

***Tools for Teaching Academic Vocabulary***

*by Janet Allen*

78-page flipchart

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This excerpt from the flipchart *Tools for Teaching Academic Vocabulary* by Janet Allen includes the Table of Contents, introductory pages and four of the 20 modules:

- Word Talk with Word Questioning
- Multiple-Meaning Words
- How to Use External Context Clues to Learn New Words
- Word-Rich Instruction

Each of the four sample modules is followed by its associated reproducible page(s) from the Appendix.

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## DEDICATION

*For Glenn—with love and gratitude for the constant encouragement (a.k.a. nagging). I'm sorry I didn't get this finished in time for Stenhouse to give you your easy chair in the exhibit hall booth!*

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# Introduction

*I don't think my handwriting has improved because I have been doing it "half fast."*

—Fourth grader's self-assessment

If I were assessing my teaching of vocabulary, I would have to admit that my assessment would be similar to this fourth grader's self-assessment of his progress. Knowing no other options, I tried to teach and assess knowledge of words in the same ways I had been taught. Our district used programmed-vocabulary books and it seemed an "efficient" way to teach vocabulary. The troubling aspect for me was that students seldom used the words in their writing or speaking. I felt what I was doing wasn't really increasing their vocabulary, but I didn't know what else to do. I fell into the trap of seeing vocabulary as *something* we did but not part of *everything* we did.

The purpose of this text is to develop a deeper understanding for effective academic vocabulary instruction and provide you with tools to help your students learn new words, become more conscious of words, and increase competence in knowing when and how to use the words. Like the two previous flipcharts I've written—*Tools for Teaching Content Literacy* and *More Tools for Teaching Content Literacy*—*Tools for Teaching Academic Vocabulary* is not designed to provide you with a program. It is designed to provide you with resources to create your own program that meets the needs of your students and your learning goals, as well as the demands of rigorous texts and high-stakes assessments.

*Tools for Teaching Academic Vocabulary* begins with Developing a Comprehensive Vocabulary Program, which is an overview of the components of a research-based vocabulary program (Graves 2000, 2006). This is followed by Defining Types of Vocabulary: General Academic; Domain- or Discipline-Specific; Topic-Specific; and Passage-Critical (Text-Specific), with a quick reference chart (Reference Chart for Vocabulary Types) that highlights the salient characteristics for each type of vocabulary.

Following these introductory materials, you will find the instructional tools I have included to support teaching academic vocabulary. For ease of use, the tools are ordered based on the four components of effective vocabulary instruction. An overview page is provided for each of the four components followed by tools that can be used to develop effective instruction for that component.

As educators, we know it will take a wide variety of resources to ensure that all students experience the power of knowing and choosing the right word for any task. It is my hope that this resource will add to your existing repertoire for accomplishing that goal.

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# Developing a Comprehensive Vocabulary Program



*It is certainly possible to know the what of a thing without knowing the how or when of it.*

—P. A. Alexander, D. L. Schallert, and V. C. Hare,  
“Coming to Terms”

With each new wave of literacy reform, we seem to know more of the “what” of vocabulary instruction without clearly knowing the “how” or “when” of that instruction. The publication and widespread adoption of the Common Core State Standards (2010) have heightened the discussion about the importance of effective teaching of vocabulary. However, all state standards include standards focused on increased knowledge of language. In spite of the pressure to meet and exceed standards, many educators say that creating a comprehensive vocabulary program that is effective, efficient, and engaging still eludes them.

Fortunately, today we have access to a great deal of research that documents and describes components of a comprehensive vocabulary program. Understanding these components and knowing how to focus instruction so all components support word learning in every classroom is critical. The components are not grade-level or discipline specific and should apply to any words you want students to learn. You may want to use the organizer on page A1 in the appendix (Graves 2006) to guide discussion and assess the degree to which these components are established and used in your classrooms.

**1. Providing Rich and Varied Language Experiences:** This component is a cornerstone for all instruction. If students have access, including time, to read, discuss, and write a wide variety of texts, they will encounter many unfamiliar words. The chart below shows the potential benefits (Nagy and Herman 1987).

Amount of Reading	Number of Days Reading	Number of Words Encountered	Number of Unfamiliar Words Encountered	Annual Gain in Vocabulary
25 minutes/day	200	1,000,000	15,000–30,000	700–1,500 words

- 2. Teaching Individual Words:** Teaching individual words that are essential to content is critical, but the sheer volume of words that would need to be taught is overwhelming. Stahl and Fairbanks summarized the problem: “Since a vocabulary teaching program typically teaches 10 to 12 words a week or about 400 a year, of which perhaps 75% or 300 are learned, vocabulary instruction is not adequate to cope with the volume of new words that children need to learn and do learn without instruction” (1986, 100).
- 3. Teaching Word-Learning Strategies:** This component is based on the importance of supporting students in becoming independent word learners. Vygotsky’s words, “What a child can do in cooperation today, he can do alone tomorrow” (1962, 104), aptly describe the necessity of students knowing and using a wide range of strategies for learning words independently.
- 4. Fostering Word Consciousness:** Word-consciousness activities are often the most engaging part of word study. Many activities fall into this component: activities involving word play, researching and sharing word origins, and helping students become aware of the structure, subtleties, and use of language.

