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# The LeafLIT

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## IMAGERY

Can You See It?

by  
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"Which did you like better, the book or the movie?" We've all asked this question of our friends, family members, and students. More often our students seem to be answering, "The movie." Why is this? Are we assisting in the creation of a generation of students who can't create pictures in their minds?

**Imagery** is defined as, "the ability to form mental images of things or events." As fluent readers, we take for granted the ability to use imagery when reading. We do it so automatically that it's even difficult to explain the process.

**R**esearch provides logical justification for teaching imagery through storytelling, particularly when working with young children. Because storytelling and read-alouds eliminate decoding, young learners may have more available attention for imagery. However, a critical difference between a typical read-aloud and storytelling is pictures. Sadoski (1983, 1985) found that students reading non-illustrated stories reported more images. Additionally, students who read illustrated stories did not discriminate between their own mental images and the text's illustrations. Therefore, the absence of pictures in storytelling may prompt and challenge students to generate images that are self-relevant, not just primed by illustrations.



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# IMAGERY

## How to Use Visual Imagery



Follow these few simple steps to provide practice in developing students' mental images:

- **B**egin reading. Pause after a few sentences or paragraphs that contain good descriptive information.
- **S**hare the image you've created in your mind, and talk about which words from the book helped you "draw" your picture. Your picture can relate to the setting, the characters, or the actions. By doing this, you are modeling the kind of picture-making you want your students to do.
- **T**alk about how these pictures help you understand what's happening in the story.
- **C**ontinue reading. Pause again and share the new image you created. Then ask your students to share what they see, hear, taste, smell and feel. Ask what words helped them create the mental image and emotions. By doing this, you are providing them with practice for this new skill.
- **A**re your images identical? Probably not! This is a great time to talk about why your images might be different. Perhaps a student went on a school field trip or had a school assembly that changed the way he created the picture in his mind. Perhaps experiences you've had as an adult influenced what you "drew." These differences and our individual schema are important to understand and respect.
- **R**ead a longer portion of text and continue the sharing process.
- **O**nce this is a familiar skill, encourage your students to use mental imagery when they are reading by themselves. You can feel confident that these mental pictures will help them understand the story in an important way.



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Although mental imagery has been a hallmark of a good reader, in an increasingly multimedia world, visuals play a much more salient role in communication. Ironically, storytelling, by the absence of competing visuals, may represent an ideal setting to introduce the concept of mental imagery to young learners. The combination of dramatic narration with interactive discussions can naturally interest students in mental imagery. This practice seems particularly well-suited for preparing beginning readers to move from texts with high levels of pictorial support to pictureless chapter books (McTigue, 2010). I believe that imagery instruction via storytelling deserves future inquiry.



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