

Introduction

Teachers of students with visual impairments know the importance of providing their students equal access to key information on the printed page. *BOP-K* lessons and activities focus on reading and understanding written text. Along with print, kindergarten materials are also rich with pictures that supplement the text. Meaningful descriptions of pictures enhance the child's understanding when the text does not fully incorporate information shown in the images.

Describing Images and Illustrations

Adapted from *Building on Patterns, Second Edition, Prekindergarten: Reference Volume*, pp. 23-25, by Kay Alicyn Ferrell.

Description refers to the verbal description of key visual elements that would otherwise not be available to a child with a visual impairment. It is an art as much as a skill, and descriptions are now available in educational videos, movies, and television, thanks to the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 and the efforts of the U.S. Department of Education to require description of educational content.

Regardless of how much vision a child has, get into the habit of describing visual images to them, whether they are in books, on television, or happening in real life. Ferrell (2011) suggests the following:

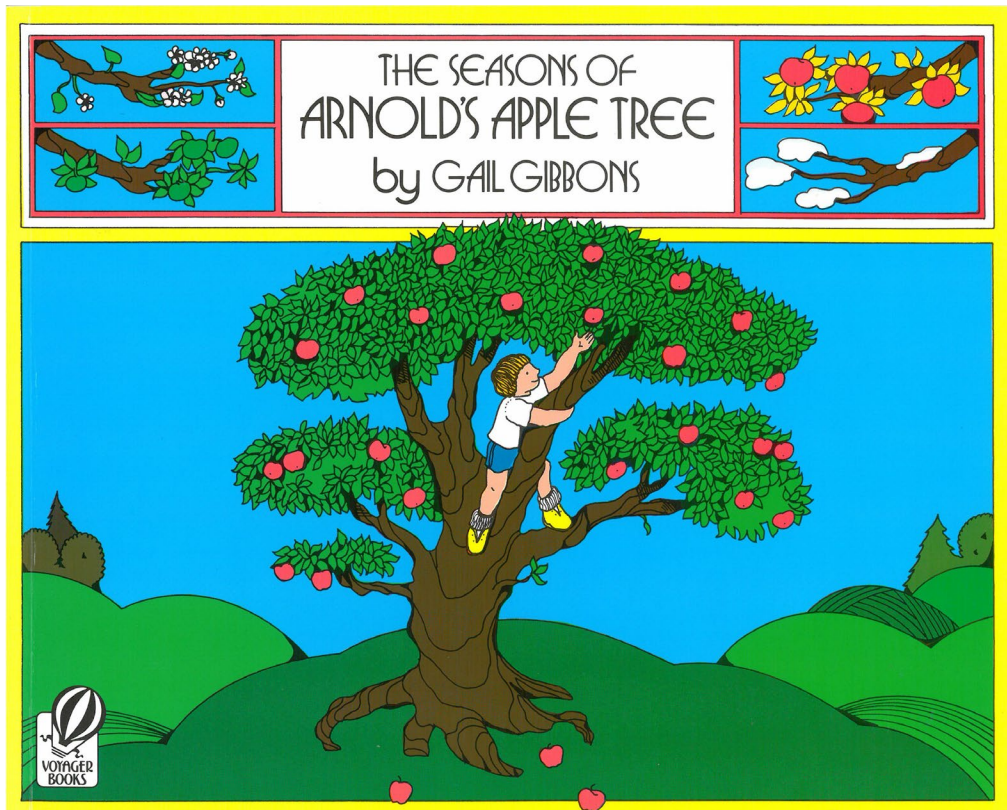
- ✓ Begin with the obvious: simple pictures of single objects.

“This is a ball. This is a telephone.”

Compare the picture to the real object if possible.

- ✓ With the more complicated illustrations ..., you will want to systematically describe an illustration (p. 278).

Lesson 8 in *Building on Patterns Prekindergarten* uses a book titled *The Seasons of Arnold's Apple Tree* (Gibbons, 1984). To describe the cover, systematically describe the cover illustration using the steps adapted from Ferrell (2011, pp. 278–279):



THE SEASONS OF ARNOLD'S APPLE TREE by Gail Gibbons. Copyright © 1984 by Gail Gibbons.

Introduce the book: This is a book about Arnold and his apple tree. It was written by Gail Gibbons. The title of the book is *The Seasons of Arnold's Apple Tree*.

Set the context: The cover shows Arnold climbing in a big tree that has many apples on it. Arnold is reaching for one of the apples.

Provide important details: The cover also has four smaller illustrations at the top. One shows a tree branch with green leaves and pretty white blossoms or flowers. Another shows a tree branch with green leaves and small green apples. A third picture shows big red apples on the branch, but the leaves are yellow. And the last picture shows a branch with no leaves at all, but covered in snow. These four pictures represent the different seasons—spring (with blossoms), summer (with green apples), fall (with red apples), and winter (with snow).

Use rich language: Choose descriptive words—color, size, hyperbole (“no leaves at all”)—to engage the child’s attention.

Imitate the action (if possible), or relate the picture to something previously experienced:

Since the child may not know about climbing trees, you may want to talk to the child's parents about climbing trees safely at home or in the park. It may be a matter of lifting the child up to feel branches and leaves rather than actually climbing, but the point is that the concept of trees is generally not within a child's experience without some mediation.

Make no assumptions: Even if the child has climbed a tree before, it may not have been an apple tree. So, probe a little deeper to be sure the child understands all the concepts conveyed by the illustration.

Use the same procedures for any illustration:

- ✓ Set the context
- ✓ Provide important details
- ✓ Use rich language whenever possible
- ✓ Imitate the action, or relate the picture to something previously experienced
- ✓ Make no assumptions about the child's understanding

This is a developmental approach to describing a picture that takes into account principles of moving from LARGE (setting the context) to SMALL (pointing out the details), also explained by Ferrell (2011):

This procedure is somewhat the opposite of how a child learns [tactually], ... when no adult is present to mediate. [The] child has to examine the parts (what [they] can feel at one time with [their] two small hands) and somehow construct the whole image in [their] mind from all of the small parts It's a much more difficult process to learn *inductively*, than to learn *deductively*—in inductive learning, children take the parts to make a whole, whereas in deductive learning, children see the whole and then break it down into parts. That's why, to the extent that you ... [and the other adults in the child's life] can, it's important to set the context for any picture, visual or [tactual]. (Ferrell, 2011, pp. 279–280)

Generally, image description guidelines suggest that your first consideration is to make a judgment about whether the image is important to the story, test item, or concept. When reading to the entire class or a small group, kindergarten teachers will discuss many pictures or ask a child to describe them. Before reading a picture book aloud to a child, it is helpful to preview the pages to identify content conveyed in the pictures that

is not described in the text. As you read aloud, describe those pictures that will add to the child's understanding of the story. Pay particular attention to the important picture details that are not described in the text. With young children, the text is often simple, and the illustrations are used to provide more information. As children grow older, the text assumes more importance than the illustration. There are also instances when the illustration has no obvious relationship to the story or text being read. Pictures might have been included for background knowledge or to convey humor. If that is so, it is always a good idea to let the child with visual impairment in on the joke!

Reference

Ferrell, K. A. (2011). *Reach out and teach*. AFB Press.

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