

4 Imaging

Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences has established the concept of the 'visual learner'. For all language users, though, whether 'visual' or not, words evoke images. For example, when we say a word such as 'world', an image flashes through our mind. One person's mental image of that word may be quite different from another's: the 'world' may be seen as a satellite picture, an old-fashioned globe or a conventional map of the world on a classroom wall, divided into different countries. At the same time, such mental images can be very powerful. One of the reasons that film adaptations of books are often so disappointing is that our imaginations have created something richer and we are disappointed by another person's vision that doesn't coincide with our own.

By triggering mental images, it is believed that learners retain language items and can then recall them more easily. In fact, those learners who can generate a lot of mental images have been found to perform better in certain memory tasks and achieve better academic results¹. Numerous experiments have proven that subjects learn and remember material that is concrete (imagery-related) better than that which is abstract. One of our tasks as language teachers then is to help those students who are less visual and have more difficulty in picturing experience. Some of the tasks in this unit aim to do just that. Such work becomes more challenging when considering the intense diet of visual images that many of our younger students receive on a daily basis. We are bombarded by so much visual stimuli that it has been claimed that attention spans among young people (the so-called 'digital natives') are becoming alarmingly short. Faced by this intense visual exposure, it is refreshing to give students a chance to look inwards. In many cases, our imaginations conjure up far richer images from within (from our mind's eye) than the ones we receive externally. In this way, we can take a step back from the need for sensory overload and expand our students' horizons. We are perhaps moving from talking of 'a short attention span to a broader attention range'².

¹ *Imagine That!* Puchta, Rinvolcuri, Arnold (Helbling/Cambridge University Press), 2007 is a useful resource book on using mental imagery in class.

² This quotation from Rushkoff I first came across in a talk by Herbert Puchta on teaching adolescent learners.

Imaging

In many respects, this chapter includes tasks which attempt to activate the mind's eye. For more sceptical or less visual students, the first task (4.1 Photo association) leads us in gently, introducing students to the notion of image association. Here, they have to find unexpected links between different mental images and order them in a logical sequence. This kind of image association is often used by advertisers (for example, a 'car' is often associated with 'freedom') as a marketing technique. In other tasks, external stimuli are provided: in 4.2 Questions to a portrait, students aim questions at a person on canvas, and, as they do so, they create an ever-stronger mental image of this person's identity. Other tasks are more game-like in nature: in 4.4 I am . . ., students are required to personify abstract objects, and in 4.6 Holding the image, students test their memories, retaining as many details as they can. We return to external stimuli in 4.7 Hotel rooms, in which the learners conjure up mental images regarding rooms and paths. The path is a particularly evocative image here, inviting learners to take separate journeys and describe where their particular paths are taking them. Such inner visualisations can be very powerful and profound. As in many other tasks in this book, the viewer is encouraged to interact fully with the image to create multiple meanings.

4.1 Photo association

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Outline | Students practise 'image' association, finding unexpected links between images and ordering them into a logical sequence. |
| Focus | Vocabulary sets according to the chosen lexical field. |
| Level | Intermediate–Advanced |
| Time | 30 minutes |
| Materials and preparation | Images to be accessed from: http://www.flickr.com/groups/gameofphotoassociation/ This is a group of photographers who regularly upload images into a sequence. One image reminds one photographer of another; in this way a chain of images is created. A selection of images from the above website link will be needed. Generate two PowerPoint presentations using these, one with the images in sequence and the other with the images mixed up. A computer and projector will be needed to display these in class. |

Procedure

- 1 Explain to students what word association is: *A game in which one word leads to another through association.* Write the following chain on the board to give them an idea:

Working with Images

DOG → CAT → MOUSE

- 2 Explain that we make these associations because words frequently co-occur in real language use (like *fish and chips*), and because words of similar or related meaning form semantic networks in the mind (like *fish, fin, scales*).
- 3 Practise with students, giving them the first and last word in a chain of three. They have to complete the word in between. Write on the board these sequences. What do the last two have in common?

APPLE → _____ → EVE

FARM → _____ → EGG

PARTY → _____ → FLIES

FOOT → _____ → PARK

Answers: Adam, hen, time, ball. The last two examples in the sequence feature a word which acts as a hinge between two others: *football – ball park*.

- 4 Seat the students in groups of three. Ask each group to put the words below into a logical sequence. Establish that there is not necessarily one correct sequence, but they have to justify their order.

doctor teeth apple white dentist

One sequence could be:

APPLE → DOCTOR → DENTIST → WHITE → TEETH

Reasoning: An apple a day keeps the doctor away – A doctor looks after people as does a dentist – A dentist wears a white jacket – Your teeth should be white if you go to the dentist regularly.

