Theresa Manchey teaches in Frederick County, Virginia, at James Wood High School, where she is English department chair. To initiate a teacher research program, she garnered support from school administrators, educated herself and colleagues about teacher research, and responded to the interests and needs of fellow teachers. Manchey is a recognized leader in her school district, where she now leads teacher-researcher groups, but her teaching experiences are the grounding for her thinking and action.

In the year of the research reported on here, Manchey became intrigued by the effects of an assignment she had used off and on during several years of teaching. She remembers when a class had studied first Candide and then Billy Budd, and she had first asked her students to draw a metaphor representing the life of Candide. The results were up on the bulletin board. When they finished reading Billy Budd, they repeated the assignment and placed those drawings on the bulletin board as well. At once the students began to see differences in the pictures and to discuss how those differences were related to the literature. They began to create their own literary theory, and Manchey never got to give her prepared lecture comparing the two books. Even though she is a "stick figure" type of artist, she says, she wanted to learn more about the effects of drawing and sketching to learn and understand literature.

The Question
For several years I have included drawing in my English classes as a means to help students see big concepts and to provide an incentive for closer reading of a text. Recently my school chose to implement a block schedule. Longer class periods (90 minutes) allow more time to complete drawing activities, and I’ve found myself using them more frequently. This year a conversation with another teacher caused me to rethink this method. Talking about her feeling that students in her single period classes were doing better than students in her block class, she said, "In the single classes we just move right along." No one likes to believe they’re asking kids to do useless “stuff,” so I began to wonder: what effect does the drawing have on students’ learning? Is it really worth the time invested in it? I decided to investigate and began by asking my English 10 students to recall what they could of the topics we studied first semester.

Gathering Data
Our course was organized into units based upon the archetypes or story patterns found in one of our texts, Man the Mythmaker. When the students responded to the survey, they had completed the first two chapters of the text, “The Earth Belonged to Them All," a series of creation myths depicting the idea of a golden age and “The God-Teacher,” stories such as the Prometheus myth in which humans received special knowledge from their gods. As a review of the second unit, the students were organized into small groups and asked to draw their concept of these mythical figures who taught humans important lessons. In looking at their responses to this preliminary survey, I noted several references to the drawings we did as well as other visual cues:

- We drew pictures of our ideal god-teacher.
- I remember the picture we drew [of the god-teacher].
- I remember when we made the god-teacher posters, too.
- There was a musical score on one page and a piano with things placed inside to alter its tones [a reference to a page in their text].

One student volunteered the following information about her learning:

I learn best when we do things besides read and log, read and log, for example: games, movies, filmstrips, drawing, etc.... Reading and logging is okay sometimes but the information just doesn’t stick.

There was certainly some indication that the drawing played some role in the students’ memories of units of study. I followed this initial investigation by closely observing students’ reactions to other drawing activities through the year.

Some Drawing Assignments
Next, I assigned A Separate Peace, by John Knowles, and asked students to do a
drawing for each chapter rather than the usual written response (log). My idea was to focus on symbolism in this book, and I hoped certain objects — the tree, the river, etc. — would surface in these drawings and help students see the relationship of these objects to the meaning of the story. On the day the drawings were due, I asked students to spread their drawings out and look for objects that occurred in more than one drawing. Not surprisingly, all the major symbols from the book surfaced in the ensuing discussion. Their drawings were very interesting: some included quotes from the book (Figure 1), some were completely visual (Figure 2), others relied heavily on words (Figure 3).

After a quick survey of which objects occurred in the drawings of most or all students, we looked at a few objects that were found in only one or two students' work (such as Anne's locker drawing mentioned below). I felt the assignment had been really successful since the objects that occurred most frequently in the drawings were those most critics agree have symbolic value in the book, and the occurrence of personal symbols in some drawings helped us make some distinction between universal and personal symbolism. Because the students had already chosen these objects as significant by using them as representative of events in particular chapters, they found it easier to see how Knowles could use such objects symbolically. By the end of class, I felt we had achieved one of the objectives for study of this book as I had recorded it in my journal of 1/3/95.

