

## Increasing Students' Vocabulary Skills

### An optimal vocabulary program has four components:

1. it facilitates wide reading
  - books are good
  - remember the 3 Rs (read/read/read)
2. it teaches individual words
  - word lists
  - words taken from reading selections
  - words students know
3. it provides word-learning strategies
  - context cues
  - dictionaries (BEWARE)
4. it fosters word consciousness
  - games are good

### Fast Facts

- Average students learn 3-4,000 words each year.  
*Source: Nagy, W. E. (1988). Teaching vocabulary to improve reading comprehension. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.*
- Vocabulary knowledge is one of the best predictors of verbal ability.  
*Source: Jensen, A. R. (1980). Bias in mental testing. New York: Free Press.*
- Vocabulary difficulty strongly influences the readability of texts.  
*Source: Klare, G. R. (1984). Readability. In P.D. Pearson (Ed.), Handbook of reading research (pp. 681-744). New York: Longman.*
- Teaching the vocabulary of a selection can improve students' comprehension of the selection.  
*Source: Beck, I. L., & McKeown, M. G. (1983). Learning words well: A program to teach vocabulary and comprehension. The Reading Teacher, 36, 622-625.*

# The Dreaded "Vocabulary" Test

**Monday Morning**  
***Study for the test!***

<b><i>Vocabulary Words</i></b>	
1. firkin (n.)	a small wooden vessel or cask
2. straddle (v.)	to walk with legs spread apart
3. tractable (adj.)	easily taught; docile
4. piscatorial (adj.)	pertaining to fishing
5. immure (v.)	To imprison; to shut up in confinement

**Friday Morning**  
***Get ready for the test!***

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

an exercise in context...

## **Tayshaun's Stryte**

Tayshaun blew hard into his stryte, when his sala fropped from downstairs, "Cut out that stryting. You'll bother the clypers." Tayshaun fropped back, "But I need to practice my stryte for the verpand, Sala."

Suddenly, Tayshaun's Wala fropped, "Listen to your Sala, or you'll get no blasurn after supper."

Tayshaun put down his stryte and dreamed of playing like his idol, Dizzy Gillespie. "Someday, I hope tons of folks come to my verpands to hear me play my stryte."

## Vocabulary Songs & Chants

*Remember to always sing before you take a test!*

### **Take Our Test!**

*lyrics by Danny Brassell*

*based on the melody from "Be Our Guest" in Disney's Beauty and the Beast*

Take our test! Take our test!  
Put your name above the rest.  
To the right you write the date there.  
Who would ask for any less?  
Use a pencil - make it sharp. You are now ready to start.  
Read directions very slowly, One by one, part by part.  
You'll do great! You'll impress!  
You are heads above the rest.  
And remember you're the student who's the best.  
You're the smartest one.  
Now come and have some fun.  
Take our test!  
Take our test!  
Take our test!

### **Tayshaun's Stryte**

*lyrics by Mrs. Gibson's 11<sup>th</sup> grade English class, Dorsey HS, South Los Angeles  
based on "The Muppet Show" theme*

It's time to play my music. It's time to blow my stryte. It's time to practice stryting in my bedroom tonight.

My parents keep on fropping, "You mustn't blow your stryte! We know you love your bugle, but you can't practice tonight!"

My Sala and my Wala, they just don't understand. If I cannot rehearse here, I won't play a verpand.

Though clypers keep complaining, I'll loudly play my stryte. Even if I don't get blasurn. I like ice cream for blasurn.

I'll gladly skip my blasurn, & ignore the clypers, & ignore my Wala, & ignore my Sala who keeps on fropping, so I can play my stryte in a verpand!

