

Mental Imagery: Improving Text Recall

Description: By constructing “mental pictures” of what they are reading and closely studying text illustrations, students increase their reading comprehension.



Reserve at least a full instructional session to introduce this comprehension strategy. (For effective-teaching tips, consult the guidelines presented in “*Introducing Academic Strategies to Students: A Direct-Instruction Approach*”).

Materials:

- Overhead transparencies of sample passages taken from expository or narrative texts, transparency markers
- Student copies of practice expository or narrative passages (optional) or reading/text books

Preparation:

- Prepare overheads of sample expository or narrative passages.

Intervention Script:

1. Tell students that they can remember more of what they read by:
 - making pictures in their mind of what they are reading
 - carefully studying pictures or illustrations that appear in their reading or text books
2. Using a “think-aloud” approach, read through a short sample narrative or expository passage. Pause at several points to tell the class what “mental pictures” come to your mind as you read; ask students to describe their own mental imagery as they react to the same passage. As you come across pictures or illustrations in the passage, study them and reflect aloud on what clues they give you about the passage’s meaning.
3. Read aloud from additional passages. Stop at key points in the passage and call on students to relate their mental imagery evoked by the passage or to give their interpretation of the significance of illustrations or pictures.
4. When students are able to use mental imagery independently, use a prompt at the start of reading assignments to cue them to use the strategy. You might say, for example, “Now we are going to read about what life is like in a country village in Zimbabwe. Remember to make pictures in your head about what you are reading and study the pictures carefully.”

Tips:

Have Your Students Become More Active Reading Participants. As your students become more adept at using mental imagery and text illustrations to comprehend their reading, enlist them in critical discussions about the strengths or drawbacks of a particular book, chapter, or article. How clearly does the author write? Is it easy or difficult to form mental pictures of the passage's content, and why? How would they grade the author on the quality and clarity of his or her illustrations?

References:

Gambrell, L.B. & Bales, R.B. (1986). Mental imagery and the comprehension-monitoring performance of fourth- and fifth-grade poor readers. *Reading Research Quarterly, 21*, 454-464.

Gambrell, L.B. & Jawitz, P.B. (1993). Mental imagery, text illustrations, and children's story comprehension and recall. *Reading Research Quarterly, 23*, 265-273.