SPENCER SALAS, BRIAN KEITH WILLIAMS, MARYANN MRAZ, AND SOUFIANE ADRANE
United States and Morocco

Reading Eyes Wide Shut: Visualization, Language Learners, and Texts

The man who followed slipped on a smooth rock and nearly fell. He recovered his footing with a great effort, at the same time uttering a sharp cry of pain. He seemed faint and stretched one hand forward, seeking support against the air. When he had steadied himself, he stepped forward. But he slipped again and nearly fell. Then he stood still and looked at the other man, who had never turned his head.

The man stood still for fully a minute, as if he were deciding something. Then he called:

"I say, Bill, I hurt my foot."

Bill struggled ahead through the milky water. He did not look around. The man watched him go, and although his face lacked expression, as before, his eyes had the look of a wounded animal.

—Jack London, "Love of Life"

In 1907, Jack London published a series of short stories that would eventually work their way into the canon of U.S. literature. Of these, "Love of Life" narrates the plight of two Klondike gold prospectors lost in the Canadian Yukon and their struggle to survive. The excerpt above (London 2005; original version published in 1907) opens with one of the two men slipping on a rock and injuring his foot. Bill, his companion, leaves him to fend for himself. The days and nights and weeks pass, and the unnamed man struggles to live. The story ends with a group of sailing scientists discovering the man dragging himself across the shore of a deserted river beach. Aboard ship, the man slowly recovers—regaining his weight and speech. In the meantime, the team of scientists learns that he has lined his bed with the stale bread hoarded from his sympathetic shipmates as he prepares for another possible famine.

For secondary-level teachers working with adolescent language learners who are generally familiar with the basic process of reading, the question remains as to how to reframe reading in ways that promote active engagement both for enjoyment and for learning. For many of us who work in secondary classrooms, one of our motivations for choosing English teaching as a profession is a shared love of reading short stories such as London's. At its best, entering a narrative is a sensory experience: engaged readers see, hear, and feel the words of a story and imagine themselves within its pages. Often, however, in literature-based secondary-level English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms, reading doesn't feel engaging or interesting. Too many adolescent language learners do not readily identify as proficient readers. We also recognize that in high schools, reading

as a sensory experience is a distant childhood memory, clouded by an emphasis on high-stakes standardized testing and the multiple demands of the secondary curriculum.

To that end, our intent in this article is to illustrate how secondary-level teachers might reframe reading a classic American short story as a sensory experience, leveraging visualization strategies that tap into student creativity.

We begin with a brief overview of the literature surrounding visualization and reading comprehension. Using the London short story as an anchor text, we continue with a series of five concrete but flexible strategies: Reading Graffiti, Image-Scaping, Guided Imagery, Storyboarding in Person, and Logographic Cues. Although our emphasis is on the adolescent classroom, we encourage teachers and readers across grade levels and content areas to try out these moves and adapt them to their own classrooms and circumstances. Our argument is that visualization strategies can make reading in high schools as exciting as we remember it when we were young children before bedtime with our parents or when we sat in a circle on the floor of our kindergarten classrooms.

VISUALIZATION, ADOLESCENT LANGUAGE LEARNERS, AND TEXTS

We preface the classroom strategies with a review of the literature surrounding the intersection of visualization and literacy. Beers (2003) notes that comprehension is both a product and a process, something that requires purposeful and strategic effort on the reader's part. In this process, readers must anticipate the direction of the text, see the action, correct any misunderstandings, and connect what is in the text to what is in their mind in order to make an educated guess about what is happening in the text. These dynamic and recursive reading procedures play an important role in comprehension because readers use them to construct coherent mental representations and explanations about what they have read (Graesser, Singer, and Trabasso 1994).

That said, even if an array of reading strategies can support comprehension, only a limited number of strategies, such as questioning, predicting, summarizing, and clarifying, are routinely emphasized in English language teaching (ELT) classrooms (De Koning and Van der Schoot 2013). Moreover, we have found strategies for "seeing reading" relatively untapped in secondary ELT contexts. This is problematic because reading is not only a linguistic experience but also a sensory experience. When readers use their senses and visualize, texts come alive and make sense. That is, beyond their motivational value, visualization strategies are highly effective tools for deepening reading comprehension.

