

During-Reading Response: Visual Response or Drawing through the Text



In this article, **Lesley Roessing** shares ideas for helping readers visualise texts by drawing images as they read the text. This strategy helps to promote comprehension at deeper levels.

Much of the writing we assign our students is public writing: writing to communicate with others. Writing-to-learn is personal writing, writing that helps students increase comprehension of texts—fiction and non fiction—in all disciplines. Reader response compels readers to interact with the text and makes visible for readers and their teachers the depth of text comprehension. This was the sixth in a series of columns on scaffolding writing-to-learn by teaching a variety of reader response strategies before, during, and after reading.

Good readers visualize as they read a text. They use the words from the text, in combination with background knowledge and prior experiences, connections from their lives and other texts, and inferences made, to construct mental images. When readers create images in their minds that reflect or represent the ideas in the text, they comprehend text at deeper levels and they retain more information and understanding.

The most effective way to teach students to visualize is to teach readers to draw images as they read a text as a during-reading response strategy—visual response or ‘drawing through the text.’ When drawing through text, readers draw the important details, images, people, places, and events they are reading, noting the words from the text that helped them, as readers, form the image.

Advantages for Readers

There are a variety of advantages to guiding readers to create sketches of what they read as they read. All these advantages lead to an improvement in comprehension for struggling to proficient readers.

1. Readers read more slowly and carefully.

In *The Bad Habits of Good Readers*, (<https://www.hmhco.com/blog/the-bad-habits-of-good-readers>)

Carol Jago writes that avid readers often ‘value speed over reflection.’ Readers who read too quickly often miss key words,

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details, or even plot events. When they stop to not only draw but to contemplate what they should draw or to plan a drawing, readers slow down their reading.

- 2. Readers need to read all of the text.** Jago also points out that good readers ‘Skip anything they find boring.’ When they are choosing what to draw, readers need to read everything and weigh the relative importance of parts of the text. During an exciting plot development, is the description of the ‘haunted’ house actually important to what occurs? Does the physical description of a character influence her personality and future decisions? Is the scientific theory that was described in the article as being disproved actually more important to the meaning of the article than the theory that was eventually proven? Was the scientist's background important to understanding his motivations?
- 3. Generating an image while reading requires the reader to be actively engaged with the text.** Readers must engage critically with text to make judgments about what and how to draw. When drawing, readers are interpreting text and analyzing the ways in which texts represent ideas. Engagement is necessary for evaluation, synthesis, and higher-order thinking skills.
- 4. Readers look for meaning in words.** One can't illustrate a scene or event unless one understands what the author is saying. Some readers will draw literal representations, and others will draw symbolic representations. One student drew a simple 2-dimensional square to represent Charlie at the beginning of the short story *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes. As Charlie's IQ increased, the square became 3-dimensional and more elaborate in this reader's illustrations.
- 5. Readers determine what is important in the article.** Readers cannot depict everything, so they must distinguish what is significant rather than merely interesting. The teacher may want to limit the number of drawings for an article or text to engender the use of this strategy to develop more discerning readers.

- 6. Readers access prior knowledge or make connections to their experiences in life and through other texts to create the drawings.** Sometimes readers will conduct a little on-the-spot (authentic) research to consider how to draw something in the text. Students were reading a text about animal dads. In one section it talked about emperor penguins. A student asked if he could use his computer to find out if and how emperor penguins looked different from regular penguins.
- 7. Drawing makes abstract concepts in text more concrete and personal.** Through their sketches, many times readers will represent abstract concepts and complex ideas in a way that is easier to understand, a real-world skill that often becomes necessary in explaining concepts to others.
- 8. Readers will retain more information from their reading.** Cognitive research shows that visual is more memorable than verbal. Creating an image while reading requires the reader to be actively engaged with the text while reading, which not only improves comprehension, but improves recall of what was read. According to Haig Kouyoumdjian, Ph.D. in *Learning Through Visuals: Visual Imagery in the Classroom*, ‘A large body of research indicates that visual cues help us to better retrieve and remember information’.

(<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/get-psyched/201207/learning-through-visuals>).

Directions for Drawing through the Text

This during-reading response strategy is a very simple technique as long as students connect what they draw to what they are reading and realize that they do not have to be artists. Students can be encouraged to draw people as stick figures and not to worry about how elaborately they draw.

