From Introduction to Neurophysiology (Biology/Nursing)

In past semesters, this instructor had experimented with various methods of teaching students about the human visual system—how the eyes, the nerves, and the brain work together to produce vision. Although students usually mastered the names and locations of the component parts, they rarely seemed to develop an appreciation for the dynamic nature of the system. To focus attention on the process of vision and the system, she broke the class into five groups of about eight students each and assigned them the task of "acting out" how the visual system works. She gave each group a checklist of elements that their Class Modeling had to represent and include. The most important point to the instructor was that the models demonstrate, in broad strokes, how visual images are created, transmitted, and stored by the eyes, the nervous system, and the brain, respectively.

The groups were given two weeks to prepare, and each group was to have five minutes of performing time. The groups were told that the assessment exercise was worth the same credit as a weekly quiz—about 5 percent of the total grade. Furthermore, all members of a group would get the same credit—either full credit or no credit. The instructor arranged to have the performances videotaped for later viewing and brought extra copies of the checklist for the students to fill out as they watched the other groups. Each of the "human models" of vision was quite different from the others, and all were at least adequate. Two groups used simple costumes and makeshift props—with members in "rod" and "cone" hats, for example—and received much applause. The groups took their performances very seriously, but they also clearly had fun.

After all the groups had performed, the teacher made some comments on strengths and weaknesses and encouraged class members to join in the critique. Many students had questions and comments based on their attempts to represent the process. She noticed that these students were discussing vision in much greater depth and detail than had been typical in past classes. The class seemed to her to have gotten "into" the topic very deeply. Later, on the midterm, the class scored higher on questions about vision than on any other topic, reinforcing the instructor's earlier estimate of the assessment's teaching and learning value.

From Aspects and Concepts of Art (Fine Arts)

To assess students' understanding of the development of perspective in European painting, this instructor assigned small groups of students the task of "posing" the same scene—the Madonna and child surrounded by the three "Wise Men"—as Human Tableaus. (A doll was used as the child.) Each group was asked to demonstrate the differences in perspective used by artists during the Late Roman, Late Byzantine, and Quattrocento periods. The instructor took instant photographs of each tableau and also made quick notes on the tableaus. The photos were transferred to slides, and she and the class critiqued each group's live "rendering" of these diverse solutions to the problem of perspective. On the whole, the groups came up with interesting and creative ways of portraying the "distorted" perspectives of the two earlier periods; but many students, to their surprise, had difficulty in posing the Renaissance tableaus.