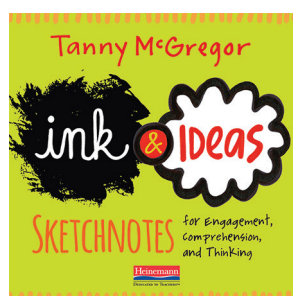


BOOKS-IN-ACTION

NICOLE SIEBEN, *Column Editor*

Lauren Zucker explores the benefits of teaching sketchnoting in the secondary school ELA classroom through the review of the book Ink and Ideas.

Embracing Visual Notetaking



Ink and Ideas: Sketchnotes for Engagement, Comprehension, and Thinking

Tanny McGregor. Heinemann, 2018.

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I first met Tanny McGregor during a session at the 2016 NCTE Annual Convention. While sitting in the audience, I glanced over to find her taking beautiful notes with colored markers, a mix of words and pictures called *sketchnoting*.

McGregor shares her sketchnoting expertise in more detail in *Ink and Ideas: Sketchnotes for Engagement, Comprehension, and*

Thinking. She defines sketchnoting as “creative, individualized notetaking that uses a mix of linguistic and nonlinguistic representation, aka words and pictures together” (3).

MOTIVATING “UNARTISTIC” TYPES AND PERFECTIONISTS

Keenly aware of potential skeptics, McGregor front-loads the book with arguments directed toward readers who might belittle drawing or proclaim a lack of artistic talent. She shares a list of influential thinkers prone to doodling and sketching out their ideas, including Jane Goodall, Bill Gates, and Virginia Woolf (xvi–xviii). In a reader-friendly review of literature on the benefits of sketchnoting, McGregor argues that sketchnotes make thinking visible, welcome linguistic and nonlinguistic representation, broaden student choice, strengthen memory, make annotation thinking-intensive, enhance focus, reduce stress, and embrace design (4–10). She cites a recent study by Jeffrey D. Wammes et al. that found that drawing enhanced memory “regardless of [one’s] artistic talent”

(7). Even the “least artistic” reader can feel hopeful after reading that the many benefits of sketchnoting do not discriminate based on artistic talent. Sketchnoting can provide a pathway for all learners to make their thinking visible and actionable for later use.

For teachers who want to start with sketchnoting basics, McGregor provides introductory tips for organization, color, and content. Alternatively, she recommends that readers who are ready to start sketching after reading the preceding chapters can skip over certain sections entirely. McGregor’s encouraging voice accompanies readers throughout the book and into the classroom, convincing skeptical students and teachers alike to conquer new terrain. She writes, “I want kids and teachers to hear that mistakes are opportunities and that quick sketches are what we’re after, not detailed realistic pieces of art. I want them to believe they can do this and this will, indeed, benefit them in ways they might not anticipate” (28). In fact, McGregor’s encouragement inspired me to write in a new genre (this review) and to create my first

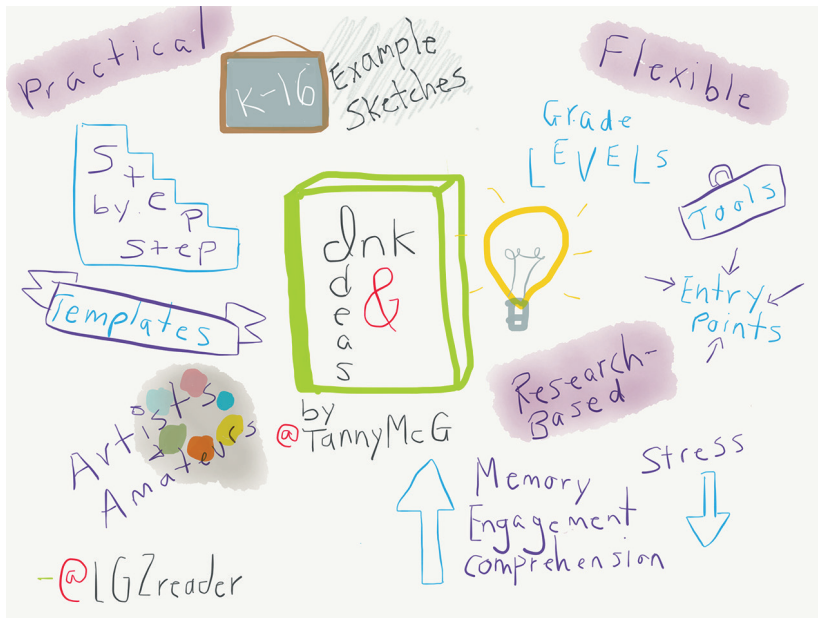


FIGURE 1. Lauren Zucker's sketchnote summary of *Ink and Ideas* was created on an iPad with the Paper application. Photo courtesy of Lauren Zucker.

digital sketchnote to accompany this review (see Figure 1).