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# Defining Types of Vocabulary

*I'm not sure I know what that term means, but I think I'm already doing it.*

—Virginia middle school teacher

The practice of replacing old words with new ones that may, or may not, be more precise can lead to confusion for educators. A common question I hear is: “Everyone is talking about teaching academic vocabulary, but how is that different from what I’m already doing?” A brief response to this question is that academic vocabulary is the language that is used to comprehend and communicate within or across academic disciplines or content areas. However, under the umbrella of this definition, there are types of academic vocabulary, and all types of academic vocabulary would not be taught using the same methods.

In an attempt not to add to the confusion about terms, I want to describe the four types of academic vocabulary I address in *Tools for Teaching Academic Vocabulary*. While these terms are used with increasing frequency, not everyone would categorize or use these types of words in the same way. In order to provide a common language for my writing and your reading, I have defined and described the terms as I use them. These definitions and descriptions should help you determine the type and frequency of vocabulary on which you will focus based on your teaching and learning goals.

## General Academic Vocabulary

These are words used across disciplines rather than words that are specific to a single discipline or domain. These words are used in the CCSS, in other state standards or learning results, and in the questions and prompts students encounter on standardized tests. Students will encounter these words in any discipline. They are often verbs as they usually indicate the cognitive processes or actions students must employ to complete a task. Based on their frequency of use, I would classify these as Tier 2 words (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan 2002).

## Domain- or Discipline-Specific Vocabulary

These words are a constant in a given discipline. I view these words as a subset of academic vocabulary as they are critical to

understanding the discipline and the tasks associated with that discipline. In the context of a specific content area, these words would be considered Tier 2 words, as they are high-utility words in that discipline. They may be encountered in other contexts, but they are most often and definitely necessary to comprehend, use, and communicate the content of a given domain or discipline. In general usage, these terms might be considered Tier 3 words if encountered infrequently.

## Topic-Specific Vocabulary

Topic-specific words are a subset of discipline- or domain-specific words. These words are related to a unit or topic of study that occurs within a discipline. Usually, these words are Tier 3 words because they are related to a specific domain and may have a lower frequency of use than the discipline-specific words since they are connected to a single topic within that discipline.

## Passage-Critical (Text-Specific) Vocabulary

Passage-critical words are words students don’t know, are critical to understanding a specific text passage, and can’t be defined from their repertoire of word-learning strategies. Categorizing these words as any one tier would be difficult; they might be rare (Tier 3) but critical to comprehension, or they might be basic words (Tier 1) that readers still don’t know. Therefore, these are words I would target for direct instruction.

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Beck, I. L., M. G. McKeown, and L. Kucan. 2002. *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. New York: Guilford.

## Reference Chart for Vocabulary Types

Word Types with Examples	Critical Features	Tier	Instructional Implications
<p><b>General Academic</b> Examples: <i>analyze, cite, compare, determine, develop, recount, restate, summarize</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not discipline-specific so encountered frequently</li> <li>• Usually indicate task or action being required</li> <li>• Necessary for understanding prompts, questions, or directives</li> </ul>	Tier 2	<p>Since these words are widely used, in-depth instruction and frequent use is required so cognitive action is automatic.</p> <p>The words should be used in classroom activities, in-depth discussions, learning tasks, and preparation for testing.</p>
<p><b>Domain- or Discipline-Specific</b> Math: <i>fraction, integer, ratio</i> English: <i>conflict, genre, plot</i> Science: <i>formulate, hypothesis, observation</i> Music: <i>dynamic markings, lyrics, measure, tempo</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discipline-specific</li> <li>• Frequently used and repeated as the language of the discipline</li> <li>• Language necessary for reading, writing, listening, and speaking about the content</li> </ul>	Tier 3	<p>These words would be cumulative in a discipline so frequent references to the words and their use would be critical.</p>
<p><b>Topic-Specific</b> Photosynthesis: <i>chlorophyll, endothermic, exothermic, photoautotrophs</i> Holocaust: <i>extermination, Nazis, persecuted, systematic, regime</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic-specific</li> <li>• Necessary to understand and communicate learning about the topic</li> </ul>	Tier 3	<p>These words are critical to comprehension and communication of information about a topic or concept so direct instruction and guided practice about how the words connect to the topic or concept would be necessary.</p>
<p><b>Passage-Critical</b> In <i>BATS: Biggest! Littlest!</i> (Markle 2013): <i>echolocation, homing, roost, wingspan</i> In <i>ICE! The Amazing History of the Ice Business</i> (Pringle 2012): <i>chisel, sawdust, thaw</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context-specific</li> <li>• Words critical for understanding a specific passage or entire text</li> </ul>	Usually Tier 1 or 3	<p>These words are critical to understanding passage of text so direct instruction would be required if the word is common or basic.</p> <p>If the word is rare, you might want to give students the definition within the context and help them see how and why the word was used.</p>

