

**Vocabulary Activities
that Promote Rich Acquisition**

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Sentence Completion

Tell students there is a sentence or the beginning of a sentence already written on their log sheet. What they need to do is add a sentence or finish the sentence in a way that makes sense.

Read the first sentence. “Mom had to coax me to take the medicine.” Ask why Mom would have to coax you to take medicine and then have a student give a response, using the whole sentence, e.g. Mom had to coax me to take the medicine because it tasted awful.”

When a good sentence is elicited, write it on the board (or overhead).

The sentences elicited should be fairly short. They need not restate a definition or the target word.

relief _____: lessening of worry

There was a huge sigh of relief when the group finally

suspicious _____: seeming to be wrong, with little or no
proof

Francisco saw Susan in the hallway and was instantly suspicious.

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Word Association

Students match the vocabulary word with a simple definition or example (alter the definition somewhat each time you use it). There are common matches, but there are no right and wrong answers in this activity. The critical part of this exercise is to explain why they go together once they have made a match. While students should answer why every time, it is particularly important when a student gives an answer other than the one you expected.

i.e. novice = beginner (simple definition)

kindergartener (an example)

“sick with the flu” (students will likely say listless)

“Good, why did you think sick with the flu goes with listless?”

“forgetting your lines in a play” (students will likely say flustered)

“Good, why did you think forgetting your lines goes with flustered?”

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Scenarios

This activity uses vocabulary words in a way that requires an understanding of the implications of the target word in context. The context does not contain definitional elements of the word. The scenario is always followed by a question.

for the word commend

"When father heard that Lisa had ripped up the letter from Steve, he commended her for it.
What do you think father thought of Steve?"

for the word miserable

Enrique had waited all month for the circus to come to his town. Today was the big day and he was miserable.
What do you think is going on?

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Yays & Boos

The teacher says each word and students say "Yay" or "Boo" based on how they feel about the word. Then the teacher calls on students (choose students with different ratings when possible) and asks them to explain their rating. For example, T: Why did you say boo for horror? S1: Because horror makes me think of scary things, and I don't like scary things. S2: I said yay because I love being scared at horror movies. Both students have a good understanding of the word meaning based on their explanations.

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Describe a Situation

This activity is designed to have students develop contexts for the target words, making connections between the word and a familiar experience or activity. Ask the question and have students think, pair, share. Then call on one student to share their context before moving on to the next word.

Tell about something you might want to eavesdrop on.

Describe the most melodious sound you can think of.

Describe a time you wanted your parents to consent to something.

Describe a time you had to use gestures.

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Pantomime Activities

The teacher and students create movements, facial expressions or body stances for words. The class uses the appropriate motion when the teacher uses the words in sentences or stories.

“Hello down there. Can you hear me?” (point to bellow)—the person is talking to someone far away and must shout; when you shout you sound like you are bellowing. *Show me what you look like when you bellow.*

“What time did they fall asleep?” (point to whisper)—they don’t want to wake the sleeping people so they are whispering. *Show me what you look like when you whisper.*

“I am the fastest runner in the class.” (point to crow)—the person is showing off; when you show off you crow. *Show me what you look like when you crow.*

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

In the/At the...

This worksheet asks students to do a little imagining and writing about some of their vocabulary words (it can also be done completely as an oral activity).

Pass out copies of the worksheet. You can change it to At the game, In the cellar, At the dance...

Begin the worksheet with the class in the following way:

Question 1: Read: “Why might you be *startled* when you walk in the room?”

Then say “startled means to be surprised; what might be in the room that would surprise me? Maybe the room was full of decorations and people for a surprise party for me.”

Write “I would be startled if I walked in a room and people shouted out surprise at a party for me.” on the board and have students copy it on their worksheets.

Why might you have crept into the room?

What might be pungent in the room?

Why might you be huddled together in the room?

Why might you feel weary in the room?

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Generating Contexts

Provide 2 or 3 contexts for a given word and ask students to identify the context that best matches the vocabulary word. Then have students generate another context on their own or with a partner.

Which activity might an accomplice be engaged in?

- working for the police
- Helping to rob a bank
- Writing a letter to someone in jail

What else might an accomplice be engaged in?

Which activity might an admirer be involved in?