We want our students to be able to enter the world of a narrative—especially classic ones such as London's. When readers begin to see what they read, they create mental images and envision settings and situations within a text; they become the book (Wilhelm 2016). Further, researchers note that an important factor in differentiating proficient readers from less proficient readers is their ability to visualize text content themselves (De Koning and Van der Schoot 2013). When meaning breaks down, proficient readers consciously create images in their head to help make sense of the words on the page (Tovani 2000). Thus, readers who do not create mental images—or do not know how to create mental images when reading—often experience comprehension problems and, by consequence, disengagement (Hibbing and Rankin-Erickson 2003; De Koning and Van der Schoot 2013).

On the one hand, when mental visuals do not come easily to a reader, this can signal that the reader's comprehension of the text is limited. This disruption may be due to text complexity, difficult vocabulary, or limited background knowledge. On the other hand, comprehension is enhanced when students are prompted or taught to use mental imagery (Beers 2003). Modeled visualization strategies are critical for "reluctant and low-ability readers and . . . can help them become more proficient creators of internal visual imagery that supports comprehension" (Hibbing and

Rankin-Erickson 2003, 759). Consequently, when students learn to create mental images as they read, they experience improved recall and an enhanced ability to draw inferences and make predictions (Gambrell and Bales 1986).

Related studies suggest that mental images "can make reading a text more enjoyable, result in positive attitudes toward reading . . . and can influence the time readers are willing to spend on a text" (Hibbing and Rankin-Erickson 2003, 762). Furthermore, visualizing text content provides readers with information about people, places, and things not associated with their individual experiences, expanding their outlook on the world. In short, we argue that visualizing a text leads to learning in a way that cultivates a heightened awareness of how readers see the world. It is important, therefore, that teachers see students' ability to visualize as an essential skill in the reading-comprehension process, making it a pedagogical priority.

EYES WIDE SHUT: FIVE STRATEGIES FOR SEEING READING

We have used "Love of Life" as an anchor text here, as a number of London's classic stories are available for free download through American English resources in PDF and audio (see U.S. Department of State 2020).

As we explained at the start of this article, "Love of Life" opens with the image of two gold prospectors, Bill and an unnamed protagonist, making their way slowly down a rocky bank into an icy stream somewhere in the Yukon Territory. The unnamed protagonist slips and injures his ankle. Bill trudges on, carrying a heavy sack of gold—deserting his injured companion to the elements. As the story unfolds, we watch the protagonist battle famine, fear, and the wild. He finally catches up to Bill—and finds the sack of gold alongside Bill's skeletal remains. A team of scientists traveling on a fishing ship ultimately rescues the lost and injured man. Approximately a month after the story began, the unnamed man returns to San Francisco via the fishing vessel—traumatized by the experience he has endured. We understand that it was his "love of life"—his will to live—that saved him.

Stories such as "Love of Life" lend themselves to visualization. Ideally, they are stories that we read both aloud and silently and that we watch in our mind's eye. They can also include information texts across content areas of study. As we have explained in the literature review, visualization increases both reading comprehension and reading pleasure. A story becomes a movie in Technicolor. But visualization doesn't always come easily for readers—especially for those reading in a foreign or second language. Thus, we offer the following visualization strategies—and we have purposely selected strategies that might be used in classroom environments with limited resources.

As a disclaimer, we recognize that none of these strategies is uniquely ours. Rather, these and their variants might be readily found online and in primary-level literacy methods textbooks with a complex genealogy of origin and passed on from teacher to teacher in ways that make it challenging to pinpoint their distinct sources. Our hope is that teachers reading this article will take them up with their students and broadly adapt them and share them as they engage in classroom and extracurricular reading.

We encourage teachers to select and apply these strategies based on the needs of their students and the topics or texts they are presenting in their classes. The sequence of strategies might follow the order that we have provided here—or teachers and readers might collectively select a strategy randomly or the strategy that resonates most with the text at hand or with the resources available to the participants.

