COVET

Continuing Professional Development in Vocational Education and Training

Visual Communication and Semiotics: Album Covers

Inspiration for online teaching

In the COVET project, we have collected many great examples of teaching that have been transformed from the classic off-line version into a modern online learning method.

These sample lessons have been created by VET teachers from different EU countries. We present them to you as inspiration for your work.

The lessons are particularly suitable for vocational teachers, but can also serve as a training tool for teachers, trainers and lecturers in other educational settings.

All sample lessons, training materials as well as all information about the project are available at:
https://www.covet-project.eu/

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Visual Communication and Semiotics: Album Covers

Offline version of the lesson

A lesson plan

Art and Design Foundation Diploma

Topic: Visual Communication:

- ILO: create album covers using the principles of Semiotics to understand signs and signifiers as presented in different genres.
- Theoretical learning: semiotics – Roland Barthes: *The signifier is the image used to stand for something else, while the signified is what it stands for (a real thing or, in a stricter reading, a sense-impression).*
- Examples:

Duration (minutes)	Activity	
Preparation • Bring records/CDs as examples • Genres written on slips of paper to hand out • Assessment forms • Pens • Computers – log ins for Canva		
9.25 (5 mins before we start)	• Computers – students to sign up and log in to Canva. • Hand out assessment forms (face down) • Pens	
9.30 (3 mins)	**Introduction** What we will do today: There will be two SMART ILOs for today's session: *(Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-appropriate)* • Today we will use digital design technology (Canva) to create our own album covers.	

	- By the end of this session you will be able to describe how *semiotics* are employed in visual communication using the example of album covers. - Be able to understand and use visual clues (signs - colours, fonts and images) to signify musical genre. - You will be able to use digital graphic design technology (Canva or Photoshop) to create an album cover which conveys a specific genre of music. - This exercise will enable you to understand links between theory (semiotics) and product (album cover). **Theoretical background:** - Genre is employed in films, tv, music and more. - Music and visual communication – musical subcultures (goth, punk, new romantics etc.) all had a visual branding, communicated via fashion, posters, merchandise, artwork etc. This was even more important in the pre-internet era. - Musicians give us information about their identity via visual clues or *signs* – logos, album art, posters, clothes, typography, colours. - Look at album covers – What sort of music (genre) in each album? Guess and explain why you thought that. - This system of signs/signifiers (e.g. Doc Marten's boots) and signified (e.g. Punk) is called semiotics. - Semiotics is the study of communication via signs to signify implied meanings. - It is widely applicable, but today we will take album artworks as an example which will enable us to understand. E.g. skulls on a black background on an album cover are a sign which implicitly communicates a specific genre to us. We know in an unconscious way. Which genre? - The signifier is the image used to stand for something else, while the signified is what it stands for (a real thing or, in a stricter reading, a sense-impression). - French Critical Theorist Roland Barthes wrote about signs as a cultural system. - Font/typeset as signs – use record covers as examples. - Colours and imagery as signs - use record covers as examples. - Semiotics are widely apparent in culture; in fashion, art, media, design – loads of things!
9.33 (2 min) (1 min)	**Ideas - Brainstorm** - Who likes music? Which sorts? - Assign a genre to each student by handing out slips of paper - Which design elements might you expect to see in a (your chosen genre) album cover? Think about typography, colour, imagery. We are looking for *signifiers* (in semiotic terminology) the musical genre is the *signified* (meaning). - Brainstorm ideas – What do you associate with this sort of music? Choose a band name, album title, which colours and sort of font you will use to convey musical genre – 1 min on sheet of paper (back of assessment form)
9.35 (7 mins)	**Practical Activity** – on computers

	• Bring up Canva as it's v simple and easy (you may also choose to use Photoshop or Illustrator) **Demonstration:** • 3 elements you must include: Background colour, at least one image (elements), text – how to do this • Include band name, album title and an image. • Your artwork must visually communicate your assigned musical genre	
9.42 (2 mins)	**Assessment – peer assessment** • Swap seats with person beside you • Turn over assessment forms and complete	
9.44 (1 min)	**Finish up – plenary** Link back to intro and ILOs. Constructive alignment. • **Ask the class:** • What does the term semiotics refer to? • What is an example of a sign/signifier in an album cover? (colour, imagery, type) • What is an example of a signified? (musical genres - punk music, rock music etc.) • **What we learned today:** • Learned how *semiotics* are employed in visual communication using the example of album covers • You are now able to understand and use visual clues (signs - colours, fonts and images) to signify musical genre • You are all able to use digital graphic design technology (Canva or Photoshop) to create an album cover.	