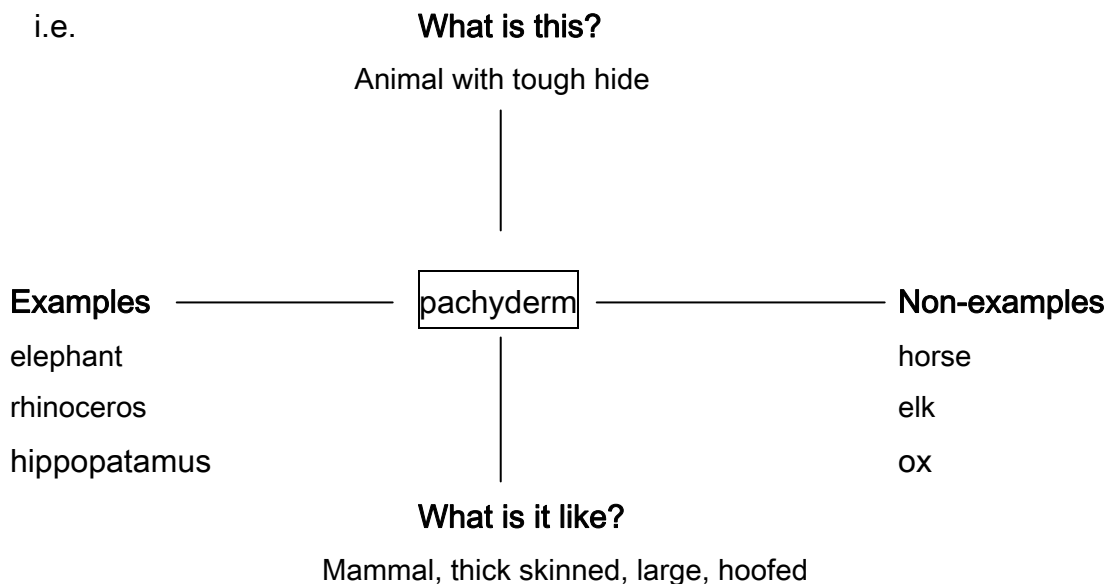
- listening attentively to a speech
- interrupting a speech
- making a sarcastic comment

What else might an admirer be doing?

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Word Mapping

This graphic organizer helps students see connections within a concept by assigning it to a category (What is this?) describing attributes (What is it like?) and then identifying examples and non-examples to solidify understanding. Have them discuss the differences between the examples and the non-examples.



From: Stahl, S. and Kapinus, B. (2001). *Word Power: What every educator needs to know about teaching vocabulary*. NEA Professional Library.

Synonym Sentences

Write a sentence that contains an underlined synonym for the vocabulary word. Students write the correct vocabulary word on the line.

| | | | |
|---------|-------|----------|---------|
| weary | pesky | tremble | nudged |
| huddled | crept | startled | pungent |

1. The shipwrecked man crawled to the safety of the cave.

2. It was so cold waiting for the bus, I began to shiver.

3. Angel poked me with her pencil when I started to fall asleep in class.

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Semantic Relationships

This activity is designed to help students work with the relationships between words. They need to compare the features of both words and determine if they are mutually exclusive. If so, the answer will be no. There will be times when the two words are not mutually exclusive, and can apply to the same situation. In either case, the student must provide a rationale for their thinking. It's the rationale that uncovers the depth of understanding.

Could a virtuoso be a rival?

Could a philanthropist be a miser?

Would you just glimpse at something you were investigating?

Could something magnificent also be treacherous?

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Double Duty

Show students a word and have them generate a definition (or example) using the given parameters.

Define exquisite:

- a. as a jeweler might use it
- b. as an archeologist might use it

Define dismal:

- a. when talking about the weather
- b. when talking about what happened during your day

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Instructional Cloze

Create a short text with blanks. Have students fill in the blanks with words from the word box. This can be done orally, in partners, individually... After everyone has made their choices, discuss the choices for each blank, centering on sources of information.

| | | | |
|----------|---------------|--------------|---------|
| cowardly | dismal | deliberately | console |
| ashamed | unfortunately | discouraging | |

Troy banged his fist down so hard on the dinner table that all the dishes and cups rattled. This was turning out to be a more _____ day that he could have imagined. Not only did he have to bring home his _____ progress report and have his parents sign it, but now his mother was just getting off the phone with his baseball coach. He knew he shouldn't have done what he did at practice this afternoon, but he just didn't stop and think. He hadn't meant to actually hit his teammate when he threw the pitch so wildly, but everyone was accusing him of doing it _____ because they had seen the kid make fun of him in class when he had gotten his progress report earlier in the day. Now he realized that lashing out at the kid like that was _____. He should have just ignored the taunting and played the game.

He thought he would be able to hide all this from his parents, but now that he hadn't come right out and told them he was feeling quite _____. _____, it was too late to change what had already happened. And by the look on his mother's face as she approached the table, he could tell she wasn't coming over to _____ him.

