

Let's Work Together Teaching Guide

Dear Teacher,

Students need words—lots of words to think, speak, write, and read! Vocabulary deficits are one of the main reasons that students are below grade level in their reading proficiency and year after year struggle to catch up. It's important to start expanding students' word knowledge before guided reading or any small group instruction. This guide offers an easy-to-implement game plan—one that is systematic and doable. From my experience, I know that excellent and consistent vocabulary building has the power to close the gap between proficient and developing learners. Having an ever-growing bank of words will give a powerful leg up to all students, including English language learners, children living in poverty, and students in grades four to six reading three or more years below grade level. As you dip into this guide, know that studies done from 2006 to 2011 by NAEP (National Association of Educational Progress) clearly show a deep correlation between students' vocabulary and their reading comprehension. One key point to keep in mind: the best way to improve vocabulary for your students is for them to read, read, read!

Laura Robb

BUILD VOCABULARY BEFORE STUDENTS READ

Most guided or small group reading lessons start with a short introduction of the book by the teacher and then sometimes students take a picture walk through part of the text and discuss what they learn. I'm asking you to change things up—right after introducing the book, start building and extending vocabulary with your students. These are word experiences that should not be tested. What you're doing is expanding students' word knowledge by introducing extra words related to the book, discussing them, and using them as much as you can when talking to students. Think of this as *planting word seeds*.

Build Vocabulary Before, During, and After Reading

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TEACHING TIP

Model, using a picture book you've read aloud, how to compare and contrast the protagonist with present-day boys and girls using a VENN diagram (See an example on Page 2).

MATERIALS:

You'll need a 12 x 18 piece of construction paper to use as a mini "word wall" and a marker pen.

GETTING STARTED:

Gather students around the reading table, give them a book, show them the cover, read the title, and have them pair-share to generate words using the concept or big idea, or a word from the title. Write the words on the word wall.

IDENTIFYING CONCEPTS OR KEY WORDS:

The titles of leveled books for grades K to 2 have clues for word building. Here are some tips:

- If the title is *Big and Little*, then have students find examples of things that are big and little on one day and build a list of synonyms for big and little on another day.
- If *Opposites* is the title, then invite students to build a list of opposites.
- A book titled *The Birthday Party* offers opportunities to create a list of words that relate to celebrating birthdays.
- In addition to the title, you might want to use a theme or concept from the book. For example, for a biography of Martin Luther King, you could build words related to *segregation*, or for a book about natural disasters, you could build a list of words about *first responders* or the concept of *devastation*.

FOLLOW-UP WORD BUILDING:

Keep building the list on the word wall and discussing words:

- Add words from the book that aren't already on the word wall.
- Discuss words on the list that are also in the book.
- Choose one (or more, depending on the group) word and write other forms or related words. For example, for the book *Big and Little*, if students offer *forest* and *a clump of trees*, then next to *forest* you can add: *rainforest*, *jungle*, *deforestation*, *forest ranger*. Take time to discuss related words and show students how each one works in a sentence.

Use Pictures and Photographs to Enlarge Vocabulary.

For ELL students and for young students with limited vocabularies, have them name items in the pictures (or photographs) and write these on the word wall.

- Link these words to the concept or big idea of the book.
- Ask students to discuss the words and tell what they know about each one.
- Show them how to categorize words and then invite them to help.

TEACHING TIP

Before starting a read aloud book, take a few minutes to enlarge students' vocabulary. You can select a word from the title or use a concept or theme the book teaches.

DURING READING:

Use Context Clues To Enlarge Students' Vocabulary

While students are reading, it's important for them to be able to use context clues in the text to figure out a word's meaning. Research points out that if students can't figure out what a word means in thirty seconds, they skip it. It's fine to skip a few words, but when students skip three to four words on each page, their comprehension can be greatly diminished.

Model how you use context during your daily read alouds. In your think alouds, include the clues a sentence provides. If the sentence doesn't have enough clues, then read one or two sentences that come before or one to two sentences that come after. Help students understand that clues might not be in the sentence with the word; they might have to back up and read or read on.

After modeling several times, invite partners to use context clues and explain how they figured out the meaning. Place the text you're using under a document camera so students can read it. You can also model and invite students to practice during small group reading lessons. Remember, students benefit from lots of practice before you ask them to work independently.

FOUR KINDS OF CONTEXT CLUES

Post this list on chart paper and/or give each student a copy to paste in the back of their readers' notebooks.

- 1. Definitions and Synonyms.** Immediately after or close to a word, the author gives a definition and/or a synonym. A definition or synonym follows a *comma* or *dash*, or words such as *or*, *is called*, *that is*, and *in other words*.
- 2. Concrete Examples.** The author gives an example that helps you figure out the word's meaning. Examples often follow these words: *for example*, *such as*, and *especially*.
- 3. Restated Meanings.** The author defines the words by restating its meaning in simpler terms. You'll find restated meanings after these words: *such as*, *or*, *that is*, and *in other words*.
- 4. Comparison.** The author uses a comparison to help you understand a tough word. Comparisons often follow words such as *alike*, *unlike*, *differ*, *on the other hand*, *likewise*, and *similarly*.

TEACHING TIP

When students can't figure out a word's meaning, have them go back to the beginning of the sentence, reread it, skip the tough word, and read to the end. Next, invite students to reread the sentence and see if they understand the word. If not, invite them to back up and read and/or move ahead and read to find context clues.