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Pringle, L. 2012. *ICE! The Amazing History of the Ice Business*. Honesdale, PA: Calkins Creek.

# Providing Rich and Varied Language Experiences

*My language is changing. I don't understand it. I read all those books and then I find these words just coming out of my mouth. I don't even know where they come from.*

—Sarah, grade ten

## What Does It Mean to Provide Rich and Varied Language Experiences?

Sarah's announcement is a living example of Stahl's research: "The amount of reading that people do is directly related to their knowledge of word meanings, even after accounting for intelligence. One obvious way then to increase the number of words children know is to increase the amount of text to which they are exposed" (1999, 13). We could look to many researchers and find agreement in terms that rich and varied language experiences are the foundation for all vocabulary instruction. And most would agree that those rich experiences begin with increasing the volume and diversity of reading in which students participate. Those experiences can range from your reading aloud to students to their participation in shared, guided, and independent reading.

However, rich and varied experiences should include more than reading. James Britton says that "writing floats on a sea of talk" (1970, 64). In trying to establish a *productive* "sea of talk" in a classroom, you will want to create opportunities for students to read and write and to discuss their reading and writing with others, but you will also want to provide them with time to develop expressive ways to communicate in print and nonprint media. Many language experiences can directly support students in learning language without taking a great deal of time. These activities can support comprehension and increase students' verbal and writing fluency in your discipline.

## How Do Varied Language Experiences Support Learning?

Providing time in school and support out of school for students to increase the volume and diversity of reading is absolutely essential in terms of learning new words. With the large amount of content students encounter in each discipline, it is necessary that they develop a working knowledge of the language of each discipline. Moore, Readence, and Rickelman cite the importance of being able to recognize and use disciplinary language:

"Outsiders are restricted in their communication with a group because they cannot use the group's special vocabulary and the concepts inherent in that terminology. Insiders use special vocabulary freely to communicate with the collective members of a group" (1989, 36). Some of the development of this disciplinary "insider" language can occur through a variety of rich language experiences prior to and during immersion in the content. Common prereading activities such as word sorts, possible sentences, or information passes can provide students with engaging opportunities to encounter and discuss the disciplinary language necessary to help them comprehend and communicate in your class.

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# Word Talk with Word Questioning



*I tried to put my mind back on Paradise Lost, but it was hard going. Somniferous was my word of the day. It means sleep inducing, and it was a good one to describe that dull and endless poem. Milton meant to give us a glimpse of hell, Miss Wilcox said, and he succeeded.*

—Jennifer Donnelly, *A Northern Light*

## What Is Word Talk?

Word talk is the active discussion, clarification, refinement, and questioning that occurs in situations that are designed for students to encounter and discuss content-related vocabulary. The lesson you design might provide a structured opportunity for students to encounter, discuss, and debate domain- or topic-specific vocabulary prior to encountering those words in the texts they will read. This discussion is a rich source for you in assessing the depth and breadth of content knowledge students bring to the unit of study. As students encounter the words they have previously talked about, they are able to contextualize their earlier discussion which leads to deeper understanding.

## How Could Word Talk Work in the Classroom?

Increasing the word talk in your classroom could range from relatively incidental learning to structured activities. Word talk could occur before beginning the study of a topic in order to assess and build prior knowledge of the topic-specific words, and it could occur after the reading to solidify students' understanding of key information related to the topic.

## When and Why Should I Use Word Talk?

In the context of providing students with a total language experience, Johnson and Pearson highlight the importance of talk in learning new words: “The best way we have found to reach our goal is to insist that by the end of any lesson a total language experience has been offered. That is, any vocabulary lesson must encourage students to really experience new words—to hear them used, to discuss and define meanings, to read or write them in meaningful context” (1984, 19–20). One of the greatest challenges for students is understanding content-specific vocabulary. If these words are only encountered in the text without any prior opportunity for students to see and talk about those words, there is a good chance they will understand only a small portion of what they read. Ideally, word talk should be used when students

encounter a new word or categories of words related to content they will be reading.