SKETCHNOTING IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Ink and Ideas is rife with ideas for classroom applications—all paired with example sketchnotes—organized into four categories: thinking ahead, thinking after, sketchnoting live, and sketchnoting tapas (a catchall). To think ahead of reading or writing, learners might create a “schema sketch” or an “idea bank” for brainstorming (104–08). Afterward, learners can create a “symbol sketch” about the themes of a text, or use sketchnotes to summarize, synthesize, or reflect (111–16). Additional recommendations include sketchnoting a thought-provoking quotation, sequential information in a timeline, and in collaboration with others (126–31).

Consider McGregor's lesson for “live sketchnoting” during a read-aloud. First, select a short text and give students options for structuring their notes (e.g., free form, within a “windowpane” organizer). Using the title, author, and introductory information, the class can create a communal “idea bank” with words and images to reference. McGregor describes the teacher's role during a similar exercise:

. . . sketchnote live on chart paper or under the document camera while kids dip in and out of the text. Our cycle is read, think, sketch, repeat. Kids are encouraged to use a combination of words and pictures, constantly asking themselves “What is most important here?” and “What do I find to be interesting?” (38)

The flexibility of her instructions makes it easy for readers to

imagine alternative possibilities; for example, this lesson could also be paired with a digital text such as a TED Talk or podcast.

DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM MENTOR TEXTS

McGregor's hand-drawn quotes and examples appear on every spread of the book, along with sketchnotes and testimonials from students, parents, and teachers. Captions beneath sketchnotes reveal their stories: “Jasmine, a high school junior, viewed PowerPoint slides that her teacher had prepared. She captured sequenced information with phrases and symbols, letting go of the urgency to copy from each slide” (87). An eighth-grade teacher describes her student's work: “Deaton made these sketchnotes while reading *Pax*. He said that he had never thought of himself as an artist, but after our work with sketchnoting, he became interested in taking art as an elective” (97). Lisa, a high school English teacher, reflects on her students' sketchnoting: “Students have commented favorably on the flexibility of sketchnoting, (. . . [it's] up to you to decide what was important’), the tone of the lesson (‘the lesson seemed more relaxed and wasn't so formal like when we take notes’), and the final product (‘it looked cool’)” (120). Hope abounds in the captions and sketches.

The appendices offer a bounty of extended reading: Twitter accounts and hashtags to follow, book recommendations, and tools to try. The book concludes with

ten sketchnoting templates waiting to be filled in, available for free at Hein.pub/InkandIdeas. Teachers seeking additional resources can consult *The Sketchnote Handbook* (Rohde), which includes many practical tips that my high school students have enjoyed (Zucker). However, what differentiates *Ink and Ideas* from other books in this genre is that McGregor writes explicitly for teachers with the voice of an experienced colleague.

TACKLING NEW CHALLENGES VIA SKETCHNOTING


After reading *Ink and Ideas*, I introduced sketchnoting to my eleventh graders. After I paired a sketchnote assignment with *Metamorphosis*, a student, James, approached me and shared, “Will you look at my sketchnote? I’m a terrible artist. Is it OK?” He had oriented the paper vertically, organizing his notes sequentially and linearly, picking out key moments to illustrate. On the top line, he drew a business executive with a speech bubble, depicting the executive as a simple,

head-and-shoulders figure donning a jacket and tie. To compensate for his self-perceived lack of artistic talent, he had resourcefully copied the picture from The Noun Project (one of the many resources in the Appendix of *Ink and Ideas*). I admired James’s well-organized and thoughtful notes and appreciated his unique artistic expression.

Sketchnoting creates powerful opportunities for students to defy a fixed notion of their own abilities. If they are wrong about a perceived lack of artistic talent, how else have they been underestimating themselves? By providing an à la carte menu of options, we can empower students to develop agency and self-efficacy by creating their own approaches to their learning. McGregor’s text provides me with strategies for doing so.

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I am a novice artist and since I started sketchnoting, I am taking more creative risks in the

classroom, using more colors, arrows, and doodles on the board, which spark both encouraging and critical comments from my students. By sharing my sketchnotes with my students, I create natural opportunities to point out decisions I make as a writer and editor, as well as the doubts and problems I encounter. The concepts found in *Ink and Ideas* empower students to develop and share personalized responses, demonstrate their learning in creative ways, and strengthen their memory and understanding via sketchnotes. 

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