Review: The Museum visit provided an opportunity to “Read a Picture” and practice looking and thinking about what one sees. Practicing these skills is a great way to help students as learners, museum goers, and artists.

Objective: In this lesson, students explore how illustrations contribute to the telling of a story. They will create illustrations to accompany text and then create text to accompany illustrations. Students will explore wordless picture books and discuss the specific elements of the illustration that "tell" the story. They will learn to "read" illustrations as they look at the ways in which pictures reveal information about the characters, setting, and plot of a story. Supplies: Drawing supplies, a large picture book, a collection of wordless picture books (see bibliography).

Procedure: Choose an excerpt from a picture book to read to your students without showing them the pictures. Be sure to choose text that provides them with some inkling of the characters, setting, and/or plot of the story. Tell them to listen carefully since they will have to be the illustrators for this page of the book. After reading the excerpt, instruct the students to create an illustration to go along with the text. Invite students to share their illustrations, asking them to explain why they chose to depict what they did, and how the picture connects with the words that were read. Based on what the students have shared discuss how illustrations are an important element in picture books. Ask how many of them look to the illustrations for clues when they are stuck on a word. Help them to see how illustrations can illuminate what is happening in the story as well as fill in between the words, thereby enhancing the story.

Have the students talk about how listening to the words created a picture in their minds. Tell them they are now going to explore how looking at a picture can create a story in their minds. Choose an illustrative with a strong narrative element from either a big book if you have them available or a picture book with large illustrations. Be sure to cover any visible text. It is also helpful if the illustration is from a book that is not well known by the students. Ask the students what they see going on in the picture. Ask them what they saw in the picture that prompted their response. Do they identify who the story is about and what they are feeling or thinking (character)? Where the story takes places (setting)? Do they describe the action that is taking place (plot)? If they identify them, be sure to highlight the techniques the illustrator used to “tell” the story: facial expressions, actions, body language, gestures, or clothing, the artist’s use of line, color, shape.

Exercise: Explain to students that some books rely entirely on pictures to tell a story. (wordless picture books). Divide the students into groups of 2-3. Provide each group with a wordless picture book. Tell them that as a group they need to flip through the pages reading the pictures until the group can agree on a story to go with the pictures. Remind them to use the artist’s illustrations to help determine the characters in the story, where the story takes place (setting) and what is happening in the story (plot). At the end of this exercise groups should choose a reporter to briefly share the plot of the story with classmates, along with one of the illustrations that most helped them to understand the story and why.

Variations/ Extensions:
1.) Give groups the same wordless picture book and explore the differences in the stories that are created.
2.) Have students actually write out a text for the wordless book.
3.) Select and create captions for a variety of pictures. Some captions should be very generic and able to be applied to a number of pictures, others should be detailed enough to be paired with just one. Have students match pictures with the captions and ask them which seemed to fit the best and why. Discuss the fact that some matches may have required them to use careful observation whereas others were more apt to employ their imagination.