

CAEA Lesson Plan Format

LESSON TITLE: *Give that Left Brain a Break!* Blind Contour, a New Approach

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Grade Level: Elementary, MS, HS, University, Special Needs (all)

Background Information:

Blind contour drawing is the time-honored gateway to understanding realistic, representational drawing, yet teaching students blind contour is often tedious and frustrating as students struggle to figure out what they should be seeing and to trust that *not* looking at their paper will actually facilitate them truly seeing. Students typically draw too quickly to catch details we're trying to help them see and they sneak peeks at their paper, losing necessary focus on their subject. Even as we move toward a more student-centered model of learning, right-brain focus is a valuable tool in any artist's toolbox. The difference between this method and traditional blind-contour methods is that this method is fun and engages students, who instantly see positive results.

Art Content Standards:

H.S-2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.4 Review and refine observational skills

Common Core Content Standards addressed with the lesson:

Blind Contour drawing helps to increase right-brain focus, a valuable tool for meeting the challenges of higher-order thinking and problem-solving of Common Core.

Learning Objectives/Goals/Essential Understandings:

Students will discover and begin to associate the ability to draw realistically as a talent that can be acquired with right-brain training and practice.

Students will explore blind contour drawing through various exercises, facilitating increased right-brain focus to use in Art or in other subject areas as well as in future careers.

Vocabulary:

realistic drawing, photorealism, right-brain, left-brain, contour, blind (as it relates to this assignment)

Access to the curriculum / modifications:

Preferential seating is important for English language learners, as well as special needs students, but they should also have clear view of other students to model the process.

Motivation:

The Hook: "How many of you have tried to draw something and it just doesn't

turn out right?" "How many of you get frustrated when it doesn't come out right?"

"What if I said, 'It's not your fault—it's the way you are 'wired'?"

Explain that when people are able to draw realistically, it's not so much about talent as it is **learning to see** (it should be noted that most of the research regarding right-brain information applies to right-hand dominant individuals. Left-hand dominants will also benefit from the exercises, however.) So if you have been frustrated that your drawing doesn't exactly look like what you're trying to draw, it's not your fault. Your right brain is the side the "sees" what's really there, but, for most, it's your left brain that's in charge of the hand you write and draw with. Those who have "talent" at drawing realistically have developed a way of accessing the right side of the brain. These lessons will help the rest of us do the same.

Materials:

12"x18" white drawing paper, folded in half, matching short ends. Fine tip markers. Overhead projector (I've found the quality of light to be better than other projection methods,) transparencies, overhead markers.

Procedure:

Step-by-step instructions:

- Students title the top of their first page, BLIND CONTOUR 100%/0%
- *Number pages on the folded paper 1-4 and make a two-column T-chart on the right side of page 1, labeling it LEFT and RIGHT.*
- *Note characteristics of what the strengths are of the LEFT and RIGHT brain (see diagram at the end of the lesson plan)*
- *Ask students what they think "Blind" means, as it relates to what we are about to do. The 100%/0% denoted at the top of their paper means that, they will be looking at the screen of the overhead 100% of the time will be looking at their paper 0% of the time (left-brain is probably freaking out, feeling out of control right now.) Remind them they will only be looking away for a few seconds, and then will be permitted to look at their paper.*
- *Ask students if anyone know what "contour" means, in the title "Blind Contour." The overhead light projects a strong silhouette to describe the "edge" of an object (I usually start by showing the contour of my hand and then of my profile and then explain that when we draw the contour, we'll be drawing the edge only, no shading or inside details.*

Student Learning Tasks:

Guided Practice: *The Essential Rules of the Game:*

- 1) **Silence while drawing**—let your right-brain stay in charge! Talking, giggling, making noise is all your left-brain trying to get control—don't let it!
- 2) *Once the pen is placed, look 100% of the time at the screen while drawing. You'll be given the signal to look after a few seconds.*
- 3) *Focus on the line, without trying to predict where the line is going*
- 4) *Draw one single line, not a "sketch line" that is broken.*

PAGE 1

- *Have students draw 4 dots, a couple of inches apart, down the left margin of page 1 (opposite the LEFT/RIGHT Chart)*
- *Make sure all students are facing forward, or sideways, where they can easily look forward.*
- *Check for understanding to see if there are questions about the game rules.*
- *Have students place their pens on the first dot. Place your pen on your dot. Instruct students to look at the screen. Silence. And begin.*
- *Draw a simple, slow line that varies in characteristic, for example, having a horizontal, leading out from the dot, a couple of stair steps, ending with a loop. Keep the first line short and simple.*
- *Allow students to look. They are usually VERY excited to see that their line even resembles what you have drawn. Walk around to observe what they have done, pour on the praise, and remind them that their line may not look exactly like your line, after all, they weren't looking, but it should have a lot of the characteristics. Point out the stair steps and the loop.*
- *Students will be anxious to try another line. And then another.*
- *I often slip in a side-ways human profile into the last line on this page.*

TAKE A SHORT BREAK and have a debriefing of the process.