Shift to online version of the lesson

Things to be considered

Description of the things that needed modification for the online delivery.

- Students will be remote, so my presentation needs to be viewable online.
- Students will not have access to specialised design software, e.g. Photoshop.
- Students will not be able to 'swap' work physically in order to complete a peer assessment.
- I as teacher will not be able to view students' outcomes physically; these must instead be digital and shareable.

Reasons for the decission

- Introductory presentation and introduction to topic: I created a presentation using Microsoft Powerpoint that I was able to share via Microsoft Teams
- Example album covers: digital images shown to students instead of physical objects.
- Brainstorm: use online technology (Miro app, designed for brainstorming and real time online collaboration) instead of pen and paper.
- Digital design software: use Canva as it is free and online. Also designs are shareable – teacher can create a class 'team' to view work. Don't mention Photoshop as students won't have remote access.
- Teacher demonstration: use Canva and 'share screen' option on Teams.

- Peer Assessment: split students off into breakout rooms on Teams to chat in twos. Peer Assessment to be an online form in Teams which they can submit and teacher can view.
- Plenary: Use Quizlet (online quiz website) to create a quiz to test student understanding and knowledge. Whole class can play from home like a game with the website collating who answered fastest, background music to make it more entertaining, etc.

Tools and apps used

Microsoft Teams: online meeting software, College standard, students already organised into classes or 'Teams' and the app has lots of options for sharing work online. Useful screenshare option. Breakout rooms option and Forms section for peer assessment are very useful.

- **Miro:** Editable mind map templates, students can collaborate in real time. User friendly, well designed interface, boards are saveable and shareable so we can return to them in subsequent lessons if nedds be.
- **Canva:** Free, easy to use online design software. Designs are shareable – teacher can create a class 'team' to view work, it is downloadable and there are useful templates for printing.
- **Quizlet:** Online quiz creation software. Creates a light hearted atmosphere whilst consolidating learning, students can play from home either alone or in teams, quizzes can be written by me and then saved for future use.

Competencies needed to be newly acquired

Apps:

- **Microsoft Teams:** I had to learn and become familiar with all useful and useable aspects of the software.
- **Miro:** I had to learn and become familiar with all useful and useable aspects of the software.
- **Canva:** I had to learn and become familiar with all useful and useable aspects of the software.
- **Quizlet:** I had to learn and become familiar with all useful and useable aspects of the software.

Competencies:

- Problem solving
- Adaptability
- Digital literacy
- Clear communication
- Digital lesson design
- Use of specialised software

To do it I needed to obtain/purchase THIS (apps, tools).

List of options, each choice explained

- A fast, reliable computer, donated to me by the College.
- **Microsoft Teams:** Free software in use college wide, linked to student profiles, Canvas and Intranet.

- **Miro:** Free online software, students needed to create log ins and I created a class 'team' to enable the class to view each others' work.
- **Canva:** Free online software, students needed to create log ins and I created a class 'team' to enable the class to view each others' work.
- **Quizlet:** Free online software, students needed to create log ins and I created a class 'team' to enable the class to play together and collaborate.

Feedback on the lesson
Strengths:
- Introductory Powerpoint presentation was dynamic and full of brightly coloured images. Students were engaged throughout. 'Raise hand' tool enabled them to interject, comment and chat in a managed fashion.
- Topic: students were engaged and passionate about sharing their own musical tastes.
- Digital design is popular in the Art department at the minute so students loved designing something that matters to them.
- Microsoft Teams: easy for students to use as this is the system employed college-wide. Students are already used to it and already organised into class teams.
- Canva: free and easy to learn basics.
- Miro: easy to use, good to collaborate and allowed chatting as the students had the freedom to create their own boards.
- Quizlet: good fun at the end of the lesson, exuberant atmosphere and interaction between students encouraged.
- Breakout rooms: allowed students to chat one on one and share ideas in a more intimate, quitter online setting. I was able to drop in to each breakout room to chat.

Weaknesses:
- Online format meant that free and easy conversation was more limited, students less willing to speak out individually than in physical classroom.
- It would have been fun to have shown actual album covers and allow students to handle or even listen to them, rather than showing pictures.
- Canva, whilst a good Photoshop/InDesign substitute, is limited in its design options and is not industry standard.
- Miro: also a good substitute but lacks the spontaneity of pen and paper.
- Some issues with logging in to various online websites, apps and software within a single lesson.

