

**DRAWING OUT
THE BEST
IN YOUR BRAIN**

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DRAWING OUT THE BEST IN YOUR BRAIN

Drawing is a brain tool---a literacy tool, a memory tool and a higher-level thinking tool. It is a way to go beyond the world of words and numbers to the more fluid, accelerated world of mental movies. Students who can PICTURE what they think can read faster, write better and retain information longer. Much of school is audio or verbal sequential (students listening or reading)---while research has shown most students process visually-spatially (in pictures).

What follows are some techniques I have developed while working with more than one million students, teachers, administrators and parents around the world. After presenting teacher workshops and school assemblies for over twenty years, I have developed a profound respect for students' ability to turn other people's words into their own mental movies. I have learned that not only the art but the act of drawing helps students get the big picture, sequence and details of what they read. I have seen students use drawing to learn math, science, history, foreign languages---and build a life-long sense of the uniqueness of their own minds.

Drawing is a terrific learning tool because the better you can:

SEE it...

the better you can

SAY it...

and the better you can say it...the better you can

WRITE it...

and the better you can write it...the better you can

READ it.

For example, instead of having students write a story and then draw a picture---I have them draw a picture, tell a slew of stories and then choose one and write it. Talking to a partner from a picture---students can make lots of oral "rough drafts" and (without worrying about spelling or punctuation) focus on vocabulary and intonation. Students can go "on location" in their own imaginations and discover the writer in themselves before they even write a word.

Drawing is not only an amazing writing tool---it is also an unforgettable teaching tool---even if you "can't draw a straight line." Drawing on the board gets, keeps and directs attention and puts listening in "real time" so students can simultaneously see, hear and feel what you are saying. If you can't draw well, but draw anyway---you give every student in your class the permission to try, "fail" and feel safe.

It is, actually, possible to draw "poorly" well. A primitive drawing of a buffalo may suggest fifty other things and open the mind to metaphor. Drawing can be a language for capturing thoughts, feelings and the substance of things. Your first "writing" was drawing. At its best, drawing is a magnet for thoughts and a mixing bowl for concepts, emotions and the senses. It is a haven for "off road" thinking. We hear words. We read words. We write words. But most of us collect, store and retrieve our thoughts in pictures. Drawing can make all learning more lasting and meaningful by making it more creative and personal.

BRAIN POWER TECHNIQUES FROM JON PEARSON



RECALL COMB



SHOESTRING OUTLINE



SHOESTRING OUTLINE...SNAPSHOTS....WRITING



SEE---IMAGINE



SENSES---QUESTIONS



IMAGINARY TELEVISION



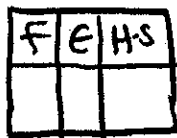
PHOTO ALBUM



OFFICIAL MISTAKE BOX



K-W-L-T-F



SELF-ESTEEM INVENTORY

BRAIN POWER TECHNIQUES

RECALL COMB

*This may be the world's easiest way to take notes. After you read something---stop and let the pictures flow by in your mind. Then, take a piece of paper and draw a vertical line down the middle. On the right of the line, list everything you recall from your reading---as fast as you can---in any order. Don't write full sentences---just key words and numbers and don't worry about spelling. The entries will look like "teeth" on a comb. Go fast, be random and capture your mental pictures in key words and numbers. It builds confidence because all you have to remember is what you **did** remember...not what you **should** have remembered. Re-read the material...add more teeth to your comb.*

On the left side of the line, draw icons of what you just listed. What you recall first and fastest you will recall best and longest. After making the random recall list---put the items in logical or chronological order and string the images into a story.

