

WORLD OF FUN

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Using visual literacy in the Primary classroom

What is visual literacy?

Visual literacy is our understanding of all kinds of images, pictures and symbols in our everyday life. Very young children observe and try to make sense of pictures and objects around them before they even master their verbal skills.

What does it mean to be visually literate in the 21st Century?

Defined as a 21st Century skill by ELT specialists, being visually literate is ever-growing in importance in our media-driven world. We are bombarded with images, from online advertising to memes to emoji messages, which underlines how much traditional forms of interaction are changing. As educators we need to rise to the challenge of developing visual literacy skills in our classrooms, providing our students with the tools they need and the language necessary to talk about images.

Do we teach it?

As primary teachers we all use visual literacy in one form or another, whether it be through flashcards, mind maps, slide shows, posters, story books, videos, apps or any other form of visual stimulation which helps with language learning, but are we using it to its full potential? We know the value images bring to language learning, but are we aware of the life competencies we can teach through them? These span the most basic use of visual literacy of naming the object on a flashcard

to interpreting and evaluating a scene in a YLs test, to appreciating an image, to understanding and giving an opinion about a work of art. Images can provide a stimulus for creating something and by encouraging understanding we can help children as they grow to use images ethically, which is essential in our media-dominated world.

How can we teach key life competencies through visual literacy?

Let's look at some ideas exemplifying how we can explore and expand our students' visual literacy skills focusing on these key life competencies:

- Interpret
- Recognize
- Appreciate
- Understand
- Evaluate
- Create

As the common saying goes '*Variety is the spice of life!*' have a library of images to hand. Here are some examples: digital images, works of art, memes, emojis, graphs, mind maps and storyboards

Works of Art: select a work of art which is appropriate for your class. This Van Gogh piece is excellent for introducing furniture and other objects from *Fun skills* Level 2 you might find in a house.

1 Interpret: Where is this place? What furniture can you see in the picture?

But now let's go beyond the image. Here are some ideas for developing key visual literacy skills:

2 Recognise: Have you seen this picture before? Is it a painting? Do you think it's famous? Who do you think the bedroom belongs to? What does he or she look like? How old is he or she?



3 Appreciate: Do you like this painting? What do you think about the colours of the bedroom? Why do you think the painter decided to paint it?

4 Understand: Do you think the bedroom is old or modern? Why do you think that? Are there any clues in the picture?

5 Evaluate: Would you like a bedroom like this? Would you change anything in this bedroom? What do you have in your bedroom which is not in this picture?

6 Create: Let's create our own beautiful bedroom in an origami house.

Connect to the digital world...

It's important that as educators we connect with the world the children live in outside of the classroom. We can't ignore the influence and impact the digital revolution has had on their lives, so we need to adapt our teaching practices and choice of visual material to reflect this. Here is an example of an image which many children can relate to as it is similar in style to popular digital games they play and films they enjoy.



Ask children what they think about this farm from Fun skills Level 1. Do they like the design? If it was their farm would they add any other animals? Why don't you draw your animal in the style of the picture and another of you in the cube style?

You could even make a class poster with all the extra workers (pupils) and their animals.

Encourage creativity



Go beyond describing what the course characters look like and what they are wearing. Design a new outfit for them. Encourage children to explain why they chose this outfit. You could even design one for different seasons. Display the designs and vote on the class favourite!

Use graphs and mind maps...

5 Make a graph of your class hobbies.



6 Look at the graph. Write about your friends' hobbies.

In my class ...

- 1 children like painting.
- 2 children like
- 3 children
- 4 children
- 5 children

Let's reflect!

Visual literacy instruction is inclusive and caters for diversity in the classroom. Approximately 65% of learners are visual: even when reading a text without images, learners tend to visualize what they are reading to get a better understanding of a text. Children who are dyslexic or autistic have very strong visual skills and learn better through visual means. Images help improve memory and recall and through using mind maps and graphs children are able to make connections between different pieces of information which might otherwise have been lost.

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