

Learning Disabilities and Struggling Learners

By Sharon Jeffus Copyright 2010

Many parents have students who are struggling learners. Could art be the answer to their problem? When I began to compose my ideas for this article, I typed in the word “Special” and went to this wonderful poem found at this web address:

<http://gyanguru.org/meaning-of-word-special/>

“Special”
is a word
that is used to describe
something one-of-a-kind
like a hug
or a sunset
or a person who spreads love
with a smile or kind gesture.

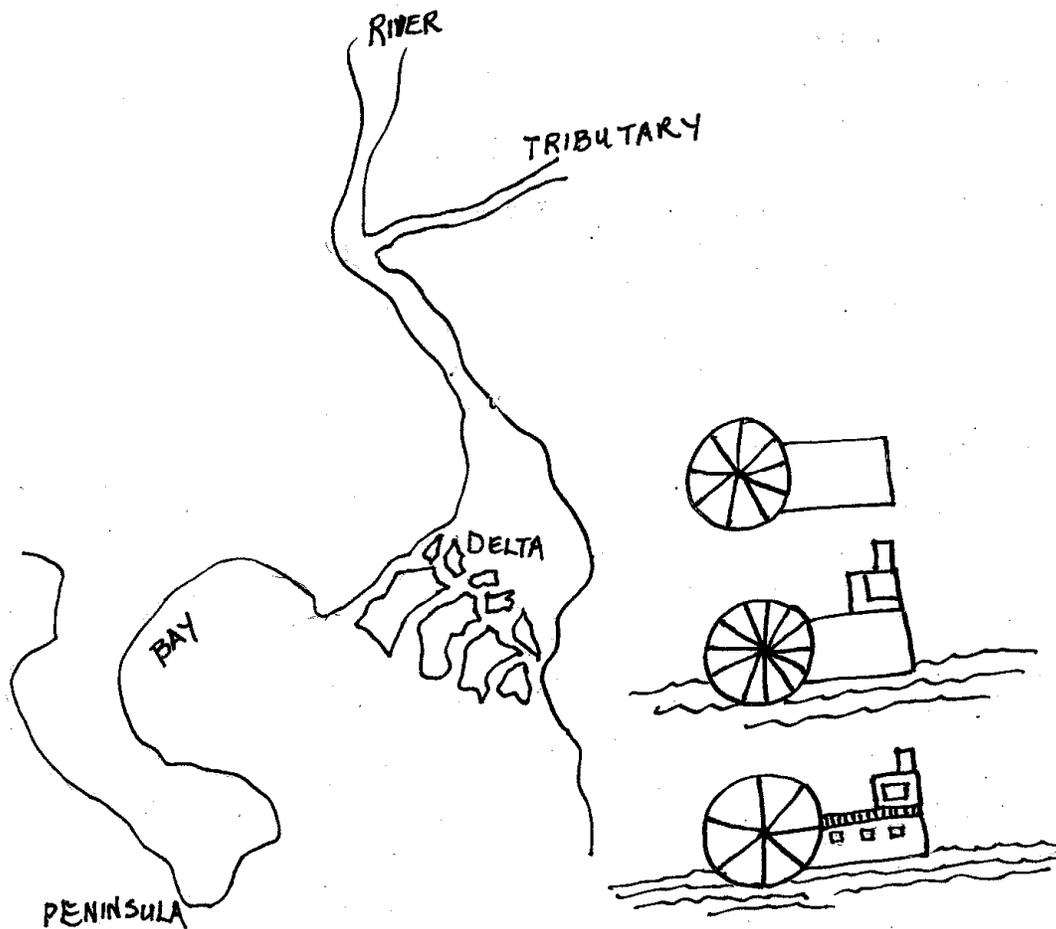
Reading this poem made me realize just how precious and special all the children I have worked with are. In writing my books, I always have a deep sense of how special each child is. My own son had a severe visual problem. Although his sight was not good, I was able to work with him using a visual and kinesthetic approach very successfully. Doctors said he would never be able to drive and would have to go to a special school for the blind. This never happened. In my experience in working with “Special Needs” children, I find that they respond well to the visual and kinesthetic approach to learning. Students who have experienced failure in school become problem learners. These children are also very special. It is my experience that they all also respond well to encouragement and to art. Each small success builds on the previous small success. Because of the large variety of diagnoses under the “Special Needs” umbrella, the process of leaning techniques and vocabulary and then having a result that is something that belongs only to them is very important. Especially in this area, curriculum that encourages success and is graded in an individual way is so important for the children. Failure is never viewed as failure, but only as an opportunity for learning and doing it better the next time. Our multi-sensory and hands on approach is very successful for the preschool or early elementary mentality, as well as for older children who may be dyslexic or autistic.

