

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

The Beat of the Street

Setting
(*realistic fiction*)



Visualizing

When we visualize, we create mental pictures of what we are reading that belong to us and no one else. It is about taking the words of the text and mixing them with our preconceived ideas to create pictures in the mind. Visualizing personalizes reading, keeps us engaged, and often prevents us from abandoning a book prematurely. It strengthens our inferential thinking. When we visualize, we are in fact inferring, but with mental images rather than words and thoughts.

Authors help readers visualize by using vivid language and sensory detail to bring their writing to life. Skillful authors act like old-time movie projectionists who crank up the projector with their vivid words and then sit back as the reel runs freely for the viewer. When authors write in this manner, we can imagine ourselves in the settings we read about.

When we have a lot of background knowledge of a particular place, we have a more detailed movie than when we know less about a setting. Combining the author's words with our background knowledge allows us to create mental images that enhance our understanding of the text and bring life to reading. One way that helps us to visualize is to close our eyes in order to picture the scenes in our mind. Another way is to draw pictures of the scenes to help us visualize the story.

Creating Mental Images That Go Beyond Visualizing

The term *visualizing* implies seeing pictures. Proficient readers create images from all their senses when they read. We-written text allows us to taste, touch, hear, and smell images, as well as see them when we read.

Visualizing: Movie vs. Book Versions of a Story

How well readers use visualization often becomes clear when they view film versions of the books they've read. Readers who use the visualization strategy are often disappointed with the film version, as it doesn't portray the story as they imagined it. Readers who don't visualize are often amazed by the film and prefer it to the book version.

Visualization Improves Reading Comprehension and Written Expression

Many readers don't always visualize so it is important that they are prompted to do so. Researchers have found that when children visualize, their reading comprehension is improved. They have also found that when children visualize when writing, they write significantly more than children who don't visualize. Their stories are more original, descriptive, coherent, and well organized. It appears that visualization facilitates language expression, encourages reflection during the composing process, and results in improved written expression.

References:

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