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Definition Drawing

After introducing and discussing words with students, have them create definition drawings that they can refer to during instruction when a word hasn't stuck yet.

| Word | Sketch | Definition |
|-------|--------|------------|
| Stoop | | |
| Isle | | |
| | | |

Bamboozled

Provide sentences for students that contain the bolded word “bamboozled” in place of a vocabulary word. Students write the correct word on the line provided.

| | | |
|------------|---------|------------|
| threatened | caution | contract |
| dispute | uneasy | defeat |
| protective | finicky | meddlesome |

1. The bully bamboozled the little kids. _____
2. I wish I had studied. I feel bamboozle about the science test. _____
3. If our team practices we can bamboozle the champions. _____
4. The toddler was so bamboozle that he would only eat food that was orange. _____

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Hogwash!

Divide students into 2 groups. Write vocabulary words on slips of paper and put them into a bowl. The teacher draws a word and pronounces it. Students write down a definition of the word, choosing whether to write a true definition or a false one. Students hand their definitions to the teacher. The teacher mixes up the definitions and reads each one; students give thumbs up or thumbs down to indicate if the definitions are accurate.

Similarities

Given 2 or 3 words, students fill in the vocabulary word that fits into the group.

| | | |
|---------|----------|-----------|
| impress | stern | convince |
| fidget | ceremony | miserable |

- | | | | |
|---------------|-------------|-----------|-------|
| 1. twitch | be restless | jiggle | _____ |
| 2. persuade | win over | talk into | _____ |
| 3. observance | ritual | custom | _____ |
| 4. amaze | inspire | thrill | _____ |

Analogies

Students determine the relationships between the words by filling in the blanks correctly. If student's responses differ from those below and they can justify their response, then consider their responses correct.

i.e. To plan secretly is to _____; to listen secretly is to _____
(scrutinize, eavesdrop, conspire)

Mean is to _____; as

Argue is to _____.
(journey, spite, protest)

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Semantic Feature Analysis

This grid provides students the opportunity to see and discuss relationships between and among vocabulary words. The left column lists the vocabulary words. The top row lists features that might be applied to the words. Students determine which features fit which vocabulary words and then discuss the relationships revealed by their choices.

| | <i>elected</i> | <i>dictatorship</i> | <i>multi-party</i> | <i>majority rule</i> | <i>private ownership</i> | <i>individual freedom</i> |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>democracy</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>communism</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>socialism</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>fascism</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>tribal rule</i> | | | | | | |

Adapted from: Stahl, S. and Kapinus, B. (2001). *Word Power: What every educator needs to know about teaching vocabulary*. NEA Professional Library.

Beat the Clock

Students are given a list of sentences using the target words in True/False sentences in a timed situation. There are no absolutely correct answers. If a student responds with an unanticipated answer, ask them to justify their choice.

- ___ It is easy to cook for someone who is finicky.
- ___ The defeated team brought home the trophy.
- ___ You need to be protective of a new baby's head.
- ___ A meddlesome person is someone you would trust with a secret.
- ___ You would sign a contract without reading it.

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Ready, Set, Go

Students match vocabulary words with definitions while being timed by a partner. Following a check of their work, a second opportunity is provided to work with the same words in a different sequence in an attempt to match the words more quickly.

| | |
|---------|--------------------------|
| crow | a low, throaty noise |
| exclaim | to yell out |
| stammer | to brag |
| coo | to speak very quietly |
| growl | to repeat sounds |
| croak | to say in surprise |
| whisper | to say in a hoarse voice |
| bellow | murmuring sound |

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Word Pairs

This grid provides students the opportunity to see and discuss relationships between and among vocabulary words that are paired together.

| Word Pair | Same | Opposite | Go together | No Relation |
|----------------|------|----------|-------------|-------------|
| desert-nomad | | | X | |
| nomad-wanderer | X | | | |
| nomad-settler | | X | | |

From: Stahl, S. and Kapinus, B. (2001). *Word Power: What every educator needs to know about teaching vocabulary*. NEA Professional Library.

Four Square Vocabulary

Place the vocabulary word in the upper left box. Then describe the word to students. Have students generate examples and non-examples and place those in the upper and lower right-hand box. Finally, have students generate and write a definition of the concept in the lower left box.

| | |
|---|--|
| Word Soothing | Examples calm music bath |
| Definition comforting offering relief | Non-Examples tests loud noises construction site |

From: Stahl, S. and Kapinus, B. (2001). *Word Power: What every educator needs to know about teaching vocabulary*. NEA Professional Library.

