CONTENTS

Acknowledgments 4

Foreword 5

Introduction 6

Chapter 1 Pictures Drawn Out of Words: Reading Like a Writer 11

Chapter 2 Picture Basics: Abstract to Concrete 23

Chapter 3 Pictures That Make Sense (and Scents): Sensory Details 31

Chapter 4 Pictures of Places: Atmosphere and Setting 41

Chapter 5 Pictures of People: Appearances in Context 53

Chapter 6 Pictures of Personalities: Actions and Emotions 65

Chapter 7 Pictures in Action: Moment-by-Moment Narration 77

Chapter 8 Pictures of Situations: Hypothetical Scenarios 89

Chapter 9 Pictures in Frames: Movie and Comic-Strip Techniques 99

Chapter 10 Pictures Beyond Compare: Figurative Language 113

Chapter 11 Pictures as Poetry: Evoking Emotion 125

Chapter 12 The Big Picture: Why Details Matter 133

Appendices 140

References 143

Teaching Students to make Writing Visual & Vivid © David Lee Finkle, Scholastic Teaching Resources

CHAPTER 1

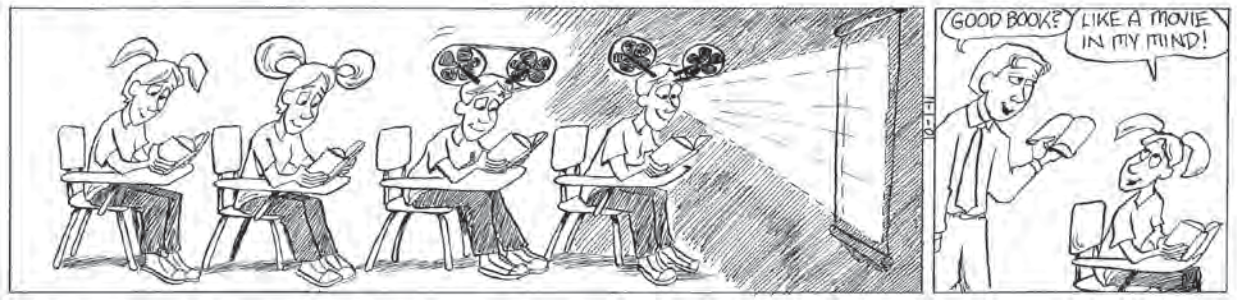
Pictures Drawn Out of Words: Reading Like a Writer

Teaching Students to make Writing Visual & Vivid © David Lee Finkle, Scholastic Teaching Resources

I have always seen a strong relationship between words and pictures, perhaps because of my very early interest in comic strips, which are a combination of both. I learned to read when I was five or six for a very practical reason—so I could read the newspaper funnies (especially *Peanuts*) without having to beg my older brothers to read them to me. I remember lying on our living room carpet with the funnies stretched out before me and independently reading my first *Peanuts* plotline, which involved Linus and Sally going on a field trip to an actual field, Linus getting stuck on a barn roof, and Snoopy turning into a helicopter to rescue him. After learning to read, I kept on reading the funnies but added books without pictures to my repertoire. What I learned, without really being conscious of the lesson, is that books without pictures *did* have pictures—pictures I drew in my head.

I was recently in The Family Book Shop (one of my local haunts here in DeLand, Florida), buying a few books for my classroom library, when I found a copy of Lloyd Alexander's *The Marvelous Misadventures of Sebastian*. I had not seen this book for many years, but immediately recognized the title. It was one of the first, if not *the* first, chapter books I ever read. I opened it and began looking for the illustrations I remembered of Sebastian's marvelous misadventures. There were no pictures. I had created the pictures. But the impression I'd had all these years was that the book had come with illustrations.

