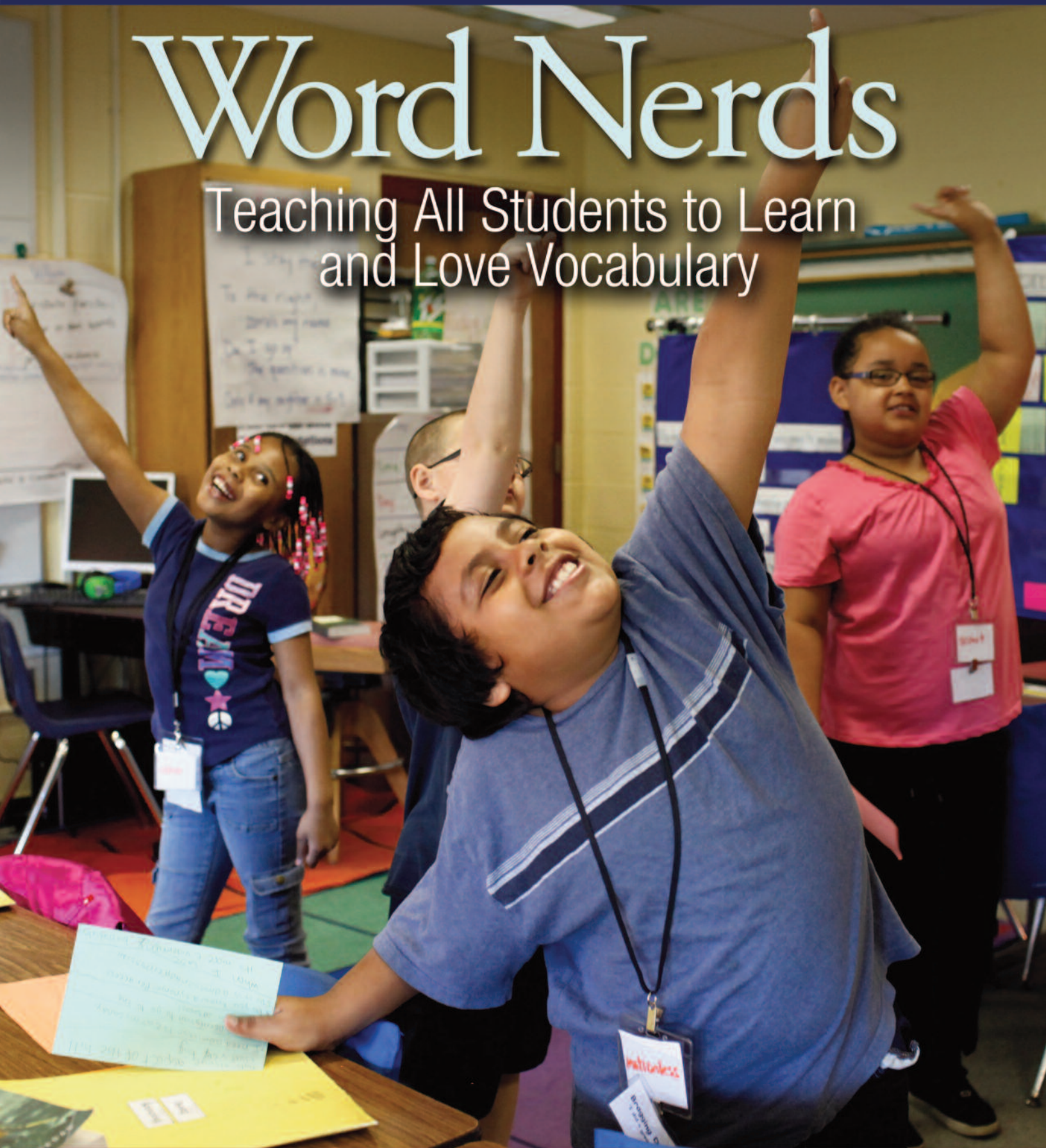


Word Nerds

Teaching All Students to Learn
and Love Vocabulary



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and Margot Holmes Smith

About the Book

Research confirms that vocabulary development is a crucial factor in developing reading comprehension skills. In fact, some literacy experts consider word knowledge to be the key to advanced learning. For high-poverty students and English language learners (ELLs), vocabulary development is especially important because limited word skills can stunt academic progress. Unfortunately, many teachers don't know how to blend vocabulary development into daily classroom instruction in ways that truly help students learn and retain words.

