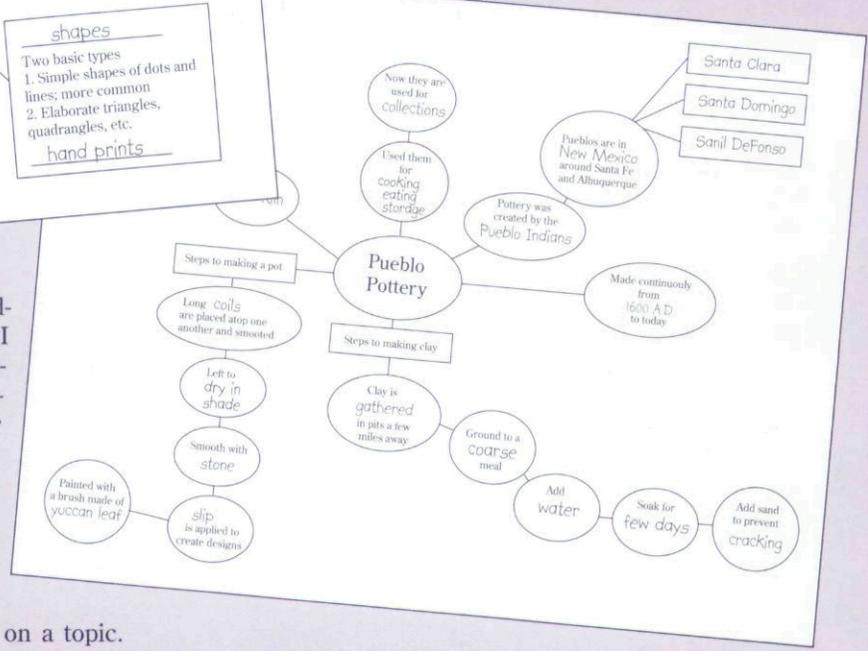
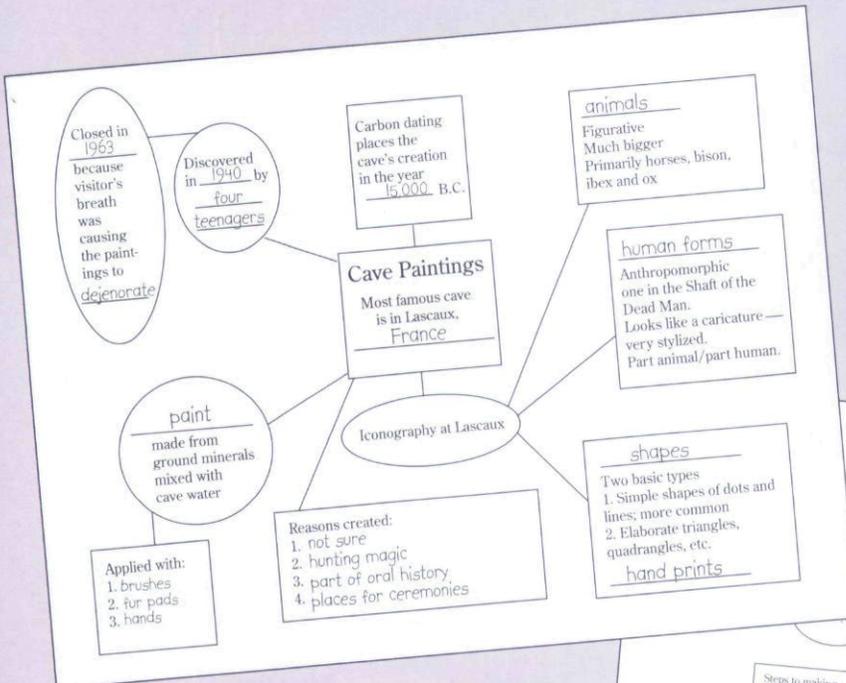


Getting the Information Graphically

by Michele Mosco



Along with the growing emphasis on reading and writing across the curriculum, I wanted a way to make students active participants in art history lectures and when I presented information about an art technique or style. So, I began using a tool I had used when I taught a sixth-grade self-contained classroom—the graphic organizer.

Graphic organizers are highly recommended learning tools throughout the curriculum. Simply stated, a graphic organizer is a diagram that assists students in organizing information on a topic. There are many types of graphic organizers, but the type I utilize most often in my art class is a simple “web.”

The web consists of boxes and circles connected by lines. The lines denote the connection between the information within the attached boxes. Most often I give the students some of the information for each box, but leave a few missing words. This is an effective learning strategy, as it forces the students to listen to the information presented so as to find the missing information. The quest-like hunt for this information often engages my middle school students, thus enhancing their interest in the information.

This method of transferring information is beneficial for the special education students who are mainstreamed into my art classes. Depending upon their functioning levels and the content presented, sometimes I write each missing word on the board as I am speaking. This is their visual signal that the written word needs to be placed into the diagram. In this manner, they feel successful with minimum accommodations.

I have noticed visibly increased comprehension for units that utilize graphic organizers. The visual format appears to act as a memory enhancer for many students. The connections between items correlates with brain research that emphasizes connection-building to increase learning. Students also learn more when they preview the information because they can see the way the information fits together before the information is presented, thus pro-

viding them with an overview.

When designing a graphic organizer, I begin by noting key words and phrases. I write down any specific terminology I want the students to remember or processes that I want them to be able to enumerate. Then I use lines to show the connections or sequences. Then, I’m off to my trusty computer to create the graphic organizer.

The easiest software to create these graphic organizers is “Inspiration.” In fact, I’ve often had students create their own graphic organizers when presenting an artist to the class. However, I often use Microsoft Publisher or even Word to draw my graphic organizer. I then print two copies of the document—one is to reproduce for the students and the other is for my “master” sheet. This “master” sheet also comes in handy when a student is absent for the presentation, and yet needs the information for the studio project that follows.

I have had many successes with using these graphic organizers with middle-school students, but that didn’t stop me. I modified some of them to use with my third- and fourth-grade classes. Student engagement is always very high and students remember more of the information and use the sheets as study guides. ■

Michele Mosco teaches K–8 art at St. Thomas Aquinas School in Avondale, Arizona.

Copyright of Arts & Activities is the property of Publishers Development Corporation. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.