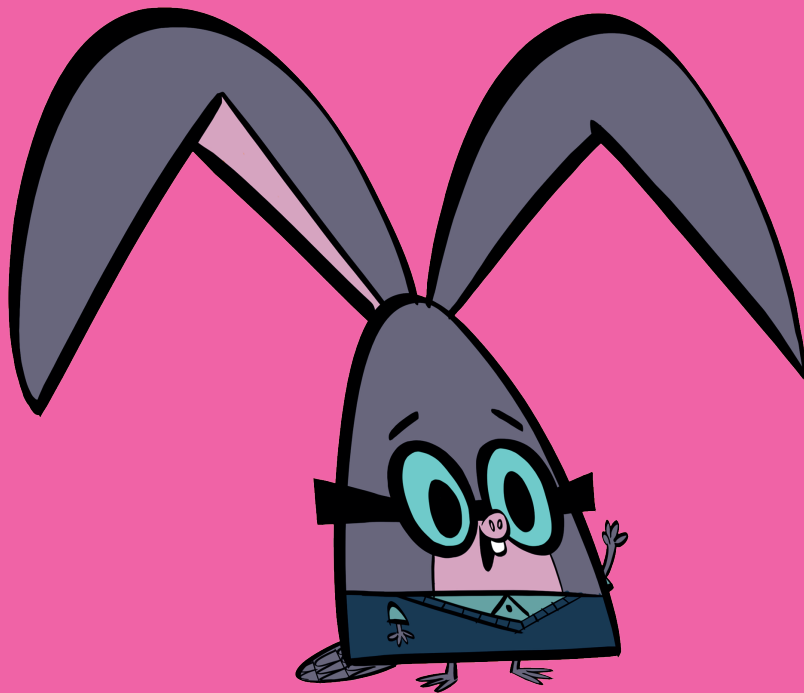


Mrs Wordsmith® | Research

How humor aids word retention



And how visualization
fosters memorization

**The saying that
“a picture is worth
a thousand words”
is particularly true
for vocabulary
development**

Neuman and Wright (2013)

Illustrations help learners interpret and remember the content and context of what they have learned



Visualization fosters memorization

The human information-processing system is made up of two pathways that engrave concepts into our memory (Clark & Paivio, 1991).

- The first one is the verbal system, which consists of words and all things linguistic.
- The second one is the visual system, which is made up of everything we see.

These two systems are structurally and functionally separate. In other words, it's possible to learn things through only one of the two. But they can also support and expand each other.

If the two systems are engaged in processing the same information, they trigger a deeper processing of this information.

This means that when we see an image that's a reflection of what we hear, the information flows through the two channels, and creates a deeper and more meaningful representation of the targeted concept.

Research has also found that it's easier, and faster, to map a word to an illustration than to a photograph (Saryazdi & Chambers, 2018).

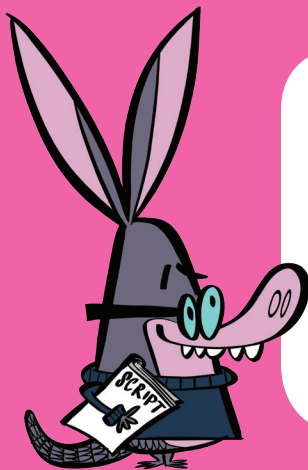
- This is because illustrations highlight the most iconic elements of the subject matter, without overloading the child's visual system with unnecessary details.

It is also possible that illustrations stimulate what good readers do naturally, namely, transform information in a text into mental images with visual-spatial information, and, in this way, make the newly acquired information more memorable (Kamil et al., 2000).

Visualization fosters engagement

Experts confirm that using illustrations in instructional material is an effective method of learning. This is because illustrations are an interest-getting device (Anglin et al., 1996).

- Studies focusing on vocabulary teaching show that images increase learners' motivation by creating an element of fun and excitement that grabs their attention on the word being taught (Ahikpa, 2011: 50).
- A study that compared text with illustrations against text-only material found that illustrations had significantly more of an effect on learners' interest and motivation compared to the text-only material (Park & Lim, 2007).
- Images are a great vehicle for humor, which has also been shown to enhance learning (see right below).



Create a working-wall in your classroom, with labels and pictures representing the meaning of challenging words. This way, children will have enough opportunities to see them during the day, and will find it easier to comprehend and memorize challenging vocabulary.

The role of humor in learning and memorization

Research shows that humor is the perfect ingredient for memorability (Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977; Banas et al., 2011).

There are two main reasons behind this:

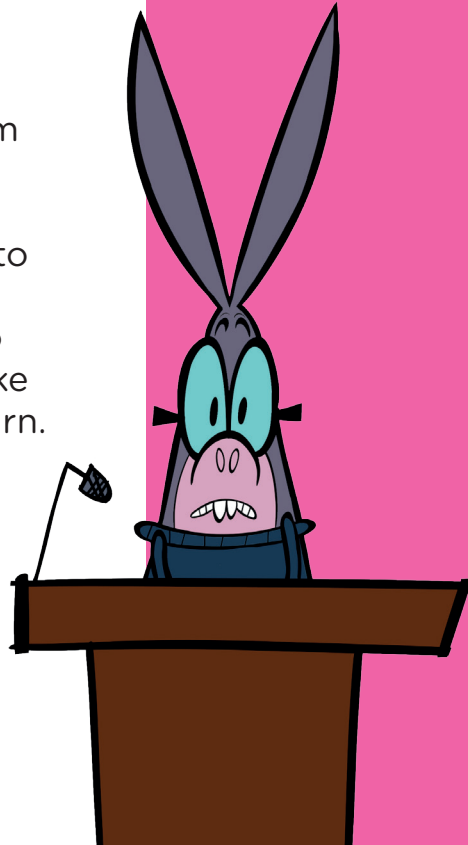
Psychological reasons:

