

Vocabulary Activities

Like most readers of this book, we frequently give our students long lists of vocabulary words and instruct them to write the definition of each one and use it in a sentence. After all, that's how most of us were taught vocabulary when we were students. Once we had memorized these words, we were given on a quiz, usually on a Friday. Today we know that this is not the most effective way to teach vocabulary. The charge today is to make vocabulary lessons *contextual*. But what does contextual mean in the classroom and how can we teach vocabulary to students with special needs? Another question is, How can we help students understand new words when they run across them in their reading. How can we help students use these new words them in their writing?

The task may seem overwhelming, but we can find answers to these questions. It's important to realize that ownership of vocabulary words does not come from memorization but from language experimentation and exploration. In short, we need to teach our students how to be language *detectives*. We can do that by considering the following as we teach:

Students need to study words, not memorize them.

Students need context clues. We can introduce strategies that allow students to use the text to discover the possible meaning of words.

We can teach students about the influences of other languages on English.

We can teach specific suffixes and prefixes to assist in understanding on familiar words.

We can instill the motivation to explore language and to find useful words.

In addition, it is imperative for all students that language study be active. It is especially important for students with special needs, as this can be an area of immense frustration for students. Therefore, in this chapter we offer lessons that employ more than one learning style, or intelligence, as well as provide students with opportunities to direct their own language study.



Tips

To begin creating vocabulary lessons suitable for preparing to read literature:

- Study word history and origins. (This is especially useful for British and world literature classes.)
- Study words and language patterns.
- Provide lessons that develop students' skills in using context clues to understand words.
- Use word chunks (such as prefixes, suffixes, or root words that build meaning for a larger word) to teach students about the building blocks of words.
- Develop lessons in which learning language is a game. Students need to learn how to manipulate language.
- Use graphic organizers and other visualization tools to help students learn about language and vocabulary.

Exhibit 6.1 shows the vocabulary strategies covered in this chapter and the skill sets addressed by each strategy.

The first year that Katie taught British literature to juniors, she was required to teach about the origins of the English language. In her eleventh-grade class, more than half of the students' first language was not English. As they explored the Angle, Saxons, and Normans in their quest to dominate that island, which was barely separated from the European continent, she discovered that her students liked to study about language. This interest was not unique to this class; it was true of most of her classes. When she queried her students, their responses indicated that they liked to know how words became part of everyday English. In other words, they became detectives in a mystery.

Exhibit 6.1 Strategies and Skill Sets

During-Reading Strategy	Appropriate for These Learning Styles	Multiple Intelligences
Anglo-Saxon Vocabulary	Visual Auditory	Visual/Spatial Logical/Mathematical Verbal/Linguistic Intrapersonal
Invading Words	Visual Auditory	Visual/Spatial Logical/Mathematical Verbal/Linguistic Intrapersonal
Norman-French Vocabulary	Visual Auditory	Visual/Spatial Logical/Mathematical Verbal/Linguistic Intrapersonal
Words in Action	Tactile/Kinesthetic Visual Auditory	Bodily/Kinesthetic Interpersonal Visual/Spatial Intrapersonal
Word Diagrams	Tactile/Kinesthetic Visual	Bodily/Kinesthetic Interpersonal Visual/Spatial Intrapersonal
Circling Words	Tactile/Kinesthetic Visual Auditory	Visual/Spatial Interpersonal Musical/Rhythmic
Word Sort	Tactile/Kinesthetic Visual Auditory	Visual/Spatial Intrapersonal

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