1. Teachers give students an article, short text, book chapter, or poem to read.
2. As they are reading, every few paragraphs or stanzas, readers should underline or highlight key words or phrases and draw what they are picturing in the margin. Readers can be encouraged to draw arrows from the words to parts of the drawing.
3. When they finish reading the text, readers read vertically down the column to review a summary of the text they read and ascertain if they left out any key details or plot elements. When artists review their own drawings, they can literally see if they have omitted any essential information or lost the sequencing of events.

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- When teachers read down the column, they will realize their readers' understanding of the text.
- If they are reading a common text, readers can compare their depictions with a partner, noting there are no correct 'answers.' When they compare, images most likely will be different. Readers may focus on different parts of the text, or readers may have different prior/background knowledge or experience. As with any reader response, responses should be unique and personal.
- Afterwards, ask the students to write a few sentences about how 'drawing through the article' helped them understand what they were reading.

A 6th grade student draws through an article in Social Studies class.

How Native American Slaveholders Complicate the Trail of Tears Narrative
 The new exhibition 'Americans' at the National Museum of the American Indian prompts a deeper dive for historic truths
 By Ryan P. Smith - Smithsonian.com March 6, 2018

When you think of the Trail of Tears, you likely imagine a long procession of suffering Cherokee Indians forced westward by a villainous Andrew Jackson. Perhaps you envision unscrupulous white slaveholders, whose interest in growing a plantation economy underlay the decision to expel the Cherokee, flooding in to take their place east of the Mississippi River.

What you probably don't picture are Cherokee slaveholders, foremost among them Cherokee Chief John Ross. What you probably don't picture are the numerous African-American slaves, Cherokee-owned, who made the brutal march themselves, or else were shipped en masse to what is now Oklahoma aboard cramped boats by their wealthy Indian masters. And what you may not know is that the federal policy of Indian removal, which ranged far beyond the Trail of Tears and the Cherokee, was not simply the vindictive scheme of Andrew Jackson, but rather a popularly endorsed, congressionally sanctioned campaign spanning the administrations of nine separate presidents.

These uncomfortable complications in the narrative were brought to the forefront at a recent event held at the National Museum of the American Indian. Titled "Finding Common Ground," the symposium offered a deep dive into intersectional African-American and Native American history. For museum curator Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche), who has overseen the design and opening of the widely lauded "Americans" exhibition now on view on the museum's third floor, it is imperative to provide the museum-going public with an unflinching history, even when doing so is painful.

"I used to like history," Smith told the crowd ruefully. "And sometimes, I still do. But not most of the time. Most of the time, history and I are frenemies at best." In the case of the Trail of Tears and the enslavement of blacks by prominent members of all five so-called "Civilized Tribes" (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole), Smith went one step further, likening the ugly truth of history to a "ranging, snarling dog standing between you and a crowd-pleasing narrative."

"Obviously," Smith said, "the story should be, needs to be, that the enslaved black people and soon-to-be-exiled red people would join forces and defeat their oppressor." But such was not the case—far from it. "The Five Civilized Tribes were deeply committed to slavery; established their own racialized black codes, immediately reestablished slavery when they arrived in Indian territory, rebuilt their nations with slave labor, crushed slave rebellions, and enthusiastically sided with the Confederacy in the Civil War."

Students commented on the advantages of trying this response method:

Drawing through the article is a lot of help to me because it shows how it happened. I can comprehend the information better by illustrating it. Not only does it help me understand it a bit more, but it helps me figure out what happened based on key terms and details.

Sketching through the article helped me visualize what was happening in the article. It was a good reading strategy because not only can it help me visualize an image, but you can use a picture to help you comprehend or understand the meaning of a word. This helped me because there were words in the article that I didn't know.

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Truth?

In other words, the truth is about as far a cry from a "crowd-pleasing narrative" as you could possibly get. "Do you want to hear that?" Smith asked the audience. "I don't think so. Nobody does." And yet, Smith is firm in his belief that it is a museum's duty to embrace and elucidate ambiguity, not sweep it under the rug in the pursuit of some cleaner fiction.

Tiya Miles, an African-American historian at the University of Michigan, agrees. At the "Finding Common Ground" event, she meticulously laid out primary source evidence to paint a picture of Indian/African-American relations in the years leading up to the Civil War.

