

Promoting Discipline & Learning

by Dr. Marvin Marshall

Visualization

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Visualization activities make brain compatible learning easy, fun, and engaging.

Brain compatible learning infers that learning will take place in a manner that is "natural." Unfortunately, however, many teachers expect students to learn in an "unnatural" way.

Let me explain by asking you to visualize the last time you dreamed. Not that you remember your dream, but did you dream in letters, in words, in sentences, in paragraphs? Or did you dream in pictures? We often forget that the act of reading is a relatively recent development in human development. Until recent years, very few people read. Reading is not a "natural" brain activity as is visualization.

Then how was history passed from generation to generation? The answer is in stories--stories that are told as people visualize them, as you will discover later in this article. You will also learn how to make reading more brain compatible.

Here is an example from my own classroom teaching of having my students read about and then learn the names of the 13 colonies that became the original United States of America. To make the learning easy, I classified the new states into divisions: New England, Mid-Atlantic, and Southern. We made maps, memorized the states, and reinforced the learning with repeated drills. Still some of my students were not successful in learning what I had taught. So I turned to visualization.

Follow me on this. Do as I suggest and say the *ANSWER* to each question **OUT LOUD**.

Visualize a cow. The cow's name is Georgette.

What's the cow's name?

It's a Jersey cow.

What kind of a cow?

The cow is sitting on the Empire State Building.

What is it sitting on?

And it's singing a couple of Christmas carols.

What is it singing?

Under its chin is a ham.

What's under its chin?

It's a Virginia ham.

What kind of ham?

The cow is wearing yellow underwear.

What's the cow wearing?

In its hoof is a pencil.

What's in its hoof?

And the cow is making a connect-the-dots drawing.

What kind of a drawing?

Of Marilyn Monroe.

Of whom?

Walking down a road.

Down a what?

Going to mass.

Going where?

What was the cow's name?

What kind of a cow was it?

Sitting on top of the _____

Singing a couple of _____

In its mouth pops a _____

What kind of a ham?

The cow is wearing _____

In its hoof was a _____

It was making what kind of a drawing?

Of?

Walking down a _____.

Going to _____.

Congratulations! You just named all original thirteen states:

Georgia, New Jersey, New York (the Empire State), the Carolinas (North and South Carolina), Virginia, New Hampshire (ham), Delaware (underwear), Pennsylvania (Pencilvania), Connecticut (connect the dots), Maryland (Marilyn), Rhode Island (road), Massachusetts (Mass).

My students had no difficulty remembering them because it was easy for the brain to visualize and connect each picture.

The same approach can be used for remembering the capital city of each state. Memorization experts suggest that the more outlandish the picture, the easier it is for the brain to picture and remember. The process becomes even more engaging if the students themselves create their own images. Here are two starters as examples. (1) The capital city of Connecticut is Hartford. See a valentine-type heart driving a Ford car connecting cutouts of itself (heart-Ford-cutouts). (2) The capital of New Hampshire is Concord. Visualize a rolled up ham piloting the thin and sleek Concord airplane?

Conjuring up vivid images (right brain) while reading a book (left brain) encourages hemispheric integration and leads to improved memory and more efficient learning. If you think of engaging both sides of the brain, no matter what you are teaching, the learner builds up more hooks and cues to ensure long-term memory. The brain can keep on making connections and, therefore, grow throughout life. Learning builds learning because, as we continue to learn, the neural networks of the brain augment, creating ever-abundant connections.

We can even improve reading comprehension by encouraging students to make mental pictures as they read and use their own experiences. For example, students can mentally image the entrance to their residence--the first room they enter, then the kitchen, and then other rooms. This imaging encourages focusing and generates additional richness of detail. A person can mentally stop in any room and visualize the furniture and decor. Using this technique, students can visualize or "peg" information to any location.

Here is a simple experiment you can do with your students. Find two similar reading selections. Have students read the first selection and then ask questions about the reading. Then take your students through a visualizing exercise. Use their bedroom as an example. Say, "As you read something that is important or that you wish to remember, make an image of it or describe it in two or three words and then place it on the bed. Place the next item in a different location and continue the procedure until the end of the reading selection." Have the students answer similar questions as they did before the imaging exercise. Explain to your students the reason for their improvement: *The brain remembers experiences and images better than words.*

Visualization can benefit in training, which is one reason that professional athletes use the technique. The process transforms complex motor procedures into automatic movements. The reason is that imaging the movements activates the same motor regions of the cerebral cortex that light up during the actual movement. Repeatedly visualizing the movements

strengthens or adds synaptic connections among relevant neurons. An alternative is to visualize the result--rather than the motions--such as a golf ball dropping into the cup. Golfer Tiger Woods reports that it is easier for him to sink puts when he imagines the rattle of the ball in the cup.

In learning information, any image can be created to enhance recall. For example, **to learn Stephen Covey's seven habits of highly effective people correctly and in proper order, I conjured up the following image.**

	<u>Habit</u>	<u>Mental placement on my body</u>
1.	Be Proactive	head
2.	Begin with the End in Mind	shoulders
3.	Put First Things First	chest
4.	Think Win/Win	belly
5.	First Seek to Understand, Then to be Understood	hips
6.	Synergize	back
7.	Sharpen the Saw	thighs

By creating this visualization, I have immediate recall. In addition, it took less time to create the image than if I had attempted to memorize the list through repetition. And reinforcement takes but a matter of moments.

"SAVER" is a simple acronym to remember when using imagery. "S" refers to *seeing* the image in the mind's eye. "A" refers to associating the image to some *action*. "V" refers to *vivid*. The more colorful and clearly defined the image, the easier recall will be. "E" refers to *exaggerate*. The more extraordinary the better! "R" refers to *reviewing* the image periodically. Reviewing assists long-term retention.

Visualization should be encouraged regularly. It is a simple technique to improve performance in reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and other areas. Most important, because imaging increases comprehension and recall--two of the most tested skills in schooling--it gives students considerable confidence and faith in themselves.

Take every opportunity to simplify the written word so that information can be created in a picture or experience. One way to do this is to convey information in story form. When we use this approach, we help create meaning and improve retention for the listener. Stories are retained longer than facts because they create visual images. Images touch emotions because they arouse sensations, which are remembered longer than facts.

When the history teacher was asked the secret for making the subject so interesting and students so enthused, the response was, "I can tell you in two words: *Tell stories*. An old storyteller's tale makes the point.

TRUTH walked around naked, and everyone shunned him.
STORY walked around in colored clothes, and everyone liked him.
TRUTH inquired of STORY, "What is it that you do that people like you?"
STORY lent TRUTH some colorful garb and interesting clothing.
Everyone began liking TRUTH.

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