In *Word Nerds*, teachers Margot Holmes Smith and Leslie Montgomery, with the support of literacy specialist Brenda Overturf, demonstrate a proven method of engaging students in systematic vocabulary work. Together the three authors have fashioned a year-round vocabulary plan that encourages students to play with words, make them their own, and want to learn more.

This book does the following:

- Explains the research base underlying vocabulary instruction and assessment
- Describes literacy classrooms where students' "word confidence" can flourish
- Uses real classroom vignettes and student examples to demonstrate the success of a five-part plan for vocabulary development:
 - Introducing words
 - Adding synonyms and antonyms
 - Engaging in active practice
 - Celebrating student vocabulary learning and use
 - Assessing to understand the next steps in learning

Word Nerds includes numerous suggestions for adapting the recommended instructional strategies, classroom activities, and approaches to assessment. The authors encourage teachers to use the framework as a guide for developing their own vocabulary plans.

About This Study Guide

Each section of the *Word Nerds* study guide includes:

Synopsis—A summary of the big ideas in each chapter

Guiding Questions for Discussion—Three or four reflection questions to guide group discussions or individual journal entries

Quote to Ponder—A quote from the book that sheds light on the authors' thinking about vocabulary. You can use the quote as a springboard for discussion, writing, role playing, and other reflective practices.

Ideas for Work Groups—Activities teams can do as part of a professional learning community, a team meeting, or a professional development session

Ideally, teachers, literacy specialists, and supervisors will have opportunities to read and discuss *Word Nerds* together; however, the study guide is constructed so that individual educators also can use it to facilitate reflection, such as through journal entries. While using the study guide in group settings, participants have several options:

1. Use the guide as a chapter-by-chapter review for a professional book study. Organized study groups can be physical, where teachers meet in person on a regular basis, or virtual, where group members meet online through a chat room, Skype session, or other connected forums. Teachers can read each chapter, try ideas in their own classrooms, and then discuss their experiences with colleagues.
2. Use the guide as a culminating experience after participants have read the entire book. Teachers can read the book on their own, try out ideas, and come to the group prepared to discuss their experiences with the book's suggested practices.

Introduction and Chapter 1: What's the Big Deal About Vocabulary Instruction?

Synopsis

In the introduction to *Word Nerds*, Brenda Overturf describes the school, the students, and the classrooms where Leslie Montgomery and Margot Holmes Smith use a rigorous and creative plan for enriching word study. Chapter 1 summarizes the underlying research base for the book and connects the instructional activities to the Common Core State Standards. Chapter 1 concludes by outlining a five-part instructional plan based on a well-known framework for vocabulary development.

Guiding Questions for Discussion

1. What research about vocabulary teaching and learning presented new ideas to you? How do these research-based concepts relate to your students?
2. Vocabulary knowledge has consistently been correlated with school achievement. How and why do you think vocabulary achievement relates to student success?
3. The concept of building “word schema” appears throughout the book. What is your understanding of word schema? Why is it important to learning?

Quote to Ponder

“For students who arrive at school with a limited ‘school talk’ background, systematic vocabulary instruction opens a door to a secret world.”

Ideas for Work Groups

- Review the major vocabulary research outlined in Chapter 1. Create a chart to show how you currently address each of the concepts. Include evidence. Compare the charts of different group members and discuss the strengths and omissions. Identify gaps in vocabulary instruction that may be limiting students' word knowledge.
- Review data from classroom and standardized assessments and the socioeconomic breakdown of your school population. Share anecdotal findings from the classroom. What does the collective evidence reveal about the vocabulary needs of your students?

Chapter 2: Classrooms That Foster Word Confidence

Synopsis

Chapter 2 describes two classrooms where students are developing “word confidence.” Although Margot and Leslie follow a balanced literacy program that includes continual vocabulary development, they have different teaching styles and different classroom setups.