I'm not sure when I first became really, truly conscious of authors creating pictures with words, but it may have been when I read *The Chronicles of Narnia* on my own for the first time. The images in the Narnia books were so striking to me, so vivid, even when they were descriptions of things that would be impossible to find in the real world, that they have stayed with me ever since. I can imagine those settings, those characters, and even the sounds and smells of Narnia as well as I can imagine some places out of my own past. The recent movie versions seemed superfluous to me—I already had in my head a 3-D movie with smell-o-vision and quadraphonic sound.

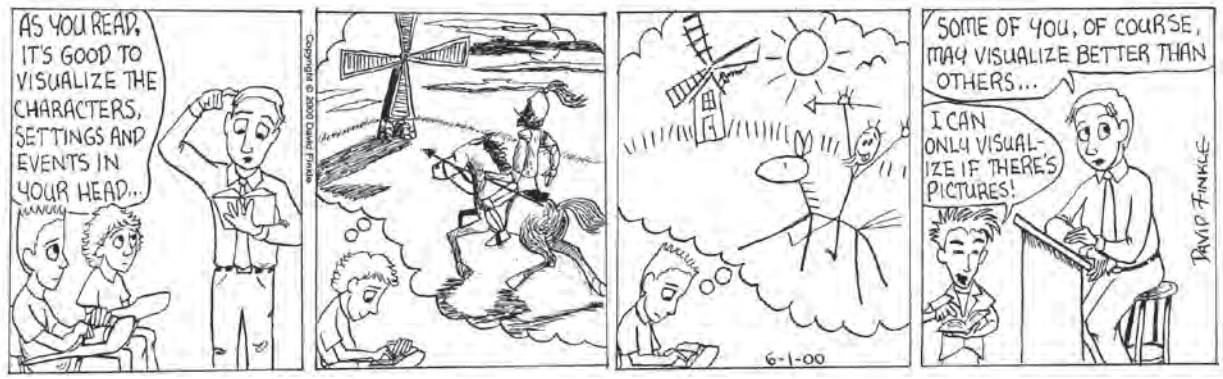


The pictures of Narnia I created in my head were only the beginning. Nearly every book I can remember reading since, I remember as images in my head. What I discovered as an older reader in high school and college was that nonfiction could create images, too, images that could help you think about life in a different way.

If we want our students to create pictures when they write, we must first make them aware of the pictures in what they are reading. If they are unaware of word pictures, or worse yet, unable to create mental pictures as they read, they will almost certainly fail to write in a way that creates pictures in their readers' heads.

For many of our students, reading is a chore, and visualizing is yet one more chore added to the already mundane work of reading. Other students come to us as avid readers who visualize very well, but even they may be unaware of what writers do to create the pictures they see in their heads as they read. Some combinations of words create pictures in our heads; some combinations of words create no pictures. If we are going to teach young writers how to do the former with their writing, we need to get them visualizing as they read, and then looking at how authors created those images.

What follows for the rest of this chapter is a series of strategies that help students pull images from what they read and analyze how those images were created. Once those skills are in place, getting students to write in word pictures is possible. The added benefit is that reading for details in this way will not only make them better writers, it also helps make them stronger readers.



Teaching Students to make Writing Visual & Vivid © David Lee Finkle, Scholastic Teaching Resources

Drawing From Text

We want students to create pictures in their heads when they read, but the problem is that the act of visualizing, like much of the reading process, is invisible. Our job is to make visualization visible.

There is a way to make students' visualizations visible, however, and that is to ask them to draw them. Roger Essley's (with Linda Rief and Amy Rocci) *Visual Tools for Differentiating Reading and Writing Instruction* (2008) is devoted to the subject of using drawings to help students read and write better. I will mention some of his techniques for storyboarding, but I will also discuss other ways that drawing can be used to make students' mental images visible.

Drawing From Narratives

Narratives naturally lend themselves to drawing pictures because a story is a series of concrete events—first this happens, then that, then the other thing—so I often begin teaching visualization with this form of writing. I may start with familiar stories such as the fairy tales I use with my sixth graders, then move to fictional stories from our literature book, and later to narrative essays to bridge the gap between narratives and essays. A great source of narrative essays is the *Reader's Digest* annual edition of "Everyday Heroes." (You can also find recent hero stories online at http://www.rd.com/heroes-stories-of-bravery.) The stories are brief, interesting, and often action-packed. Any of these selections, from fairy tales to "Everyday Heroes" essays, can be used to teach students to create pictures as they read.