How many were surprised that they were actually able to draw without looking? Ask how or if this way of looking seems different than other ways they've looked at or observed things. It's often a good time to mention that medical schools have brought in artists to teach future surgeons how to focus to really see what's there.

This really is "the secret." Students just drew what they actually saw. That is what artists who draw realistically do. They need to remember to "feel this focus" as they are given different things to draw. It is important to remind them that keeping a close eye on their subject is essential; otherwise left-brain starts making things up.

PAGE 2

- *Draw 4 dots in the left margin and repeat the lesson from page 1, using longer and more complex lines. (I often use the exercises from pages one and two whenever we are heading into an assignment requiring a high degree of focus.)*

PAGE 3

- *Put a label at the top that says, "80%/20%" and ask students to predict what they think this means.*
- *It is correct that they will be allowed to take peaks and look at their papers to see how they are doing, but emphasize that as soon as you look away, you will start to forget what is there, so look most of the time*

at the thing you are drawing and only take a momentary look at the paper.

- *Put four dots down the left column of page 3. Students will follow the lines you draw, and are able to take little peaks at their paper.*
- *Ask students which way they feel most comfortable drawing the best. Eventually, artists have to start looking at their papers, but many students will report that the 100%/0% is the most comfortable and they should be allowed to continue to draw this way until they are ready to change.*

PAGE 4

Off the screen and out into the world!

I like to use my big, plastic dinosaurs for this part, one per every 4 students, but any larger objects with interesting contour lines will work, as will their own hands. I will describe the process using their hands.

- *Students place their non-dominant hand on the table so it presents some interesting contour lines (a very loose fist works well. Flat hands on the table generally don't because left-brain runs amuck and draws an overly simplified hand.)*
- *REMINDE STUDENTS THAT THEY ARE USING THEIR HAND AS A MODEL FOR CONTOUR, but they are not drawing their hands to look like a hand. They really can't draw the entire hand in 15 seconds without breaking the rule to draw slowly ("ant speed"!)*
- *Students are to choose a starting spot on their hand and will, at the signal, draw at the same slow speed for about 15 seconds, to draw a portion of the hand. Stop at the signal, reposition their hand to create a different contour and call for the "draw" signal again. Again, this is right-brain focus practice. The goal is not to draw the hand.*
- *Students may be drawing the contour between the fingers and that is fine, as long as they use one single line. They should not be picking up their pens to draw individual fingernails.*
- *Change hand position and repeat 4-5 times.*

Students will now be looking around the classroom for interesting contour lines. The line may be the outside edge of someone's backpack, a water bottle, or the edge of the curtain as it is hanging, or even someone's profile!

Switch back to 100%/0% drawing.

- *Students are instructed to look around the room to look at interesting contour lines.*
- *Choose a contour line they see and at the signal, they will have 15 seconds to get as far as they can—again, the goal is not to draw the object, but to get practice "seeing" and following the contour lines (it's a good idea to model this process.) "Find your line. Okay, draw." Signal "stop" after 15 seconds and instruct students to—find a new line. "Ready? Begin." It's good to keep this one moving.*
- *About this time, students will notice they're running out of space on page 4. They are simply to allow lines to overlap.*

Independent Practice: *students are given the homework assignment to draw at least 5 profiles. They can draw on the bus or on BART. They can also have friends or family members pose.*

Checks for Understanding / On-going informal assessment:

Through observation of the style of a student's drawing, you can easily discern whether a student is using right brain focus. They will not be talking, they will be drawing slowly, they will be focused at least 90% of the time on the object, rather than their paper, as evidenced through comparison of their drawing to the lines that were modeled.

Closure and extensions:

Students will share profile homework in a group critique/discussion. What was easy or difficult about this assignment? Did you notice any interference by your left-brain? What has surprised you about your experience drawing? Are you noticing any changes in the way you are "feeling the focus"? What do you think a good "next step" could be? In what other classes might you be able to use this focus? How will it be useful in science classes?

Is it important to always draw realistically? Show examples: Frida Kahlo, Self Portrait—Pablo Picasso, Guernica. What do they share in common? How are they different? Which is more realistic and why?

LEFT	RIGHT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizes • Logic • Simplifies • Analyzes • Speech • In control • Linear • Safe/cautious • Math 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional • Intuitive • Creative • Adventurous • Non-verbal • Artistic • Musical • Observes • Imagination