

Developing Vocabulary Within a Balanced Literacy Framework

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Children develop concepts, dispositions and skills in relation to:

- Oral Language: Outcomes 5 & 6: Acquisition and use of vocabulary
- Reading Outcome 6: Reading vocabulary
- Writing: Outcome 5: Vocabulary

The Importance of Vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge is one of the skills critical to literacy development (the others are phonological awareness, phonics, fluency comprehension, and writing). It is best nurtured within a developmentally appropriate research-based **balanced literacy framework**. Interaction within meaningful contexts, such as pretend play, read aloud, guided reading, shared writing and writing workshop, supports children in acquiring a rich vocabulary. The breadth and depth of a young child's vocabulary is a strong predictor of their reading

comprehension at both primary and secondary level. Variation in children's vocabulary knowledge is common, and vocabulary gaps can be bridged by intensive and focused intervention from a very early stage (i.e., age 3 or 4 onwards). Such an early focus can not only improve oral vocabulary, but can also impact positively on later reading comprehension. This link is an important one, as children can more easily and swiftly segment, read and understand words that are already in their oral vocabularies.

No one instructional method is sufficient for optimal vocabulary learning. Opportunities for both incidental word learning and explicit intentional teaching are necessary. The activities described here can be completed orally only (rendering them suitable for all age levels), or in combination with reading, writing, drama or art activities.



Parents are critical collaborators in the vocabulary learning process and are central to efforts to promote, enhance and maximise vocabulary learning at home through interaction in play, in sharing books, in informal conversations (e.g., at mealtimes) and through engaging in some of the activities outlined below.

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Selecting Vocabulary for Instruction

Given the sheer volume of words in the English language, it is important that the **words targeted for explicit teaching are carefully selected**. It is useful to use a framework for this purpose. One such framework categorises words into three tiers. Priority should be given to the instruction of Tier 2 words, given their high utility and their importance for understanding increasingly challenging texts that children encounter as they progress through school.

Categorisation of Vocabulary

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Description	Basic words that most children know before entering school	Words that appear frequently in texts and for which students already have conceptual understanding	Uncommon words that are typically associated with a specific discipline or domain of knowledge
Examples	Rock, come, play	emerge, prosperous	igneous, herbivore

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The ideas and concepts in this practice guide are drawn from the research cited at the end of this guide.

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Criteria for Selecting Words for Instruction

Is the word critical to comprehension of the chosen text?	Yes? Add to list.
Could children use context or structural analysis to unlock its meaning?	No? Add to list.
Does it represent a specific concept children need to know?	Yes? Add to list.
Will it be useful outside of the current text? Can it help with understanding other words? Can it be used in multiple contexts?	Yes? Add to list.

Teachers should select the words from a text they are using for read-aloud or texts that children will read as part of their literacy instruction. These texts will contain many more Tier 2 words than there is time to teach.

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Complexity of Word Knowledge

A child's knowledge of a word can range from basic to advanced. Advancing from basic (phase 1) to advanced (phase 5) requires multiple exposures (at least 12) and engagement in a range of rich activities in order to encourage deep processing and reflection on the multifaceted nature of the target words.

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Levels of vocabulary knowledge

Level 1: No knowledge of the word, totally new

Level 2: General sense of the word. Has heard the word before but has a vague knowledge of its meaning

Level 3: Narrow, context-bound knowledge of the word. Can use it in one context

Level 4: Good knowledge of the word and able to use it appropriately

Level 5: A rich de-contextualised understanding of the word and ability to use it in multiple contexts orally and in written form

Suggested Number of Words for Intensive Instruction

Stage 1	Stage 2
4 per week	6 per week

Differentiation

Instruction can be differentiated by increasing or reducing the number of words and the intensity of instruction with reference to children's needs. In addition to rich explanations and explicit teaching, the use of non-verbal cues – such as facial expressions, gestures, illustrations and other visuals – can contextualise word meanings and enhance word learning. Whole class teaching can be supported

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by small-group instruction, whereby books are re-read by the resource/learning support team and activities are further reinforced.