Strategy 1: Reading Graffiti

Reading Graffiti is based on the concept of a "gallery walk," which comes from the world of museums. For example, in Washington, D.C., the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History recently revamped its dinosaur exhibit with a new display of an exceptional Tyrannosaurus rex, among other things.

Visiting the museum with friends or family is exciting, and stopping to inspect the fossils often inspires visceral reactions such as, "Wow!" or more exploratory talk: "I wonder how the Tyrannosaurus rex died?" In other words, the visit often incites responses. In the same way, Reading Graffiti is a practice that involves participants moving physically from textual segment to textual segment, responding with a pen or pencil or marker.

Taking up "Love of Life" in a Reading Graffiti format, you can begin by identifying textual segments that lend themselves to quick illustration or sketching. Place bits and pieces of the narrative onto large sheets of paper taped around the classroom's four walls. In one particularly visually dynamic moment, the exhausted prospector hallucinates a bear for a horse:

> Once, as his mind was wandering, he was returned to reality by a sight that almost caused him to faint. Before him stood a horse. A horse! He could not believe his eyes. A thick cloud was in his eyes, flashing with points of light. He rubbed his eyes fiercely to clear his sight. Then he saw before him not a horse, but a great brown bear. The animal was studying him with curiosity. (London 2005)

With the passage as a starting point, a textual image might read, "Before him stood a horse. A horse! He could not believe his eyes." Another image might read, "Then he saw before him not a horse, but a great brown bear." A third might read, "The animal was studying him with curiosity."

Then, direct groups of students to each poster or large sheet of paper where you have already written these sentences and invite students to envision on the paper what the text invokes for them visually. Instead of having a single representative for each group sketch or illustrate the textual segment, ask all the participants to respond "graffiti style," making quick sketches or even stick figures. Encourage participants to build off what individual students and previous groups have already started, with each group having a few minutes to respond to each of the textual images before moving on to the next. Afterwards, debrief the class on the sketched, visual responses and encourage individual or collaborative elaboration of ideas. Ask learners to explain their sketches in response to the text. Questions to ask include "What might be missing?" and "What might we take away?" The point of Reading Graffiti is, thus, to have students illustrate, however briefly, what the text invokes in the mind of the reader, both concretely and abstractly.

Strategy 2: Image-Scaping

What we like to call Image-Scaping asks students to pause while reading to sketch quickly the images that the text generates. It is related to Sound-Scaping, a way of collaboratively building the setting for a narrative aurally to activate prior knowledge and imagination (Murray, Salas, and Ni Thoghdha 2015). In the case of the "Love of Life" excerpt, a Sound-Scaping activity would ask readers to brainstorm a list of words to describe an Alaskan winter forest. What are the sounds of this forest? What are the primary sounds? The subtle sounds? Are there voices? Students suggest options and try them out—slowly building a one-minute soundscape using the class as the sound chorus, pausing for feedback and revision from the whole group, then circling back to incorporate ideas.

Image-Scaping asks readers to do the same thing—but visually. Taking up the same "Love of Life" excerpt, the reader would pause strategically during the narrative, allowing individual participants or pairs or small groups of participants to create a two-minute illustration of the page, a passage, or even a phrase. A variation of the activity might transfer the sketch from a single individual page of blank paper to the blackboard or whiteboard. After segments of the text are read aloud, invite students to come to the board one at a time to sketch what each segment has provoked in their minds. What does it make them see? Limit each individual artist/reader's time on the blackboard group sketch to less than a minute. Once that minute is over, invite another student to do the same.

The result is a collaborative, layered group illustration or representation of the passage. Gather students in a circle near the group sketch and ask them to talk about it together. Have them describe what they included and how it relates to the text. Have them describe what others included and how it relates to or extends their own choices. You might ask, "How do the images help us visualize the text? What is missing? What is superfluous? What have we chosen to emphasize?" Help students understand that Reading Graffiti and Image-Scaping are less about creating a polished illustration, something that is often beyond the capacities of teachers and students. Rather, these activities and the ones in the next sections emphasize the power of visualization before, during, and after reading for increasing and consolidating reading comprehension.

