

# Visualizing Text: The New Literacy of Infographics

by Mark Davis and David Quinn

*Exactly - loss of words to understand the world deciding if just an tool.*

Since the beginning of recorded time, humans have been using pictures to communicate with each other. Sumerians used pictographs for record-keeping purposes, and Egyptians used hieroglyphics to capture their history. Infographics (see Figures 1 & 2) are modern, written artifacts about collected resources in a dynamic, visual format. The concept of an infographic stems from information literacy, which is the "set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze, and use information" (American Library Association, 1996–2013, para. 1).

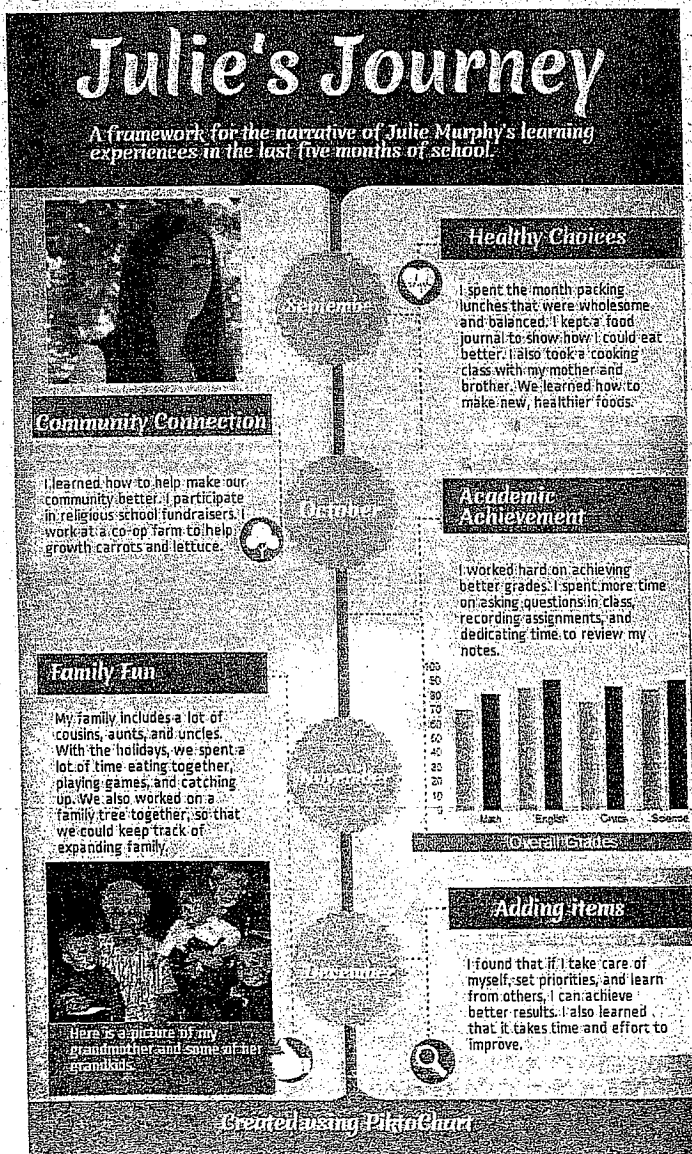
Importantly, infographics should be viewed as complex, standalone texts, not simply a text feature or graphic element. More and more, infographics are being used by digital media outlets and marketing companies to communicate with their audience. Infographics can be used in education as a timely and relevant means to support reading and writing in exciting and powerful ways.

Figure 1

## What makes a good infographic?

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) call for greater emphasis on complex texts where students demonstrate knowledge through evidence collection and content connections (see sidebar on this page). The nature of the infographic lends itself to the elements commonly cited in writing. The most powerful infographics include the following elements:

- **Purpose:** The audience should be able to infer the author's purpose, draw conclusions based on the evidence, and summarize the gist of the infographics.
- **Style:** The graphic components including the layout, text, symbols, and color schemes should address the tone of the author.
- **Evidence:** Data and text must be cited and appropriately integrated in the design to support the reader's understanding.
- **Format:** The infographic can be represented in a static format, designed for print, or a dynamic medium, allowing for interactivity.



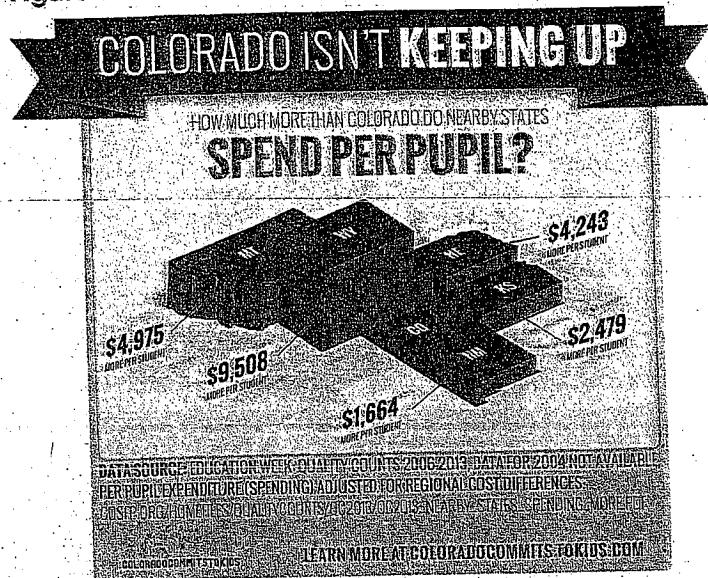
### Sampling of Common Core English language arts standards that can be addressed by including infographics in your classroom reading materials

**Reading:** Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue. (Standard R7, Grade 6)

**Writing:** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas; ... group related information in sections; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension." (Standard W2a, Grade 6)

**Listening and Speaking:** "Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally); and explain how it contributes to a topic or issue under study" (Standard SL.2, Grade 6).

