

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)

Visual Thinking Strategies (known as VTS) is a research-based method that uses works of art to stimulate critical thinking, communication skills, and visual literacy.

VTS is also a wonderful tool we can use to invite children to look, think, and talk thoughtfully and creatively about images in a book!

Here's how to use VTS when sharing a book with your young reader:

- Together, take a few moments to look closely at an illustration or image in the book.
- Encourage your child to look in silence for a few moments before you ask them anything.
- Don't focus on the description of the image (e.g., the title of the book, or text on the page) at this time. Let your reader make their own discoveries.

Now, ask your young reader these (and only these) open-ended questions:

1. What's going on in this picture?
2. What do you see that makes you say that?
3. What else can you find?

These questions help you guide the child to provide **visual evidence** to support their interpretations.

You can help deepen your young reader's understanding of language by paraphrasing what they say as you go along, all the while increasing the accuracy of the language. (Try to do this without making them feel corrected.)

One way you can do this is by beginning, "**What I hear you saying is...**" or "**So you're seeing...**" For example, if your child makes a descriptive remark, your conversation could go like this:

Young Reader: There's a woods and some houses.

Adult (pointing out the image details): So you're seeing these trees, which look like the woods, and some buildings that look like houses.

When your child makes an interpretive remark (drawing conclusions about what they see), ask, "**What do you see that makes you say that?**" For example:

Young Reader: The house is a happy place.

Adult: What do you see that makes you say that?

Young Reader: It reminds me of my babysitter's house when I was little. I had a lot of fun there.

You: I see. So you see a house in this picture, which reminds you of a place that holds happy memories.



Other things to try:

- validating the child's views
- connecting observations (with other observations, and with things the child knows)
- discussing differences of opinion (if more than one reader is describing the same image)

Where else can you use VTS?

Everywhere!

It can be fun to use the three VTS questions with your child to help you both look, think and discuss images anywhere in your environment: in advertising; in art; at school; on the playground; at the grocery store; in games; online; everywhere!

A few places to play with VTS online:

What's Going On In This Picture?: The Learning Network at the New York Times

Every week The Learning Network at the New York Times posts a new photograph (an image from the week's news, with the caption stripped) along with the question "What's going on in this picture?" Kids are invited to join the moderated conversation in the comments, and read what others have posted.

<https://www.nytimes.com/column/learning-whats-going-on-in-this-picture>

10 Intriguing Photographs to Teach Close Reading and Visual Thinking Skills - These are ten of the most popular images to discuss from "What's Going On in This Picture?"

<https://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/02/27/10-intriguing-photographs-to-teach-close-reading-and-visual-thinking-skills/>

More information about VTS

More information about VTS can be found at the VTS website: <https://vtshome.org/>