Because all children with disabilities perceive the world a little differently, allowing them to use the multi-sensory approach is very important. Terri Mauro, (<http://specialchildren.about.com/bio/Terri-Mauro-13624.htm>), when speaking about behavior problems in an article called, “What are Special Needs,” says *...parents need to be flexible and creative.* The style of learning in my books allows parents to do just that and approach academics in a flexible and creative way.

She also says, “Children with learning disabilities like dyslexia and Central Auditory Processing Disorder struggle with schoolwork regardless of their intellectual abilities. They require specialized learning strategies to meet their potential and to avoid self-esteem problems and behavioral difficulties.” With our materials, parents/teachers have a

multitude of choices for lessons that would teach required subjects in a unique and creative way. When learning fractions, sometimes breaking a chocolate bar into parts and then learning how to break a whole into twelve pieces is very successful. Think how much fun baking a cake is! Now challenge your child to triple the recipe. This is math. Folding an origami chair and learning how to fold the paper into nine pieces and then building the chair into a throne is another approach to learning fractions...or making a triptych and counting the parts, or how about learning about dehydration by making a necklace out of dried potato pieces? Especially with children who have learning disabilities, learning by doing is an alternative method from the traditional approach to achieve success. Our projects are given on two levels; one for older children with more developed fine motor skills, and then projects for children who are preschool and do not have motor skills that are developed.

.In American History through Art, we look at a picture by George Caleb Bingham of life on the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers and then do an art project about it.



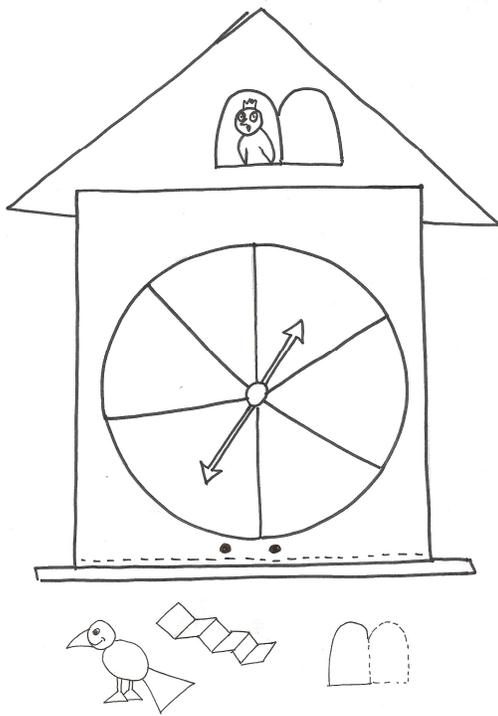
Discussing master works of art in a simple way is good for retention of facts. If children do not get bored, they will always remember the picture and the project. Questions like

“What is the center of interest? What do you look at first? Where is the horizon line? Where do you see a pattern? What do you think the animal in the boat is?” stimulate thought processes and then doing a project about the picture helps children remember. I do a treasure map teaching terms about an island such as inlet, coast, etc. while looking at the artist Rousseau’s tropical paintings.



The picture above is “Fur Traders Descending the Missouri” by George Caleb Bingham. He illustrated life on the Missouri and Mississippi while Mark Twain was writing about it with stories of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn.

The project below is about telling time. Children can make the clock face as a colorwheel, and then they can make a bird pop out of the clock. They can use the flamingo they have drawn below for the bird. Telling time is a basic math skill, so I always tell the children we are making an “It’s time to say I love you clock.” They can decide which time they want it to be after they have listened to you present how to tell time.