- 5 Explain that the same game can also be played with images. Show students a selection of approximately 20 photos from the image association group in flickr.com. The best way to present the images is by downloading them one by one and inserting them – with the order mixed up – into a PowerPoint presentation. (Remember to make another presentation with the images in the correct order so that you have a record of the original sequence.)
- 6 In groups, students sequence the images, looking for a visual link between them.
- 7 Students report back their sequences in open class. Show the PowerPoint presentation in the original sequence. Did the students' suggestions match? Emphasise again that there is not one 'correct' sequence.

Note

A way of exploiting the PowerPoint format called *Pecha Kucha* was devised in 2003 by two architects in Tokyo. *Pecha Kucha* is Japanese for ‘chit-chat’. Such presentations consist of 20 PowerPoint slides, each shown for 20 seconds. Therefore each talk lasts just under seven minutes. The idea is to create a series of concise talks (there are usually 14 presenters) in a given evening. Ask advanced learners to show their image/word associations in this *Pecha Kucha* format. This will add a competitive and fun element to their PowerPoint presentations.

Variation: Advertising

Word and image association lies at the heart of many successful advertising campaigns. Consider the images that you associate, for example, with cars (e.g. power, strength, elegance, open space, desert, wilderness, freedom). How has this image association been influenced by advertising campaigns and trends? For project work, students can collect images from different adverts, bring them to class the next day and ask their classmates what kind of product they belong to.

4.2 Questions to a portrait

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Outline | Students imagine and conduct a ‘conversation’ with a portrait. |
| Focus | Fluency practice. Practising question forms. |
| Level | Elementary–Advanced |
| Time | 30 minutes |
| Materials and preparation | CD-ROM images 4.2A Painting by Edvard Munch, self-portrait. The Night Wanderer; 4.2B ‘Roman’ portrait. You can choose any portrait for this. I have chosen a painting and a photograph to exemplify the idea. However, it is a good idea to choose portraits of an enigmatic nature. |
| Note | It is important for students to realise that there are no correct answers to their questions. They are asking the questions to an image of a person who cannot answer back. The idea is for the questions to create mental images about the identity of a person based on their own imaginations. In order for the images to remain enigmatic, remember not to give the names of the paintings or the painters to the class. |

Working with Images

Procedure

- 1 Show the self-portrait of Edvard Munch (CD-ROM 4.2A) to the students. Tell them to look at the image for about a minute without saying anything. Do not give them any other instructions at this stage.
- 2 In open class, students come up with questions, aiming them directly at the portrait, as if they were having a conversation with the person.

Note

Depending on the level of the class, the complexity of the question can vary, from *Where are you?* to *What have you been up to?* Be careful not to prompt at this stage. Let the questions emerge naturally from the group but make sure that all questions are asked in the second person.



Painting by Edvard Munch, self-portrait. *The Night Wanderer*,
© Munch Museum / Munch–Ellingsen Group, BONO, Oslo / DACS, London 2008

- 3 Students listen to each question, study the portrait closely, and imagine (but do not articulate) an answer in the voice of the person in the portrait.

Imaging

- 4 Carry on in this way, asking students to volunteer questions, pausing and then imagining the answers. Correct any errors. Make a note of the questions yourself.
 Sample questions (based on the Munch image) could be :
 - *How old are you?*
 - *Are you at home?*
 - *What are you thinking?*
 - *Where have you been this evening?*
 - *How are you feeling?*
 - *Why are you standing in that corridor?*
 - *Are you looking at somebody or at yourself?*
 - *What are you going to do next?*
- 5 Put the students in pairs or small groups. Ask them to recall the questions (prompt if necessary) and report back the answers that occurred to them. It is important for the class to answer in the first person, as if they were the person in the painting.
- 6 Each group then selects the best ‘answers’ and constructs a mental image of the person and how he/she is feeling at that time.
- 7 Students report back their mental images of this person to open class. How many of their mental images coincide?

Sample answer: The Munch portrait seems to sum up the artist’s anxiety, restlessness and loneliness. We get the idea of a person wandering aimlessly around his house at night, unable to sleep, and catching sight of his own reflection. The bare room and windows emphasise this sense of loneliness even more. Munch painted a number of different self-portraits, each of which reflects a different mood.

- 8 Students repeat the exercises with image 4.2B.

Variation: Adopting the voice

Ask one student to sit beside the portrait. He/she is responsible for adopting the voice of the person in the portrait and has to answer the questions from the whole class as if he/she were that person.

Acknowledgement: *The original idea of asking questions to a still portrait who ‘answers back’ comes from Imagine That!, by Arnold, J., Puchta, H. and Rinvoluceri, M., (Innsbruck: Helbling, 2007).*

See 4.4 I am . . . for a task which involves the personification of inanimate objects.

Working with Images

4.3 Flashbacks

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Outline | Students get into the mind of a character and write up their mental storyboard, which builds up to a final image. |
| Focus | Writing practice. Narrative tenses for story-making (past simple, past continuous, past perfect). |
| Level | Intermediate–Advanced |
| Time | 40 minutes |
| Materials | CD-ROM image 4.3 <i>Four thoughts</i> . Alternatively, find any image that has four people in it and prepare a short text to accompany preparation it. |

Procedure

- I Show the image *Four thoughts* (CD-ROM 4.3) to the students. It is better if you can project this onto a screen, but otherwise a photocopy will do. Ask the students to establish the relationship between the four people.



