted. If using a substitute title, determine if the book is artistic and if it is a good example of multicultural picture book art.]

Use at least three of those titles in children's classes, focusing on the illustrations.

Chosen titles must meet HCLS materials use guidelines.

- Titles may be used in any appropriate children's class. You do not necessarily need to schedule a special class or series of classes to fulfill this assignment.
- Some suggestions for "focusing on the illustrations":
  - employ early literacy techniques, like asking questions about the pictures
  - experiment with Visual Thinking Strategies: <http://www.vtshome.org/what-is-vts/vts-in-action--2>
  - design a craft activity based on the illustrations

Recommend at least three of those titles to a customer because the illustrations meet the customer's need.

Feedback Plan:

*Please describe how you plan on getting feedback about what you are learning. You will need to get feedback from someone who has expertise or experience in what you are learning about. Feedback from more than one source can be helpful. This can be from a supervisor, mentor, experienced peer, expert, or community of practice (including online communities).*

Email the Beyond Words exhibit curator or post to the discussion board for the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. Questions and comments should have something to do with the artistry and cultural qualities of illustration.

Discuss with your supervisor what you learned from this exercise, and how you plan to incorporate your new skills in your job.

Learning Portfolio Plan Approval:

Name of Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

## Part 2 - Activities and Resources Log

Please document your activities and resources here.

Date	Time Started	Time Ended	Total Time	Activities/Resources (Please cite source for resources)
2/4/14	1:30-2 PM		.5	Gathered/placed holds on titles owned by HCLS & ordered available titles through Marina. (Some titles are not <i>available</i> ; however, there may be copies to view at exhibit.)
2/5/14	1:30-4:30 PM		3.0	Read required resources: articles, letters, & chapters. Started research of online resources: Visual Thinking Strategies ( <a href="http://www.vtshome.org/">http://www.vtshome.org/</a> ), Common Core Standards ( <a href="http://www.corestaodargs.grg">http://www.corestaodargs.grg</a> and <a href="http://www.hcgss.org/lac9demi!;;sl!:Qmmon-corelcurricul um.shtml">http://www.hcgss.org/lac9demi!;;sl!:Qmmon-corelcurricul um.shtml</a> ).
2/8/14	1:30-2:30 PM		1.0	Continued readings & research from 2/5.
2/10/14	10-11:30 AM		1.5	Read books held by HCLS.
2/11/14	2-4:30 PM		2.5	Viewed Beyond Words Exhibit at McDaniel College with its curator, Dr. Robert Lemieux. We viewed individual pieces of art & artifacts & books. I was able to scan books unavailable to borrow. photos of exhibit.

2/20/14	9:30-10:30 AM	1.0	1-Discussion with several co-workers re exhibit (showed books & photos I had taken}, some articles (pros & cons of proliferation of award). Talked about my new appreciation of the artists & their artistry in many of the picture books we use in classes & recommend every day.  2-Read about & joined Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators ( <a href="http://www.scbwi.org/">http://www.scbwi.org/</a> -) blueboard
2/27/14	12-4PM	4.0	Composed notations of titles used for classes & recommend to customers.
2/29/14	12 PM	1.0	Wrote draft of letter to Dr. Lemieux re exhibit & "what I learned & what I will do with it".
3/5/14	10 AM- 12 PM	2.0	Visited Visual Thinking Strategies website (see above). Continued work on letter & notations.
3/5/14	1-2:30 PM	1.5	Putting it all together!
3/6/14	4:30-6 PM	1.5	Continued putting it all together!!
3/8/14	4-6 PM	2.0	Prepared Picasa Web album with captions to share. <a href="https://www.picasaweb.google.com/116423599777580491913/BeyondWordsTheArtistryOfIllustratedChildrenSBooksExhibit">https://www.picasaweb.google.com/116423599777580491913/BeyondWordsTheArtistryOfIllustratedChildrenSBooksExhibit</a>
3/18/14	5-6 PM	1.0	Polished letter & emailed to Dr. Limieux. (Enclosed)  (Received response 3/31/14. Enclosed)
4/21/14	3:30-5 PM	1.5	Completed Learning Portfolio.

**Total Time = 24.0 \_\_\_\_\_**

### **Part 3 - Learning Feedback**

*Please document obtained feedback (from supervisor, mentor, peer expert, community of practice provides feedback) by either describing it here or attaching documentation to this form.*

**SEE ATTACHED.**

### **Part 4 - Reflective Summary:**

*Please summarize what you have learned. How can you use what you have learned to benefit your library/library customers? Also, if applicable, please list where you have communicated reflections (examples: participating in collaborative communities, blog posting, library staff, committee or team meeting, etc).*

**SEE ATTACHED.**

### **Part 5 - Evaluate the Learning Process**

*Please write a few sentences about your experience completing your learning portfolio. Was the process helpful? Is there anything you would change about the process?*

This Independent Study took much longer than I had anticipated which is probably my fault. There was a lot to read, digest, & research about this topic-artistry in children's books. (See Part 4) The readings that focused on the awards controversy, although a bit tangential, actually prompted the more interesting & diverse conversations with my co-workers. Definitely food for thought.

The process was helpful in that I could spend time on those requirements that seemed the most useful in my day-to-day responsibilities as a Children's Instructor & Research Specialist. As Pete the Cat would say: "It's all good!" The most difficult part of this study turned out to be finding time to discuss the exhibit, readings, research with my supervisor & co-workers. This is an important part of the trainings we do; however, finding a specific time with them owing to very busy schedules can be near impossible. I have requested some time during our quarterly Children's Staff meeting to share what I have learned. Up till now I have had to use the "shotgun" approach-a bit here, a bit there with this one and that one.

This has proven to be a wonderful opportunity to delve into a topic that is of great interest to me while broadening skills/information I can to pass on to my peers & the customers I serve.

Learning Portfolio Completion Approval:

Total Number of Completed Contact Hours: 24

**Please remember to complete the Official Record of Earned Continuing Education Units (CEUs) and attach this form with all documentation.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name of Supervisor*

4/23/14  
*Date*



## BEYOND WORDS: CUSTOMER RECOMMENDATIONS & CLASS USE

"The most effective experiences for stimulating aesthetic development give the learner repeated opportunity to construct meaning from different points of view, take place in an environment that supports looking in new and meaningful ways, and are inspired by rich, varied, and carefully chosen works of art." -Abigail Housen, from Art Viewing and Aesthetic Development

My independent study with the Beyond Words: The Artistry of Illustrated Children's Books exhibit at its center has been an opportunity to tie what we "do" as Children's Instructors in Howard County Library System ("public education for all") to the Visual Thinking Strategies alluded to in the above quote. After viewing the VTS website (<http://vtshome.org/what-is-vts/vts-in-action--2>) as a part of this study, one discovers how all this can be tied to the Common Core Standards currently on the minds of anyone with a child or involved in education. Howard County Library System's commitment to public education in its "delivery of high quality education for all ages" offers such an environment. This study has given me a renewed and more focused awareness of the strategies I use in my classes to enhance aesthetic development.

Below is a selection of the books I have evaluated for presenting in the classroom and for recommending to customers. (Captioned photos of the exhibit at McDaniel College can be viewed in my Picasa Web album <https://picasaweb.google.com/11.6423599777580491913/BeyondWordsTheArtistryOfIllustratedChildrensBooksExhibit>)

### BOOKS RECOMMENDED TO A CUSTOMER:

Biography: Snowflake Bentley by Azarian.

Explain the painstaking process of his woodcut technique; use of photos. Not all biographies are created equal. My job is to lead my customer to choose to read one that is filled not only with information, but also beautiful images when possible and in this case, appropriate to the subject.

Fairytale (:fractured): The Three Pigs by Wiesner.

The way he has "torn apart the story & the images to rewrite an old familiar story makes this so interesting & exciting. Do you think the changing perspective and different styles makes it feel more "fractured"? It feels like a magical journey through an old story.

Wordless: Flotsam by Wiesner.

Try to use your life experience to image the story. Here is another example of the artist's changing the style of the illustrations. Some pages have bold, rich saturated color from edge to edge while other pages are much softer and in graphic novel

style. Why does the artist do this? To give you a heads up about a change of place, time, etc.? What would you do with that camera? NB: The size of this painting is large (22" x 36"). It is a shame that in the book, it is cut in half by the gutter! I wish it had been printed as a fold out.

Real life event: The Man Who Walked Between the Towers by Gerstein.

How does the perspective in the illustrations make you feel? Like you're up there with him? Does it make the story more interesting & authentic for you?

Black History &/or Folktale (African): Beautiful Blackbird by Bryan.

Because of the cut paper technique used in this book, the images in the book come the closest to looking like the original piece of art in the exhibit. The bold colors and clean scissor lines are very assertive. This is an excellent example of adapting an old folktale-telling people of Zambia-of a small, distinctive group of people bringing to the attention of a worldwide audience. It speaks to the very essence of awards like the Coretta Scott King which it did win. Herein lies a pro side of the argument concerning the growing number of awards targeting specific writers and illustrators. (I am referring to the article "Slippery Slopes and Proliferating Prizes" by Marc Aronson in Horn Book Magazine, March/April 2001. Vol. 77 Issue 5, p500-508 and letters to the editor that followed in Sept/Oct 2001.)

BOOKS USED IN A CLASS (or in planning stage for a class):

A Ball For Daisy by Raschka

Here is an example of a book that embodies the universal lessons of caring and sharing. This nearly wordless book with minimalist swirls and impressionistic watercolor images was perfect for a discussion about "what do you think is happening here?" Does someone else have a different idea? Do you enjoy the challenge of "reading" a book without words? Is this something you would like to try again? In this instance the actual art is very much as we see it in the book. Do you think using simple images is probably very difficult when you're trying to tell a story? (I think this art is something any child, no matter the age, can identify with.)

The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Carle

Although this particular praying mantis on display is not in any of Carle's picture books, his style of collage is throughout his work; therefore I used this book pointing out how he paints the plain tissue paper with acrylic paint; then, cuts it for collage.

ART PROJECT: We used die cuts of insects from discarded Carle books to make our own Carle-like piece of art. (This was part of a 40th anniversary class of this book.)

### Pigeon Finds a Hot Dog by Willems

Class on sharing & kindness; civility. Talk about the simplicity of Willems' drawings. How he leaves lots of "white" space on each page. Do you find it easier to follow the action because the drawings are so simple & the page is not cluttered? How he lets you know when a character is excited or upset with the size & boldness of the words and not just punctuation.

### Knuffle Bunny Too: A Case of Mistaken Identity by Willems

Talk about how in his Knuffle Bunny books, Willems does something different. He places his drawings on top of photos of real places. Do you think this makes the illustrations more interesting? Do you find the "action" of the story jumping out at you because the background is such a contrast to Willems' drawing? Does it give you the feeling that this story might be based on a true story? (It is about his daughter, Trixie.)

ART PROJECT: Take pages from a magazine of scenery. Have children draw or paint their "characters"; then, cut out & paste onto the background. Tell class what is happening in their illustration.

### The Snowy Day by Keats

Horn magazine declared this to be "...the very first full-color picture book to feature a small black hero." The simple lines of the paintings emphasize the vastness of the smooth, white snow. (The painting in the exhibit is page 23 in the book. The original is actually stark, much simpler than the illustration. I actually like the original better.) Does the simplicity of the illustrations allow the action to be front & center for the reader? Could this have been a successful, wordless picture book? Perhaps show another illustrator's take on a day in the snow- Colon's *The Snowman's Path* which exemplifies painting & pencil work that is filled with both very detailed texture. The warm yellow cast throughout the illustrations is contrast to Keats' art; yet, both books exude the artistry of an exceptional picture book.

ART PROJECT: Cut out 2 or 3 pieces of construction paper to fill background; then, place one die cut onto the background. Tell the story.

### Joseph Had a Little Overcoat by Taback

In contrast to The Snowy Day, here is a very colorful, busy group of illustrations coupled with strategically placed cut outs. The text is simple as it gathers momentum. Here is a wonderful example of a distinctly cultural picture book based on an old Yiddish folk song. The style of Taback's illustrations, using a combination of collage, gouache, crayon, ink & pastel on illustration board evokes the peasant's humble, yet vibrant cultural heritage. Passover: Celebrating Now, Remembering Then has the same look and feel with the beautiful bright, bold colors reminiscent of folk art reflecting the Hebrew culture.

Dear Dr. Lemieux,

Thank you for the experience of your Beyond Words exhibit. It began simply as part of an independent study. There has been an unexpected ripple effect of viewing this art, researching various articles and websites regarding artistry in children's books, and **really** looking at these books through widely opened eyes. You have tackled a theme that is very broad in scope with a modest number pieces of original art; yet, there is a depth in this grouping that is greatly appreciated. The flow of the exhibit was in and of itself very artistic, down to details that made me, as a children's instructor, smile. The goal of presenting a variety of cultural themes through the art of the book—mainly picture books—is well achieved. Both children and adults must have stood before these "pages" of often familiar books in awe. My initial response was: "All this creativity, attention to detail, and great effort of *execution* just for a child's book? Incredible!" How fortunate to live in a time when such art can be viewed and handled by just about everyone—at least, anyone with access to a library via the book.

Doing research for my independent study with your exhibit as the focal point has proved to require far more depth (mostly because this notion of artistry in picture books excites me) than I had anticipated. Beyond Words inspired me to think about ways to share this short, magical journey through your exhibit. Offering special displays reflecting cultural diversity or pointing out the "artistry" when assisting a customer choose a book can be thoughtfully accomplished. I look forward to encouraging comments and critical thinking during an "ordinary" story class more deliberately in an effort to enhance aesthetic development.

After viewing the Visual Thinking Strategies website, one discovers how all this can be tied to the Common Core Standards. "The most effective experiences for stimulating aesthetic development give the learner repeated opportunity to construct meaning from different points of view, take place in an environment that supports looking in new and meaningful ways, and are inspired by rich, varied, and carefully chosen works of art." -Abigail Housen, from *Art Viewing and Aesthetic Development*. Howard County Library System's commitment to public education in its "delivery of high quality education for all ages" offers such an environment.

In the end, my goal for this training evolved from an interesting way to earn CEUs to an exciting journey that has just begun for a 67 year-old (1968 Western Maryland graduate!) children's instructor surrounded by eager minds full of potential for growth and joy through the magic, the artistry of children's books. Here's an idea: How about just one piece of original art in every public library for "children" of all ages to view and sit beneath while they read their books?

Many thanks for your time and curator tidbits guiding me through this wonderful exhibit. What we have here is art that happens to be in a children's book. These books are wonderful gifts for generations of children of all backgrounds! It was very uplifting and invigorating. I am still smiling!

Sincerely,  
Jane De Behardo Conlon

PS I would be very interested to hear how you feel the exhibit was received by various attendees--children, adults, educators, art students. What kind of feedback have you gotten? Did you get the numbers you had anticipated? Did school classes take advantage of this unique experience? Would you consider another exhibit pairing books with the art of the book? I hope so! JDC

\*(Emailed to Dr.Lemieux 3/18/14)

**From:** .  
**Date:** 03/31/14 4:39 PM  
**Subject:** Re: Sending this again because...  
Hi Jane,

**To:**  
**Cc:**

Charming and engaging. Those are the two words consistently used by visitors to describe the exhibit. Reports from the gallery indicate a steady flow of traffic throughout the show's run, complete with repeat visits. The interest and attendance went waaaaay beyond my expectations. It's clear the community (and beyond) was intrigued with our show. Although we didn't keep official attendance numbers, we know the following:

- 325+ visitors signed the guest book
- 190+ visitors registered to win one of the signed copies of Mr. Wuffles by David Wiesner (we gave away 12 copies)
- 12 school groups attended (2 more were scheduled but cancelled due to snow days)
- 6 library groups attended, including a group from the Maryland Library Association

Those are happy numbers, especially when you consider that the exhibit's run was shortened by five snow days (in essence, we lost a week). The show is now traveling to the Oddfellows Gallery in Hattiesburg, MS (<http://www.oddfellowsgallery.com/#!photos/c4su>) as part of the 45th annual Children's Book Festival (<https://www.usm.edu/childrens-book-festival>).

I enjoyed reading your analysis paper, and I really like your idea of having a piece of original art in every library. There's certainly enough art out there to accomplish that idea. Thanks again for your interest.

Robert

## Reflective Summary of Beyond Words: The Artistry of Illustrated Children's Books

Viewing Beyond Words exhibit was an instructive, uplifting, and invigorating experience. There has been a ripple effect of viewing this art, researching various articles and websites regarding artistry in children's books, and *really* looking at these books through widely opened eyes. Before I begin my commentary of selected titles from this exhibit, let me explain that not every picture (and a few "chapter" books) in this exhibit necessarily exemplifies the art I would consider to be multicultural. Some of the books are obvious in their cultural point-of-view, such as Happy Feet, Passover: Celebrating Now, Remembering Then, Adele and Simon, Beautiful Blackbird or Joseph Had a Little Overcoat. Others seemed to possess universal themes not necessarily having an obvious cultural connection, such as A Ball for Daisy, Carle's praying mantis, The Three Pigs, or Flotsam; however, the artistry of each piece is resounding. Here we have numerous examples of different ways an artist employs to turn a story into a picture.

Of the 35 titles represented in this exhibit, Howard County Library System owns 15. Of the 11 unavailable to borrow, I was fortunate to view several at the exhibit itself, while borrowing 8 through interlibrary loan. Carle's acrylic & tissue paper collage of the praying mantis does not appear in any of his books; therefore, I have substituted another.

When I choose a picture book for a class, it can't be just about the story. Often the illustrations are more important in this situation. I often explain the reason/s for my choice have as much or more to do about those illustrations after all it is a picture book. If I have a choice in fulfilling a request from a customer, I try to point out the how the illustrations in my choice are an important part in telling and enhancing the story.

All too often children and adults are "guilty" of just filling their basket or shopping cart with indiscriminate picks. My job as a Children's Instructor is to promote those books that have merit as a story and as a work of art. How fortunate to live in a time when such art can be viewed and handled by just about everyone--at least, anyone with access to a library. What we have here is art that happens to be in a children's book. What an wonderful gift these books are for generations of children of all backgrounds!

This independent study has opened my eyes regarding not only the bottomless, creative talent of the children's book illustrator, but also their commitment to opening a new world with their gifts of art. (All of these pieces either grace the walls of a museum or are held by private collectors which speaks to their value and beauty.) I am thinking about a class in which I would share this heightened awareness of the artistry of children's books, tying HCLS's Public Education for All to the Common Core curriculum using this particular exhibit as a jumping off point.

To quote from the Visual Thinking Strategies website (<http://www.vtshome.org>): "Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is a method initiated by teacher-facilitated discussions of art images and documented to have a cascading positive effect on both teachers and students. It is perhaps the simplest way in which teachers and schools can provide students with key behaviors sought by Common Core Standards: thinking skills that become habitual and transfer from lesson to lesson, oral and written language literacy, visual literacy, and collaborative interactions among peers."