I'm thinking tonight there are 2 things I want to get from A Separate Peace:

1. How symbols occur and function in a novel and 2. Vocabulary building.

At the conclusion of that activity, I asked students to reflect on the merits of this drawing in contrast to the usual written responses to the reading. Almost all students said they enjoyed the break from writing, though several kept logs along with their drawings. Most indicated the drawings helped them focus on the main idea of
each chapter, while writing brought reactions to the smaller details. They found the drawings took less time than writing and were not as much of an interruption to their reading. Other interesting comments were:

*Some things are hard to express in words.*

*A picture captures an important moment in time.*

*Sometimes a chapter gives me a picture in my head.*

*Pictures give words actions.*

*Using colors helps show emotions.*

A few students described the process they used in determining what to draw:

*I run through pictures of events in the chapter and pick the main one.*

*I weigh the importance of events.*

Others felt the pictures would benefit them later:

*Seeing the pictures makes you remember the chapter.*

*I'm able to visualize the story later.*

Colleen added a less positive comment about the picture logs on her midterm exam:

*I think writing logs helped me understand more than the picture logs although they [the pictures] were easier.*

Colleen’s comment alerted me to a pattern that seemed to be emerging — some students seem to rely more on the written word than others.

After our discussions of *A Separate Peace*, I assigned an essay demonstrating how one symbol was used in the book and a visual project presenting the main symbols. The paper was due about a week before the project. I wondered after looking at their comments on the drawings if perhaps I should have reversed those due dates. When I posed this question to the students, the responses were mixed, but they favored doing the visual first by about two to one. Some representative comments were:

*I think the visual should have come first because when I was thinking...*
about what to do for it, I gained a better understanding of how I actually looked at the different symbols of the book. I could’ve used my thoughts from that to help me with my writing.

I feel the visual was somewhat of a brainstorm for me and gave me more ideas.

Interestingly, these two comments come from students with widely different degrees of artistic talent. Both show the feeling of the two-thirds of the class who saw the visual project as a means of pulling together their thoughts on the symbols.

The other third had equally clear statements of how the process worked for them:

The essay helped me think of ideas and things to do for the visual.

Working on the essay first established the background and content of the visual.

One student indicated a benefit from all these visuals that I had not anticipated — the ability to see and learn from other students’ ideas:

I think the project could also have gone before the essay and that would have been helpful too because then everyone would have gotten more input and ideas to use in their essays.

When asked if they used their picture logs to complete these two assignments, the students were almost evenly divided. Some representative comments follow. Some said the drawings were a kind of road map for them:

I did use my pictures occasionally. Mostly when I was trying to find a certain part of the book.

Others systematically reviewed their work looking for patterns:

For my visual I looked at all the symbols I drew and carefully decided which one to draw. I also looked at how I drew them in my chapter drawings and decided if they had any special meaning.

For my essay I used them to look at the different ways that I had previously looked at or thought about the water.

Some who did not use the drawings cited the quality of the drawings as the reason:

I’m not very good at drawing and it would be hard for me to interpret them anyway.
Others noted their preference for words over pictures:

... I looked back in the story. I don’t believe the drawings were a good idea.

The essays proved to be quite good and showed the understanding of symbolism that had been my original goal. Two students actually mentioned their drawings in their essays, even though they were not asked to do so.

While I was reading *A Separate Peace*, I didn’t notice a lot of the water. Even when I drew my pictures, I didn’t make the connection. It wasn’t until we laid all of our drawings out that I noticed... In my pictures I had drawn the lake, the ocean, the rain, and Gene and Finny swimming... it [water] plays an important role.

This first excerpt is most interesting since Rose had indicated that she did not use her drawings to help with the essay.

The second excerpt shows how a personal symbol surfaced in the drawings:

*The main reason I remembered this part [Gene’s open locker] is because for my Chapter 13 picture I drew the locker left open. When asked about the symbolism in the book, this part came directly to my mind, and it stuck there. This part of the book was a powerful image to me so I analyzed what I felt the symbols were. By playing sports I know when I see an open locker that is empty it symbolizes the end of a season, clearing out and going on. Gene’s locker represents the end of a season for him too.*

It seemed I had achieved my objective. The drawings had helped most students see the role of symbolism in this novel. While a few students claimed the drawings did not help them understand the novel, none really felt the drawings were a hindrance to their reading. In addition, I discovered that having those projects displayed in the room was helping students see more interpretations of the story and its symbols.

**Taking a Look Back**

In the midst of this study, a member of my research group, Vicki Pitcock, told me that drawings from my classes last year had been mentioned in her class. She had asked what they knew about the idea of the hero. Several students recalled that we spent considerable time on the hero archetype. Then Susan remembered a drawing they did showing a metaphor for the hero’s journey. “She seemed kind of surprised like she thought the drawing hadn’t meant anything until then,” Vicki said. Susan’s memory of that drawing then set off a kind of “wave effect” in the class as others remembered their drawings and thus the pattern of those hero stories.