*\* Don't worry: Danny teaches the gestures that accompany each song during the workshop.*

## Great Vocabulary Books

Every week you should lead a “book talk” with your students. We know that the best way to improve our vocabularies is to read a lot, and this book talk focuses on reading materials that have a particular focus on words:

### CHILDREN

1. Eight Ate, Marvin Terban
2. A Chocolate Moose for Dinner, Fred Gwynne
3. Amelia Bedelia (series), Peggy Parrish
4. Cryptomania, Edith Hope Fine
5. Hairy, Scary, Ordinary, Brian P. Cleary
6. Baloney (Henry P.), Jon Scieszka

### YOUNG ADULT

7. The Rest of the Story, Paul Harvey
8. Charlotte’s Web, E.B. White
9. Frindle, Andrew Clement
10. A Series of Unfortunate Events, Lemony Snicket

### ADULT

11. Reader’s Digest
12. Words, Words, Words, Janet Allen
13. The Vocabulary Teacher’s Book of Lists, Edward B. Fry
14. Vocabulary Strategies Every Teacher Needs to Know, Danny Brassell & Jim Flood
15. What in the Word?, Charles Harrington Elster
16. The Professor and the Madman, Simon Winchester

## Brassell’s Hypothesis

TR + CE + BT + LIB = SWLR

Translated: Time to Read + Comfortable Environment + Book Talks + Lots of Interesting Books = Students Who Love Reading

The most important thing  
That I can do  
To enhance my students’ vocabulary  
Is to remember the 3 R’s:  
Read.  
READ.  
READ!

## The Language Living Room

The English language is like a living room: it has accumulated quite a bit of “stuff” over the years. English has adopted, adapted, created and manipulated a variety of words.

With a partner, write down examples of:

- Blends (e.g. brunch)

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- Clips (e.g. prep, plane)

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- Abbreviations (e.g. NCLB)

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- Acronyms (e.g. scuba)

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## The Know-It-All and His Two Dense Friends

\* adapted from Dr. Rosalind Horowitz, UT-San Antonio

### Rule #1

**Nick:** Larry hit a foul ball.

**Nac:** A what ball?

**Nick:** A *foul* ball.

**Nac:** Wait a minute. I have to look up *foul* in the dictionary. (*finds word*) Okay, now I know. Larry hit a ball that smelled really bad.

**Know-It-All:** Many words have several meanings. When you look up a word's meaning, you need to choose a meaning that makes sense in the context in which the word is used. You can't just take the first definition listed!

### Rule #2

**Nick:** The new kid called me señor. What does it mean?

**Nac:** Look it up.

**Nick:** It says "Spanish word." Why would he call me a Spanish word?

**Nac:** Beats me, amigo.

**Know-It-All:** When considering a definition, we need to consider the full definition given and not just part of it.

### Rule #3

**Nick:** I want to say the monster was *vile*. Does that sound right?

**Nac:** Look it up.

**Nick:** Perfect!

**Know-It-All:** Often, the dictionary works best when we have some idea of the word's meaning but aren't certain of it. This makes the dictionary useful when we want to use a word in our writing but are not certain of its meaning.

## Dictionaries

- Dictionary/map
- Sending students to dictionaries to learn words is ineffective unless they already know something about the words.
- Students need to learn how to choose appropriate entries and how to understand them.
- Understanding a word from a dictionary is a difficult metalinguistic task, especially since some definitions are more complicated than the words in question.
- Remember that different types of words require different types of instruction. Not all words are completely foreign concepts to students.

## Word-Learning Strategies

REMEMBER: Vocabulary is a living, growing thing. We are constantly expanding our vocabularies. Here are some strategies to use with students:

- Prefixes/Root Words/Suffixes
- Student Created Aids
- Environmental Print
- Student Created Labels/Realia
- Magnetic Boards
- Word Construction Centers
- Word Walls with Words
- Synonym Squeeze
- Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy
- Context Cues
- "Top Ten" Lists
- Word Relationships

## Context

If students learn 3-4,000 words each year, it is almost certain that we learn the majority of our vocabulary from context. Some basic facts for students to know:

- *Most words are learned from context.*
- *Sometimes, context clearly tells us a word's meaning: sometimes it only hints. Context cues include words, phrases and sentences that give us hints about the unknown word.*
- *Cues can come before or after the unknown word.*
- *Cues are usually in the same sentence but sometimes they are in other sentences or paragraphs.*

## Context Cues

### poliath

Tyson hates Fridays because his teacher always gives his class a poliath.