SHOESTRING OUTLINE

*If you make a string of pictures or even a chain of doodles you have a natural story or a movie (a sequence of events). You can take the images from your recall comb and string them into a little "necklace" of icons and use this to tell a story. The line of images forms a story line or outline for an oral or written story. Drawing and talking can deepen, broaden and accelerate reading and writing. Students may better write stories in their OWN words if they start with their own pictures. A string of pictures is easy to memorize and makes a great "outline" for an oral report. One image can represent a whole paragraph. Students who can SEE what they say---can SAY it more convincingly. Speaking **from** something is more powerful than simply talking **about** it. Pictures can draw us closer to experience.*

SHOESTRING...SNAPSHOT...WRITING

Fold a piece of paper into three horizontal sections. On the top section draw a shoestring outline. "Read" your story (your string of pictures) to a partner. Have your partner "read" it back to you and if she/he adds something you didn't say, don't say, "I didn't say that." Say, "Oh, I forgot to mention that." Listen next to your partner's story. Listen with your imagination not just your ears. The story will grow in detail and develop a pattern, a sequence. In the middle section of the paper have students draw four large squares. In each square have students draw a complete picture (snapshot) of a moment in their stories. Ultimately, they can draw a zillion snapshots from their story. The top section, then, represents the "plot," the middle section represents the "setting," and the third section is for the written story or "narrative."

SEE—IMAGINE

Have the students draw a large rectangle on a piece of paper. Let the students draw whatever they want in the rectangle (or something they are currently studying). After the students draw for maybe ten minutes have them stop and at the top of the paper on the left of the rectangle have them write the word "SEE." Students, then, list everything they can name in their picture---everything. A picture is a thousand words: "house," "horse," "castle," "armadillo," "perimeter," "tree." It is endless. It forces analyses and synonyms. The words, themselves, break into more words. "'Tree' breaks into "trunk," "branches," "leaves"... Students may list words in English, Spanish, or more drawings. Younger students may draw leaves and branches outside their original picture---to show they can break their picture down into its parts.

Next, have students switch their papers with a partner and have the partner write the word "IMAGINE" at the top of the paper to the right of the rectangle. Have students, now, list everything they do not see in their partner's picture. It does not have to make sense. After a few minutes, have the partners return their papers to the original persons who must, then, add to their pictures everything their partners did not see. Trick: if a partner has written the word "tiger" and you are not sure you can draw a tiger---draw a large packing crate and pretend the tiger is inside...draw the "tiger" behind a garage....draw it in the distance as a dot. Draw it well and be an "artist." Make a case for it and be an "attorney." The idea is to mix the familiar and the unexpected---to stretch your imagination and your vocabulary. Students learn to go beyond the seen to the unseen---to the implied and the inferred.

SENSES AND QUESTIONS

Here is a simple way to AMPLIFY any sentence. Let's say you read, "Ben Franklin walked into Philadelphia with a loaf of bread and muddy shoes." Stop, and get a picture of what you just read. SEE it and then explore it---go around inside it. Describe everything you can see in the picture. Pretend your head is a video camera (it is) and you are, actually, inside the scene moving around and inventorying in words all the details you can. Inventory all five senses---everything you can see, hear, feel, taste and smell. We don't simply have five senses. We have ten: the five actual and the five imagined. This is a way students can turn sentences in books into surround-sound-smell-touch-taste movies in their heads.

Next, have students ask "who," "what," "where," "how," "when," "why" questions about the scene. "Why did Ben Franklin come to Philadelphia?" "What was Philadelphia like in 1725?" "How did he feel leaving his family in Boston?" Making movies in their heads---inventory the movies---and asking questions... is what good students do naturally. Have students do it consciously, routinely, systematically. Gifted students tend to think in more detail, ask more questions

and make more connections than most people. The imagination thinks better in details and questions than simply in generalities and conclusions. I tell students, "Don't just hear what the teacher (or the author) says---see what he/she means!" I tell students, "Don't just get the point. Get the picture."

IMAGINARY TELEVISION

Have students draw a rectangle on a piece of paper. They have just created a television or computer screen. Now, they may draw whatever they wish on the screen. Only, they draw an imaginary picture---with their finger. They may draw something they just read (illustrating a single sentence) or make something up. Have students get with a partner and draw an imaginary picture out loud (describing minutely in words to a listening partner). The partner who is drawing will be moving his/her hand, eyes and mouth all at the same time. The listening partner simply watches and listens. It is easy to draw imaginary pictures---you don't have to get them "right." The process is more about accessing than executing images---and you can move at the speed of thinking. A picture can turn into a little video clip. Things can happen and change in your picture---you can zoom in and pan out. You learn to read like a movie director.