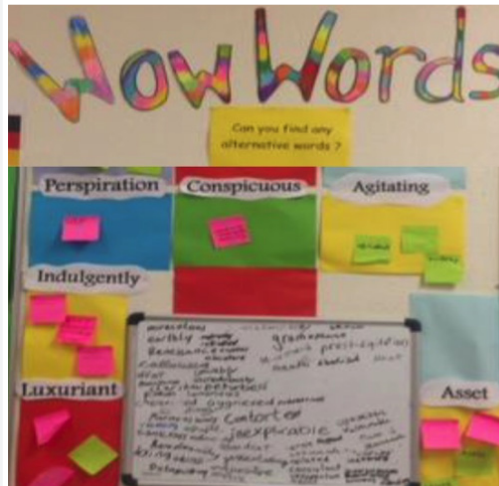
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Guidelines for Comprehensive Vocabulary Instruction

A systematic approach is needed in order to develop children's oral, reading and writing vocabulary. Activities can range from explicit teaching of individual words to building word consciousness in oral language, reading and writing.

1. Using literature to develop understanding of word meanings

Using the guidelines above, an appropriate number of words should be selected for systematic explicit instructional purposes. Short daily interactions with the words through a variety of oral, dramatic, artistic and written activities within pairs or small groups will provide multiple and varied exposures to the words, increasing the likelihood of the words being internalised to an advanced level. The words selected should come from a teacher read-aloud text or the big books and short chapter books that children are engaged in reading within groups during reading instruction. Children enjoy noticing new words and can also be involved in choosing the words for the class to study.



One way to do this is to have children record new or interesting words while reading either on post-it notes or within their reading journals and to add these to the class notice board. The teacher and children can decide together which words will be the focus for intense instruction.

A Five-Day Instructional Sequence for Teaching Individual Word Meanings

Getting Started

- Select an appropriate number of high-utility tier 2 words
- Prepare child-friendly definitions of the selected words using a sentence from the text in which they were found. Provide further examples of the words in a range of contexts. These can be put on flashcards with the target word on one side and the definition on the other

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Example: Startling

- Use the context in which the target word appears: *'Stellaluna landed headfirst into a soft downy nest, **startling** the three baby birds that lived there'*.
- Give a child-friendly definition: If someone is **startled** they feel surprised or get a sudden shock. It can also mean that something unusual has happened.
- Create a visual display to focus attention on the words.

Day One

- Focus on enjoying the story and explain the words briefly as they occur in the text
- After reading, the flashcards can be used to review the words.
- Promote **active** participation by encouraging children to discuss and share their thinking and experiences in relation to the words.

Day Two to Day Four: Explore and Consolidate

(about 10 Mins daily)

- Re-read the whole text or parts of the text (optional).
- Review the target words using the flashcards.
- Provide opportunities for children to play with the words by selecting one or two of the sample activities for children to complete in small groups or pairs. Activities should prompt children to deal with various facets of the words' meanings and investigate relationships between the target words and conceptually related words.

Sample Activities

Target Word: **Startle**

1. Game: That's _____

If I say something that might be startling, say: *'that's startling!'*

Short daily interaction with the words is more effective than longer sessions once or twice a week.

- Seeing a snake in the grass
- Winning the lotto
- Ignoring the person beside you
- Your Aunty from America arrives unexpectedly
- A sudden bang when you're alone at home

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2. Frayer Model

In pairs or small groups, have children collect synonyms and antonyms for the target words. They can continue to add to their chart throughout the week.

