

This article written in 1975 illustrates many ways to use visuals in English Language Arts, Foreign Language, and ESL classes. Today there is an abundance of electronic visuals.

Using Visual Material in the Foreign Language Classroom

by Harry Grover Tuttle

Foreign language students can benefit from many types of visual material—display cases, posters, flannel boards, wall charts, books, flashcards, overhead transparencies, television, chalkboards, flip charts, handouts, still pictures, filmstrips, slides, films, models, and teaching machines. The still or flat picture can prove to be a rich resource in the foreign language classroom. This type of material can easily be obtained from magazines, newspapers, books, catalogs, calendars, posters, advertisements, coloring books, comic books, postcards, prints, and travel brochures. It may be commercially made or made by the teacher or student. Teachers can create picture files from which they can readily select the visual material to fit a particular need.

Since the still picture can be used in all phases of the lesson—introduction, development, and evaluation—and in all of the language areas of listening, speaking, reading, writing, culture, vocabulary, and grammar, the teacher must select pictures based on specific objectives for the lesson part. In addition to this condition of suitability, a flat picture should also be well composed, clear in detail, realistic, typical, size related, effective in color or contrast, and large enough to be seen. Once a picture has been chosen, the teacher must consider how to show it. Will it be held up, passed around the class, shown through an opaque projector to make it larger, or referred to its location in the room? The teacher may decide to use more than one picture but should keep in mind that the careful use of a few pictures is better than the hasty use of many.

The teacher should be aware that some pictures present misconceptions, i.e., all Mexicans wear ponchos. The teacher can point out that certain things are true only for certain sections of a country at certain times.

Students can become more actively involved through the use of visual material. The teacher can stimulate students' creative expression through contrast, comparison, and continuity. Specific questions will help students to learn to "read" visual material better. They will learn, as Merton (1954) so adequately explains, to read the size, temperature, motion, sound, distance, depth, color, odor, speed, and weight of things in the picture. This ability to read visual material will help the student in extemporaneous talking or writing; in answering questions about visual material; or in observing cultural similarities and differences.

O'Rourke (1967) suggests a few of the many uses of visual material in aural comprehension testing: true—false vocabulary items; matching pictures to spoken statements; checking statements which are contained in a picture; listening to a paragraph and answering true—false questions based on pictures; and selecting pictures in response to questions. O'Rourke also enumerates the tremendous variety of speaking evaluation through pictures: pronunciation, making up questions, negating, combining the actions of two pictures, saying the action in another tense, modifying grammar structure, speaking fluently.

Reading can be tested using pictures. Ask students to arrange pictures in chronological sequence, to select pictures that describe a character or situation, to identify pictures that depict a typical action or attitude of a character. The testing of writing skills can likewise be enhanced by visual material. Students can write vocabulary items in a picture, write a series of actions in paragraph form, compare or contrast an item in two pictures, write questions about the picture, or explain a cultural point portrayed in the picture. To teach historical or cultural viewpoints, the students can be asked to select a picture that portrays a given country; to select a picture appropriate for a specific historical event; to explain why the depicted action is typical of a certain place; to tell why a certain situation exists in a picture; or to tell how the picture of a certain country is similar or different from its American counterpart.

Visual material lends excitement and interest to the foreign language class. It can be used in a variety of language activities. Most of the activities mentioned below take only a minute to do, so a great variety

of activities can be done during any one period or for a short time daily. One of the most effective methods is to have the students work in pairs. That way each student uses the language intensively during a short period of time. The following activities can also be performed as written exercises.

50 Activities Based on Visual Material

- 1) One student orally describes a picture for one minute to his partner.
- 2) One student describes a picture orally to a partner who then repeats the description, using the picture as an aid for recall.
- 3) One student orally describes the picture to another student who does not see it; the second student then repeats the description to the first student.
- 4) Two students look at a picture; then one student looks away while the other student asks him questions about it.
- 5) Two students look at the picture and compete to see who can make up more questions about it.
- 6) Two students make up questions about a picture; one student uses question words, the other does not use question words. A continuation of this exercise would be to have the students answer each other's questions orally or in writing.
- 7) One student orally describes a picture to a second student who then draws a copy of it.
- 8) One student orally describes a picture to another student who then is given a choice of pictures and must choose the one described.
- 9) Two students tell a story using a picture. One student tells what happened before the scene in the picture and the other tells what will happen afterward.
- 10) While one student orally describes a picture, the other student changes descriptive statements to questions.
- 11) While one student orally describes what is happening in a picture, the other student says the same thing in a different tense or in the negative.
- 12) While one student orally describes a picture, the other paraphrases what the first student is saying.
- 13) While one student orally describes a picture, the other repeats the same thing but changes all subjects to the plural or singular and makes all other necessary grammatical changes.
- 14) Two students look at a picture and one acts the angel conscience and the other the devil conscience to debate what the person in the picture should do in a certain situation.
- 15) Two students look at the same picture and one tells what will happen in an optimistic point of view while the other relates the future in a pessimistic point of view.
- 16) Two students look at the same picture and one tells all the good points about things in the picture and the second tells all the bad points.
- 17) Two students look at the same picture and as one describes the picture the other says the exact opposite, i.e., "the chair is big" will be changed to "the chair is small."
- 18) Two students look at the same picture and supply the dialogue for the people represented. (If there are more than two characters in the picture, group students accordingly.)
- 19) Two students look at the same picture and act out what is happening in the picture as they are describing it.
- 20) Two students look at the same picture and each pretends to be an object in the picture. The two objects then talk to each other.
- 21) One student selects an object in the picture and tries to sell it to the other student.
- 22) One student tells the other student all the colors in the picture and the second student tells what objects have those colors.
- 23) One student tells the other student what he would do in the shown situation. The other student then tells what he would do. At a more advanced level the second student might use a different verb construction such as "should have."
- 24) After selecting a picture, a student chooses a letter of the alphabet and then names as many objects as possible in the picture that begin with that letter. The student who names the most in one minute wins.
- 25) Two students look at the same picture; the first student names an object and describes it. The second student compares it to some other object in the picture. They do this for as many objects in the

