

PICTURE THIS...

VISUAL LITERACY TOOLKIT

FULL RESOURCE PACK

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Visual Literacy Classroom Toolkit

This comprehensive classroom resource offers engaging, standards-aligned visual literacy activities for elementary educators. Designed to support diverse learners, this toolkit encourages critical thinking, emotional expression, and storytelling through images.

Grade Level Range: K-5 (with adaptations)

Estimated Time: 1-3 class periods

Materials Needed:

Mentor texts (Suggestions Below)

printed templates

drawing tools (pencils, crayons, markers)

paper or notebooks

Section 1: Visual Thinking Prompts

What This Activity Does:

This warm-up activity helps students observe and analyze illustrations, deepening their understanding of mood, character, and narrative. Great for morning meeting, read-alouds, or partner work.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will observe and describe visual details in illustrations
- Students will make inferences based on facial expressions, color, and composition
- Students will develop empathy and emotional awareness through image analysis

Why This Activity Works:

It's accessible to all learners, opens up student talk, and helps build vocabulary for expressing thoughts and feelings.

At-a-Glance Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.7 – Use illustrations to describe characters, settings, or events
- CASEL SEL: Self-Awareness, Social Awareness
- 21st Century Skills: Critical Thinking, Visual Analysis

Step-by-Step Implementation

Pre-Reading Preparation:

- Set up a chart paper or whiteboard for shared responses
- Select a visually rich spread from your chosen picture book

- • Prepare visuals for modeling responses

During Reading Activities:

- • Ask open-ended prompts during read-aloud or shared viewing (Samples Below)
 - • What do you notice first on this page?
 - • What do the character's facial expressions or body language tell you?
 - • What colors do you see, and how do they make you feel?
 - • What do you think is happening that the words don't say?
 - • What might happen next, based on what you see?
 - • If you were inside this picture, what would you hear/smell/feel?
 - • Why do you think the illustrator made that choice?
- • Model think-alouds to scaffold student observations
- • Encourage turn-and-talk or small group discussion

Post-Reading Extension:

- • Have students respond in journals with sketches and sentence stems
- • Create a class mural of 'visual emotions' from different books

Section 2: Silent Comic Strip Activities

What This Activity Does:

Students retell or invent stories using pictures only, developing sequencing skills, creativity, and non-verbal communication.

At-a-Glance Standards

- **VA:Cr1.2.2a** – Make art or design with various materials based on personal decisions.
- **VA:Cr2.1.3a** – Create personally meaningful images that explore storytelling.
- **VA:Re7.1.3a** – Use art vocabulary to describe personal reactions to art and visual narratives.

Step-by-Step Implementation

- • Choose a nearly wordless book and read aloud, discussing visuals
- • Read it aloud, pausing to discuss what's happening visually.
- • Distribute comic strip templates or folded paper
- • Challenge students to draw a full story in 3–4 panels without using words
- • Pair students to read each other's strips out loud using only the visuals
- • Reflect: What was easy or hard about telling a story with only pictures?

Section 3: Booklist with Teaching Tips

I Will Not Eat You – Use shadows and shape to infer emotions. Pause to ask: What's happening that the words aren't saying?

Lift – Ask students to narrate the story using visuals only. Focus on facial expressions and image sequence.

The Rock from the Sky – Act out scenes with no dialogue. Emphasize posture and pacing to explore mood and humor.

Mel Fell – Discuss how the book layout shows movement. Challenge students to create vertical stories.

I Talk Like a River – Show spreads without text and ask: What mood is this? What do you think the character feels?

A Stone for Sascha – Explore grief and memory without words. Ask students to interpret color and time jumps.

The Arrival – Study detailed imagery for emotional clues. Great for immigrant experiences and symbolism.

Journey – Create storyboards of student 'portal adventures' inspired by the book's imaginative world.

Flashlight – Use lighting and shadow to discuss what's hidden or revealed. Ask: What would you explore?

Lines – Use abstract images to prompt emotional storytelling. How do lines create movement or emotion?