## Word Knowledge Through Questioning

Provide student groups with a list of domain- or topic-specific words from the new topic or unit of study. Ask students to discuss them based on their knowledge of the words and the topic and respond to the questions you provide. The following word-questioning activity is based on the topic of malnutrition.

- How are vitamin B, milled rice, and beriberi related?
- What possible connection could there be between pirates and vitamin C?
- What is the relationship between growth spurts and empty-calorie foods? (Choose two words that would seem to be unrelated.)
- How are scurvy, diets, and picky eaters all related to malnutrition?
- If I discovered a cure for malnutrition, what scientific words would likely describe the process I used?

The figure provides an additional example, which students will discuss prior to reading Jurmain's *The Secret of the Yellow Death: A True Story of Medical Sleuthing* (2009). The questions will be revisited and revised throughout the reading of this informational text. A blank version is included on page A4 of the appendix.

### Word Talk with Word Questioning

Directions: Demonstrate your knowledge of the underlined words by using those words to respond to each of the questions.

1. How are autopsies, microscopes, and test tubes related in *The Secret of the Yellow Death*?
2. What possible connection could there be between bouillon and yellow fever?
3. What is the relationship between mosquitoes and Bacillus icteroides?
4. How are Cuba, the battleship Maine, the Spanish-American War, and Dr. Walter Reed all related to yellow fever?
5. If I noted the use of gelatin, bouillon, and bacillus, where would I probably be? Why would I be using these words?

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## Word Talk with Word Questioning

- How are \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_ , and \_\_\_\_\_ related?
- What possible connection could there be between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- What is the relationship between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ ? (Choose seemingly unrelated items.)
- How are \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_ , and \_\_\_\_\_ all related to \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- If I discovered \_\_\_\_\_ , why wouldn't I be in \_\_\_\_\_ ?

# Multiple-Meaning Words: From General to Domain-Specific Knowledge

*One of the greatest sources of vocabulary development lies not so much in learning new words as in learning other meanings for words already known.*

—E. Dale and J. O'Rourke, *Vocabulary Building*

## What Are Multiple-Meaning Words?

Words with multiple meanings are referred to as polysemous words because they have two or more meanings. There are many details that can make a word have multiple meanings. In fact, if you look in a dictionary, you will discover that most words can have multiple meanings. The chart below highlights the most common types of multiple-meaning words. When you add other nuances such as contronyms (words that can mean the opposite, such as *clip*, which can mean to separate or to attach); capitalization (*will*, *Will*); parts of speech (*move*—noun or verb); and tense (*read*, *read*), it is easy to see why multiple-meaning words can make comprehension overwhelming.

Type	Spelling	Pronunciation	Meaning	Example
Homonyms	Same or Different	Same	Different	<i>Key</i> (used to unlock; low island reef)
Homophones (type of homonym)	Different	Same	Different	<i>To, too, two; bow, bough</i>
Homographs	Same	Same or Different	Different	<i>Lie</i> (untruth; lie down)
Heteronyms (type of homograph)	Same	Different	Different	<i>Tear</i> (trip or pull apart) <i>Tear</i> (fluid in/from the eye)

## How Could Teaching Multiple-Meaning Words Work in the Classroom?

Teaching multiple-meaning words can be a daunting task because there are so many types. After introducing your students to different types of multiple-meaning words, I believe the most effective tool is teaching each word at the point of need. Whenever you encounter a domain-specific word students may know from another context, it is important to teach and talk about the word as it is used in the context of your discipline.

In the example shown in the figure, the teacher is using this organizer as a word wall to keep a cumulative record of the domain-specific math words students are learning. Students keep a copy of the organizer in their academic journals as well so they can keep track of each new math term that is a known word from another context. Students brainstorm definitions or details related to what they already know about the word, note the math definition, and create a visual to help them remember the new definition. This organizer is one used in math class, but a generic form (Expert Language) is provided on page A16 in the appendix, as the same process can be used for helping students learn the language of any domain or discipline. For example, in

PE some multiple-meaning words might be *court*, *foul*, or *score*. Regardless of the type of multiple-meaning words you are teaching, three critical components of effective instruction should still be employed: integration, repetition, and meaningful use (Stahl 1986).



## When and Why Should I Teach Multiple-Meaning Words?

The most important reason for teaching students about multiple-meaning words is the impact on comprehension. Words that look the same but have different meanings can lead to ambiguity for any reader. However, these polysemous words can be particularly challenging for readers with limited language and a low volume of reading. The more limited students are in terms of depth of word knowledge, the more likely they are to struggle with reading and the more limited they will be in terms of word choice in writing and speaking. Many struggling readers simply give up when they experience confusion with a multiple-meaning word because that confusion can make all other surrounding sentences confusing.

