

Simulated Field Trips

A simulated field trip is a powerful way for students to create vivid experiences in their minds. Many older people remember when the major form of entertainment was radio. With its absence of visual images, radio required its listeners to create mental pictures of the way various characters looked and acted. It was common for listeners to imagine landscapes, cities, and any number of exotic settings, thereby stretching their creativity.

Research has shown that with their eyes closed, people activate parts of their brain-mind systems that are not often stimulated. When we picture things in our minds, we call these parts of our brains into activity. Studies show skill in picturing things in our minds enhances our ability to enrich reading and to increase skill and imagination in writing. The capacity to remember concepts, words, names, and ideas is enhanced.

The following guidelines provide a basic, useful approach to simulated field trips as a teaching tool:

1. Ask the students to lay aside all pens, pencils, books, and such.
2. Instruct the students to sit in a comfortable and relaxed position with their eyes closed.
3. Wait until you see a general state of relaxation before beginning.
4. Using a steady and paced reading or speaking style, begin offering the students the narrative. Remember to speak slowly and steadily. If you want the students to create rich mental

pictures, you must allow them time to do so. It takes about as much time to observe mental images as it does to carefully review actual physical settings.

5. Once the narrative is finished, invite the students to review all of the images they saw in their minds. Again, try to allow enough time for an adequate visual review—and remember, the review takes time.
6. After adequate time for mental review (at least 1 minute and possibly 2 minutes), ask the students to open their eyes.
7. Begin discussing the simulated field trip in terms of the instructional purpose for its use.

In some cases, the process serves simply to provide a visual review of some of the students' past experiences. At other times, you are providing stimuli for the students to create original images. In any case, it is important to realize that there are no mistakes in mental images. The images are data. If students create images that are consistent with what you expected, consider the images to represent differing perspectives rather than wrong answers. Try to honor and nourish variety as a means to add richness to the topics being explored. In addition to being a powerful and effective way to explore and remember concepts, regular use of simulated field trips also tends to relax students. When relaxed, they frequently will be more productive in all academic areas.