

Picture Notes

Creating an image can be a visual summarization and/or a depiction of complex information. This transformation of challenging information into visual representations involves deep processing of content and will help students uncover meaning as well as retain information.

Picture Notes, which involve students reading, talking, and then drawing their own representations of content, work well as a small-group activity. In the following example, small groups worked together to explain key concepts in a biology unit (photosynthesis). After developing their representations, they gave oral presentations of their drawings to the class, and then they wrote explanations. Reading, talking, drawing, presenting, and then writing helped these students do multiple transformations to reinforce their understanding.



Introduction, Modeling, and Reflection

1. After students have read an assignment, organize them into small groups. Give each group a large sheet of paper and a set of colored markers. Tell them to determine the important ideas relating to the purpose for reading and to come up with a way of representing their ideas on paper through pictures, diagrams, and words.
2. It's rarely necessary to do any modeling, but if needed, model with previously learned information, not the current topic, and use symbols, icons, and simplistic illustrations. The reason for this is that once students see your representations, it is difficult for them to create something different and, if they see quality artwork from you, they may get discouraged and give up.
3. Explain that the quality of the artwork is secondary to the thinking processes involved in discussing content and deciding how to organize it. The only criterion is to represent central ideas and their interrelationships. Encourage students to use line drawings, symbols, pictures, circles, squiggles, or whatever creative endeavor they feel best portrays their analysis. Changing words into pictures encourages active synthesis of ideas. No two productions will be the same. Several student examples are usually sufficient to launch the rest into creating their own unique representations.
4. Have the teams share their productions with the class. Emphasize that their presentations need to pull together the discrete images into a clear and complete explanation.