In addition, many students assume that knowing a definition for a word means that they know the word. This thinking is reinforced each time we give students lists of words out of context and ask them to provide the definition for each word. However, knowing a definition for a word is the lowest level of word knowledge. Stahl notes that “a full and flexible knowledge of a word involves an understanding of the core meaning of a word and how it changes in different contexts” (1999, 25). Making students aware of the importance of context when encountering multiple-meaning words is critical so students begin to see patterns of multiple-meaning words they might encounter in your class.

Expert Language: Math			
Word	General meaning usage is . . .	In math it means . . .	Visual to help me remember . . .
<i>base</i>	bottom of something, support	number that is raised to a power in a mathematical expression	$2^3$
<i>power</i>	strength, the ability to do something	another name for exponent; indicates the number of repeated multiplications of the base	$2^3 = 2 * 2 * 2 = 8$
<i>product</i>	something produced by labor or work	result of multiplying two or more quantities together	$6 * 4 = 24$

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**Expert Language**

Word	What I already know about this word . . .	In this class, it means . . .	Visual to help me remember . . .

# How to Use External Context Clues to Learn New Words



*Students must know why and when to use context. Sometimes the context is quite explicit about word meanings; at other times the clues given by the author merely suggest an attribute or relationship. Students need to see and discuss various levels of context explicitness to develop sensitivity to the different levels of help context can provide.*

—C. Blachowicz and P. J. Fisher, *Teaching Vocabulary in All Classrooms*

## Why Is It Important to Teach Students How to Use Context Clues?

Regardless of what content is being assessed on a standardized test, students' strategies for figuring out the meaning of new and unknown words are always being tested. Words have meaning in a context, and research supports direct instruction in showing students how to use those clues from the text in order to help determine word meaning. In order for students to effectively use external (outside the unknown word) context clues, they have to know several things about context:

- Words have meaning in a context and the context can provide clues for meaning.
- Authors provide many types of clues to a word's meaning and knowing where to find and how to identify the clues is critical.
- Context clues, when used alone, can be uninformative or misleading.

Research shows that local context—the rest of the words in the sentence containing the unknown word—when used as the sole source of word meaning, is unreliable (Baumann and Kame'enui 1991). However, when students receive instruction and guided practice in determining word meaning through context and when definitional information is combined with context clues, students are more likely to effectively use context (Stahl and Fairbanks 1986; Nagy 1988). Therefore, it is important to provide students with an opportunity to learn how and when to use context clues. For maximum benefit, this instruction and reinforcement should occur in all content areas.

## How Could I Teach Students to Effectively Use Context Clues?

Teaching students how to use context clues is not an easy task regardless of how easy it looks when you use lessons or worksheets where the context explicitly leads students to a word's meaning. While many textbooks offer pronunciation, definition, or example as parenthetical supports for learning content-specific words, most texts students read will not offer such explicit support. Beck, McKeown, and McCaslin (1983) highlight contextual levels of helpfulness for readers: directive, generally directive, nondirective, or misdirective. As you create lessons, you will want to use examples with explicit context clues as well as examples with nonhelpful or even misleading contexts so students learn how to activate other strategies when the context is questionable in terms of support.

### Introduction/Anticipation

Use some kind of age-appropriate pictograph or visual puzzle such as the ones drawn by Troy Cunningham on page A38 in the appendix.

Ask students to try to “read” the pictures for you. Students will easily get “pushing the envelope” and may come up with *Death of a Salesman* and *Grapes of Wrath* for the remaining two. Ask them what they used to figure out what the pictures meant. Most students will agree that they used the picture clues with their background knowledge. Explain that when authors write, they expect readers to use their background knowledge with clues in the rest of the sentence surrounding an unknown word in order to figure out what a word means.

### Modeled Lesson

Choose excerpts from a variety of texts you use in your class. The excerpts should contain a word students probably do not know, and the contexts should provide varying levels of support. Provide students with a blank Get a Clue! organizer (see page A39 in the appendix). Demonstrate each of the context clue types, and think aloud about how that context could help you determine or predict the meaning of the unknown word. You will want to use only a few types in each lesson and then repeat the lesson several times reinforcing the types previously encountered and introducing a new type. See page A40 in the appendix for descriptions and examples of each type of context clue. All examples came from two informational texts: *Frogs! Strange and Wonderful* (Pringle 2012) and *Scorpions! Strange and Wonderful* (Pringle 2013).

### Guided Learning/Independent Practice

Provide students with an opportunity to practice the context types you introduced using the graphic organizer Finding the Clues (see page A41 in the appendix). Provide time for students to work together perusing a variety of texts to find sentences with unknown words and practicing using context clues to help them determine meaning.