Lessons Learned:
- It might be best in future to limit number of softwares like Canva etc. used in one lesson due to time consuming logging in issues.
- I would have included an ice breaker at the beginning of the lesson e.g. Quizlet or similar to encourage informal chatting between students right from the beginning.
- I will look for a more sophisticated design software than Canva to use next time.
- Due to digital issues it is advisable to leave extra time for each activity/task

Final result – a lesson plan

Duration (minutes)	Activity	
Preparation • Powerpoint presentation ready to share • All apps open and logged in on desktop ready to enter • Microsoft Form ready for Peer Review • Quizlet prepared • Example Miro board ready to use.		
9.25 (5 mins before we start)	• Computers – students to sign up and log in to Canva and other websites in preparation to use them • Test microphones and cameras • Refresh basics of using Teams for online classes including online etiquette – raising hand etc.	
9.30 (3 mins)	**Introduction** • Open Powerpoint Presentation and share screen. • Students asked to mute and raidse hand if they want to comment. What we will do today: There will be two SMART ILOs for today's session: *(Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-appropriate)* • Today we will use digital design technology (Canva) to create our own album covers. • By the end of this session you will be able to describe how *semiotics* are employed in visual communication using the example of album covers. • Be able to understand and use visual clues (signs - colours, fonts and images) to signify musical genre. • You will be able to use digital graphic design technology (Canva or Photoshop) to create an album cover which conveys a specific genre of music. • This exercise will enable you to understand links between theory (semiotics) and product (album cover). **Theoretical background:** • Genre is employed in films, tv, music and more. • Music and visual communication – musical subcultures (goth, punk, new romantics etc.) all had a visual branding, communicated via fashion, posters, merchandise, artwork etc. This was even more important in the pre-internet era. • Musicians give us information about their identity via visual clues or *signs* – logos, album art, posters, clothes, typography, colours. • Look at album covers – What sort of music (genre) in each album? Guess and explain why you thought that. • This system of signs/signifiers (e.g. Doc Marten's boots) and signified (e.g. Punk) is called semiotics. • Semiotics is the study of communication via signs to signify implied meanings. • It is widely applicable, but today we will take album artworks as an example which will enable us to understand. E.g. skulls on a black background on an album cover are a sign which implicitly communicates a specific genre to us. We know in an unconscious way. Which genre?	

	• The signifier is the image used to stand for something else, while the signified is what it stands for (a real thing or, in a stricter reading, a sense-impression). • French Critical Theorist Roland Barthes wrote about signs as a cultural system. • Font/typeset as signs – use record covers as examples. • Colours and imagery as signs - use record covers as examples. • Semiotics are widely apparent in culture; in fashion, art, media, design – loads of things!
9.33 (2 min) (1 min)	**Ideas – Miro Brainstorm** **Open Miro and go to today's board** • Who likes music? Which sorts? • Assign a genre to each student verbally. • Which design elements might you expect to see in a (your chosen genre) album cover? Think about typography, colour, imagery. We are looking for *signifiers* (in semiotic terminology) the musical genre is the *signified* (meaning). • Brainstorm ideas on Miro board– What do you associate with this sort of music? Choose a band name, album title, which colours and sort of font you will use to convey musical genre – 1 min on Miro board.
9.35 (7 mins)	**Practical Activity** – on computers • Bring up Canva as it's v simple and easy • You should already be logged in and connected to our class team **Demonstration (teacher share screen):** • 3 elements you must include: Background colour, at least one image (elements), text – how to do this • Include band name, album title and an image. • Your artwork must visually communicate your assigned musical genre • Save when finished so I can view
9.42 (2 mins)	**Assessment – peer assessment** • Teacher assign breakout rooms – in pairs • Enter breakout rooms • Teacher to check in • Complete peer review questionnaire in Forms section of Teams. • Submit forms so I can view.
9.44 (1 min)	**Finish up – plenary** Link back to intro and ILOs. Constructive alignment. • **Back to online classroom. Cameras on and mute whilst I'm speaking** • Open Quizlet, You should already be logged in. • Start Quiz: • What does the term semiotics refer to? • What is an example of a sign/signifier in an album cover? (colour, imagery, type) • What is an example of a signified? (musical genres - punk music, rock music etc.) • Who's the winner? • **Plenary: back to online classroom. What we learned today:** • Learned how *semiotics* are employed in visual communication using the example of album covers • You are now able to understand and use visual clues (signs - colours, fonts and images) to signify musical genre

| | You are all able to use digital graphic design technology (Canva or Photoshop) to create an album cover.
Make sure all work is saved/dopwnloaded
Thanks and end call. | |

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