Strategy 3: Guided Imagery

Guided Imagery is also a powerful tool for helping readers construct mental images while reading—an important component of text comprehension, especially for students who struggle with a text, or who are still building familiarity with the English language. Guided Imagery encourages students to activate background knowledge, build an experience base for further inquiry, and explore and extend conceptual understanding (Deshler et al. 2001).

To implement the strategy, the teacher begins by prompting the students to imagine themselves in the setting of the text, in the role of a character, or in a historical period that is the subject of a unit of study—in the case of "Love of Life," the nineteenth-century Klondike Gold Rush. Once they have had time to formulate their own visual images, students are encouraged to share those images with a partner or in a small group. Depending on the students' familiarity with the topic, the teacher may offer descriptive details of the subject matter in order to facilitate the visualization process.

For example, before taking up London's short stories, a teacher could ask students to imagine life as it might have been at the end of the nineteenth century across the United States and why men and women might have been taken in by the thought of prospecting for gold. Here the teacher might provide descriptive information about the boomtowns that emerged during the Gold Rush and the hardship the prospectors faced both in town and in the wild—supplementing the discussion with historical images and documents surrounding the Gold Rush of 1887. Then, the teacher might ask students to image the decision-making processes of gold prospectors as they abandoned their lives and families with the hope of striking it rich in the Klondike. Finally, the teacher might ask students to imagine those decisions and to share images with peers in a small-group format. The Guided Imagery strategy helps to foster students' interest and engagement in the upcoming unit study.

The process of creating visual images in one's mind strengthens inferential thinking and supports conceptual connections. The mental images enable readers to better understand concepts and actions described in the text, identify with characters, and connect the concepts in the reading to their own experiences and background knowledge (Harvey and Goudvis 2017). Guided Imagery can be used before, during, or after reading, and it can be applied to both English literature and content-area material. A science teacher, for example, working in tandem around "Love of Life," might ask students to imagine the perspective of a grizzly bear. What sort of habitats does the bear need to thrive? How have man-made events such as the Gold Rush and contemporary oil drilling, mining, and climatic change threatened bears' existence?

Strategy 4: Storyboarding in Person

To support comprehension, we have also leveraged something we like to think of as Storyboarding in Person—a collaborative, kinesthetic visualization practice that draws from applied theater. Here the teacher challenges readers to use their own bodies to create a series of frozen images of textual moments or key concepts. To order a sequence for filming, film directors commonly use storyboarding.

To begin, have students identify a short passage to divide into frames. The opening scene of "Love of Life," for example, might be

divided into three distinct visual moments: the image of the two men making their way carefully down the slippery rocks, the image of the unnamed man slipping and injuring his foot, and the image of Bill abandoning the injured prospector. Or, in the scene where the injured and famished prospector mistakes a bear for a horse, the frames might include the man hallucinating on the forest floor before a rearing horse, the same man rubbing his eyes in disbelief, and the man being studied curiously by a brown bear.

Once students have identified a series of frames from these or other narrative moments within the larger text, divide the class into small groups and ask them to create a frozen image of the scene. Tell them to use nothing but their bodies. Encourage them to double and triple up—with two or three readers taking on the form of the man either separately or combining themselves into one individual. Likewise, one classmate might take on the image of the horse—or three or four might collaborate to create one great horse, and so on. Have each group present its frame to the class in sequence and discuss. What might also be included in the frames? A forest? A boulder? Other animals? Students might initially create frozen scenes and then slowly add repetitive movements or sounds. Let the frames and the readers' collective creativity guide the improvisation.

Strategy 5: Logographic Cues

Visualization and reading can also take on smaller and more-private formats in the form of Logographic Cues. A logograph is a visual symbol used to support readers as they navigate a given text (Beers 2003). Specifically, "logographic cues are designed to offer readers a high-utility message in a minimum amount of space" (Beers 2003, 129). In practice, readers insert visual symbols into the text to support their understanding of a story's progression. These symbols act as "signposts" to indicate characters, conflict, or setting as well as to show questions, clarifications, or inferences (Beers 2003). While it is okay for teachers to establish a bank of symbols for students, it is best that students design their own for better understanding.

