



## Teaching 101

# Target Identification

By Tim Cameron

**I teach several courses including Hunter Education, Firearm Safety, Bowhunter Education and Trapper Education. The topic of seeing and being seen is a critical one to ensure everyone is safe and shows respect for game and non-game species. I would like to share a teaching tip in this regard. It initially came from the International Bowhunter Education Program.**

Proper target identification is vitally important for all hunters. To begin this part of the lesson, I quickly pass signs with three common phrases in front of the students. The word arrangement is important.

**“Look before you  
you leap”**

**“Once in a  
a lifetime”**

**“A bird in the  
the hand”**

Once I have removed the phrases from their view, I then ask the class to tell me what the signs said. The reply will be “Look before you leap, Once in a lifetime, and A bird in the hand.” I will inform them they were wrong and we will try it again, showing the signs and repeating the question. Usually, after several tries someone will identify the inaccuracy and tell the class.

Now the learning process for the students begins.

First, we explore why the class could not catch the real wording on the signs. These are all common phrases they have seen before, so their minds automatically fill in the blanks to create phrases that make sense. Their minds drop the repeated

words and the students never notice the difference. To transfer this to a hunting situation just think of all the magazine articles you have read with a picture of a deer, bear, moose, or other game animal you are hunting.

How many television programs have you seen with pictures of the animals you will be hunting? How many 3-D targets have you shot at with your bow or electronic shooting simulators? What this media has done is to create in your mind a “common phrase” for your image of a game animal.

Now to make the lesson hit home personally to each student in the class:

When you are out hunting in the woods and hear the twig snap—what goes through your mind, what question do you ask yourself? When polling the class the usual response will be “Is it a buck? Is it a bear? Is it...?” and they continue to list game animals.

This is the trap that many hunters fall into. They inadvertently prepare their mind to see that “common phrase” or common image of the game animal they are seeking. They are now trying to apply that noise, movement or shadow to the image in their mind. They fail to realize, as they

did with the three simple phrases, that their mind is now searching within for every image of a game animal and filling in the blanks to make this noise, movement, or shadow fit that image. This is a mistake. This is how accidents happen. The proper question to ask yourself is “What is it?” This should leave an open or blank image for your mind to interpret the noise, movement, or shadow for what it is instead of what you want it to be. Once you know what it is, then and only then can you determine if it is a suitable target.

**“Look before you  
you shoot”**

Always be sure to ask “What is it?” This is just a small part of the lesson on game identification and safety; but I feel this interaction in the classroom does cause the students to think. This, I hope, will lead to thinking in the field and safety for all concerned. +

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