

Using Visual-Spatial Strengths to Learn New Material

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I talk to a lot of teachers about how they can best reach the visual-spatial learners in their classes, those who think in images and see the whole picture, not in words or step-by-step. Many of these teachers tell me that they try to incorporate visual tricks so their students can master the material that must be memorized. But, there are things you can do, as a parent, to help your visual-spatial student make learning permanent, as well. Here are some examples.

Take the information your children must memorize and have them create a silly story with it. I once met an incredibly dynamic teacher and conference presenter named Jon Pearson (www.createlearning.com) who taught the 13 colonies by having his audience memorize a ridiculous story—in pictures that participants created in their minds—of a Jersey cow named Georgia, atop the Empire State Building. Can you “see” New Jersey, Georgia and New York here? The tale went on to include all 13 colonies and after each line we were instructed to create an image in our mind’s eye while we repeated the line back to him:

There’s a cow named **Georgia** (Georgia)
It’s a **Jersey** cow (New Jersey)
She’s sitting on top of the **Empire State**
Building (New York)
She’s singing a couple of Christmas **carols**
(North and South Carolina)
Under her arm is a **Virginia ham**
(Virginia and New Hampshire)
The cow is wearing a pair of yellow **underwear**
(Rhymes with Delaware)
In its hoof is a **pencil** (Pennsylvania)
The cow is making a **Connect**-the-dots
drawing (Connecticut)
Of **Marilyn** Monroe (Maryland)
Walking down a **road** (Rhode Island)
Going to **mass** (Massachusetts)



When Jon was done, every member of the audience could accurately recall the ridiculous images each had mentally created and, hence, all 13 colonies. The best part is that your children don't have to be artists to accomplish this. If they want the images drawn, not just imagined, stick figures work just fine. As long as the story is silly and funny and you use color, exaggerated sizes and humor to convey the new material, it will be remembered. They can use this trick to remember so many different types of material, from historical data to science principles, and so much more.

Why do you suppose beginning piano students are taught the notes of the scale as Every Good Boy Does Fine? Because it works to stick in the student's mind. Why did we learn the letters of the alphabet to the tune of *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*? Because catchy tunes serve as an anchor and they make new information permanent and retrievable.

Or, show your children how to use acronyms for remembering strings of words. Have you seen the trick for memorizing the Great Lakes?

H	Huron
O	Ontario
M	Michigan
E	Erie
S	Superior

When you read them going down, the first letter of each of the lakes spells out the word, "homes." A Canadian woman I met while presenting in Australia taught me that if you learn this as "Super Man Helps Every One" (Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, Ontario), then you've memorized them in geographical order!

Creating acronyms and mnemonic devices are a helpful way to memorize a wide variety of material, especially if you can make the acronym stand for something silly, because humor engages the right hemisphere of the brain, the strongest side for visual-spatial learners. My oldest son, had to memorize this information for his science class:

Domain
Kingdom
Phylum
Class
Order
Family
Genus
Species

So he created this silly "headline" to remember the order:

Darwin Kracks Porpoise Code Orders Families to Group Specialist

It's meaningless and ridiculous, which makes it memorable! Try this with your kids the next time they have a string of material to memorize.



A dear friend of mine wrote me with this:

I took an exhausting/exhilarating 16-hour reflexology certification course this past weekend. I was told that memorizing the official 47-word definition of reflexology – exactly, word for word, was worth 15 points on the Certification exam. First I thought, I can never do this. Then, I decided I would make a song out of it!! I put it to a familiar tune! THAT came from YOU!! (Personal communication, E. Meckstroth, October, 2004.)

Put the information your children are trying to learn to the tune of a familiar song, like *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*, or *Three Blind Mice*, or even *Happy Birthday*. Always remember, visual-spatial learners thrive on the use of color, humor, music, hands-on activities—anything that gets the right hemisphere of the brain into the act. Such techniques are sure to make the learning fun and permanent.

Create a game out of new material your children are learning. This works great for memorizing capitals to states, countries to continents, specific animals of a species, or any other information that includes two groups of data that are related to each other. Matching games like “Concentration” don’t take long to create, are fun to play and can help you remember which information goes with what. Just take some blank white index cards for recording your information. You can create each note card with words or drawings, whatever works best for your children .

Let’s suppose they are trying to memorize the states’ capitals. Make a card for every state, using an outline of the shape of the state with the name of that state included somewhere on or above the outline of it. Then, make a card for every capital. You can make up silly stories if that helps remember the names of the capitals. (Springfield, IL could include a drawing of a field of springs, for example.)

You can also use color to help your children remember which capitals go with which states. Just have them include color in the drawing or put a dot of color somewhere and use the same color on the card that matches. This will be a good way to confirm your selections as they play the game, too.

Once all the cards have been created, lay them face down and play the traditional game of concentration where you match capital to state. (You’ll probably want to start with just five or seven states and their capitals and gradually increase the number.)

No matter what material must be memorized, show your children how to call upon their strengths—using color, humor, music, rhyme, etc.—to learn it and be able to recall it later.

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