As a result of this experience, I decided to interview a student from last year’s class to see what she could remember and if drawing had any role in those memories. An excerpt from that interview follows.

T: One of the things I’m interested in is the drawing activities we did. Can you remember any of those at all?

M: Like in our projects?

T: Uh huh. What you did for your projects and we did some group drawing in class.

M: The charts and stuff we used to do. I don’t know if it [drawing] helps a lot, but like looking at them [the group drawings] — it helps you remember. When you looked at them — when you come into class, you remember what you did last time.

Once again the idea of the drawings as memory aids was surfacing. Mary went on to say that she didn’t feel the group drawings were all that helpful for her but did say there were some small benefits.

M: I don’t know... I think it was fun. They say that drawing is really a stress reliever and that... we did think about oh we could use this because that means symbolism and put that on there and let’s do this... maybe more of a time limit.

Our conversation next turned to the value of art projects. Mary’s attitude was quite different toward this type of visual.

T: What about your projects?

M: I loved drawing like projects. Remember the time I made that shirt from reading... um, uh, about the school.

T: A Separate Peace.

M: Yeah. I loved that and I like made that shirt. I really had fun doing that. I had like a lot of fun doing the drawing. I did one this year that really looked like a person. Yeah. The face looked real.

T: What do you think you get out of doing a project like that where you have to draw rather than write?

M: I don’t know... you can... like with the shirt, I like thought of like a lot of different aspects that I could use in it... like different events or you can... I don’t know... it kind
of helps you pick out... if you want to draw a picture of an event or a person that you really thought was the best in the book or the most interesting... it kinda... I don't know... it's more fun actually than having to write if you don't like to write very much.

T: Is that selection process, uh, you know like you said you had to think about it and pick out what you were going to draw or decide what colors to put on the shirt and all that?

M: Uh huh.

T: Do you think that that makes you look at the book any differently?

M: Yeah, cuz I had like both sides of the shirt to fill up so... yeah, cuz I went through each thing and oh I can put this on here like this and the symbolism that we used... I think you can do a lot of that in your drawing... oh I used this for a symbol for... you know, you can put 'em in your drawings.

The last thing I did was to run through a list of the drawings we did last year and ask Mary to respond if she remembered them. The only response she had was to the drawing of a metaphor for the hero's journey:

M: We made a puzzle and all those obstacles that they went through. Oh yeah because they'd start out then they'd get sidetracked and hurt and then they'd find their way back home and finding their family or whatever and coming home to it. I remember that one.

Mary's mixed response to the drawings seems to indicate that she found the individual projects more beneficial than the group drawings, but in both cases my objective of having students think more carefully about their reading and having them find a pattern in groups of stories was met. In addition, she showed me an unexpected value of the drawings, they reminded students of the previous day's lesson, a valuable benefit when classes met on alternate days.

**Another Assignment**

At about the same time, I began a read-aloud with my English 9 students during which they were asked to do a drawing at the end of each chapter and to write a chapter summary. My purpose in this assignment was to encourage the students to visualize the events of the story as I read to them. On their semester exam, these students were asked to recall events from the story and later were asked which activity most helped them to complete that question—the summaries or the drawings. Some said that neither helped; they had not considered looking through their folders to help them answer the question. Several, however, did indicate that the pictures were most helpful.

To follow up on this information, I decided to interview one of those students. An excerpt from that interview follows:

T: When you read, do you visualize, in other words, get pictures of what you're reading?

E: Yeah.

T: Do you do that almost all the time or...

E: Not really. Sometimes...

T: Okay. Let's talk a little about the Death-watch thing where we did the drawings. Um. When I was reading out loud to you, could you picture what Ben was doing?

E: Yeah. Sometimes. When he was in the sand in the tubes. I could picture that...

T: Do you remember any other parts?

E: When he was uh... shot Madec... and what you read today.

T: The trial part.

E: Uh huh. I could picture that....

T: Now, I wonder, you may not be able to answer this, but when you knew you were going to have to draw a picture... did that have any effect on how you listened to the story or...

E: What do you mean?

T: Well, I guess I mean, were you more likely to try to get a picture in your head because you knew you were going to have to draw a picture?

E: Yeah, kinda... yeah, I guess so.