Storyboards

Storyboards are primarily used in the movie business to create a flexible visual script of a movie as it is being planned. Each shot of a movie is rendered as a drawing on a card that indicates the type of shot being planned (e.g., close-up) with sound effects and dialogue noted below the drawing. These cards are placed in order on bulletin boards all around the room, and the creative team discusses how the movie flows and works before ever filming it. Sections can be cut or re-ordered simply by moving, removing, or adding cards.

Teaching Students to make Writing Visual & Vivid © David Lee Finkle, Scholastic Teaching Resources

In our version we are not creating an actual movie necessarily, though that is not out of the question. Instead, we are attempting to re-create on paper the movies students have already created in their heads, or to assist them in producing their own mental movies. This technique works best for narratives, though as we'll see below, it can be adapted for other types of text. You can have students storyboard an entire story, as I often have students do for tales like Rudyard Kipling's "Rikki-tiki-tavi," but you can also take one particular set of events and storyboard them.

Roger Essley makes it clear to students that "bad drawing is fine" (p. 9) in storyboarding and recommends using stick figures for clarity of expression. Although stick figures can be highly effective, I also tell my more artistic students that if they want to cut loose and show off a little, that's okay, too. As a student, I loved to draw (I still do), and if the teacher allowed us to draw, I wanted to use my abilities.

Full-Story Storyboard

If a narrative isn't too long, I may have my students storyboard the full narrative. This process requires that they not only figure out where the word pictures are, but also which word pictures are important events worth putting on their storyboards. Fairy tales are ideal for this activity, and if you think that sounds too "babyish," try finding the original Grimm's Fairy Tales either online or in print. They are indeed grim—and gory. The students love it. "Cinderella," for instance, is not the prettified Disney version. The stepsisters mutilate their feet to make the slipper fit, and then get blinded by vengeful birds at the wedding. Fun stuff!

I have found that for neatness and clarity it's often good to give students a template or "frames" for their storyboards. I try to fit six to eight frames on a page. I usually model a storyboard for the class based on a very short, very simple story such as "The Three Little Pigs." Picking out the main events is simple, and drawing the events with "stick pigs" and a "stick wolf" takes hardly any time at all. You are teaching students to summarize the main events by drawing storyboards this way. Many teachers do this kind of summarizing, but we don't very often point out to students that we are able to draw (in both senses of the word) pictures out of the story only because the story used words to create pictures.

"The Three Little Pigs," written as a plot summary, creates few pictures at all.

Once there were three pigs. They went and built three places to live. A wolf came and ate the first two but then got killed by the last pig.

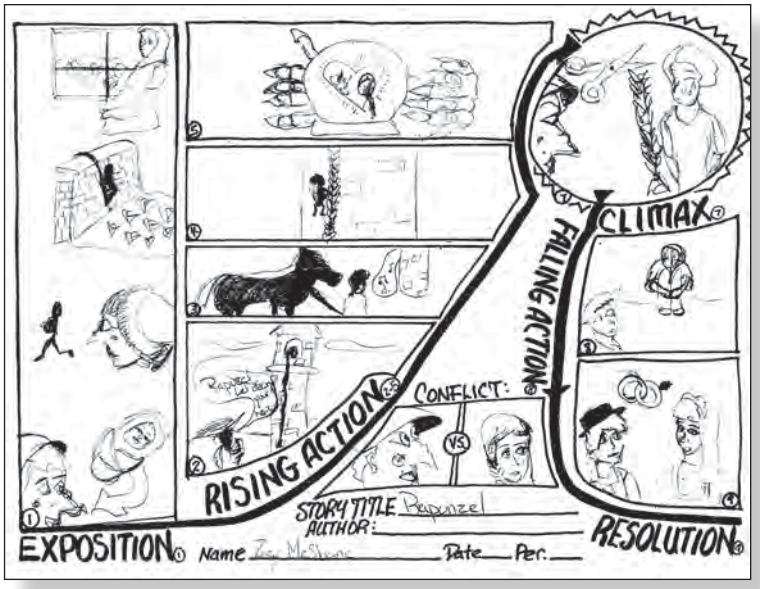
The details the author adds to that bare-bones plot are what create the pictures. When I discuss the way authors write narratives, I begin to use the terms "list-of-events narration" and "moment-by-moment narration." A plot summary lists events without much detail—a list-of-events narration—and some students write their stories that way. A narrative creates pictures because it goes into moment-by-

