Using Pictures in ELT

Mark Hancock

"A picture is a text where the student provides the words". In other words, the image gives the students content, but leaves the expression of that content up to them. Below, I suggest a list of ideas for using pictures under the headings *Description*, *Narration* and *Instruction*.

A. Description

Single frame

1. Spot mistakes: You describe (spoken or written), but with some differences. They listen/read and find difference between what they hear/read and what they see.

2. Memory game: Show the picture for a limited time. Then hide it and they say what was on it from memory.

3. I spy: They find things in the picture eg things beginning with the letter F, or things containing the sound /i:/. Or as true I spy: you select a thing in the picture and give a clue (eg it begins with F). They guess what you selected.

4. Role-play: If the picture has two or more characters, they can role-play a dialogue between them.

5. Opinions: If the picture shows something striking/polemic, it can serve as discussion starter.

6. Listen/read and modify: If you give them a copy of a black and white drawing/map, you could then ask them to modify it according to your description, eg you describe a man as wearing glasses, so they draw the glasses on him or you say where things are, they mark them on map.

7. Text reconstruction: Write a text about the picture. Replace all words with numbered gaps. They have to reconstruct the text guessing at the words in the gaps.

8. What's wrong: picture has obvious errors eg anachronisms. They identify them.

9. Describe and draw: Do a drawing. Describe it. They must listen/read and do their own drawing.

10. Deduction: Describe someone from the evidence we see in the picture.

11. Identify in a crowd: In a busy scene, describe someone and they must identify the one you describe.

Language: there is (still life) was/will be (still life contextualized in past or future) present/past continuous (busy scene contextualized in present or past)   have (describing people) can (describing machines)
Sources: posters adverts maps weather maps magazine pictures textbook pictures paintings cartoons your drawings

Picture-pairs

12. Spot the difference: If they're not to easy to see, students search for them and then tell you the differences they find.

13. Find the difference: Students in pairs, describing the pictures to one another and discovering where the differences are.

14. Remember the differences: Show first picture. Then hide it and show the other. They say what the difference was from memory.

15. Invent a connection: Take a random pair of pictures. They must invent a way they are connected.

Language: comparative (same things in two pictures, but different) present perfect/passive (before and after pictures)   countability (pictures with differences in quantity eg of foods)
Sources: magazines   textbooks   single black and white picture with tippex modifications by you   magazine pics eg "before and after" computer-modified photos

Multiframes

16. Identify: Describe one of the items (spoken or written). They listen/read and identify which one. Then they do it as pair work, one describe and the other identify.

17. Matching: Students could decide which pictures belong together, eg if there are one set

of families and another set which show houses or cars.

Language: comparative/superlative (which pic has the most of some feature)
Sources: illustrations from consumer information magazines/articles eg showing lots of different cars/sofas...   illustrations from naturalist (etc)manuals eg of different species of bird/fish... holiday brochures   a collection of similar single-frame pictures eg of faces.

B. Narration

Single frame/picture pair
18. Detective work: They look at the evidence in the picture and speculate the story that led to the situation in the picture.
19. Yes/no questions: You invent a story behind the picture. They ask yes/no questions to find out the story.
20. Invent a connection: Get two (or more) unconnected pictures. They must invent a story that connects the two. You may start them off eg by saying a character in one picture is a relative of a character in the other.
21. Text reconstruction: Write a text telling a story behind the picture. Replace all words with numbered gaps. They have to reconstruct the text guessing at the words in the gaps.
22. Guess the plot: Take a picture from a book sleeve or cinema poster. Students speculate what the story is (film posters are rich because they're often collages of many images)

Language: present tenses (narrative when describing plot of film or book) past tenses (normal narrative) modals of speculation
Sources: cinema posters   book sleeves magazines   textbooks
route drawn on a map/plan

Multiframe
23. Sequencing: Listen/read and put pictures in order.
24. Predicting: Predict the story from the pictures, then read or listen to check.

25. Invent an order: They put the pictures in any order they please (or random order) and tell the story.
26. Continue story: The invent how a story continues after the last picture.
27. Stop-gap: Take one or more of the pictures out of the sequence. They have to guess what happened in that picture.
28. Find differences: Say or write a story like the one in the pictures, but include differences. They read/listen and identify the differences.

Language: narrative tenses   present simple (story of a daily routine)
Sources: comic books   textbooks   photo-novelas   your drawing
collection of single frame pictures which juxtapose to tell a story

C. Instruction

29. Directions: You give directions on a map. They follow. Then they do in pairs, one directing the other.
30. Ask for clarification: You give directions, but miss out important information. They must notice it's missing and interrupt to ask for the information.
31. Write signs: Show a picture with lots of potential dangers. They write signs of instructions for avoiding accidents.
32. Write instructions: Show a picture of a machine/device. They write instructions of how to make it or use it.

Language: imperatives   modals of obligation (eg giving advice/instructions) first conditional (eg saying what'll happen if your instructions aren't followed)
Sources: maps   plans   diagrams   instruction manuals   road signs   textbooks