This chapter explains how and why the two teachers set a vocabulary routine as part of a daily schedule and choose words for vocabulary study.

Guiding Questions for Discussion

1. What is your definition of “word confidence”? Why is word confidence important, especially for high-poverty students?
2. Margot and Leslie have very different teaching styles, yet each of them effectively develops the vocabulary knowledge of her high-poverty students. What makes each classroom a place where students develop word confidence?
3. Leslie and Margot carefully choose words from vocabulary suggested in the school's reading series. How can you select appropriate words and plan for instruction with your own students?
4. Discuss the benefits of establishing a daily vocabulary routine. How does the routine fit into a vocabulary cycle? Would a vocabulary routine be important for the students you teach? Why and how?

Quote to Ponder

“We know that vocabulary development does not and cannot exist in a vacuum. To achieve the goal of multiple exposures to words that build word schema, we have to emphasize vocabulary instruction throughout the curriculum and across the school day.”

Ideas for Work Groups

- Review materials that are currently used for reading instruction in your school. Is vocabulary development part of these materials? With group members, create a plan for increasing vocabulary learning during the school day.
- Choose a few key words that your students need to learn. With a partner or your team, use the Vocabulary Planner template (Appendix A) at the back of the book to develop a strategic plan to teach these words.

Chapter 3: Making Introductions

Synopsis

Chapter 3 describes the ways Margot introduces words to her primary grades students and Leslie introduces words to her intermediate grades students. The use of vocabulary journals is included in this chapter.

Guiding Questions for Discussion

1. How do Margot and Leslie address students' needs (emotional, social, academic) as they are introducing new words?
2. The Common Core State Standards stress students' use of context clues to determine the meanings of unfamiliar words and phrases. Discuss the ways that Leslie and Margot teach students about context when introducing new vocabulary. Why is it important to do so?
3. Review one or more of the student conversations included in the chapter. What do the comments reveal about vocabulary learning?

Quote to Ponder

“Students need time to explore new words, play with them, and connect them to concepts they already know. Words without a meaningful context remain random.”

Ideas for Work Groups

- After choosing words to teach, create a set of sentences that will help students learn each word through context clues. Create sentence strips and word cards to use on a pocket chart during instruction.
- If you teach nonnative speakers, create a plan to introduce words to these students.

Chapter 4: Squeezing the Juicy Words: Adding Synonyms and Antonyms

Synopsis

Chapter 4 describes the research about adding synonyms and antonyms to vocabulary instruction and shows how Leslie and Margot encourage students to use reference materials, vocabulary lanyards, anchor charts, and journals, as well as understand vocabulary code switching.

Guiding Questions for Discussion

1. The Common Core State Standards include a focus on learning word relationships and nuances. What does this emphasis mean for your students?
2. In Chapter 4, students have many opportunities to find their own synonyms and antonyms. Share your insights about these practices. Discuss other ways to help students take ownership of their vocabulary study.
3. How do vocabulary lanyards support students' vocabulary learning in Leslie's and Margot's classrooms? Is this a good idea? Why or why not?
4. This chapter explains the concept of vocabulary code switching. Discuss examples of code switching within your school population and how you might address it within vocabulary instruction.

Quote to Ponder

“When we introduce synonyms and antonyms, we help our students build word relationships and vocabulary networks. Activities that require them to contemplate word meanings and engage in academic discussions about vocabulary enable them to construct deeper content knowledge, which in turn leads to higher achievement.”

Ideas for Work Groups

- Using a variety of reference materials, select appropriate synonyms and antonyms for words you plan to teach.
- Using the Vocabulary Planner template (Appendix A) at the back of the book, create a set of Vocabulary Planners for key vocabulary words you need to teach within the next month.
- As a group, analyze student vocabulary journal entries to determine what students know about vocabulary. Identify misconceptions and develop a plan to reteach the words students are struggling to understand.