1-1: Student artwork "draws out" the main events of a familiar story.

Teaching Students to make Writing Visual & Vivid © David Lee Finkle, Scholastic Teaching Resources

moment narration to tell us, in detail, what the characters are doing. This distinction becomes important whenever students write narratives, either fiction or nonfiction.

1-2: A sixth grader's storyboard of the fairy tale "Rapunzel" creates a visual map of the story's major events and plot structure.



Plot Storyboard

Another storyboard template I've developed does double duty; it not only gets students to visualize on paper, but it also gets them to analyze for plot structure. Designed around the Freytag Pyramid, this template gives students a way to draw the main events in terms of Exposition, Climax, Rising and Falling Action, and Resolution. A blank version of the plot storyboard can be found in Appendix D, page 140.

I tell students that when they put their pictures in, they should actually do so out of order. They should start with the exposition square, which is easy since it always represents the beginning of the story, then draw the resolution, which is also easy because it always comes at the end. Next they should pick out which event is the climax of the story and draw that, because the rising and falling action are framed by those other three parts of the story. The climax, of course, is the turning point for the main character, or the high point of the action (or both) right near the end of the story. Once the climax is drawn in, then they fill in four events from the rising action and one picture for a brief falling action.

I ask them to think that way—deciding on beginning, ending, and turning point first— because many fiction writers actually think that way when they write. They have the beginning and end in mind before they write, and then decide what the climax of the story will be. Only then do they design the action to lead to that ending. They begin with the end of the story in mind rather than just making it up as they go, as most students prefer to do. We talk about the Harry Potter books and how J. K. Rowling had the whole series, and each book, planned out before she started writing.

This may be a little advanced for some students, but I have found it helps them to see the story structure in a much more vivid way than simply listing the events in words.

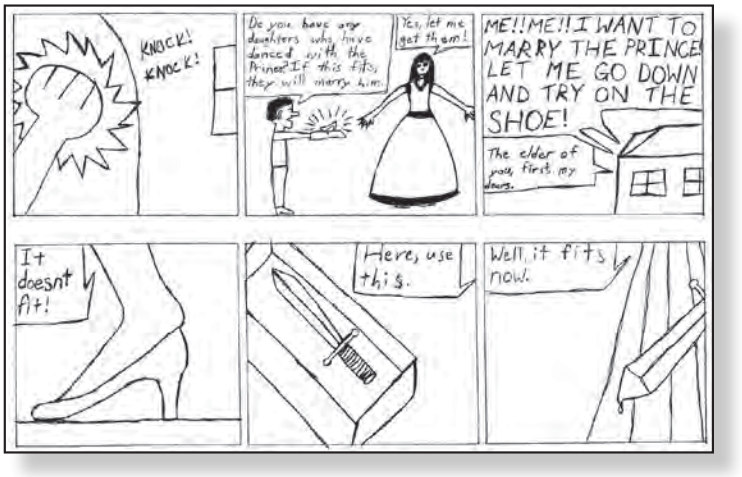
Event Storyboard

Sometimes if a story is longer, and creating a storyboard of the whole plot would be too complex, I will ask students to create a storyboard of just one event of the story—especially if it's a story with a lot of action. I will sometimes read through the text myself and either draw it or count out how many individual pictures it would take to re-create the event as a storyboard. I'll then give the students an estimate of how many drawings they will need to create their storyboards.

