

Visual Aids

‘A picture is worth a thousand words.’ Have you read the book of Ezekiel and wished for a picture? Ezekiel saw in vision creatures and objects with which he was unfamiliar; with which we are unfamiliar. Turn in your Bible to Ezekiel, chapter 1, and read about his vision. Can you picture what he saw in your mind? It is difficult. After reading the description of the vision and closing the Bible can you describe the vision else. How much easier it would be with a picture. The following Chinese saying points this out:

If I hear it, I forget it
If I see it, I remember it
If I do it, I know it.

The more senses that are used, the more learning takes place. An effective cooking school tells information on healthful eating (hearing), prepares the food (visual), cooks the food (smell), serves the food (touch and taste), and to be most effective involves the audience in the food preparation as well.

Use visual aids:

- To make teaching clear,
- To make teaching a part of one’s personal experience,
- To bring the teaching to mind in the future when the visual aid is seen,
- To involve more senses (it helps with learning),
- To add interest, and
- To draw a crowd (especially slides, films and videos).

But there may be some problems too. A person who is not used to looking at pictures may see something entirely different from what was planned. Any visual aids must be ones that the audience is used to seeing and should be related to their background. A picture of a fly enlarged on a poster for 20 people in an audience to see may have no meaning to certain people because they never seen a fly that large. Many objects have a specific cultural meaning that has no meaning at all to another culture. People and clothing in the pictures may look so different that the audience does not relate to them as similar people. Ask the audience what they see in a picture.

When the words ‘visual aids’ are used, what comes to your mind? Pictures? Posters? Flannelgraphs? Slides? Films? Hours of preparation? Expensive equipment? Unavailable electricity? These may all be a part of visual aids. But visual aids may not mean any of these things.

Common Objects

Visual aids may be objects commonly seen or even used in life’s usual activities. The master teacher, Jesus, frequently used objects from Judean agricultural life to illustrate His teachings.

His hearers frequently saw these objects as they went about their daily tasks and each time were reminded of Jesus’ teaching.

Shepherd	Matt. 25:32, 26:31, John 10:1-16
Sower	Matt. 13:3-9, 13:18-43, John 4:35-38
Flowers	Luke 12:27-31

Birds	Luke 12:6 & 24, Matt.10:28-31
Grapevines	John 15:1-8
Salt	Matt. 5:13, Mark 9:49-50

This partial list shows how frequently Jesus used visual aids and how appropriate they were.

Look around your home, the outdoors, the market where you shop, etc. What do you see that might be used to illustrate your teaching? Here are a few examples to stimulate your imagination:

1. *Building Blocks.* What material is used for building the homes of your audience? Wooden blocks can represent bricks, adobe, etc. An attractive home uses a lot of bricks and mortar but also nails, roofing, door knobs, etc. A healthy body needs basic food plus a variety of other foods.
2. *Large cooking pot and a small cooking pot.* When each is filled with water, which heats fastest? When the water is boiling and the pots are removed from the fire, which cools the fastest? The big pot represents adults, the small pot children. Children get hot and cold faster than adults, so they need more protection.
3. *Beads.* Beads strung together can represent protein. Pieces of the circle represent incomplete protein. Other pieces must be put together to make a complete circle. Corn has only a portion of the protein chain. We need to eat other foods with corn for adequate protein.
4. *Fire.* Firewood kindling burns quickly. For a long-burning fire bigger pieces must be used. Kindling represents food the body uses quickly. Larger pieces represent proteins, fats, unrefined carbohydrates which the body uses slower and give energy for the day.
5. *Imitation store.* Set up a store with small portions of each item. Each person in the audience takes turns shopping for a balanced meal.
6. *Car (use a toy).* This represents the body. When taking a trip, petrol is necessary at the beginning of the trip. The body needs food at the beginning of the day to function well. This illustration is to show the importance of a good breakfast.
7. *Food.* Demonstrate selection of a balanced diet.

What are the advantages and the disadvantages of using common objects as visual aids?

Advantages

- They are well understood by the audience.
- They are frequently seen - and the teaching remembered.
- Inexpensive.
- Readily available.
- Relate well to the cultural/experience background of the hearers.
- Easily available so don't need to be stored.
- No electricity needed.

