



THE WABASH CENTER

**JOURNAL ON  
TEACHING**

## TEACHING TACTIC

# Graphic Insight: Hands-on Biblical Reception History

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### The context

I used this assignment in a 3000-level biblical studies class on the gospel of John and the Johannine epistles. All undergraduates at our private, Catholic university are required to take an upper-level theology course, so the class included a mix of majors, minors, and students from other fields. In the final weeks of the semester, we discussed biblical reception history and spent a class session examining fine art inspired by the Gospel. Students completed this follow-up task as a low-stakes homework assignment and posted their work to an online discussion board, where classmates could view and comment on each other's submissions.

### The pedagogical purpose

Students are encouraged to think about how various artifacts of textual reception history reflect the cultural context in which they were created. Students also consider how art may be tailored to communicate with a specific intended audience.

### Description of the strategy

Students analyze a text, identify a key message and argue its relevance for a contemporary audience of college students, work creatively in a visual medium, and write about their creative experience.

Each student designs their own graphic representing some theological concept or teaching from one of the Johannine epistles and provides a short commentary. A student may create their graphic using digital tools or basic art supplies. While creativity is encouraged, students are welcome to use stick figures or clip art if they are not confident in their artistic skills. The assignment was originally inspired by a series of posters created by artist [Jim LePage](#).

The short commentary (approximately 250 words) submitted alongside the resulting image must explain the following:

1. which biblical verses inspired the graphic,
2. what teaching from those verses the graphic captures,
3. what the components of the graphic signify, and
4. why the focal teaching is important for contemporary college-aged readers of the text.

This low-stakes assignment receives a completion grade and written feedback.

### Why it is effective

Working first in a visual medium, students identify links between familiar symbols and new course content, which generates unexpected insights. The open-ended invitation to explain why some biblical teaching might matter for a group of the student's peers allows those from disciplines outside theology to connect course content to their own areas of interest. A digital gallery of graphics on the course site allows students to appreciate their classmates' creativity.