Native Americans, she said, had themselves been enslaved, even before African-Americans, and the two groups "were enslaved for approximately 150 years in tandem." It wasn't until the mid 18th century that the bondage of Native Americans began to wane as Africans were imported in greater and greater numbers. Increasingly, where white colonists viewed Africans as little more than mindless beasts of burden, they saw Native Americans as something more: "noble savages," unrefined but courageous and fierce.

Native American ownership of black slaves came about as a way for Native Americans to illustrate their societal sophistication to white settlers. "They were working hard to comply with government dictates that told native people that in order to be protected and secure in their land base, they had to prove their level of 'civilization,'" Miles explained.

How would slave ownership prove civilization? The answer, Miles contends, is that in capitalist America, slaves became tokens of economic success. The more slaves you owned, the more serious a businessperson you were, and the more serious a businessperson you were, the fitter you were to join the ranks of "civilized society." It's worth remembering, as Paul Chaat Smith says, that while most Native Americans did not own slaves, neither did most Mississippi whites. Slave ownership was a serious status symbol.

Smith and Miles agree that much of early American history is explained poorly by modern morality but effectively by simple economics and power dynamics. "The Cherokee owned slaves for the same reasons their white neighbors did. They knew exactly what they were doing. In truth," Smith said, the Cherokee and other "Civilized Tribes were not that complicated. They were willful and determined oppressors of blacks they owned, enthusiastic participants in a global economy driven by cotton, and believers in the idea that they were equal to whites and superior to blacks."

None of this lessens the very real hardship endured by Cherokee and other Native Americans compelled to abandon their homelands as a result of the Indian Removal Act. Signed into law in the spring of 1830, the bill had been rigorously debated in the Senate (where it was endorsed with a 28-19 vote) that April and in the House of Representatives (where it prevailed 102-97) that May.

Their teacher commented, 'This assignment allowed me to check what my students knew from reading the article. It was beneficial for the students as a reading strategy because they were able to form images in their minds. They were able to replace written annotations that we typically use with illustrations. As the students drew, they used their margins as a miniature storyboard to explain the information from the text.'

In lieu of drawing on a photocopied article, an adaptation of the double-entry journal form (see April 2018 [AMLE Magazine](#) for an article on double-entry journals) can be substituted. Teachers can direct readers to copy words, phrases, or sentences that are important to the understanding of the novel or textbook they are reading on the left side of the journal and sketch what they visualize on the right side.

Advantages for Teachers

7th grade English-Language Arts students create visual responses to NEWSELA articles. Page 2 of each article is shown.

NEWSELA

The question now is whether the country's new two-child rule will undo the effects of the one-child rule. The Chinese government hopes that the new rule will help fix some of the country's problems.

The greatest benefits of the rule change will take time to appear. Some effects will become apparent more quickly. One major effect has to do with family spending and Chinese businesses. The new rule will likely lead to an increase in the number of children per household, which in turn will cause families to spend more money. This would help Chinese businesses.

Toy Story

Currently, families in China save an unusually large amount of money. This forces many Chinese businesses to sell to other countries. The economy, or level of business activity and the availability of jobs, would improve if Chinese families started spending more and saving less, allowing businesses to sell more goods and services within China.

As families start having second children, they will have little choice but to spend more. After all, children are expensive. The added spending will also boost sales of children's books, toys, and bicycles. With time, demand for housing and medicine will increase too.

The two-child rule will also change the balance of China's aging population. The number of young people in China went down under the one-child rule. In 1970, more than half of the people were under the age of 20. By 2010, only about a quarter of the people were under 20. Meanwhile, the share of people above the age of 60 doubled during that time. Overall, the Chinese population has gotten older.

Under Pressure

This has put pressure on young people in China. A large portion of the population is elderly, and more and more elderly people retire each year. There are not enough working people to support them. The imbalance presents challenges for families. Most people born under the one-child rule will have to support two parents without any help from siblings. When the two-child generation becomes middle-aged, its members will each have to support only one elderly person, on average, helping to fix some of the problems caused by China's aging population. It will take many years, though, for these children to start.

The purpose of during-reader response in general and drawing through the text specifically are twofold: 1) readers increase comprehension, especially of complex text, and 2) teachers can ‘see’ how their readers comprehend text. Readers' pictorial response is as varied as their verbal reflections, which gives the teacher more information about students as readers. Using drawings to retell a story, a chapter, or a section of a book—whether fiction or non fiction—is more than a simple summary of events. It is synthesis, and from the drawings the teacher can recognize and evaluate how and if the reader comprehends the text.