Disadvantages

- The teacher needs creativity to recognize how the objects can illustrate the class.
- The teacher must be acquainted with local customs.
- A class must be 'put together'. It cannot be purchased.
- The objects can be bulky to carry to class.
- It does not draw a crowd if an attention-getter is needed.

Easy to prepare/prepared visual aids

Flannelgraph

A flannelgraph board is a relatively inexpensive, readily available visual aid. Pictures can be cut from magazines or drawn and backed with flannel or sandpaper. There are resources for purchasing flannelgraph teaching aids (see Appendix). Pellon is an alternative material on which pictures can be drawn or painted. Books which explain how to make your own pictures are available (see Appendix).

Advantages

- Same pictures adaptable for several stories or classes
- Inexpensive
- Attractive
- Relatively easy to make
- Minimal equipment needed
- Prepared classes available for purchase
- May have audience participation in placing pictures on the board
- Adaptable for discussion

Disadvantages

- Need to be carefully stored to prevent bending, dust, loss of items
- May become dirty and torn
- Usually need to be cut out and assembled
- Purchased flannelgraph pictures may not look like people in your area -- clothing is culturally based
- Teacher may have difficulty placing pictures on the board at the appropriate time

Hook and loop board

Hook and loop material (e.g. Velcro) is currently used to hold straps together and such items as blood pressure cuffs. It can be purchased by the metre. Prepared boards and kits can be purchased in many places. (In the United States a company that sells the kits is: Charles Mayer Studios, Inc., 168 E Market Street, Akron, Ohio, USA 44308-2095.)

A hook and loop board can be used in place of a flannelgraph board. All pictures which adhere to a flannel board will adhere to a hook and loop board. In addition, a strip of 'loop' glued to the back of objects serves to adhere them to the hook board as well. For example, place a strip on the back of food items - then put them up on the board.

The use is similar to flannel except:

Advantages

- No artwork is necessary
- Minimal preparation time
- Available objects can be used

Disadvantages

- No 'ready made' programmes which may be purchased
- Cost of the material is greater than a flannelgraph

Flip charts

Flip charts are sets of drawings with a script on the back. The sheets are bound or unbound for easy turning. The teacher may adapt the script as desired. The advantages and disadvantages of the flip chart are similar to those of the flannelgraph except that the flip chart is not as adaptable. The speaker flips each page instead of placing a number of objects on the board. The script is usually on the back of the picture so it can easily be read. World Neighbors (address in Appendix) markets an excellent set of flip charts.

Puppets

The use of puppets is an interesting method of teaching. *Puppets for Better Health* by Gil Gordon describes this teaching method as well as how to make the puppets (order from Macmillan Distribution, Ltd.).

Projector visuals

Filmstrips

Battery-operated filmstrip projectors are available. Filmstrips may be purchased with a script to be read, with cassette tapes, or records. The script for reading can be adapted. Some speakers who are too nervous to give a talk, find it much easier to read a script in the dark.

Slides

Slides can be rearranged in order desired by the teacher. They may be purchased in a variety of ways. The battery-operated film-strip projector may also be used for slides.

Films and videos

These are available in a variety of topics and types of equipment. A dependable supply of electricity is a must.

Advantages

- They draw a crowd, and
- It's all prepared and ready to give

Disadvantages

- Equipment may malfunction,
- Potential lack of electricity,
- Expensive,
- Sometimes not applicable to all cultures, and
- Discourages audience participation, except when a discussion follows the presentation

Summary

Visual (or audio-visual) aids improve teaching. Select the type which best fits the goals of the class as well as the budget.

In summary, here are some of the principles of visual aid effectiveness:

1. Illustrations must be based on the past experience of the viewer.
2. Keep the visuals simple - present only one idea.
3. Do not use a detailed background. It detracts from the point.
4. Make the presentation and as real as possible.
5. The appearance of the people should be similar to the viewers appearance.
6. The colour should be realistic and in keeping with the cultural beliefs on colour.
7. Photographs are most easily understood.
8. Line drawings are often poorly understood.
9. Find out from the viewers what they see.
10. A picture showing only part of an object or person may not be understood, or even may be seen as ugly.

Reference

Iris Hayden Stober and Barry H. Wecker (1989). *The Church Health Educator*, Macmillan Publishers