Teachers should use a short excerpt to demonstrate the application of logographic cues using the think-aloud method. Let's examine an excerpt from "Love of Life" and apply this visualization strategy.

> The ship was no more than four miles away. He could see it quite well when he rubbed his eyes. He could also see the white sail of a small boat cutting the water of the shining sea. But he could never drag himself those four miles. He knew that, and was very calm about the fact. He knew that he could not travel another half mile. And yet he wanted to live. It was unreasonable that he should die after all he had been through. Fate asked too much of him. And, dying, he could not accept death. It was madness, perhaps, but in the very grasp of death he refused to die. (London 2005)

The first sentence reads, "The ship was no more than four miles away." After reading the first sentence, we know there is a ship in sight that could potentially save the protagonist. Next to that sentence, in the margin, we draw two logographic cues in the form of a ship and a cross. The ship represents the object in sight, and the cross signifies safety. The ship is the protagonist's only chance for safety at this point of the story. As we continue to read, the lines, "But he could never drag himself those four miles. . . . He knew that he could not travel another half mile" stand out. These sentences indicate the protagonist's energy level. We might draw a logograph of a gas gauge reading "empty." This signpost helps us to keep track of the protagonist's physical state as he makes a push toward safety. The last sentences read, "And yet he wanted to live. . . . he could not accept death. It was madness, perhaps, but in the very grasp of death he refused to die." These sentences are an "Aha" moment for us. There is a connection between these lines and the title of the story. It is because of his "love of life" that the protagonist is persevering through the challenges of the wilderness. We can draw a small chain in the margin to signify a "link" between this section of the story and the title.

In sum, the logographs that we have created for this paragraph tell us a story. There is a *ship* (ship logograph) not too far away that could bring the protagonist to *safety* (cross logograph). However, he has very *little energy* (gas gauge logograph) to make it to be potentially rescued. But, because of the protagonist's *love of life* (chain logograph), he will not give up. These logographs have served as high-utility messages, supporting our visualization, internalization, and comprehension of the content.

While logographic cues support comprehension, they simultaneously work to enhance students' ability to visualize the content of a given text. The various logographs created during reading allow students to visualize the progression of the story. Specifically, students are seeing the story as it happens through their personalized lens, which is represented by their logographs. In a sense, the reader acts as the director of the story, controlling the story's artistic and dramatic visual aspects as the words on the page are read.

In terms of procedures, teachers should provide students with multiple opportunities to practice the Logographic Cues strategy before having them implement it independently. To begin, teachers might demonstrate the strategy in a think-aloud, whereby they talk aloud to the class as they read with a specific logograph or series of cues describing their thought processes as they employ the cues and the logograph. Second, the teacher can invite students to implement the previously modeled logographic cue(s) with a partner on a small portion of the text. This will give the teacher an opportunity to correct any misunderstandings and answer questions as they arise. Third, ask students to practice the strategy independently on another portion of the text. The final step requires students to present their logographs to the whole class and discuss how this process enhanced their ability to visualize the text. This debriefing capitalizes on the gradual-release method so that students are comfortable and effective in implementing the Logographic Cues strategy.

DISCUSSION: READING EYES WIDE SHUT

In this article, we have presented a series of visualization strategies for secondary teachers reading through a narrative with adolescent language learners. Using London's "Love of Life" as an anchor text, we have described how teachers might engage readers in quick, collaborative, multi-layered graffiti-inspired sketches of what they imagine the text to look like and how readers might create an image-scape of the narrative or the narrative to come. We have described how teachers might leverage guided imagery to familiarize students with the descriptive historical context of a story about a nineteenth-century gold prospector—the environment he would have encountered and how that environment has changed since then. We have explained how a narrative passage might be divided into frames and storyboarded physically by readers. We have described how readers might create smaller visual cues in the form of logographs to guide their progression through a text. In their totality, these and other visualization strategies are aimed at making a text come alive for readers so that they might begin imagining the narrative they are reading—and themselves in that narrative space.