Four thoughts, © José María Cuéllar, <http://www.josemariacuellar.com>

Imaging

- 2 Read out the following text at a gentle pace. Ask the students to close their eyes while they listen to the thoughts of one of the four characters in the photo. Ask students to match it to the thoughts of one of the four people. With lower levels, hand out the story, and allow the students to read and listen at the same time. Get students to discuss their answers.

It's six in the morning. I can't remember it being night-time. Everything's a blur now. It's very light out here, so light that I have a headache. It's going to be hot today, but right now it's cool. I look around me, at the sea, at the sand, at the others – I don't even know how we ended up here. At least we're safe, though – that's the main thing. I stare at the sea and lose myself in it. Now gradually the images are coming back to me. The images of last night . . . and it all begins to make sense.

© Cambridge University Press 2008

PHOTOCOPIABLE

- 3 Tell the class that this photo is the final image of a story or the last scene of a movie. The students individually reconstruct the story of that night in their imagination.
- 4 Ask your students, individually, to draw a set of four picture frames (model on the board if necessary). This can include matchstick figures and symbols, to make it easier.
 For example, you could simply draw a picture of a bar, suggesting that this is where the four people started the evening, and a happy face suggesting how they were feeling then.
- 5 Monitor the students' drawing until they have completed the four squares in the storyboard.
- 6 Seat the students in small groups. Each member of the group now tells his/her story to the rest of the group. Ask them to consider the narrative tenses as they are telling the story and use the first person singular/plural to make the flashback more real.

Example:

At the start of the evening, we were all sitting in our favourite bar, when suddenly there was a tremendous noise that sounded like an explosion . . .

- 7 A volunteer from each group narrates their flashback story to the rest of the class. What similarities and differences are there between the stories? Are the stories tragic or comic?

Working with Images

Variation: Comic strips

This same task can be done with the final vignettes of comic strips, which may be more suitable for younger learners.

See 1.5 Who am I?

4.4 I am . . .

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Outline | Students create a mental image of an object, describing it in the first person to others who have to guess what it is. |
| Focus | Practising various lexical fields: materials, function, etc. Adverbs: <i>sometimes, often, usually</i> , etc. and their position in the sentence. |
| Level | Elementary–Pre-intermediate (young learners) |
| Time | 20 minutes |
| Note | This personification of objects is something students enjoy because it allows them to conjure up a number of different and unexpected images. |
| Materials and preparation | CD-ROM images 4.4A Illustration – All 12 objects; 4.4B–M Separate illustrated objects: Pyjamas, Flipflops, Keys, Flowers, Toothpaste, Remote control, Candles, Soap, Chips, Cereal, Kettle, Saucepan. Alternatively, prepare a set of flashcards for any lexical set you would like to cover/revise. |

Procedure

- 1 Prepare a set of flashcards based on a lexical set you want to revise, e.g. *furniture, animals, buildings, food, everyday objects*, or use the 12 images provided (CD-ROM 4.4 A–M).
- 2 Read the text below as an example, asking students to listen and guess the object:

I'm sometimes made of plastic.
I'm usually round.
I have many different shapes.
But I'm often quite small.
I have numbers.
I often sit next to the bed.
You usually use me during the week.
You need me but you don't like me.

Answer: Alarm clock

- 3 Seat the students in groups and hand out different cards to different groups. Students work together to describe the image by imagining it in the first person. Remind them that, for their descriptions, they should

Imaging

- consider these factors: material, size, shape, location, before going into greater detail, as they may give too much information away too quickly.
- 4 Students in each group take it in turns to read out their descriptions. The other groups try to imagine what is being described.
 - 5 Monitor accordingly to check that the descriptions correspond accurately to each image.

Variation: A Martian sends a postcard home

For higher levels. Ask students to think of an object from the point of view of a Martian. Use Craig Raine's poem, *A Martian Sends a Postcard Home*, as an example. Give the class the extract from the poem below and ask them to guess the object:

In homes, a haunted apparatus sleeps,
 that snores when you pick it up.
 If the ghost cries, they carry it
 to their lips and soothe it to sleep with sounds.
 And yet, they wake it up deliberately, by tickling with a finger . . .

© Craig Raine, 1979. Used by permission of David Godwin Associates
 From *Working with Images* © Cambridge University Press 2008

PHOTOCOPIABLE

Answer: Telephone

Explanation: It's a machine that does not do anything (it *sleeps*) until you pick it up. The *cries* of the *ghost* are when it rings. Then you talk to it (*carry it to [your] lips*) or answer it and when you have finished put it back to *sleep* or hang up. We *wake it* and [tickle it] *with a finger* when we answer it or want to call someone else.