Teaching Students to make Writing Visual & Vivid © David Lee Finkle, Scholastic Teaching Resources

One scene that can be used to great effect for an event storyboard is from "The Rule of Names," a story by Ursula K. Le-Guin, set in her fantasy world of Earthsea. Its climax is a wizard's duel between Mr. Blackbeard, who is seeking his lost family treasure, and Mr. Underhill, who stole it. As they duel, they transform themselves into different creatures and forces of nature. This scene usually results in some spectacular drawings, and students have a great time reading it and drawing it. As part of an inquiry unit on happiness, I have also had students draw scenes from the original, grim Grimm's fairy tales. Figure 1-3 is one student's depiction of a stepsister sacrificing her heel to make the slipper fit.

1-3: A sixth grader's event storyboard of a rather gory event from the original Grimm's Brothers "Cinderella" uses comic strip techniques and cinematic framing and camera angles.



Another story that lends itself to a moment-by-moment storyboard is "Up the Slide" by Jack London. This story is actually quite challenging for students to visualize, and they may need a lot of assistance. A young man in the Yukon, Clay, wants to get a dead pine tree from a crevice in a cliff face so he can sell it for firewood. What seems like a simple endeavor—climb up to the tree, knock it down, climb back down—soon becomes a nightmare when getting down turns into a life-threatening proposition. He winds up going down, then up again, then sliding down by accident, and then climbing all the way back up again. A careful reading of the text is necessary to visualize the setting and the events involved. We sometimes read through the story together, visualizing and drawing together as a class as we read, because if you aren't visualizing the story, you simply aren't reading it at all.

Pictures of Settings

Another technique I use with "Up the Slide" that is vital to understanding the story is not only to draw close-ups of the events themselves but also to depict the whole setting: the river, the cliff face, the gully or "slide," the pine tree, the gorge at the top of the slide, and the grove of pine trees Clay finds beyond it.

The chapter "A Boy and a Man" from James Ramsey Ullman's *Banner in the Sky* (1988) creates an interesting situation to visualize. Rudy, the 16-year-old protagonist, finds that he must rescue a climber who is trapped on a ledge down a crevasse in a glacier. The third-person limited narration does not directly describe the situation. We get it described in pieces, part description from Rudy's point of view, part dialogue as the trapped man describes his predicament. A clear picture emerges of the man's situation and what Rudy must do to rescue him. Asking students to draw a picture of the situation does not require a great deal of drawing talent, but it does require that they understand the text itself.

In any story where a setting is important, I will frequently ask students to draw a picture, map, or floor plan of the setting. I ask students to draw a map or floor plan if the position of geographical features, rooms, or objects is vital to the story.

Teaching Students to make Writing Visual & Vivid © David Lee Finkle, Scholastic Teaching Resources

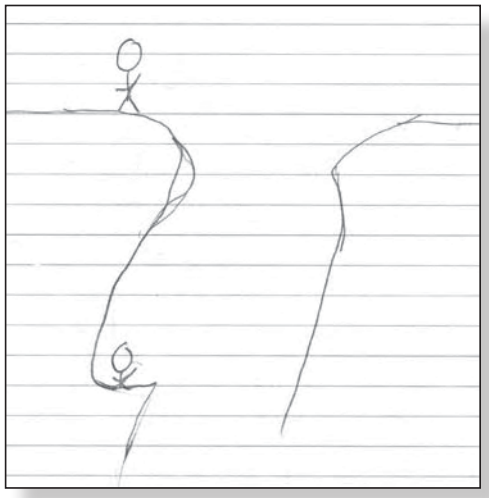
Teaching Students to make Writing Visual & Vivid © David Lee Finkle, Scholastic Teaching Resources

Floor Plans

One story that lends itself to a floor plan is James Thurber's "The Night the Bed Fell" (which also lends itself to a great storyboard). Thurber actually describes the layout of the bedrooms in his childhood home, and that layout becomes central to the action of the story.

