

Literacy Strategy

Symbols

The basis for using symbols as a literacy strategy has its roots in Paivio's dual coding theory. The dual coding theory proposed by Paivio attempts to give equal weight to verbal and non-verbal processing.

Human cognition is unique in that it has become specialized for dealing simultaneously with language and with nonverbal objects and events. Moreover, the language system is peculiar in that it deals directly with linguistic input and output (in the form of speech or writing) while at the same time serving a symbolic function with respect to nonverbal objects, events, and behaviors. Any representational theory must accommodate this dual functionality (Paivio, 1986, p. 53).



Symbols support a quick recognition system that allows for fast translation of presented information. Symbols further allow for economy in the amount of information presented. Imagine a weather map where all the important information about fronts and precipitation are represented. If that information were written out, the map itself would be obliterated by textual material. The important information would be obscured. Symbols have always been part of human culture and constitute a common visual language.

Some Common Uses of Symbols in Content Areas

Subject	Use of Symbols
Language Arts	punctuation, mythology
Mathematics	operational and relational signs
Science	periodic chart, weather symbols
Social Studies	map symbols
Health and Safety	warning symbols

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