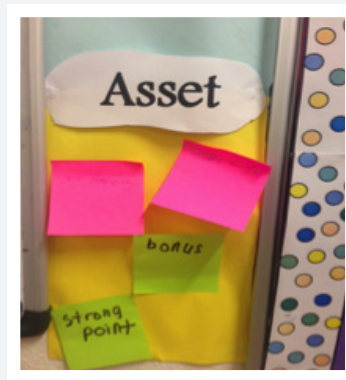
<p>Definition (Child-Friendly)</p> <p>If someone is <i>startled</i> they feel surprised or get a sudden shock or fright</p> <p><i>Startling</i> can mean also that something unusual has happened.</p>	<p>Example of the Word in Context</p> <p>(Sentence from text; additional example 'Stellaluna landed headfirst into soft downy nest, <i>startling</i> the three baby birds that lived there')</p> <p>I was <i>startled</i> when a mouse ran across the kitchen floor.</p>
<p>SYNONYMS</p> <p>Scare Surprise</p> <p>Amaze Alarm</p> <p>Astound Disturb Disquiet</p> <p>Shock Frighten</p> <p>Disconcert</p>	<p>ANTONYMS</p> <p>Reassure Calm</p> <p>Pacify Mollify</p> <p>Comfort</p> <p>Compose Relieve</p>

STARTLE

3. Questioning

- Pose questions using the target words and have children justify their answers: e.g. would you be *startled* if you found out someone had broken into your home?

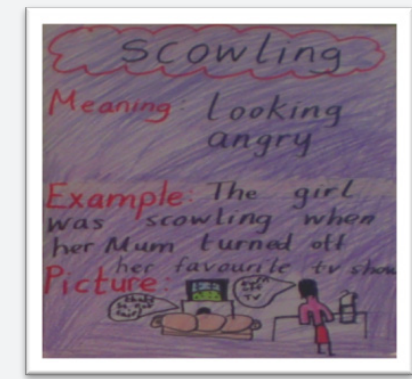
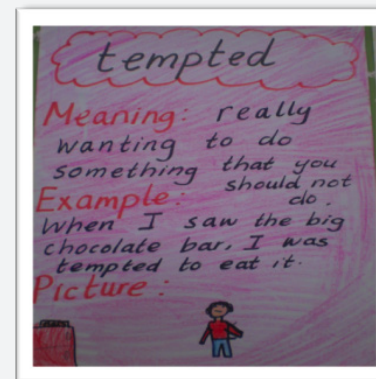
Form small groups and ask each group to respond to the questions. (Develop a question for each word).



4. Role play/write/illustrate

Have children describe/role play/illustrate some startling situations

Video 3



Engage children in activities in which they need to deal with various facets of the words and investigate relationships between the target words and conceptually related words.

5. Sentence stems

- Provide sentence stems for students to complete: John was startled when...
- Create a comment which requires children to match with the target word and say why: I saw Justin Bieber walking down main street last Saturday (that's startling).

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6. Word Wizard Chart

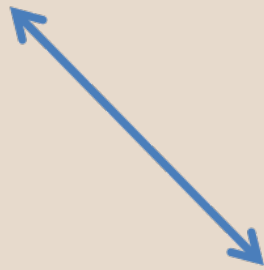
Challenge children to think about how the words could be used outside of the classroom e.g. describe a startling situation in a TV programme or book they have read. They can also be encouraged to document the use of the word at home or school throughout the week.

7. Word Cline

Have children examine the synonyms they created for their words when completing the Frayer Model exercise. Challenge them to arrange the words on a word cline.

A word cline is a language scale illustrating gradations in meaning from weak to strong or positive to negative:

glacial



scalding

meaning from weak to strong or positive to negative:

glacial, frosty, cold, chilly, cool, warm, hot, sizzling, roasting, burning, scalding.

Day Five: Follow-up Assessment (About 10 Mins)

Informal and ongoing assessment is fundamental to vocabulary instruction. Teacher designed-tests can also be used to assess the child's vocabulary development:

- **Multiple choice:** Startled means: a) calm b) bored c) surprised d) tired
- **True-false:** If something is startling you will be bored
- **Complete the sentence:** The robber was *startled* when...
- **Write** a sentence and **illustrate** the word...
- **Use** all the words in the paragraph or as a **story starter**



Provide opportunities to enable children to apply the word to a range of contexts.

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Maintenance Work

- Display selected vocabulary in the classroom and hallways. Ask members of the school community (principal, other teachers, secretary, caretaker) to elicit responses from children in relation to words displayed in corridors.

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- Store the words and continually revise. Try:
 - a) Pulling out three words at random; children connect them orally or in writing
 - b) Pulling out a word and challenging children to provide a definition or use it in a sentence
 - c) