

Prompt: In a Word document, free write for 10 minutes about what literacy means to you in the context of your own content area? There are no wrong answers, this is just a beginning to the thoughts associated to this course.

My first thought when I think about “literacy” in Visual Arts, I think about vocabulary and the words we use to talk about art. These include the Principles of Design, the Elements of Art, and other third level words like “juxtaposition,” “composition,” and “contrast.” Many words that are difficult for English learners to understand, let alone use.

On thinking deeper though, I think about the vocab not as a way to describe the art but a way to understand it too. When you know what composition means, you can engage with the art in a different way. So perhaps literacy is just a means of understanding.

In Visual Arts, we grade students on four areas: the making, the responding, the presenting, and the connecting. I think literacy is active in all four of those grades, and affects each of them differently. The more obvious ones would be responding and presenting, which would be to say how you used art vocabulary in your own piece, and the connecting which would have you communicating with art movements and previous art pieces, or maybe even your classmates. But I think literacy is crucial to creating too, because when you know more vocab, and know more art, you create differently.

As an artist myself, it can be boring to talk with people about art when they don’t make art themselves. I have a vocabulary that I use and a literacy that I’m interested in because of my making and because of the amount of art I have been exposed to. When I was younger and in my earlier stages of my career, I had less to say. That’s because I understood less. So I think literacy is something that grows with exposure and experience.

With two minutes left on the 10 minute timer, I think I’m allowed to cheat a little bit. So:

literacy /lɪt'ər-ə-sē/ 

noun

1. The condition or quality of being literate, especially the ability to read and write.
2. The condition or quality of being knowledgeable in a particular subject or field.
"cultural literacy; biblical literacy."
3. State of being literate.
4. The **ability** to **read**.
5. **Understanding** of something (ex. **computer** literacy).
6. The ability to read and write.

I’m glad to see my instincts were correct. Though I didn’t mention it, “computer literacy” is a phrase I’m familiar with and often see literacy used in. I think it’s interesting to conflate understanding with reading and writing, especially in a mostly visual field like arts classes in high school.