Chapter 5: Active Vocabulary Practice

Synopsis

Active practice is necessary for students to remember the words they are learning. Chapter 5 describes whole-group practice activities, such as Scramble, Counting Dude, Bragging Dude, Word Charades, Vocabulary Rap, and Chain Link. Small-group and independent activities include Vocabulary Board Games, Vocabulary Rings, Word Colors, Word Illustrations, and PowerPoint Portrayals.

Guiding Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways do Margot’s and Leslie’s students practice vocabulary? What is the purpose of active vocabulary practice?
2. What activities from the book do you think would work well with your own students? Why? What new ideas do you have for vocabulary practice?

Quote to Ponder

“With activities that incorporate art, movement, technology, music, drama, public speaking, and more, vocabulary practice can not only motivate students to learn but also ensure that they remember more.”

Ideas for Work Groups

- Try out one of the vocabulary practice activities included in this chapter. Share the results and any student work with the group. Discuss successes and challenges. How would you revise the activity next time?
- Review a variety of books about vocabulary activities and strategies. Choose new approaches to try out in the classroom. Share the results with your colleagues.

Chapter 6: Celebrating to Validate

Synopsis

The authors believe it is vital to celebrate students' vocabulary learning. Chapter 6 features ideas for vocabulary parties and celebrations such as Block Party, Toasting Party, *Jeopardy!*, *Deal or No Deal*, and Charades.

Guiding Questions for Discussion

1. Margot and Leslie consider celebration a vital part of their strategic vocabulary plan. Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. What new ideas do you have for vocabulary celebration in your own classroom?

Quote to Ponder

“In our classrooms, we want to see more of our students using new vocabulary confidently, but we also want them to feel joyful about their growing facility with words.”

Ideas for Work Groups

- Try out ideas for celebrating vocabulary knowledge in your classroom. Share your students' experiences with your group.
- Brainstorm a list of other ideas for celebrating vocabulary knowledge.

Chapter 7: Spreading Vocabulary Wings

Synopsis

In Chapter 7, the authors share ideas for extending vocabulary knowledge, including using children's literature and teaching students about morphology (the meanings of word parts).

Guiding Questions for Discussion

1. The Common Core State Standards emphasize that students should be able to recognize the meanings of word parts in order to determine the meanings of unfamiliar words. Why is this important to vocabulary development?
2. The Common Core State Standards also focus on students being able to determine the meanings of general academic and domain-specific words. How can vocabulary development be incorporated into other parts of the school day?
3. How can you extend students' vocabulary learning in your own classroom?

Quote to Ponder

“With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, there will certainly be higher expectations for students to learn grade-appropriate vocabulary, and our instruction will need to be intentional and intensive if we hope to guide them well.”

Ideas for Work Groups

- Choose an interesting children's trade book and create a lesson plan to extend vocabulary. Try the lesson plan in the classroom. Share the results with your group.

- With your group, brainstorm other ways to extend vocabulary knowledge. Review books on vocabulary strategies for ideas.

Chapter 8: Learning Through Assessment *and* Epilogue

Synopsis

In Chapter 8, the authors share classroom ideas for formative and summative vocabulary assessment. They also show how they record vocabulary progress and use assessment to inform their teaching. The epilogue shares the positive results of teaching vocabulary to high-poverty students and provides ideas for getting started with a strategic vocabulary plan.

Guiding Questions for Discussion

1. What does the research say about the difficulty of assessing vocabulary knowledge? Talk about your own experiences with vocabulary assessment.
2. How do Leslie and Margot use formative assessment to determine what their students know and to plan instruction?
3. How do Margot and Leslie use summative vocabulary assessment as an opportunity for vocabulary learning?
4. In this chapter, Margot guides her students to think through a summative vocabulary assessment. How could you include this approach in your classroom?

Quote to Ponder

“Formative vocabulary assessment is the glue that holds the pieces of our instruction together, and it helps us understand what our students actually know and can do. Summative assessment provides a record of vocabulary progress that we can report to administrators and parents.”

Ideas for Work Groups

- Work together to create summative assessments for the vocabulary cycles you plan to teach.

- Use the Vocabulary Progress Form (Appendix H) at the back of the book to record your students' vocabulary learning. After analyzing the charts, discuss patterns of student learning and needs for instruction.