A floor plan is even more vital to the story "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes mystery about a murder and attempted murder in an old mansion. The rooms are described in detail, and drawing floor plans helps students not only visualize but also make predictions about how the murder was committed.

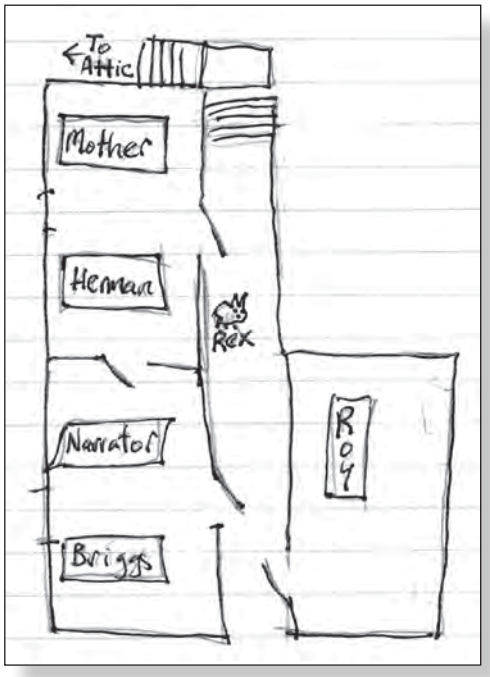
1-4: Creating this drawing helped a student visualize the predicament of a fallen mountain climber in "A Boy and a Man."



Maps of Settings

I have a special fondness for books with maps. I still treasure the memory of my first reading of *The Lord of the Rings* because the library edition I read had a large fold-out map in the back cover. When I was in ninth grade, my project for *To Kill a Mockingbird* was a map of the town, Maycomb. I remember being very careful to draw it in such a way that the view from the Radley front porch would allow for a view of all the major events of the story—an important point at the end of the book.

1-5: This student used a description from James Thurber's "The Night the Bed Fell" to create a floor plan of the house where the action takes place.



Any story that is set outside the confines of a house is a great opportunity to draw a map, and stories that take characters on journeys are even better. And again, drawing a map requires a detailed understanding of the story. Does the map hold up when compared to the actual text? Drawing a map also requires that students pay attention to how the author described the setting. Not only the various elements of the setting but also their relationships to each other must be visualized. How does the author reveal the setting? Through the eyes of a character? Through dialogue? Most students don't read to see what an author actually does so they can apply it to their own writing. Having them draw pictures of characters and settings requires a different kind of reading, in which students not only take in the details on the page but also note and appreciate how they were written.

Pictures of Characters

Rather than illustrating events or settings, students can also illustrate people from text—either characters in fiction or real people in nonfiction. If you want your students to be aware of how authors describe characters' physical appearances, then asking them to draw characters based on the descriptions from books is a terrific way to do it.

The challenge, of course, is to find specific descriptions of characters. This can be harder than it sounds. Pick up a random young adult novel, and skim through the first few pages to find a description. What you'll discover is that authors describe characters different ways—some characters and people are drawn in great detail, while others are delivered in very broad strokes. If you have a lot of details in the text, the character is easier to draw; if the description is more general, you have to create details from your imagination that fit the overall "feel" of the character.

This can lead to a discussion about character descriptions and the way authors write them. How much detail is enough to create a picture of the character in your head? How much detail becomes overwhelming? How does an author choose the most important details?

These matters will be discussed in a later chapter—for now it's enough to say that drawing pictures of characters is an excellent way to practice visualization, and to become aware of how authors describe people.