At the bottom of the "television" students can draw the four "reading comprehension channels"---SEE...HEAR...FEEL...and ACTION. I often have students represent these as a square...triangle...circle...and popcorn shape. Students describe in "real time" what they see...hear...feel (touch and emotion)...and what they predict will happen next in the picture (action). This is a fun reading tool. It can be simple or extraordinarily advanced. It can help ADHD students see how their thinking jumps around (while forcing them to stay in the rectangle and focused on the sentence they just read and are now drawing).

Struggling readers early in school may read a sentence, "The dog ran up the hill." as a stack of separate words and not a complete thought. A sentence is supposed to be a "complete thought" but making a complete scene out of a "complete thought" helps students personalize and amplify other people's words. I have had so many students who once hated to read---now love to read because they now see multi-sensory movies in their heads when they read. It is great for writing, as well. Students who can't think what to write next...can draw an imaginary picture of their last sentence and the increased level of detail (a picture is a thousand words) may issue forth more writing. Students may use the same imaginary TV screen all year.

PHOTO ALBUM

Have students fold a piece of paper into squares. Have them draw a one minute picture (with pencil or pen or crayon) in the topmost left hand square...then have them draw a completely different one minute picture in the next square...and the next square and the next square until they have filled the paper (maybe sixteen

squares). The little pictures now are like little "photos" in an album. Students can recall a story or an entire book in a quick photo album. They can draw the pictures as fast as they can in ANY order---then cut the pictures out and put them in chronological or logical order and tell the story in their own words or make up a new story. They can go back later and add detail to the pictures.

You might have students switch their drawings in a continuous line around the room. Make sure they switch their papers along their desks, not in the air (fast moving paper can cut). I, usually, have a bell and after a minute (or so) I ring it three times (which means the students have fifteen seconds to complete the square they are working on). Then, I ring the bell once and the students have to switch with the person on their left (or however you arrange it). Students can, also, just switch with themselves and go to the next square. Speed of thought is sometimes as important as depth.

OFFICIAL MISTAKE

Students are, often, afraid of making mistakes. I have them draw a little box in the lower left of their papers before drawing anything. This is the "official mistake" box. When a student is afraid he or she might make a mistake, the student makes a tally mark in the official mistake box. This turns a possible accident into a purposeful intention. It works great for young students but also may add some levity to older students' inner critics. An ON PURPOSE mistake is no longer a mistake. In the world of creativity: mistakes may be as important as objectives. After the student makes a mistake he or she can turn it into something and then put a dot over the tally mark and make it into an "i" which stands for imagination or idea. Have students draw a picture or write a story entirely out of "mistakes." It fosters divergent thought. If the purpose is to make mistakes, then there are no "mistakes" and instead a feeling of complete freedom. Think of all the "wrong" ways to draw a zebra. The possibilities are infinite.

K-W-L-T-F

KNOW...WANT TO KNOW...LEARNED...THINK...FEEL

This is an extension of the famous K-W-L process, only using drawing. Drawing may be the world's best pre-learning activity. Let's say students are about to study Columbus. Have them draw a picture of one of Columbus' ships (the Santa Maria, for example). They will want to have a picture to draw from but have them do it completely from memory. This forces questions and details. It is one thing to think generally about a subject but drawing forces students to think specifically, even minutely. Have the students list all the questions they have as they draw---"How many sails are there?...How many decks?...How many tables, chairs, cupboards?" It doesn't matter what their pictures look like. It is about wondering in detail and generating questions. Finally, have the students look at a picture of the Santa Maria, let's say, on page three eighty-eight of the textbook.