### Closure

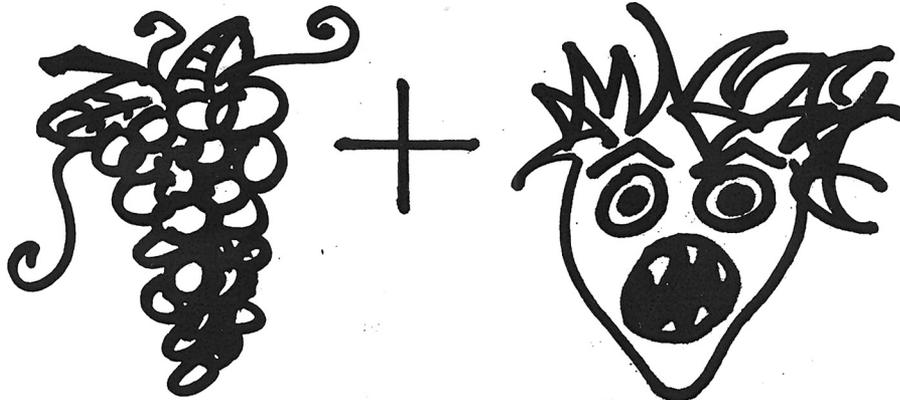
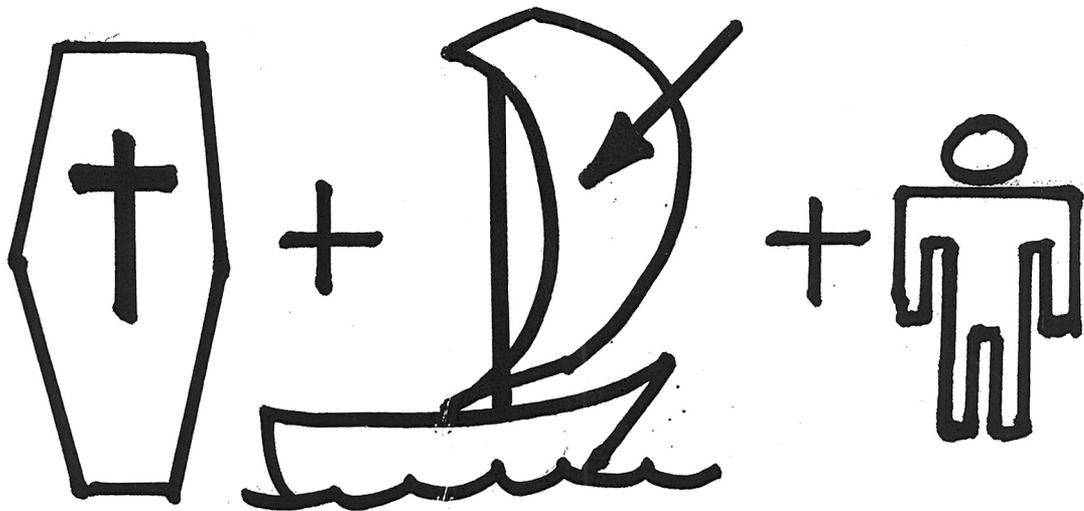
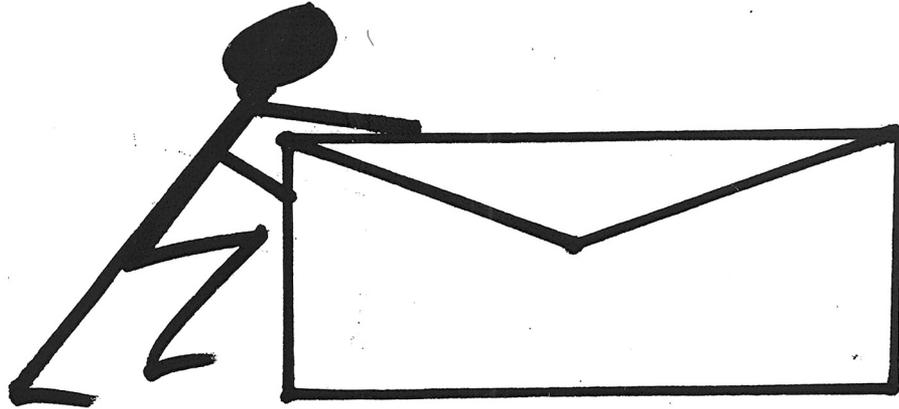
Close the first and subsequent lessons by giving students time to generate the challenges they faced and what other strategies they used when context was confusing or nonhelpful. This can be done using individual or group exit slips, or as paired or whole-group discussion.

After several modeled lessons on where to find context clues and how to use them in order to determine word meaning, students should be ready to transfer this strategy for their independent use and as part of decoding standardized tests.

