Key visuals

What are key visuals and graphic organisers?

Key visuals and graphic organisers are visual representations and organisational tools with important applications in two distinct areas.

1. They can be used to help practitioners to focus on, understand and develop children's 'meanings', the connections they make and the ways in which they organise ideas and information.
2. They can also be used to help children to focus on and understand organisational patterns and the cohesion of ideas within texts.

They are particularly useful tools for EAL learners as they give teachers important insights into prior knowledge and experience, promote inclusion by allowing pupils to construct their own meanings and make their 'ways of seeing' explicit, they facilitate access to linguistically demanding tasks, they generate talk and powerfully support the development of cognitive and academic language.

Focusing on, understanding and developing children's meanings, connections and ways of organising information

Purposes
- To activate prior knowledge
- To assess understanding
- To develop the relationship between ideas
- To link prior knowledge to new learning.

Thoughts and ideas generated in order to activate prior knowledge can be grouped into diagrams in order to help children to clarify their thinking.

Mind Maps®, semantic webs or concept maps can be constructed by practitioners in 'guided' sessions or by children working independently in groups.

They help assess children's existing knowledge, the ways in which information and ideas are grouped, and the connections children are making.

Misconceptions can be identified and the visuals revisited at the end of a unit of work to see how ideas have changed or developed.

Each step in a procedure, a sequence of events or the attributes of a character or an object can all be represented in a visual form.

Children will be developing and using the language associated with listing, classifying, sequencing and prioritising.

Recognising and using common organisational patterns in texts

Purposes

- To develop awareness of the structure of a text
- To summarise main ideas from a written text in a visual form
- To organise relevant information and ideas from a discussion in order to support the construction of a formal talk or a written text.

Structures typically identified are:

- lists, including chronological lists;
- cause – effect;
- problem – solution;
- compare – contrast;
- main idea – further detail.

Each organisational pattern can be represented by a key visual which can then be used as a framework for note taking or contextual support to help with text comprehension or text construction, before, during or after reading, before and during writing, and during and after discussion.

Lists

Fiction and non-fiction texts will generate a range of lists. In order for these to be useful they need to be organised into categories. Eric Carle's *The very hungry caterpillar* will generate two lists – days of the week and the things the caterpillar ate. These lists can be organised into a chronological sequence.
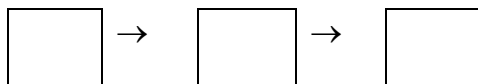
Information grids or retrieval tables, timelines, flow diagrams and cycles can all be constructed from different kinds of lists. Some examples follow.

Retrieval charts, tables or information grids

Who?	Ate what?	When?
the hungry caterpillar	1 apple	Monday
he	2 pears	Tuesday

Mini beast	Habitat	Food	Predators

Flow diagram

☐ → ☐ → ☐

For example, how we get our milk.

Timeline

|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|

Cycle
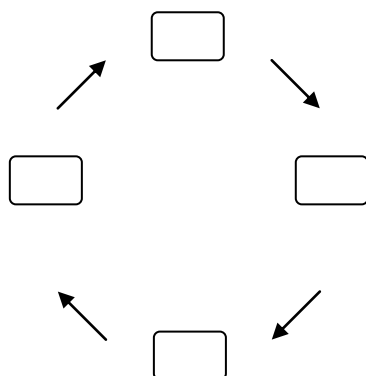
For example, life cycles, daily routines, and so on.

Cause – effect

This pattern is often found in narrative, signalled by phrases such as 'because of this the queen became more and more despondent'. In reports the language which signals cause and effect often includes use of the passive voice and nominalisation (abstract nouns created from verbs). For example, 'Erosion is caused by rainfall', 'A decline in the manufacturing industry led to high unemployment.'

Cause	Effect 1
	Effect 2

Problem – solution

This is another organisational pattern often found in narrative.

Scaffold as for cause and effect.

Compare – contrast

In order to compare, pupils will need to develop and use language such as:

- 'both X and Y do/have/are but X is …'
- 'whilst …, however…'
- 'same', 'different', 'similar', etc.