Figure 2



## How can I teach comprehension with infographics?

High quality infographics can be powerful sources for engaging students in several levels of critical analysis via close reading. Lesson objectives might include asking students to examine the elements that make an effective argument. Teachers could also use infographics to help students convey a line of inquiry.

As part of a close reading lesson, you can begin by designing an infographic using one of several free online resources listed in the sidebar on this page. While this approach offers complete control of the infographic's content, there is a learning curve to designing these texts. Thankfully, a simple Google search yields multitudes of content-relevant infographics you might use instead (see, for example, [www.pinterest.com/k12inc/educational-infographics](http://www.pinterest.com/k12inc/educational-infographics)).

Two examples include an infographic created by a student using online resources (see Figure 1), and an infographic used by proponents of Amendment 66, an effort in Colorado that would increase taxes to fund schools (see Figure 2).

When teaching with infographics, it is useful to model thinking about the text and images using focused questions. If teaching about Figures 1 and 2, for instance, four questions to prompt critical reading and their related answers might be:

• *What is the author's purpose or question?*

- Figure 1: The author, Julie, has created a narrative about the changes she has made in her life over the last five months. Julie's purpose is to share her progress with others.

• *How could the design be improved?*

- Answers will vary for any infographic. You might want to use this question as a means of identifying author's purpose or point of view. Julie's story was a

### Online Infographic Tools

**PiktoChart** ([www.piktochart.com](http://www.piktochart.com)): Free tools with simple and advanced features and a variety of templates.

**InfoGram** ([www.infogr.am](http://www.infogr.am)): Simple no-cost tool for designing both information and data visualizations with interactive content.

**Easel.ly** ([www.easel.ly](http://www.easel.ly)): Free tool for designing infographics from pre-designed templates. Easier learning curve than other infographic tools.

**Vennage** ([www.venngage.com](http://www.venngage.com)): A great infographic design that captures audience analytics.

**Visually** ([www.visual.ly](http://www.visual.ly)): A professional design marketplace with examples of infographics in all subjects.

- Figure 2: The author's question is "How much more than Colorado do nearby states spend per pupil?" The author's purpose is to convince citizens to spend more on education.

• *What evidence supports the author's claim?*

- Figure 1: Julie changes by packing her own lunch and cooking her own meals. She also provides a bar graph that demonstrates her increased academic performance.
- Figure 2: The argument is supported by data showing the dollar difference between Colorado's per pupil spending and the nearby states. Another strength of this infographic is the clear citation of the data's source.

• *What are the strongest elements of this design?*

- Figure 1: The text is clear, concise, and easy to read. The graph is simple for the reader to interpret. As a narrative infographic, the pictures of Julie and her family help to personalize the text and give the reader a visual of who is involved in this story. The timeline aspect of the graph gives a frame to this progression and adds a frame for organizing the story.
- Figure 2: The graphics are clear and dynamic. The surrounding states work as an unconventional bar graph to grab the reader's attention. The designer also uses a unique angle to visually enhance the disparity between states in a way a bar graph might not.

narrative of success, but perhaps there were goals she left out. In regards to Amendment 66, and any political infographic, students should be encouraged to think about the alternate perspective and what information would be helpful to understanding the bigger picture.

—These are just four of the many questions teachers could use to analyze these artifacts. For our purposes, once the close reading of an infographic is modeled for the students, responsibility for meaning making and analysis should be gradually released to students (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) as they work with different infographics. Initially, students can work in groups and work their way toward examining an infographic independently. A carefully selected or designed infographic could also serve as an engaging text to be used as part of a student assessment.

### How can infographics be used more broadly in your school?

Infographics can support reading comprehension and writing while strengthening critical thinking and synthesizing skills. They can be useful for dovetailing literacy content with science, history, or math lessons; creating a cross-curricular activity. Counselors and mentors may use an infographic that serves as a visual resumé of a student's learning experiences. Finally, administrators can use infographics to capture data snapshots of the school for parent presentations or professional development. While we focused on the reading of infographics, knowledge of how to create these complex texts are equally important. Given the ease with which these texts can be shared, a well-designed artifact can lead to increased collaborative engagement and supportive dialogue.

### References

American Library Association (1996-2013). *Introduction to information literacy*. Retrieved <http://www.ala.org/acrl/issues/infolit/overview/intro>.

Pearson, P. D., & Gallagher, M. C. (1983). The instruction of reading comprehension. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 8, 317-344.



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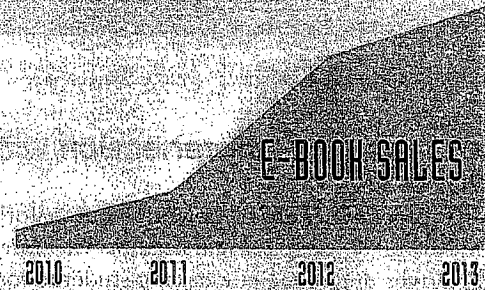
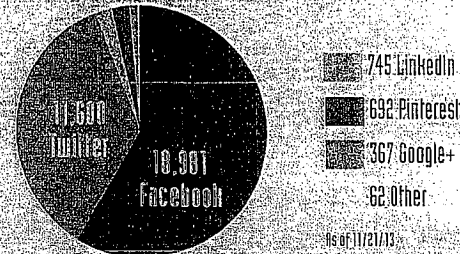
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Both are members of IRA's Technology in Literacy Education Special Interest Group (TILE-SIG).

## IRA's Digital Footprint

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### READING TODAY ONLINE

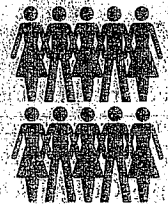
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October 2011  
24,482



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