



Literacy Connects

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The Power of Imaging

The old adage, “A picture is worth a thousand words” has profound implications for teaching and learning. Reading comprehension relies on the reader’s ability to visualize the story; vocabulary acquisition is enhanced if students can associate a picture with the term; and memory pathways are strengthened if the student can visualize new concepts. Research shows that when we image, the same parts of the brain are activated as when the eyes process real world input. Although some students are visual learners, others need to be taught how to visualize. Following are some activities that can be used across the curriculum at all levels to promote imaging:

- Rather than having students write about a concept, have them draw the concept. This can be done to reinforce vocabulary or to promote concept attainment. In math, students can illustrate what is happening in a word problem. In English or social studies, they can draw abstract concepts like peace or freedom.
- Read aloud to students and then have them draw what they see happening in the story. Ask questions that require students to visualize specific details. Strive for rich, vivid images:
 - What do you see?
 - What color...how big...how many?
 - Describe in detail
- For descriptive writing, teach students to “show” rather than “tell” by having them re-write dull sentences into sentences or paragraphs loaded with sensory details and imagery. For example, the telling sentence, “The room is messy” can be rewritten as, “A rumpled bedspread, piled-up dirty clothes, and jumbled dresser drawers assaulted me as I pushed my way into my bedroom.”
- Before students write personal narratives, have them draw a floor plan of their home, neighborhood or a map of their lives. From their pictures have them share stories with a partner.
- Mindmapping allows students to use the organizational structure of a web or bubble map along with colors and images to represent information and demonstrate connections among key concepts. Mindmaps work well for reviewing learned material, as study guides, and as a visual way to take notes.
- Have students use pictures from magazines to create collages to represent what they have learned after a unit or a reading. On the back of their collages, have them explain how their images represent the concepts learned.
- Use artwork as writing prompts. Ask students to describe what they see; speculate what might come before or after the picture; or analyze the artist’s choice of color, shape, or object placement.

As with any new strategy, you should model imaging by describing your own image to the class and explaining how that image helps you learn and remember.

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