Life in a village in Pakistan	Life in a city in Pakistan
Lanterns used to light the way at night	Street lights
Narrow streets	Wide roads
Clay ovens in the courtyard	Modern gas cookers
People go to bed early	People are out and about in the evening
Water comes from a pump	Water comes from a tap

Miss Dynamite likes:	Miss Dynamite doesn't like:
people music	violence racism

Ways in which they are the same	Ways in which they are different

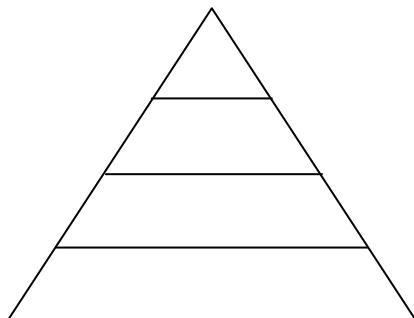| Biographies		
Nelson Mandela	**Both**	**Ghandi**

Venn diagrams would be an appropriate alternative visual here.
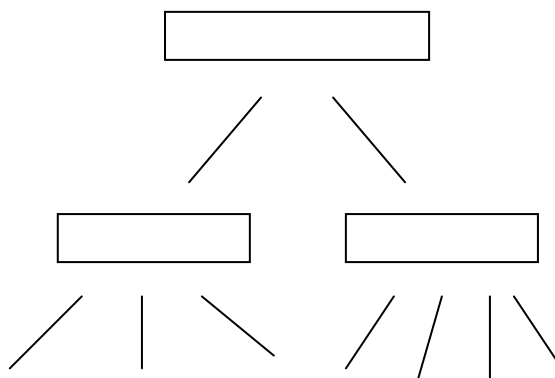
Main idea with further details

These can be differentiated for pupils with different needs in a variety of ways, for example by providing headings and sub-headings.

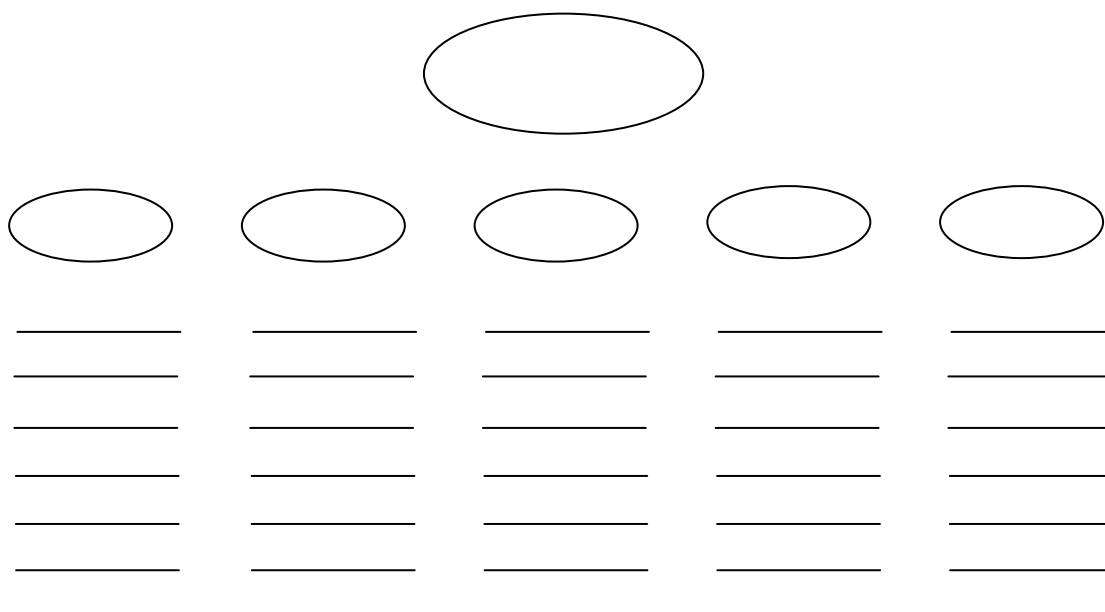Key visuals include the following.

Pyramids (hierarchy of ideas)

Tree diagrams

Structured overviews

Suggestions for teaching and learning strategies with key visuals and graphic organisers

- Practising sorting, sequencing and ordering a range of things from objects to information according to different criteria. Encourage children to explain their thinking during these activities.

- Using graphic devices within text, for example highlighting, underlining, arrows to connect ideas, bullets and numbers, and space.

- Demonstration and guided practice of constructing key visuals from text.

- Specific teaching of the language which signals the organisational pattern with opportunities to practise at sentence level where appropriate, for example using 'so' and 'because' sentences to distinguish between cause and effect.

- Demonstration and guided practice of constructing text from key visuals.

- Provide opportunities for pupils to construct visuals that reflect their thinking and understandings. This strategy is particularly powerful where pupils are required to explain their thinking to others and compare their format with visuals produced from the same text by other groups of pupils.

Useful website

The graphic organiser website (www.graphic.org) is a useful source of references, articles, templates and links.