- Humor emerges out of a two-phase process in which the stimulus (the funny thing) contains an incongruent element which needs to be recognized and reinterpreted by the receiver of the joke. This extra processing effort that the receiver puts in in order to reanalyze the joke allows for the content to be elaborated on more, and better engraved in long-term memory (Berlyne, 1960).

This explanation was confirmed by various experiments (Schmidt & Williams, 2001; Schmidt, 2002; Wanzer et al., 2010).

Neuroscientific reasons:

- Humor activates the brain's dopamine reward system; this pleasure chemical is crucial both for motivation and long-term memory (Wise, 2004).
- Dopamine also contributes significantly to habit formation because something that makes us feel good triggers the desire to do it again. So, not only does humor make children learn, it makes them want to learn.

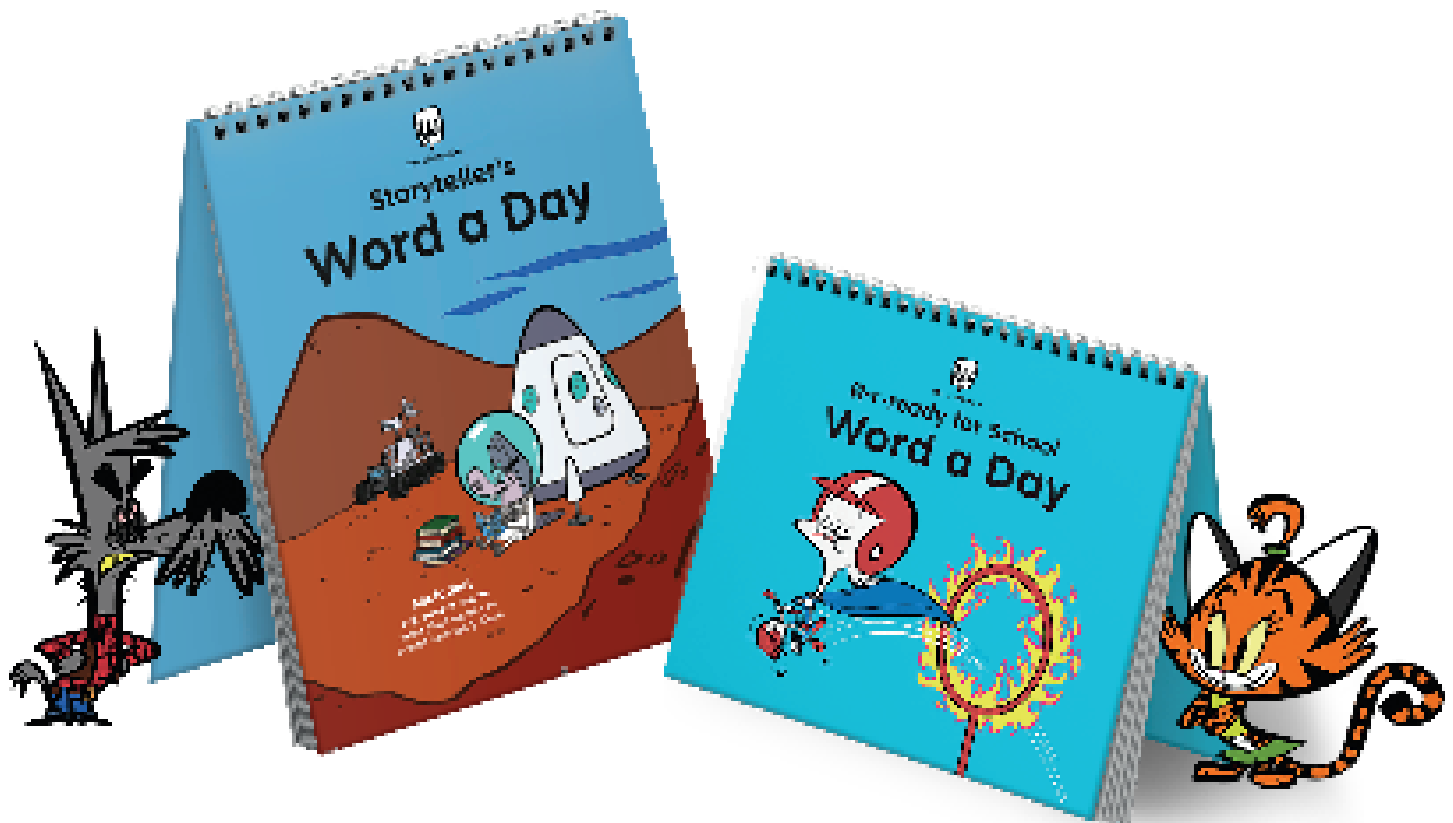


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National Literacy Trust