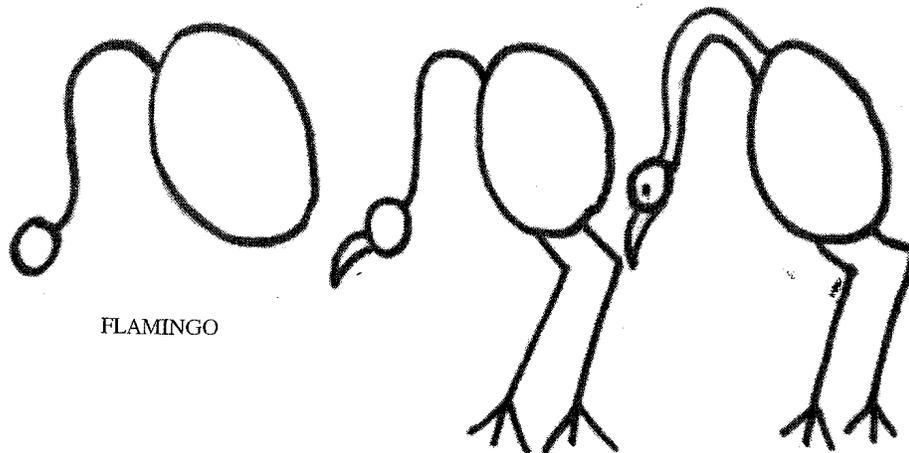
You can purchase round stickers and children can put them in the right position as you are teaching them the numbers.

On the clock on the left, you can have them color the face as a colorwheel and then teach them the numbers.

The Artsy Animal series is a multi-sensory approach to learning designed to produce a finished project that teaches core subjects by hands on art activities. Sharon Jeffus teaches internet lessons that encourage and delight children needing to learn fine motor skills, or need encouragement in learning core basics. You can get our power point on

teaching preschool children sent via email for free.

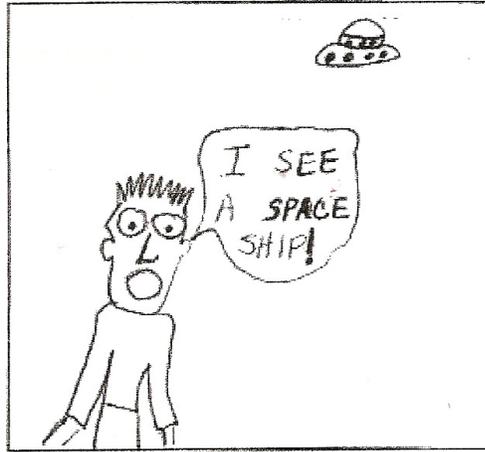
A sample of a project that we might do begins like this after we would look at a picture of Audubon's "Pink Flamingo" :



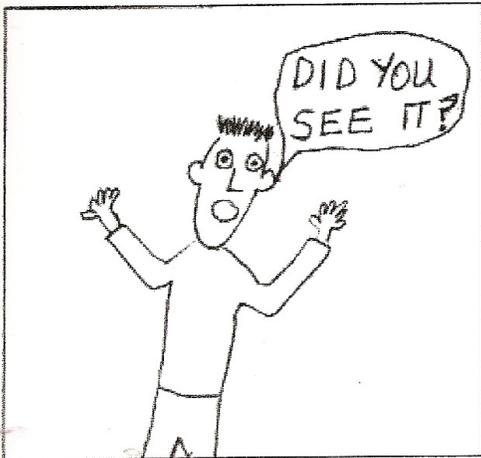
We would talk about kinds of lines. Drawings would be very simple. We might put some cut paper water on the picture. We would mention colors. We might put a colorwheel rainbow on the picture. We would talk about a bird's habitat. Children could put a fish in the mouth of the flamingo. In English, children can draw the four kinds of sentences using a cartoon format. They can retain knowledge better by drawing a picture. If you as a parent think about baking a cake, how much do you remember if you just read a recipe, as opposed to seeing it baked on a video? How much do you remember if you actually bake the cake?



DECLARATIVE



EXCLAMATORY



INTERROGATIVE



IMPERATIVE

The important thing is to understand that learning is really fun. There are so many things in education that seem to squelch the idea that it is ok to fail, because then you can try again in a different way and learn. In conclusion, leaning disabilities and reluctant

learners become “possibilities” when students truly enjoy what they are learning by hands on projects and delightful visual images. Visual Manna does just that. Go to visualmanna.com for more information.