Ambush
Roger Woodward

Here comes Joey Bacon, clanking up the hill on his rusty old Schwinn. A perfect target for my brand-new squirt gun. I scramble up the big green bench beside our tall stockade fence, and take up a sniper's position between two slats.

Joey slowly pedals into range. Red-haired, sallow, freckled. He lives on the only farm left in our neighborhood. There are cows in his driveway. None of us has ever played there. But sometimes, Joey will join our work-up baseball games on the vacant lot. He can hit a little, not much of an arm.

From my hidden perch, I watch the enemy approach. Almost, almost, almost, fire! I arc the stream of water just ahead of my target, leading him like a quarterback leads a receiver. Joey rides directly into my perfectly descending stream.

"Hey! What?" He yells, and puts his bike down, wiping water from his eyes.

I'm done hiding now, laughing over the top of the fence. "Gotcha!" I taunt. Joey gives me a considered look, and picks up a rock from the shoulder of the road.

The last thing I remember thinking is how pitiful his throws from right field had always been. I come to in the car, my weeping mother driving with one hand while holding a blood-soaked dishtowel to my forehead. Eighteen stitches and a mild concussion. My dad never could get the blood out of the car seats.

Three weeks later, the local sheriff rings our doorbell. When my mother answers, I linger just behind her, eavesdropping.

"Hi, Carol. I'm just checking around with some parents today. Seems like we got some kid who's selling fireworks at the park, the big kind, you know, M-80s, cherry bombs. I'd sure like to take him off the street, whoever it is."

Officer Sullivan smiles at me. As one of the local Good Kids, I'm not a suspect. "I'm not worried about Roger getting tangled up with that stuff. But if you hear anything, either of you." Gently checking the scar that I will carry for the rest of my life, I lean out from behind my mother and suggest:

"Maybe Joey Bacon?"

Seven years later, another man in uniform pays a visit to our neighborhood. He rings the Bacons' doorbell and tells Joey's mom that her son died in an ambush near Khe Sanh. If I remember correctly, I was drinking a beer in my freshman dorm at the time.
Lesson 4.3  Drawing Text Details

Great literature evokes powerful visual images in your mind. That is, unless you have been playing Grand Theft Auto since the day you were born. Because today's kids have had vivid, extravagant images supplied for them throughout their lives, many of them need lessons in "remedial visualization." In other words, they need to practice making their own mental images when they read, listen, or view.

**Preparation**

Practice reading the poem aloud. Make copies of the poem for each student as well as a projectable version. This lesson works best if you offer large drawing paper (legal or bigger is good) and an assortment of multicolored pencils and markers. Plan how to create groups of four for sharing at Step 4.

**Step 1**  Hand out the poem and read it aloud. Follow along with me as I read this poem called "Ascent" by Michael Salinger. Try to make a picture in your head of what is being described in this very visual poem. Read "Ascent" aloud, slowly and with drama.

**Step 2**  Give drawing instructions. Now, draw what this poem is making you see. You can draw this in any style you want—stick figures, cartoon, diagram, whatever. Don’t go all art-phobic about this. The goal isn’t to get your drawing into an art gallery, it is to help you visualize what the poet is trying to show you.

You might pick out just one section to focus on, or you can try to pull the whole thing together in one drawing, or even make a quick series of cartoons. You can label things with words if you like. Be sure to keep checking back into the poem for details to include.

This is a silent activity, so work quietly by yourself for a while—later we’ll get into groups to discuss the poem. Ready? I’ll give you about five minutes for the drawing. Raise your hand if you need help.

**Step 3**  Circulate and assist. You’ll probably have to referee the sharing of markers at first, unless you have provided plenty for everyone. As you circulate, give reassurance to kids who aren’t confident of their drawing skills, and redirect students who are simply copying someone else instead of thinking about the poem.

**Step 4**  Share drawings. Now get into your groups of four. You are going to pass your drawings around and look at each one for about thirty seconds. I will tell you the timing for this.

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**Text**  "Ascent," by Michael Salinger

**Time**  30 Minutes

**Grouping Sequence**  Individuals, groups of four, whole class

**Used in Text Sets**  1, 7