Drawing From Essays—Concrete Narrative vs. Abstract Essay

Of course, some students create great pictures if they are writing narratives but go completely blank when they begin to write an expository or persuasive essay. As I was drafting this chapter, I was dealing with students who didn't understand the difference between a narrative and an essay. They wanted to turn everything they wrote into a narrative. I had to explain that narratives tell a story and are "concrete," but that essays are built around a series of abstract ideas. It is not event, event, event in most essays; it is reasons, reasons, reasons, or examples, examples, examples. As an essay writer you are "fleshing out" abstract ideas. Pictures don't happen as naturally in essays as they do in narratives, but despite that, or maybe because of it, effective imagery is even more important. An essay without word pictures leaves nothing in the mind to remember it by—abstractions are made of Teflon. As Steven Pinker writes in *The Stuff of Thought*, ". . . even our most abstract concepts are understood in terms of concrete scenarios" (p. 3).

Picture Outline

The picture outline, a kind of modified Cornell note-taking, is something I developed to help students see the flow of main ideas—the abstractions—in an essay, as well as the word pictures that make those abstractions concrete.

Main Ideas (Abstractions)	Word Pictures (Concrete images as drawings)

The left-hand column is for the main ideas; the right-hand column is a place to represent the pictures with stick figure storyboard drawings.

The chart in Figure 1-6 analyzes Brad Meltzer's essay "Why I Love Superman."

Teaching Students to make Writing Visual & Vivid © David Lee Finkle, Scholastic Teaching Resources

When I introduce this method for reading an essay, the class reads the essay aloud together, discussing the main ideas as we go, as I draw the chart on my dry-erase board. After we have done a couple of essays together, I ask them to create picture outlines in pairs, and then on their own with new essays. Doing an outline this way has several advantages. The "abstractions" column reinforces the idea of pulling the "main ideas" out of the different paragraphs. It also allows students to see the flow of ideas and to discuss how those ideas are ordered—which is seldom done as a five-paragraph formula essay. Students are amazed to see how often writers save the main idea of the whole essay for the conclusion. The right-hand column is enjoyable because they are able to draw, but it also makes visible the idea of creating concrete word pictures.

1-6: Nick's T-chart plots the main ideas (left) and word pictures (right) of the essay "Why I Love Superman" and uses doodles to recreate the word pictures.

Noting the Words That Make Pictures

If your students have already been drawing (in both senses of the word) pictures out of text, and therefore have internalized the fact that good writing creates pictures, you may want them to start noting how the pictures are built with words. If this is the case, a few other graphic organizers to use when reading may show the way.

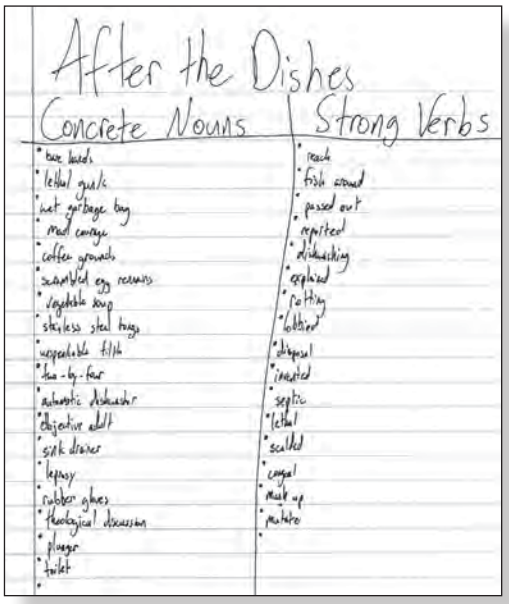
Nouns and Verbs

If you are not concerning yourself or your students with the flow of ideas in an essay, then this chart may prove useful. It may prove especially useful, because it can also be utilized as a prewriting tool, as I will describe in the next chapter. The nouns-verbs chart is a simple T-chart like this:

Concrete Nouns	Strong Verbs

As students read, they simply list the concrete nouns from the essay in the first column and the strong verbs that go with them in the other. If it sounds simple, it is, but it is also powerful because it shows students that creating word pictures is not, at heart, mysterious, complicated,

1-7



Teaching Students to make Writing Visual & Vivid © David Lee Finkle, Scholastic Teaching Resources