CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE
Boyd K. Packer, Teach Ye Diligently, p.262

Visual Aids
Many years ago I heard President Oscar Kirkham tell this experience. He had been at a conference somewhere in southern Utah. In those days much of the week was spent by the Brethren traveling to and from the conferences. On Tuesday afternoon on his way back to Salt Lake City he came to a place where the road had been washed out by a flash flood and there was a large puddle of mud and silt. Every car that tried to cross it was stuck.

An enterprising farmer stood by with a team of horses. For a fee he would hitch his team and pull the cars across the puddle. The farmer recognized President Kirkham and introduced himself as the bishop of the local ward. "I'll pull you through for nothing," he said, "provided you'll stay over and speak to our young people in MIA tonight."

President Kirkham, who was anxious to be on his way home, said he'd rather just pay the fee. "In that case," said the bishop, "you can stay where you are." President Kirkham decided that under the circumstances, he would lose no more time if he stayed overnight and got an early start, so it was agreed upon.

On the way to the meeting the bishop explained they'd been having trouble with the teenage boys in the ward. He said they couldn't hold a good MIA because of the disturbance. He said that he wouldn't feel so bad of the boys would just not come, but they always showed up to disturb whatever was going on in the chapel.

The chapel was a little frame building with steps from both sides to a landing outside the front door. Word had been sent out that one of the General Authorities was to speak and so the young people had gathered, including the rowdy boys. However, they did not come in the building but, as was their custom, assembled on the steps where they could effectively disturb all that was going on.

President Kirkham knew that he had but one chance to take charge of the situation, and he seized upon an experience of the previous weekend. He didn't begin his talk on the Word of Wisdom or reverence or obedience. He began by saying that down in the community where he had been at the conference, somebody had brought a monstrous bear out of the mountains. Everyone in town had assembled to look at it.

"I have never seen such a big animal," he said. "Why, the claws on that bear were this long," he said, gesturing with his two hands to show the length of the claws.

The boys on the steps outside could hear what he was saying, but could not see what he was doing. Soon a face or two appeared at the door.

"The teeth on the animal were this big," he said, gesturing. The faces appeared again.
He went on to describe with some words, but mostly in gestures, the monstrous bear. And, he later told us, by the time he was finished, the boys had all crept in from the porch and were seated on the back row. He moved on from his bear story to teach the gospel to them without further interruption.

That dead bear in a community many miles away brought the boys to meeting and became a very effective visual aid.

Use Sparingly

In education, as in other fields, there comes along every now and then some new development, some so-called discovery or innovation or invention that is said to be the final answer to all of the problems in teaching. Such things sweep the world, are enthusiastically adopted by teachers, professionally and in other organizations, then either fade away or adjust themselves into the small niche that they will fill thereafter.

I remember a few years ago when teaching machines were proclaimed as the final answer. There was much to recommend them. They could be adapted to the fast learner or to the slow student. They were excellent for individual study. Any subject matter could be programmed to fit them, and there were any number of other virtues. But somehow they were not the final answer, and so it goes.

Teachers would do well not to be extremists on anything and to be cautious and wise in adopting new techniques or procedures.

Audio and visual aids in a class can be a blessing or a curse, depending upon how they are used. They might be compared to spices and flavorings that go with a meal. They should be used sparingly to accent or make a lesson interesting, but the basic instruction, when all is said and done, will for the most part be lecture, question and answer, and recitation.

A lot of verbal references are found in the New Testament which indicate that the Lord used visual aids to emphasize a lesson. When He said, "Consider the lilies of the field . . . they toil not, neither do they spin" (Matthew 6:28), it is possible, even probable, that lilies were in view at the time.

When He asked for a coin and asked whose superscription was upon it, a coin was there for all of them to see.

There was also the fig tree, and on many occasions there were people-the lepers, those sick with palsy, the blind, the lame, the deaf. All visual aids.

In the chapter on apperception, we talked about the ability of man, by using the alphabet, to reproduce in symbolic form the world in which he lives. In recent generations we have acquired the ability to produce images of the world around us to near perfection. With printing and photography, both still and motion pictures, developed to the degree that they are, we have the whole world at our disposal in the form of visual aids.
If you have been to Jerusalem (and I have not), you can show me the slides you took. If neither of us has been there, we can go to the library and get pictures or motion pictures. Incidents in the life of the Savior and the lives of the prophets can be reproduced in dramatic form and filmed so that we can relive them.

Be careful to use visual aids sparingly. The best of them are really the simplest and are often those that are readily available. On balance I think that no teaching aid surpasses, and few equal, the chalkboard: first, because it is simple to use, and next, because it is universally available—everywhere in the world you can get a chalkboard. You can use it to focus the eyes of your students while the main lesson is presented audibly. As you talk, you can put just enough on the board to focus their attention and give them the idea, but never so much that the visual aid itself distracts them and becomes more interesting than your lesson.

Perhaps the most common mistake in employing written words as visual aids is in not synchronizing sight and sound. The mistake is made so frequently that only occasionally do you see it done correctly. If you have words to write on the chalkboard, or if they are on a chart, or if they are put on a flannelboard, or if they are thrown on a screen from a projector, the students should see with their eyes and hear with their ears at the same time.

Suppose you flash a list of five objectives on a screen and then describe them in words other than those the students can see on the screen. You have the eye and the ear out of synchronization. Some of the students are concentrating on reading, and their minds are forming those words. Others are listening only to you, and most of them are trying to do both at once and are doing neither very well. When you flash a list on the screen, it should be read so that the eye is directed and the ear is focused on the same word at the same time. Otherwise the chances of permanent learning taking place are greatly reduced.

Unfortunately this is rarely done. To fail to do it is to make very poor use of the powerful tools available in visual aids. Many of them are right in front of us all the time but are ignored.

I have always thought that films, filmstrips, and tapes that are not complete—that is, that are open-ended—can be very helpful in sponsoring meaningful discussion. Too often we want to tell the whole story.

In using visual aids, be sure they have a purpose. Don't use them merely as decoration. Bring them out when you are ready to refer to them, so they don't distract class members and draw their attention away from the lesson. And don't use visual aids that are merely decoration for the classroom.

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but only if it is used judiciously to enhance the lesson and make a point.