

Gathering Information from Visuals

Visual or graphic texts such as diagrams (including cross-sections and cutaways), maps, graphs, flow charts, and timelines provide information that is readily accessible to all students and is an essential understanding as students delve deeper into research. Students need to understand that visuals often contain additional information that is not in the accompanying text—the diagram and words are working together. Students need to know how to read and interpret the accompanying visuals in texts. It is recommended that you focus on only one visual at a time.

Time: 15 minutes

Materials:

- large, labelled and/or captioned diagram with all print covered by tape/sticky notes (e.g., a spider diagram—self-sketched from the Internet (<http://australianmuseum.net.au/Spider-structure>) or an appropriate page from Shared Reading in Grade 3
- chart paper divided into two columns with the headings “Diagram Observations” and “Text Information”

Grouping: whole class and partners

Procedure:

Teaching Tip: This lesson is designed to show students how to carefully analyze diagrams and the same format can be used to teach other visual text features.

1. Explain to students that there is much information to be gathered from diagrams found in non-fiction texts and often the diagram provides additional information to help further our understanding. Tell them we will be looking at a diagram together and recording the facts we discover. Introduce the chart to students.

Diagram Observations	Text Information

2. Reveal the diagram, keeping the labels concealed. Have students discuss with a partner their first ‘quick’ observation(s). Students then share what information they observed. Record their observations on the chart under the heading “Diagram Observations.” Prompt students, as they share, to notice even more graphic information.

Look carefully at this diagram. We know it is a diagram of a spider. Share with your partner a fact you noticed with a ‘quick’ glance. Yes, there are eight legs. But look closely at those legs. What else do you notice? That’s right, they appear hairy. Are all the legs the same length? You noticed the body is in two parts. Which part appears to be bigger? A diagram often contains more visual information when we look closely. Let’s record what we just noticed.

3. Now reveal the labels and read them together. Ask students to listen for new information not yet recorded. Record new information shared after reading is finished under the heading “Text Information.”

What have we learned? You're right! We know, by reading, that this spider's body is in two sections. The head and thorax are fused together to form the biggest section. There is also an abdomen which is the second section. We learned too, that it has silk spinning organs called spinnerets. We can see that the diagram and words are working together and by looking closely at the diagram, we learned even more information.

Teaching Tip: Keep descriptions of graphics simple as you repeat the process to focus on other visuals:

- **Cross-sections:** take a slice through something to show the inside (e.g., apple)
- **Cutaway Diagrams:** peel off the outside layer (e.g., inside of a clock,)
- **Flow Diagrams/Charts/Simple Timelines:** diagrams with lines, arrows, or numbers to show a process that moves through time (e.g., growth of a butterfly)
- **Maps:** place information in its spatial context and can be of anything (e.g., a city, a farm, my bedroom, a province or country)
- **Graphs:** bar and column graphs allow us to measure, compare, and rank (e.g., recording survey results, voting patterns)