Describing Hierarchy

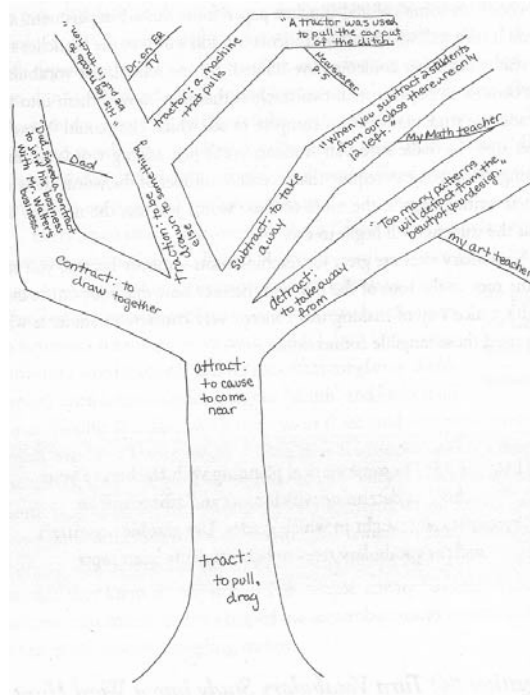
A describing hierarchy has four parts, asking students to begin broadly by naming the word and then identifying the category and becoming more specific at each subsequent level of the hierarchy.

- Name: the students state the name of the object that is to be described.
- Category: the students state the category in which the object belongs.
- Function: The students state the use of the object.
- Attributes: The students state the physical properties of the object.
 - Name: Tyrannosaurus
 - Category: Tyrannosaurus was a dinosaur.
 - Function: Tyrannosaurus was a carnivorous scavenger; it ate other animals.
 - Attributes: Tyrannosaurus was the largest carnivorous dinosaur. It had a huge neck, strong jaw muscles, sharp teeth and a long tail.
- Name: Microscope
 - Category: A microscope is an optical instrument.
 - Function: A microscope allows you to magnify very small objects so they can be seen.
 - Attributes: A microscope consists of a lens or combination of lenses with an eye piece and a platform for placing the object to be viewed.

From: *Alphabetic Phonics*. Neuhaus Education Center. Houston, TX.

Vocabulary Tree

To build a vocabulary tree, choose which root word you want students to study and have them write it in the root of the tree. Under the root, students write its definition. In the trunk of the tree, students write a key word that you provide that uses that root. Under the word, students write the definition of the word. Then, in the branches that come off the trunk, students write as many other words as they find that use that root. Students define the word and copy a sentence that uses it. In the twigs off the branch, they record where they heard or found the sentence.



From: Beers, K. (2003) *When Kids Can't Read*. Heinemann. Portsmouth: New Hampshire.

Examples/Non-examples

Tell the students that you will read 2 sentences. One of the sentences is an example of a vocabulary word and the other is not. Say "Let's do the first one together. Think of the word gesture. Which of these is an example of someone gesturing?"

- waving your arms to get your friend's attention
- yelling your friend's name to get his attention

Call on a student to respond. If no one has a response, cue them with the definition (e.g., gesture means to make a physical motion..... what might you do if you are gesturing?) When students respond, ask them why they think this is an example of gesture.

Adapted from: Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. The Guilford Press: New York, NY.

Concepts and Vocabulary: Categories and Labels

Critical words from a text are placed in a word bank. Words should be reviewed prior to the activity, providing correct pronunciation and a quick contextual definition. In groups, ask students to discuss the words and decide how to categorize the words into logical groups. Each group should be labeled. Have groups share their lists, justifying their grouping decisions and labels. This activity can be revisited at the end of the unit to explore deeper understandings by having students categorize the words differently than they did the first time. You can provide an organizer like the one below, but be careful that students understand there is no limit to the categories they choose.

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| medicine spiral cytoplasm genetic antibiotics | Legionella strep throat E. Coli bacteria invade | microorganisms microbes rodlike food poisoning spherical | walls salmonella decomposers ribosomes healthy |
| | | | |
| | | | |

From: Allen, J. (2007). *Inside Words: Tools for Teaching Academic Vocabulary: Grades 4-12*. Stenhouse Publishers: Portland, ME.

Frequent Contact

Provide students with a list of words and three category labels. Have students work in pairs or small groups to decide who or what would have the most frequent contact with each of the vocabulary words. They then place this word under that column, and are ready to justify their placement. Some words may fit in more than one column—that's okay as long as there is a justification, but remind students that they are determining the most frequent contact, so they need to pay attention to that subtlety of meaning.

| Defendant | Prosecution | Defense |
|---|--|---|
| | | |
| testimony witnesses deposition warden bible | judge alibi crime scene past precedents cell | restraints remarks expert testimony ruling guard subpoena affidavit news reporter verdict jury |
| Use the words in one of your columns to make a case for Steve's guilt or innocence. | | |
| | | |

From: Allen, J. (2007). *Inside Words: Tools for Teaching Academic Vocabulary: Grades 4-12*. Stenhouse Publishers: Portland, ME.