We have purposefully limited these selected strategies to those we think might be viable in classrooms with few resources. However, as a parting note, we encourage teachers to explore the many new technologies they might also use for visualizing texts, and we encourage teachers and students to explore them together. We also include the disclaimer that while we have focused here on the secondary classroom and on a short work of fiction, the strategies we have described can be adapted to a range of classroom contexts and texts. Certainly, not every scene in a typical story or passage of a nonfiction text is easily visualized using these strategies—or at least in our collective mind's eye. We encourage teachers to carefully select texts that lend themselves to visualization as they initially introduce students to ways of seeing before, during, and after reading.

Additionally, we know that some students will gravitate to certain strategies more than

others. Trying out more than one strategy with the same passage or even creating classroom stations where readers might self-select a strategy that resonates with them might be a way of affording choice. Whatever the format, talk to students about the strategies, which worked better for them, and why that may be. As students become more comfortable with the strategies, have them try the strategies with more-challenging texts—ones that initially they struggled to visualize. Talk about the challenges with the students; talk about other strategies individuals use to see what they read. Share success, failure, uncertainty, and innovation.

More than pleasure, reading has become a critical data point for measuring students' learning achievement and the value assigned to teachers and the work they do and the schools to which they belong. In the context of K–12 U.S. public education, for example, the work of English language arts classrooms has shifted to performance-based standards of students' ability to read a broad range of texts (literary and information) proficiently and independently. Visualization, we argue, can move students beyond simple comprehension to a space of meaning-making between text, self, and world. Ideally, as readers, we open a book or read a short story to enter the narrative fully. When this happens—thanks to the author's craft and our own reading processes—we keep reading and read more. Page by page—with every image the text evokes or that we create, eyes wide shut—our lust for life and for reading becomes that much more intense.

REFERENCES

Beers, K. 2003. *When kids can't read: What teachers can do—A guide for teachers 6–12*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

De Koning, B. B., and M. Van der Schoot. 2013. Becoming part of the story! Refueling the interest in visualization strategies for reading comprehension. *Educational Psychology Review* 25 (2): 261–287.

Deshler, D. D., J. B. Schumaker, B. K. Lenz, J. A. Bulgren, M. F. Hock, J. Knight, and B. J. Ehren. 2001. Ensuring content-area learning by secondary students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice* 16 (2): 96–108.

Gambrell, L. B., and R. J. Bales. 1986. Mental imagery and the comprehension-monitoring performance of fourth- and fifth-grade poor readers. *Reading Research Quarterly* 21 (4): 454–464.

Graesser, A. C., M. Singer, and T. Trabasso. 1994. Constructing inferences during narrative text comprehension. *Psychological Review* 101 (3): 371–395.

Harvey, S., and A. Goudvis. 2017. *Strategies that work: Teaching comprehension for understanding, engagement, and building knowledge–Grades K–8*. 3rd ed. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Hibbing, A. N., and J. L. Rankin-Erickson. 2003. A picture is worth a thousand words: Using visual images to improve comprehension for middle school struggling readers. *The Reading Teacher* 56 (8): 758–770.

London, J. 2005. *Love of Life*. (Adapted from original 1907 publication. New York: Macmillan.) https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/love-of-life.pdf

Murray, B., S. Salas, and M. Ni Thoghdha. 2015. Applied theatre, adolescent English learners, and the performance of literacy. *English Teaching Forum* 53 (2): 2–11.

Tovani, C. 2000. *I read it, but I don't get it: Comprehension strategies for adolescent readers*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

U.S. Department of State. 2020. "American English." Accessed August 24, 2020. https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/build-fire-and-other-stories

Wilhelm, J. D. 2016. *"You gotta be the book": Teaching engaged and reflective reading with adolescents*. 3rd ed. New York: Teachers College Press.

Spencer Salas is a professor of TESOL at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Brian Keith Williams is an assistant professor of Education in the Department of Educator Preparation at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.

Maryann Mraz is a professor of Literacy at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Soufiane Adrane is the Regional English Language Office Specialist covering Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. Soufiane joined the U.S. Mission to Morocco in 2018 as Education Outreach and English Language Coordinator.