### References

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### Troy Cunningham's Visual Puzzle



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## Get a Clue!

Type of Context Clue	Description of Context Clue	Example
Definition		
Description		
Restatement		
Example		
Synonym or Antonym		
Compare or Contrast		
Apposition		
Visual (font, punctuation)		
Other		
Context clue notes:		

## Get a Clue!

Type of Context Clue	Description of Context Clue	Example
<b>Definition</b>	meaning provided in a direct statement	The word <i>amphibian</i> means “double life” or “two lives.” (5)
<b>Description</b>	context provides description of characteristics, qualities of word	In front of these are pedipalps—clawed arms with pincers at the ends. (14)
<b>Restatement</b>	states again in a new way	Remember, the order of frogs is Anura—Greek for “no tail.” (8)
<b>Example</b>	context provides an example representing word’s meaning	There were growing reports of frogs that were deformed—for example, missing a rear leg. (28)
<b>Synonym or Antonym</b>	meaning expressed in terms that are similar or dissimilar	Glands in their skin produce poisons (toxins) that can make a predator sick or even kill it. (18)
<b>Compare or Contrast</b>	meaning expressed in words that are like or not like the word	This book is about real, not imaginary, scorpions. (7)
<b>Apposition</b>	uses parenthetical word or phrase to clarify/define	If necessary, however, it can stay on hot sand by “stilting”—standing tall on its legs, keeping the body away from the surface. (17)
<b>Visual (font, punctuation)</b>	uses visual to cue the reader to meaning of the word	Another threat is the chytrid (kit-rid) fungus, which has killed frogs in all sorts of habitats. (30)
<b>Other</b>		

**Context clue notes:**

## Finding the Clues

Sentence	Helpful Clues

**Challenges when using context clues:**

**If context clues don't help, what else could you do?**

# Word-Rich Instruction



*Rich instruction is very open-ended; it is not some particular set of activities but rather any activity that gets students to use, think about, and become involved with words. The major concept is to provoke thought.*

—M. D. McKeown and I. L. Beck, “Direct and Rich Vocabulary Instruction”

## What Is Word-Rich Instruction?

As McKeown and Beck note, rich instruction is open ended. While each teacher might develop very different strategies for enriching all components of a comprehensive vocabulary program, the common denominator will be that students will experience an enriched environment where they are immersed in interesting language. They will learn in classrooms filled with texts that use language in ways that make students want to read one book after another. They will learn from teachers who enjoy language, and they will want to emulate that language.

## How Could Word-Rich Instruction Work in the Classroom?

Unlike the other specific activities and strategies highlighted in this text, there is no formula for what word-rich instruction might look like in your classroom. Some examples of activities that help create word-rich environments follow.

- Begin class some days with word or critical thinking puzzles. While you won’t find this type of activity in state standards documents, it is amazing to see how those three or four minutes can take students from lethargic to energetic. Puzzles can be found in lateral-thinking books, on the Internet, and from companies such as [www.mindware.com](http://www.mindware.com). They will highlight interesting ways to help students become intrigued with words and learn mnemonic devices for remembering words. For example, you might ask your students what the following words have in common: *banana, dresser, grammar, potato, revive, uneven, voodoo, assess*.<sup>\*</sup> Or, ask them to interpret these mnemonic devices: “Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally” (order of operations in math); “Kids Prefer Cheese Over Fried Green Spinach” (order of taxonomy in biology); or, “Now I Need a Verse Recalling Pi” (a way to remember the first six digits of Pi).
- Begin some days with definition poetry such as those you would find in Michael Salinger’s *Well-Defined Vocabulary in Rhyme* (2009), and ask students to write their own definition poems for general academic or domain-specific vocabulary words.
- Show clips of speeches, talk shows, or news reports, and give students the opportunity to identify propaganda techniques as elements of persuasion: simplification, fallacy, ambiguous words, emotional appeal, hot/cold words, innuendo, exaggeration, bandwagon, and double talk.
- Develop lessons focused on language register. In the activity Whose Talk? Understanding Language Register (see page A49 of the appendix), students are challenged to identify street talk or slang, define the words or phrases, translate the words into Standard English, and identify contexts for both types of language. The example in the figure is based on language used in Aronson and Smith’s *Pick-Up Game*

Street Talk or Slang	Definition	Standard English	Context for Use
front us/fronting	an advance of money before anything else can happen	Provide some up-front capital as an investment.	If I’m hanging out with a friend and he wants us to do something, we would ask him to front us.  If I want investors like on Shark Tank, I would ask for up-front capital as an investment against profit.
sweeten the pot run-mouth dude chick skinhead “bumped out” clocked			

(2011). Use informal language from any text as an introductory activity to segue into changing language register for audience and purpose in writing and speaking.

