Visual Read-Aloud or **VRA**
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NOTE: This strategy is part of an ongoing research project. Data have been collected on three culturally different images:

- *Automat* by Edward Hopper (1927); IRA in Chicago (2005)
- *Cricket* by Sybil Atteck (circa 1940s); Trinidad Reading Conference (2006)
- *Amigo* by Byrd Baylor Schweitzer & illustrator Garth Williams; WLU in Tucson (2008)

The purpose of this visual literacy strategy is to enhance the viewers' comprehension of an image in a socio-cultural context through creativity, critical thinking, and imagination using multiple perspectives.

STEPS:
1. First, select an image (i.e. painting, drawing, sculpture, or illustration) that is culturally relevant for critical observation and discussion. In reading terminology, this discussion strategy is called a *grand conversation* (What do you think?) and in the visual arts, this technique is referred to as a *group critique*.

2. Ask the participants to transport themselves into the image/artwork, in order to answer the following questions (Gilbert, 2003):
If you were in this painting:
>*What do you see?*
>*What do you smell?*
>*What do you hear?*
>*What do you feel (touch)?*
>*What do you taste?*

3. Lead a group viewer response of the results, discussing how schema (schemata) plays an important role in the comprehension process when analyzing an image or a piece of text. Accept all interpretations, emphasizing the negotiation of meaning that occurs during the learning process.

4. Then ask each participant to enter the artwork, choosing a perspective from which to develop a monologue. The next step is to develop a dialogue (oral or written) about what is happening in the piece, with a partner who is proposing an alternative vantage point. The vantage point can also be from someone or something not visually represented in the work.

5. Finally, ask for volunteers to read or role-play their dialogues with each other.

References

Gilbert, J. (2003, Summer). *Art for imagination's sake.* (Available from the Norton Museum of Art, 1451 South Olive Ave., West Palm Beach, FL 33401.)

Smilan, C. & Towell, J. (2006, May 2). *Expanding the definition of literacy for preservice teachers through art-based learning.* Unpublished lecture delivered at the 2006, International Reading Association, Chicago, Ill.