T: Don't say it if it's not true... That's one of the reasons I was having you draw the pictures was to see if I can help you make those pictures in your head all the time when you read. So if it didn't do that, I want to know.

E: It did. It'd make you, you know, really think what they look like and what's going on.

Ellen seems to be undecided herself about the extent to which she visualizes while reading and the extent to which my assignment helped her. There is some indication that this kind of "forced" visualizing may be helpful. I think that at least the area deserves further exploration.

**One More Assignment**

All the talk we have done about drawing this year led me to try one more idea that I
picked up at an Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development conference last year. The presenter suggested using drawings to help students learn vocabulary words. During our study of *A Separate Peace*, I asked students to list any unfamiliar words they found. At the conclusion of their reading, I had them select ten of those words and make flash cards on which they drew a picture showing the meaning of the word on one side and wrote the definition on the other (Figure 4).

About two months later, I had students take out their cards and we did a series of activities to determine how many of the words they still remembered and the extent to which the drawings aided their memory. Only three students indicated that their memory was unaffected by the drawings. Some representative comments follow:

*I believe the drawing is a very good way to help. If you can get a mental picture of what it is then you can put the definition into words.*

*When I was taking the quiz the only way I was remembering the words was by remembering the pictures.*

*I missed five, but the other five I remembered because the picture would come to mind.*

*Before I have never really pictured what strange words meant, but having pictures really helps!*  

*When my partner read just the words, I remembered some pictures. For example, I remembered the picture for languid, portliness, inebriate, and cogitation. But when we used the pictures it helped me a great deal.*

*I think by visualizing the pictures I can remember these words more easily and for a longer time period.*

*I forget things I cram for very easily. I remembered these words because I enjoyed making the pictures and could remember making them.*

*Drawing helps a lot. You have something to place with them kind of like a reasoning behind them, the answer to why?*

One student really spelled out what others had hinted at as the key to their success with these particular words and the role of the drawings:

*I think the pictures helped because I drew them and I knew what they were supposed to be. I think if I was looking at someone else’s drawing I wouldn’t have know the words by the pictures.*

This activity seems to have helped the most students and to have elicited the most enthusiastic response of any drawings I’ve tried. Such a response makes me trust my original belief that all this drawing in English class functions as a memory aid for students.

**I Can’t Draw**

In several instances throughout this research, the students expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of their drawings. Such statements are common when students talk about these assignments, and I’m most sympathetic to the feeling. My own drawing “talent” is limited to stick figures and smiley faces. As I have discussed this
research with adults, most have asked if the students resist drawing. In fact, I have met with no such resistance over the years. I'm not sure why that is in light of the fact that many students apologize for the quality of their drawings. Maybe it's because crayons and markers on the table are an indication that today we'll be doing something different—not "just" reading and writing. When students say, as they often do in response to a drawing assignment, "I can't draw," I just respond, "That's okay, this isn't an art class, just do the best you can." That simple response has worked so far. Another key may be that students' drawings are prominently displayed in my classroom all the time. Most of these are group drawings done within a class period. Perhaps the presence of these single draft works encourages others to give the drawing a try. Perhaps I should have asked my students why they don't seem to mind the drawing. Maybe next time I will.

Conclusions
My investigation has raised more questions than it has answered so far. There are a few things I believe can be said at this point.

- Drawing has more power for some of my students than for others, but occasional drawing activities do not seem to hinder anyone's learning.
- Drawing seems to be useful when used to pull together large concepts or to help students see a broad pattern.
- Drawing may also have value for readers who do not naturally visualize as they read to help them make that visual connection to the words of a story.
- Drawing can serve as a memory aid for large concepts as well as small bits of information such as vocabulary words.
- Having students' drawings and projects displayed in the classroom allows students to learn from each other and helps set the tone for each day's class.

Some big questions remain:
- Are students' responses to assignments that involve drawing directly related to their learning styles?
- How useful can drawing be for students who do not normally visualize as they read?
- What role does talk about the drawings play in learning? Is it helpful to have to "defend" one's drawing before class?
- What type of talk goes on as groups work together on a drawing? What role does such talk play in learning?

The answer to that initial question raised by my conversation with my colleague seems somewhat clearer now. In the future, I will continue to use drawings and I will not feel they are a "filler." Still, I will continue to observe my students' responses to these assignments, and I will heed Mary's caution to impose more of a time limit on such activities, but I will also remember Jane's needs:

_The poster or project lets you put all your ideas and feelings into one. They all come together. I think the visual helps me understand the story a little better._