Section 4: Story Panel Templates Activity

Title: Silent Comic Strip Activities - Picture Book Lesson Guide

Featured Books: Wordless or Nearly Wordless Picture Books (see sample list below)

Primary Subject: Visual Literacy, Art, Storytelling

Grade Level Range: K–5 (with adaptations)

Estimated Time: 1–2 class periods (30–45 min each)

Materials Needed:

- Selected wordless or nearly wordless picture book (e.g., *Journey* by Aaron Becker, *Flora and the Flamingo* by Molly Idle, *The Lion and the Mouse* by Jerry Pinkney)
- Blank paper or printed comic strip templates
- Pencils, erasers, crayons, or markers

SECTION 1: QUICK OVERVIEW

What This Activity Does:

This activity strengthens students' ability to tell stories visually, developing both sequencing and comprehension skills. Students listen, observe, and then create a narrative using only illustrations—no text allowed!

Learning Objectives:

- Students will analyze story structure through visual storytelling
- Students will create a wordless comic strip with clear sequencing
- Students will interpret and narrate visuals aloud to build oral language skills

Why It Works:

Silent storytelling removes language barriers and gives all learners access to story structure, regardless of reading level. It encourages creative risk-taking and strengthens both comprehension and expressive skills.

At-a-Glance Standards:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.7 – Use illustrations to understand characters, setting, or plot
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.2.4 – Tell a story with relevant, descriptive details
- Visual Arts Standard VA:Cr2.1.2a – Experiment with materials and tools to express ideas
- 21st Century Skills: Creativity, Communication, Visual Literacy, Empathy

SECTION 2: STEP-BY-STEP IMPLEMENTATION Pre-Reading Preparation:

1. Set Up Your Space: Arrange for a read-aloud area and accessible art stations for comic creation.
2. Preview the Book: Introduce the concept of wordless books. Show a few spreads and ask, “How do we know what’s happening without words?”
3. Gather Materials: Comic strip templates or blank paper, drawing tools, anchor chart with simple story elements such as (Beginning, Middle, End) or (Mystery/Surprise Reveal). [Templates Below]
4. Prepare Students: Share expectations—no words allowed! Ask students to think about how faces, actions, and settings can tell a story.

During Reading Activities:

1. Opening Hook: “Can you tell a story without using a single word?”
2. Interactive Reading Strategies: Pause frequently to invite predictions or interpretations from the visuals.

3. Student Participation Opportunities: Students can act out or describe what they think is happening at key moments.
4. Comprehension Checks: Ask, “What’s the character feeling here? What clues help you know?”

Post-Reading Extension:

1. Core Activity:
 - a. Students plan a simple 3- or 4-panel story with a beginning, middle, and end.
 - b. Draw their comic strip using only pictures.
 - c. Pair up and "read" each other's comics aloud—interpreting from the visuals.
2. Wrap-Up Discussion:
 - What was easy or hard about telling a story without words?
 - Did the reader understand your comic the way you intended?
3. Assessment Opportunities: Review for clear visual sequencing, character emotion, and reader interpretation.

SECTION 3: COMMON CORE STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

Reading:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.7 – Use information from illustrations to understand the story

Speaking & Listening:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.2.4 – Tell a story using relevant visual details

Writing (Optional Extension):

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.3 – Write a narrative with sequential events (can be added after drawing)

Visual Arts:

- VA:Cr1.2.2a – Make art from personal experiences or imagination
- VA:Cr2.1.3a – Create personally meaningful images that convey narrative

SECTION 4: DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGIES For English Language Learners:

- Use picture prompts to model expression and action
- Allow oral planning in native language before drawing
- Pair with fluent English speaker to "read" comics aloud

For Students with Special Needs:

- Provide comic panel templates with frames already drawn
- Offer visual prompts or story starters
- Allow alternative mediums (collage, stickers, stamps)

For Advanced Learners:

- Add an emotional twist or surprise ending to their comic
- Create a silent comic sequel to the class read-aloud
- Use shading and composition techniques for dramatic effect

For Struggling Readers:

- Focus on one character's journey
- Offer step-by-step visual planning guides
- Allow drawing first, then scaffold verbal explanations

SECTION 5: LEVELING GUIDE Scaling DOWN for Younger Students (K–1):

- Use two-panel format (start/end)
- Focus on a single emotion or event
- Provide simple facial expression guides

Scaling UP for Older Students (4–5):

- Create four-panel comics with conflict and resolution
- Integrate symbolism or visual metaphor
- Discuss how layout affects pacing or tone

SECTION 6: EXTENSION ACTIVITIES Same-Day Extensions:

- Create a class gallery wall of silent stories
- Have a partner "translate" a comic into words and compare

Week-Long Extensions:

- Silent comic journals (1 panel per day)
- Turn one comic into a puppet show or stop-motion project

Cross-Curricular:

- Language Arts: Write a companion story to match visuals
- Art: Study facial expressions in comics and graphic novels
- Social Studies: Create a silent story from a historical figure's perspective

SECTION 7: PARENT INVOLVEMENT & HOME SUPPORT

Take-Home Information:

This week, we're learning how to tell stories with just pictures! Ask your child to read their comic aloud using only the pictures they drew.

