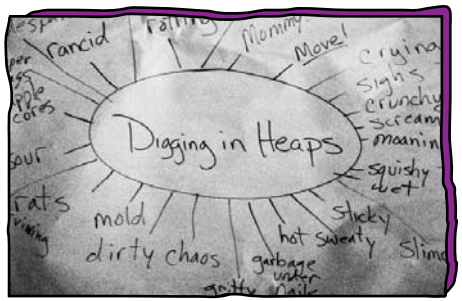
HOW TO CONDUCT A SENSE WEB



SENSE WEB: A versatile tool that explores complexity of the subject matter through the senses. Its purpose is to press general ideas to very specific images that can then be explored through an art form or creative writing by activating prior knowledge.

Determine the theme, emotions, or vocabulary you feel is central to the lesson. For example, in "The Great Depression" the time period is framed by contrasting conditions: Hard Times and New Deal. The Sense Web establishes the language of images in which to talk about text, facts and complex ideas of a specific area of study.

Step 1

Write the theme, emotion or vocabulary word in the center of the blackboard (i.e. Hard Times).

Step 2

Ask the students to describe a moment that comes to mind when they think of the theme, emotion or vocabulary word.

Step 3

After a couple of answers have been generated and written in a web-like fashion on the blackboard, the students trust that it is safe to respond and are ready for the next step.

ALL answers should be accepted. The goal is to make a personal connection.

Step 4

Go back to one of the generated answers and ask questions that press for sensory detail. Ask the students, "Who do you see?" or "Where are they?" Have them name a specific place. Ask the students what the generated answer sounds like, "Is it screaming, soft and whining, silent, etc.?" Ask the students what color it is. The answers should all be written into the web on the blackboard.

Step 5

Follow one line in the web and coach the students in verbalizing sense images to visualize more clearly. The goal is to get more and more specific.

For example, when visualizing where a migrant worker is, "She is at a farming camp in Southern California, sitting on her suitcase in front of a makeshift tent."

Step 6

Continue asking sensory questions. Do you hear any words? What is the tone of voice? Ask one of the students to say the words. Notice the tone… soft, loud, fast, slow. Ask another student to say the same words in a different tone. The goal is to establish that there are many voices to the generated answers.

Step 7

Sharpen these images by continuing to ask questions. Prove to the students that they have the experience (the prior knowledge) to connect to this concept.

How would this person walk? At this point, you shift to an experiential artistic exploration. Now you are inviting the students to take on a character.

A. Select a student to take on the role of the character in front of the class.

B. Coach the class to observe. What does his/her face look like? How would you describe his/her voice? What is his/her posture? Here, you want specifics.

C. Coach the class for interpretive words (ashamed, aggressive, afraid, etc.).

Step 8

Continue to question in order to get to more unfamiliar territory. What is the texture of the generated answer? If it were a line, what would it look like? What is the sound of one of the interpretive words? Let me hear it.

Step 9

Bring together some of the images from the Sense Web to reach an Extended Definition of the generated answer using selected images that have been built into the web. This can be done as a class discussion or each student writing first and then sharing their extended definition with the class.

Extended definition synthesizes the sense images and physical representations generated through a sense web. It is a unique and personal statement about the word or concepts at hand. Sense webs are highly specific and concrete, as well as often metaphorical. It provides a powerful connection to academic learning.