

Ed Extras

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Picture This! Using Mental Imagery While Reading

One way to help a child comprehend what he is reading is to encourage him to visualize parts of the story in his mind. These “mind movies” help clarify information and increase understanding, and can be done with fiction or nonfiction text. The images can include any of the five senses.

Many of the books you read with your child may already contain beautiful illustrations, so try this visualization practice with the longer books you use as your read aloud. Or, sit facing your child and read a few pages without having your child look at the pictures. Then follow these few simple steps to provide your child with practice developing their mental images:

- Begin reading. Pause after a few sentences or paragraphs that contain good descriptive information.
- Share 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 child to do.
- Talk about how these pictures help you understand what’s happening in the story.
- Continue reading. Pause again and share the new image you created. Then ask your child to share what he sees, hears, tastes, smells and feels. Ask what words helped him create the mental image and emotions. By doing this, you are providing your child with practice with this new skill.
- Are your images identical? Probably not! This is a great time to talk about why your images might be different. Perhaps your child went on a school field trip or had a school assembly that changed the way they created the picture in their mind. Perhaps experiences you’ve had as an adult influenced what you “drew.” These differences are important to understand and respect.
- Read a longer portion of text and continue the sharing process.
- Once this is a familiar skill, encourage your child to use mental imagery when she is reading by herself. You can feel confident that these mental pictures will help your child understand the story in an important way.

For more ideas on using mental imagery, read “Pictures in the Minds: Magicians and Elephants”
www.ReadingRockets.org/articles/34040