### wamzerger

The other day I was at the mall when I saw a clown playing with a wamzerger. The wamzerger was bright blue and floated above his head. He attached his wamzerger to a string and tied it around his wrist so he would not lose it. The clown and I hit the wamzerger back and forth until my mom told me to go with her.

### cacojar

The cacojar is down the street from Valerie's house. Sometimes she goes there with her mother. There are always lots of people standing in line, and the cacojar workers take a long time helping people. Valerie's mom says she would rather not go to the cacojar, but she needs to buy stamps.

## Top Ten Lists

NOTE: David Letterman's "Top Ten Lists" are protected by his own copyright and should only be used for educational purposes. Can you identify which words students changed in this list?

### Top Ten Signs Kid's School Is Too Congested

10. Kid comes home exhuberant saying, "I got to ride *inside* the bus today!"
9. Principal sends ultimatum -- he's not skipping class enough
8. Teacher needs a U-Haul to transport home the book reports
7. Losing 60 to 70 kids on class trip is considered "successful"
6. School play is "The Ten Commandments"— sufficient students to play all 100,000 Hebrews
5. Class photo taken using government weather satellite
4. The teacher announces, "Gus Van Rauschenbach" and 17 kids say, "Here"
3. Last spring's school bake sale garnered one and a quarter million
2. There's a waiting list to get tormented by the school bully
1. The kids actually outnumber the rodents

## Hink Pinks

plump feline \_\_\_\_\_  
angry employer \_\_\_\_\_  
artificial dessert \_\_\_\_\_  
an honest rabbit \_\_\_\_\_  
a headache \_\_\_\_\_  
cunning insect \_\_\_\_\_  
a fast hen \_\_\_\_\_  
coal cabin \_\_\_\_\_

## Hinky Pinkies

whale washer \_\_\_\_\_  
funny horse \_\_\_\_\_  
glass gun \_\_\_\_\_  
a downpour of roses \_\_\_\_\_

NOW, CREATE YOUR OWN...

## Vocabulary-Building Strategy: Word Play

Word play is an instructional strategy that utilizes dramatization to encourage students' vocabulary development. Using a short list of new vocabulary words or concepts, small groups of students create vignettes that feature and demonstrate the new vocabulary words or concepts.

### ***What Do I Do?***

1. Choose a text.
2. From the text, select three to five words that give an impression of the story structure (setting, characters, problem/goal, actions and resolution). Write the words on index cards, and make sets of the cards for all student groups.
3. Give each group a set of cards (make sure that multiple groups receive the same words), and tell students to create a 3-minute skit based on the vocabulary.
4. Allow students to work in small groups, and check for understanding as groups plan their skits.
5. Ask students to present skits. Allow students to compare and contrast similarities and differences between their skits.
6. Ask students to read the text and compare the author's use of the vocabulary words with the way they used the words in their skits.
7. Ask students to highlight the vocabulary words when they encounter them in the text. After reading, ask students to take another look at the vocabulary words and clarify their meanings as the author intended.
8. Encourage students to use the new vocabulary words in other oral and written presentations.

*\* Adapted from Brassell & Flood's Vocabulary Strategies Every Teacher Needs to Know (Academic Professional Development, 2004)*

## Vocabulary-Building Strategy: Word Riddles

1. key concept:

**space**

2. words related to key concept:

*sun, moon, Earth, asteroids, Mars, galaxy, universe, solar system, star, meteor*

3. selected word to start with:

**star**

4. selected word minus first letter(s):

**tar**

5. words that begin with letters in number 4:

**tarantula (starantula), tarp (starp), target (starget), Tarzan (Starzan), tartar sauce (startar sauce), tardy (stardy)**

6. Riddles:

1. What do you call a man who swings from planet to planet? **Starzan.**
2. What do you call a spider that lives in outer space? **A starantula**
3. How do you get a bullseye in space? **Aim at the starget.**
4. What do you put on a fish sandwich in outer space? **startar sauce**
5. What do you call it when the sun comes up late? **The sun is stardy**

**LIST OF RELATED CITATIONS**  
**“INCREASING STUDENTS’ VOCABULARY SKILLS”**

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