picture as possible (at least 5). For example: first student, "The bush is large;" second student, "The tree is larger than the bush."

26) Two students look at the same picture; the first student names everything made of wood and then the second student names everything made of metal or plastic. See who can name the most objects.

27) Two students look at the same picture; the first tells how he would add to the picture to make it more attractive and the second tells what he would do to the picture to improve its appearance.

28) Two students look at the same picture; the first names all the pretty things in the picture and the second student then names all the ugly things in the picture.

29) Two students look at the same picture; the first student tells what mood he feels is represented in the picture. The second student tells him whether he agrees with him and why.

30) Two students look at the same picture; the first student tells the other about a similar experience in his own life. The second student then tells in what way the first person's experience is similar to the original picture.

31) One student is given two pictures by his partner. The first student describes all the similarities between the two pictures. The second student then describes all the differences between them. (He should not mention any that the first student mentioned.)

32) One student is given two pictures by his partner. The first student makes up a story about the two pictures. The second student uses the pictures in a different order to tell a different story.

33) One student is given two pictures by his partner. The first student chooses an object in one picture to put in the second picture and tells how the new object would change the picture. The second student does the same thing with a different object.

34) A student is given a picture by another student. The first student tells the physical location, the season of the year, the weather, the time of day, the health of the people involved, and their activities. The second student then tells all other information about the physical conditions and health of the people in the picture.

35) A student writes out a description of a picture and then omits at least one word per sentence which he puts at the bottom of the page. The other student then replaces the omitted words in the paragraph.

36) The first student describes the home and the family of the person in the picture. The second student tells how the described home and family is similar or different from his own.

37) A student selects a picture and tells what the person's favorite sports or hobbies are, where he does them, and how he does them.

38) A student writes a letter of about ten sentences telling a friend about the picture, pretending it is a tourist site, a vacation trip, historical incident, or a news story.

39) The first student contrasts objects in the picture, i.e., "The chair is big but the book is small." The second student compares the objects using equalities, i.e., "The chair is as heavy as the table."

40) One student tells another student how he would make his picture into a TV program or movie. The second student tells what he thinks about this program.

41) One student makes up a mystery story about the picture. Another student tries to solve the mystery by creating a possible solution.

42) One student gives another student a picture and specifies a mood. The second student then writes at least five sentences about the picture reflecting that mood. The first student then makes as few changes as possible on the written description to change it to a different mood which the second student suggests.

43) One student looks at a picture and describes cultural differences between the country depicted in the picture and the United States. The second student describes cultural similarities depicted in the picture.

44) Each of the two students lists as many vocabulary words as possible from a given picture. The student who writes down the most words wins.

45) One student starts a story based on the picture. After three sentences, the second student continues the story for three more sentences. The first student then continues for an additional three sentences. The second student ends the story with three sentences.

46) Given a vowel or consonant sound, the students say all the words, objects, actions, etc., in the picture which contain that sound.

47) One student makes a statement about the picture. The second student repeats the statement and adds to it by using a conjunction such as but or since.

- 48) Two students see how many different ways they can rearrange three pictures to tell different stories.
- 49) One student looks at a picture and tells how it is similar to his house, community, etc. The second student tells how it differs.
- 50) In turn, each of the two students selects a picture and tells why the other should visit the place or do the activity illustrated in the picture. A third student will decide who wins and explain why.

No picture is perfect for all situations. Each time a picture is used its effectiveness should be evaluated. The evaluation should include the suitability of the picture to the given topic, the maturity of the students, and the academic level and motivational level of the students. An evaluation will be helpful in subsequent uses of the picture.

Visual material, and particularly the flat picture, can play an imaginative role in foreign language instruction. The activities cited above are by no means all-inclusive. Visual material can be used in as many ways as you or your students' imaginations allow. The use of visual material will help make foreign language learning an enjoyable, life-like activity.

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