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By Lynell Burmark

NEA Today; May 2002

(The Magazine of the National Education Association)

Resources: The Power of Visuals

*Visual Literacy: Learn To See, See To Learn*

# The Power of Visuals

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## **VISUAL LITERACY: LEARN TO SEE, SEE TO LEARN**

By **Lynell Burmark**

115 pp. \$22.95 paperback (non-ASCD members)  
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development  
To order visit [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org) or call 800/933-2723.

### EXCERPT

"The primary literacy of the 21st century will be visual: pictures, graphics, images of every kind...it's no longer enough to be able to read and write. Our students must learn to process both words and pictures. They must be able to move gracefully and fluently between text and images, between literal and figurative worlds."

**T**oday's children have always known a world of competing sound bites and digital images. Their attention spans are shorter than ever. Short of recruiting teachers from the ranks of MTV stars, how can educators compete for their students' attention?

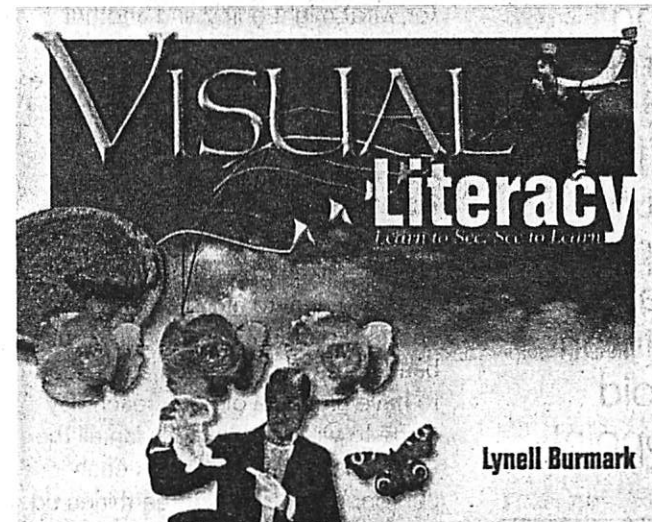
According to *Visual Literacy: Learn to See, See to Learn*, educators don't need to compete; they just need to adapt. Traditional instruction practices—the old way of teaching—simply won't work, says Lynell Burmark, author of the book and associate in the Thornburg Center for Professional Development.

"It's time for teachers to take

they foster for the betterment of student learning," she writes.

How? Through visual literacy—the 21st century's new "basic skill." According to the book, incorporating visuals—color, art, photos, fonts—into lessons can enhance and accelerate classroom instruction. Teachers will reach their students faster, more efficiently, and more effectively when they punctuate what they say with images.

The supporting facts presented throughout the book are convincing: Researchers have found that humans process visual information 60,000 times faster than textual information. They've also concluded that visual aids can improve learning



a different font during a presentation won't achieve visual literacy, Burmark writes. Like the process of learning to read, visual literacy is a learned skill, not an intuitive one. It can be achieved only by studying the techniques used to create images, learning the vocabulary of shapes and colors, and identifying characteristics that give an image its meaning.

Fast-moving and chock full of insights and facts, the book is an excellent resource to help teachers and students become more effective communicators and understand how to use the power of visuals to their advantage.

A particularly interesting chapter demonstrates how educators can use color to create specific moods for learning. Because our minds are biologically programmed to respond

accelerate learning and increase retention.

Of all the findings that Burmark presents, educators would probably be most interested in the conclusions of a German psychologist who found light blue, yellow, yellow-green, and orange to be the best colors for facilitating learn-

ing inside classrooms.

Burmark also takes the reader into schools across the United States and Canada and introduces teachers who describe their strategic, practical use of visual expression and technology.

*Visual Literacy* offers a wealth of replicable ideas and activities, as well as resources for free lesson plans, color images, books, and Web sites to help the reader become more "visually literate."

In addition to gaining practical knowledge, readers will also come away with a valuable insight: Visual literacy is imperative in today's schools because it is ever-present in the business world.

The author writes: "A lack of visual literacy is as much a handicap as the inability to read or write." After finishing this book, readers are

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