

Memory Training: Session 1

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'Use Your Imagination'

Context: An introductory training session about the role of imagination in learning.

Session Plan: Start by telling the children that their memory training is going to begin with an experiment. Ask them to listen carefully as you read aloud the following list of words:

**dragon coconut quick firework knife silence seven goat tomorrow
soft King Kong motorbike yes waterfall kite**

Then, before asking the children anything about this list ... tell them that you have three questions for them:

! Who is your favourite superhero?

! What is your worst plate of food?

! Where do you feel happiest?

Get them to share their answers, in partners or small group as well as with you and the whole class. Explore their responses – but, more importantly, encourage them to talk about what's actually going on in their brains while they're answering.

Discuss whether pictures appear automatically to help them remember and talk about these subjects. If so, are the images in colour? Are the children 'looking' at them from outside, or somehow within the picture, looking out? And is it possible to answer questions like this without thinking in pictures?

After this period of discussion, return to the list of 15 words you read out at the start. Ask the children to write down as many of them as they can remember now.

When the children have had a few minutes to do this, display the full list of words so that they can see how well they did. Ask them to look carefully at the words they remembered

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easily, as well as the ones they forgot. Explain that this is an experiment to help us learn more about the memory process – by revealing why we tend to find some types of information harder to remember than others.

Emphasise that abstract words, like silence and soft, are usually much harder to remember than words that suggest clear mental pictures, like firework or King Kong. There are lots of other things that play a part in memory, including how unusual something is and whether it excites your emotions; but an important starting-point is the 'visibility' of an idea: how easy it is to 'see' in your mind's eye.

Give the children time to talk to a partner about their personal way of visualising some of the words on this list. Encourage them to compare their own versions of the pictures, and then to share some of their ideas with the whole group. How did they picture the firework, the waterfall, King Kong ...?

Explain that pictures play a key role in memory, so it makes sense to use them whenever you can. A big part of memory training is learning to create powerful mental pictures that will help you to remember; in other words, to use your imagination to help you learn.

Ask for ideas about the times we already use our creative imagination. For example:

- ! dreaming amazing dreams, full of strange events, weird characters and colourful scenes
- ! daydreaming, letting your mind wander off into its own imaginary world
- ! thinking up ideas for stories, poems, paintings and games
- ! seeing pictures of people and places when you listen to a radio station or podcast
- ! playing games where you and your friends take on different imaginary roles

Explain that you can develop a powerful memory by using these imaginative skills when you learn. But imagining is more than just thinking about things. It's 'seeing' things as clearly as possible in your mind, and perhaps including some of your other senses, like taste and touch, to help make them really come alive.

Ask the class to think back to the list of 15 words. Which word made them imagine ...

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! tastes?

! smells?

! textures?

! sounds?

Discuss the way that pictures can stimulate several different senses. And it also works the other way around – when a taste, smell, texture or sound inspires a picture in your mind. Can the children suggest times when that's happened to them; for example, when a particular smell triggered a very clear mental picture?

Imagination and memory are clearly linked. A strong imagination is at the heart of a well-trained memory.

Set the children a challenge. If they had a big party to arrange tomorrow, would they be able to remember the following shopping-list?

ice-cream chips chocolate cake candles balloons

orange-juice lemonade napkins paper plates streamers

Display the list and give the children a few minutes to practise imagining each item in turn. Encourage them to visualise each thing in detail, thinking about colours and shapes and maybe even including other senses, like touch or taste.

Then, remove the list and ask the children about the things they remember. When a child recalls one of the words, ask them to describe the way they visualised it. How big was it? What colour was it? Did it have any special details? Were any senses other than sight involved in the version that appeared in their head?

Explain that having a good imagination is vital to being confident about your memory. Demonstrate this by reading aloud the following list. The children simply have to call out YES or NO as quickly as they can, depending on whether each word was on the shopping list for the party.

lemonade

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candles

sausages

nuts

chips

popcorn

streamers

Did they notice how quickly their brains came up with the answers? Visualising information begins the process of storing it in a very secure way. It's the first step towards developing a really strong memory.

Extra Activity below (to be set for homework or used as a follow-on task)

‘Just Imagine!’

Instructions: Use your imagination to exaggerate each item on the party shopping-list below. Bigger, noisier, smellier, brighter, weirder ... have fun making each item amazing – in any way you like. Really try to ‘see’ your new version of it in your mind's eye.

For example, you might create the world's biggest chocolate cake, as huge as a house, covered with litres of chocolate cream. How many people would it take to make it? How would it be transported? How would you feel when you saw it?

Start practising with your powerful imagination. Begin to take control of information and make it memorable.

ice-cream chips chocolate cake candles balloons

orange-juice lemonade napkins paper plates streamers

Find a time to discuss your ideas with others. Share your mental pictures and talk about how it feels to start using your brain in this way.