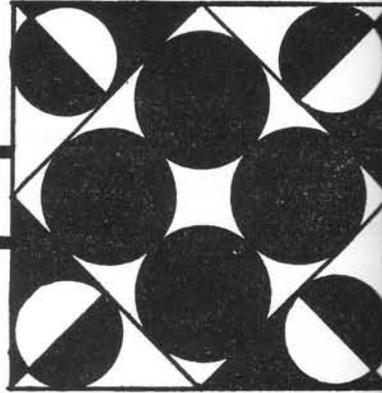


Idea Corner



“Tree-Toons” for Teaching Tree Identification

Dale Carnegie claims that the way to remember something is to associate it with the unusual or ridiculous. This idea has been used to teach tree identification. It's called a “tree-toon.”

A mental picture of an unusual or amusing scene is used to help you remember the characteristics of a tree species.

For example, if we wanted you to recall the identifying features of longleaf pine, we'd ask you to picture Captain Long John Silver with a large sewing needle in one hand and a huge white-tipped club in the other. Long John would be prodding three captives who were tied together toward the edge of the gang plank. The large needle represents the needles of the longleaf pine and the white-tipped club depicts the silver-colored winter bud. Three captives on the plank illustrate that the longleaf pine has needles in fascicles of threes.

Picture a gladiator chewing bubble gum with a mace in his hand.

He has just hit a fellow gladiator on the head. The victim is seeing stars. The stars the gladiator is seeing are representative of the leaf shape, while the mace in his hand is like the sweet gum ball. The bubble gum relates the scene to the name.

Sycamore can be illustrated by imagining a hobo with patches on his clothes and a pack tied on a stick. He's walking down the road with the mountains in the background. Patches on the hobo's clothes portray the appearance of sycamore bark. Mountains in the background are similar to its leaf margins and the button ball is shown by the pack tied on the stick.

In Louisiana this system has been used successfully to teach tree identification to about 4,000 children during the summer 4-H camping program. An approach that has been effective allowed the children to compose their own “tree-toons.” They enjoyed expressing their ideas this way.

In a 50-minute period, 15 to 20 tree species can successfully be taught to a class of elementary age

children. Usually only 5 to 10 species can be remembered if the conventional approach is used.

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An Extension Incident

It's widely assumed that the principles of community development, program planning, and the communication process have diffused generally into practice in most parts of the world. Yet you're brought up short when you realize how great the gulf is between principle and practice, especially among the vast rural populations in the less-developed countries. Recent observations of a planned extension program in West Africa may illustrate the continuing disparity between what we know (or think we know) about the education of rural people and what's all too often prevailing practice.

Around Pampam, a village of several hundred people set in the hilly rain forest not far from the Atlantic coast of West Africa, the dominant crop is pineapples and the farmers appear moderately successful. As a result of previous staff visits to the village, the Extension Department of the nearby university decided to organize a "Pineapple Day" in Pampam. It was designed to instruct the local farmers on improved pineapple production, especially through weed control.

The farmers, having received a printed flier announcing "Pineapple Day," assembled in the village primary school, along with the instructional staff, who were all experienced and had postgraduate degrees in agriculture. The main speaker, a crop specialist from the Faculty of Agriculture, spoke about 40 minutes on various methods of weed control, plant spacing, spraying treatments, and insect control.

His major recommendation was that polyethylene sheeting should be laid down between the rows of pineapples to suppress weed growth. A representative of the management of a nearby cannery commented on pineapple sales and marketing. The dialogue was spirited and the farmers' questions enthusiastic. After the usual group photograph, the program ended.

What really happened at Pampam probably varies from what was intended.

1. Communication difficulties arose right after the crop science professor began to speak. Frequent intervention by the other two extension staff was required both to interpret technical information for a semi-literate audience and to translate from the speaker's language to that of his listeners.
2. The expert apparently had little familiarity with the needs and circumstances of his audience. Many of the audience's questions had to be answered by the extension staff.

3. The program, which lasted only two hours, consisted of a lecture with no illustrations except for rough blackboard sketches and no demonstrations or field visits.
4. The principal recommendation—that plastic be laid between pineapple rows—was unsupported by demonstration or other helpful facts. When the farmers asked where they could get the material, how much it cost, and how to use it, none of the staff had the needed information. The farmers said they didn't even know what the plastic looked like!
5. When the cannery official said he wasn't there to discuss prices but to advise on production, the farmers were upset. The cannery price was 2 cents a pound compared to the 10 cents per pound paid by the market women both in nearby villages and in the capital city. The cannery representative was hooted down when he urged the farmers to increase production to increase sales to the cannery.

Clearly the main interest of the farmers of Pampam was economic.

Though exhibiting the good humor so typical of West African rural folk, the farmers seemed discontented and dissatisfied as they filed out of the school. The results?

1. Probably a drop in confidence in "experts" because of the unrealistic proposals made by the visiting speakers.
2. A confused image of the purpose of the brief visit to their village of the extension staff of the university.
3. An increased hostility toward the cannery.
4. Possibly suspicion of collusion between the university and the cannery.

Though organized by skillful and fairly knowledgeable staff, the more intensely felt needs of the farmers weren't discovered in time to deal constructively with them. Because of poor preparations and little follow-up, this program may have done more harm than good both in the short and long run.

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