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NEWSELA

Little Known About Three Men

Very little is known about the men, who are all Korean-American. Kim Dong Chul is a former Virginia resident who had reportedly been a co-organizer on North Korea's border with Russia. He had been punished with 10 years in prison with hard labor after being convicted of spying. Kim Hae Sang and Tony Kim both taught at a university in Pyongyang that was founded with donations from Christian groups. They had been held for about one year and apparently had not been sent to court.

Tony Kim's son, Sol Kim, a graduate student in California, is the only relative of the detainees to have publicly begged for their freedom. After learning of the release, his family expressed gratitude and credited Trump for engaging directly with North Korea.

State of War Since 1950

North Korea and the U.S. have remained in a state of war since the 1950-1953 Korean War. The two countries do not have formal diplomatic ties. This complicates efforts to handle the cases of American detainees. Typically, Swedish diplomats based in North Korea handle U.S. diplomatic affairs.

Pompeo, the most senior U.S. official to meet with a North Korean leader since 2000, was making his second visit to the isolated nation in five weeks — and less than two weeks after becoming a top diplomat.

Pompeo said Wednesday he was "thrilled" the men were now out.

Not Back Home Yet, But Happy

"Though we're not quite back home yet, I welcomed them back," he said, recounting his first words with the men after they were freed. "They were happy to be with us on this plane to be sure," he said.

The three boarded when most of the U.S. delegation had already got on the plane. They were seated with medical personnel in a curtained-off area of the aircraft.

After arriving at a stop in Japan, the men transferred to another plane with more medical facilities and landed at Joint Base Andrews outside Washington on Thursday morning, where Trump greeted them.

Handwritten notes and drawings:

- Stick figures labeled 'Kim Dong Chul', 'Kim Hae Sang', 'Tony Kim', and 'Trump'.
- Annotation: 'Welcome back home' with an arrow pointing to the text.
- Annotation: 'Drawing while reading made it easier to visualize. It didn't just help me see, it made me feel I was there.'
- Annotations: '2 weeks later', 'got to North Korea', 'got to North Korea', 'welcome back home'.

A teacher can observe when readers have difficulty making inferences or misinterpret what they read. For example, in Jewell Parker Rhodes' novel *Ghost Boys*, if a reader draws Jerome as a traditional ghost connected with hauntings rather than his invisible (to most) 12-year-old self, the teacher might question whether he comprehended the role of the character and the other ghost boys as black boys who were killed but haven't left, maybe fulfilling a purpose for the living.

A reader may not realize that a word has multiple meanings. If a reader reads that a character was ‘intoxicated with power’ and draws a figure that appears drunk, the teacher knows he does not realize there are multiple meanings for the word *intoxicated*.

Teachers can note miscues. Readers may misread actual words or miss parts of phrases. One student drew a casket for a character's funeral when the text actually

said, ‘James felt like he had died.’ Likewise some students, especially non-native English speakers, may take idioms or metaphors literally, which become apparent through their depictions.

Conclusion

Reader response ensures that reading becomes an interactive activity; constructing meaning from text begins with readers' unique connections with text. Visual response, or drawing through the text, is yet another form of during-reading response that expands readers' writing-to-learn toolboxes so that response becomes effective for each individual reader and each reading experience.

A middle school and high school teacher for twenty years, **Lesley Roessing** was the Founding Director of the Coastal Savannah Writing Project at Georgia Southern University where she was also a Senior Lecturer in the College of Education. Prior to retirement she served as a Literacy Consultant with a K-8 school.



Lesley is the author of five books for educators and she has also written articles on literacy for AMLE, NCTE, and NWP publications and is a frequent guest columnist for *YA Wednesday*. She posts strategies, lessons, and book reviews on her Facebook Page to support teachers. Readers are invited to join Lesley's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/lesley.roessing>

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Please note that American spelling and phraseology has been retained to preserve the originality of the article.

Books by Lesley Roessing:

Bridging the Gap: Reading Critically & Writing Meaningfully to Get to the Core

Comma Quest: The Rules They Followed. The Sentences They Saved

No More 'Us' & 'Them': Classroom Lessons and Activities to Promote Peer Respect

The Write to Read: Response Journals That Increase Comprehension

Talking Texts: A Teachers' Guide to Book Clubs across the Curriculum