Home Extension Activities:

- Create a comic together about a shared family memory
- Read a wordless picture book together and take turns narrating

Communication Tools:

- Newsletter Blurb: “We’ve been exploring how images can tell stories. Ask your child what their silent comic was about!”
- Student Reflection Sheet: “My comic is about _____. The beginning shows _____. The end shows _____.”

SECTION 8: ASSESSMENT & DOCUMENTATION

Formative Assessment Ideas:

- Observe whether visuals communicate story elements clearly
- Use a checklist for Beginning–Middle–End structure

Summative Assessment Options:

- Student-led peer reading followed by oral explanation
- Optional: Add captions or text bubbles later as an extension

Documentation Tools:

- Scan or photograph student comics
- Display comics in hallway or classroom showcase
- Collect a portfolio of visual storytelling samples throughout the year

SECTION 9: TROUBLESHOOTING & TIPS

Common Challenges:

- Students may try to add words: Remind them this is a visual-only challenge
- Story feels flat or unclear: Encourage expression through action, setting, and facial cues

Adam’s Pro Tips:

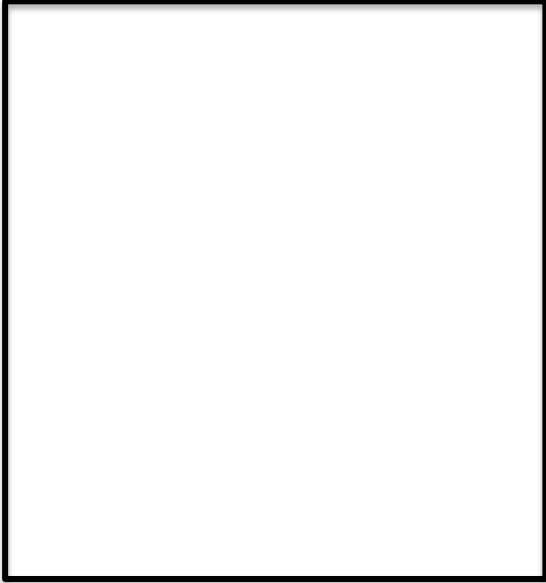
- Share a teacher-made silent comic to model the process
- Offer mini-lessons on expressions and panel sequencing
- Embrace creative differences—stories don’t all need the same structure!

Resource Alternatives:

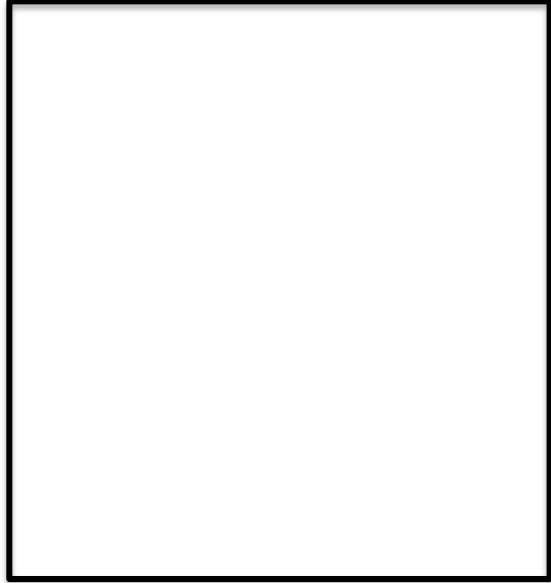
- Use sticky notes for panels if paper is limited
- Allow digital comic creation with free online tools (e.g., Pixton, Storyboard That)
- Pair with your art teacher to expand into a visual storytelling unit