- Create language activities for student collaboration and friendly competition. Students are always more engaged with language activities that offer time to talk and create challenges for other students. Teaching collective nouns with an activity such as *A Pod of Dolphins?* is one example of an interesting way to study grammar and usage. A sample version is on page A50 of the appendix, and a blank version appears on page A51. This activity can be extended to a lesson on single and plural nouns and subject-verb agreement.

## When and Why Should I Use Word-Rich Instruction?

Word-rich instruction is a significant part of fostering word consciousness. It can be a natural part of all that you do, and it can also be planned as support for your instruction. As students become more interested in language, you will find that you won’t have to plan as many activities as they will be providing much of the enriched language use in the classroom. McKeown and Beck continue their support of rich instruction with these words: “Give students a variety of information—examples, contexts, pictures, relationships. Then have them engage in interactions—create contexts, compare features of words, explain their reasoning, and discuss meanings and uses” (2004, 21). Fostering word consciousness in these ways forms the foundation for learning all types of academic language.

<sup>\*</sup>Did you figure it out? Move the first letter of each word to the end of the word and you have the same word when read in reverse (e.g., *banana—ananab*).

## References

- Aronson, M., and C. R. Smith. 2011. *Pick-Up Game: A Full Day of Full Court*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick.
- McKeown, M. D., and I. L. Beck. 2004. “Direct and Rich Vocabulary Instruction.” In *Vocabulary Instruction: Research to Practice*, ed. J. F. Baumann, and E. J. Kame’enui. New York: Guilford.
- Salinger, M. 2009. *Well-Defined Vocabulary in Rhyme*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills.

# Whose Talk? Understanding Language Register

Street Talk or Slang	Definition	Standard English	Context for Use

## A Pod of Dolphins?

**Directions:** Who knew there were so many ways to say *group*? Collective nouns are nouns that name a group of people, animals, or things. See if you can find the collective nouns that fit the groups of animals listed below.

1. A group of gorillas is called a band.
2. A group of lions is called a pride, sault, troop.
3. A group of dogs can be called a pack or a kennel but if it is a group of puppies, it is called a litter.
4. A group of monkeys is called a tribe or a troop of monkeys unless you are talking about chimpanzees. Then, the name changes to a cartload of chimpanzees.
5. Cats, cats everywhere . . . but what do we call them? It depends on whether they are cats or kittens—whether they are wild or not.  
A group of house cats could be a dout or a nuisance.  
A group of kittens would be a kindle (kendle) or a litter.  
But a group of wild cats would be called a destruction.
6. When you go swimming, you probably wouldn't want to be surprised by one shark so you certainly don't want to see a group of sharks! If you did see a group of sharks, that group would be called a school of sharks or a shiver of sharks.

Now it is your turn. See if your group can stump the other groups by creating a collective noun game. Use language books as well as Internet resources to find some interesting collective nouns that name groups of people, animals, or things.

1. Create your list of collective nouns. Be sure to keep an answer key!
2. Create some kind of game (puzzle, board, digital) for other students to test their knowledge of collective nouns.
3. Share your game with other groups. What new words did you learn?

## A Pod of Dolphins?

**Directions:** Who knew there were so many ways to say *group*? Collective nouns are nouns that name a group of people, animals, or things. See if you can find the collective nouns that fit the groups of animals listed below.

1. A group of gorillas is called a \_\_\_\_\_ .
2. A group of lions is called a \_\_\_\_\_ .
3. A group of dogs can be called a \_\_\_\_\_ or a \_\_\_\_\_ but if it is a group of puppies, it is called a \_\_\_\_\_ .
4. A group of monkeys is called a \_\_\_\_\_ or a \_\_\_\_\_ of monkeys unless you are talking about chimpanzees. Then, the name changes to a \_\_\_\_\_ of chimpanzees.
5. Cats, cats everywhere . . . but what do we call them? It depends on whether they are cats or kittens—whether they are wild or not.  
 A group of house cats could be a \_\_\_\_\_ or a \_\_\_\_\_ .  
 A group of kittens would be a \_\_\_\_\_ or a \_\_\_\_\_ .  
 But a group of wild cats would be called a \_\_\_\_\_ .
6. When you go swimming, you probably wouldn't want to be surprised by one shark so you certainly don't want to see a group of sharks! If you did see a group of sharks, that group would be called a \_\_\_\_\_ of sharks or a \_\_\_\_\_ of sharks.

Now it is your turn. See if your group can stump the other groups by creating a collective noun game. Use language books as well as Internet resources to find some interesting collective nouns that name groups of people, animals, or things.

1. Create your list of collective nouns. Be sure to keep an answer key!
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