Make sure there IS a good picture of what they are going to draw before they draw it, but don't have them look at it until they are finished with their drawing. They will see the picture in the book a zillion times better with questions in their minds!!

A simple way to do this is to have your students fold their papers into three columns. In the first column they draw a picture of what they are about to study. In the second column they list any questions they have while drawing. Then, they look at the picture in the book or wherever and list all they learned. They may add the new details to their drawings. Know (draw it)...Want to know (list questions)...Learned (list answers). "T" stands for "Think" (what you think about what you learned and "F" stands for "Feel" (how you feel about what you have learned). For example, I read that Columbus's ship, the Nina, was about forty-five feet long. What do I think? I think it was SHORT. How do I feel?---claustrophobic and awe struck.

SELF-ESTEEM INVENTORY

It is said that people want two things: to have fun and to feel important. Here is a simple way to discover students' (anyone's) motivational systems. Have your students fold a paper into three columns. At the top of the first column have the students write the word "Fun" and then have them list in single words or short phrases (not full sentences) everything they do for fun: "eat"... "swim"... "read"... "pick lint off furniture." Have the students add to the list over time. Have them list what they see themselves doing when they are your age. You make a list, also. Don't make a list of twelve things---make a list of three hundred and fifty. For me, number 238 is "buffing my shoes on the back of my pant legs." It is not a trip to Disneyland, but it's fun. As a teacher, make a list of what you did for fun when you were the age of your students. No one need read your list.

At the top of column two, have students write the word "EXPERT" and then have the students list everything they do fairly well. ("Expert" does not mean perfect). Students may, also, list what they would LIKE to do well and they may circle these items. At the top of the third column have students write "HEROES and SHEROES" and have them list everyone they can think of (living, deceased or fictional) they look up to. Have students add to these lists all year and keep a copy of their lists at your desk if possible. Basically, what you then have is a list of what gives your students a sense of pleasure, mastery and values.

Also, maybe once a week have your students (even your family) make a VICTORY LIST---listing all the victories (individually and collectively) they have had during the week. Students then may make a list of everything they did (individually and as a class) that WORKED that week. Students begin to track during the week for victories and what works. It isn't a competition. It's just a list.

MOODJEES

This is how to become an instant artist. Most people when they draw something, draw the outline first and fill in. This invites fear because at each point you could mess up. Instead, start in the middle and scribble in little circular motions "moodjees" out to the edges. There is no way to make a mistake, because if you do---you can always "swallow" it with more moodjees and make a larger version of your drawing. If you are moodjeeing an alligator and mess up---moodjee a larger alligator.

In the words of Plato:

*"You can learn more about a person
in two hours of play than a year of talking."*

In the words of John F. Kennedy:

*"If you are not having fun,
you are not doing it right."*

In the words of one sixth grader after doing some of the activities:

"I feel young again."

THE ART OF LEARNING

LEARN FROM EVERYTHING WITH ALL OF YOURSELF.

**TURN ALL WAITING, WANTING AND WORRYING
INTO WATCHING.**

DAYDREAM INTO THE SUBJECT NOT JUST AWAY.

CONSTANTLY ASK "WHAT IF?" AND "WHAT ELSE?"

MAKE LEARNING SENSORY, NOVEL AND MEANINGFUL.

**ADD MYSTERY AND SURPRISE
TO CLARITY AND UNDERSTANDING.**

**HOW YOU THINK MAY BE MORE IMPORTANT
THAN **WHAT** YOU THINK.**

TURN TEACHING MINUTES INTO LEARNING MOMENTS.

FOSTER CURIOSITY, RESPONSIBILITY AND GRATITUDE.

THE BEST "GET AWAY" IS TO BE PERFECTLY PRESENT.

WRITE THINGS DOWN...RECALL GOES UP 600%.

**TO MAKE LEARNING MEANINGFUL AND LASTING...
MAKE IT CREATIVE AND PERSONAL.**

BE A PRODUCT OF YOUR DREAMS NOT YOUR DOUBTS.

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