Template Samples Below

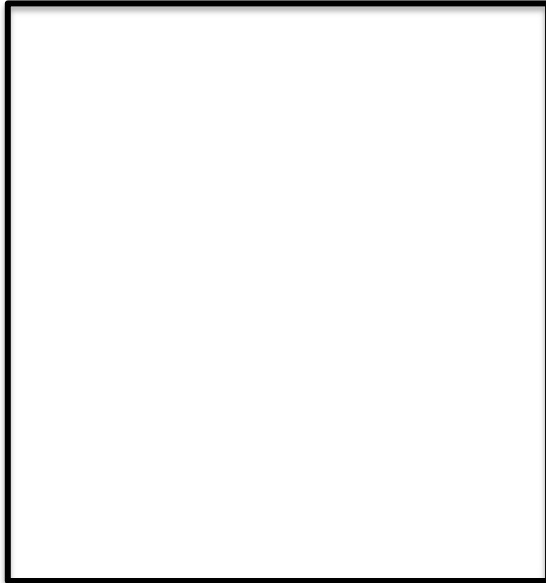
Clue 1



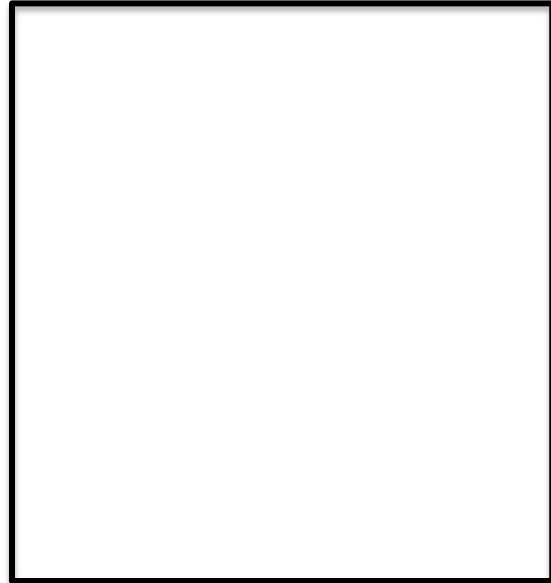
Clue 2



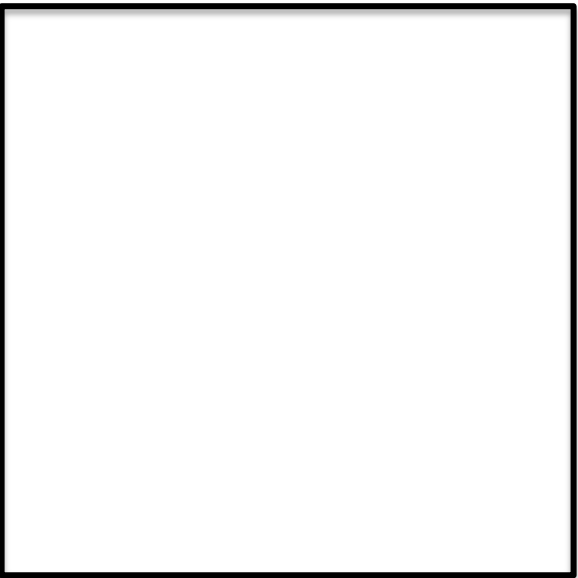
Build Tension



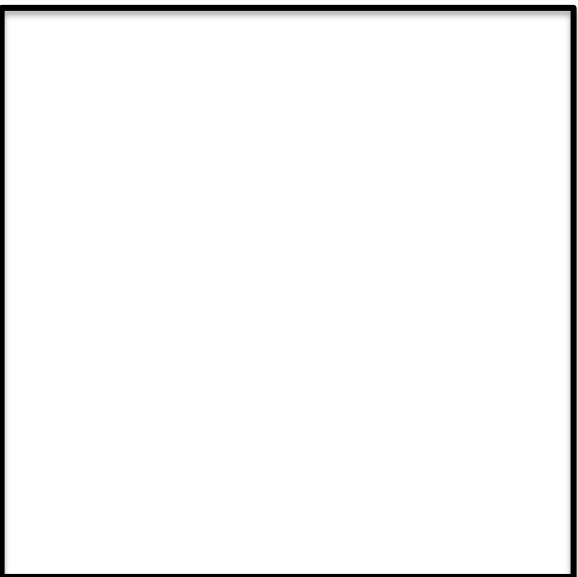
Final Surprise or Twist



Beginning



Middle



End

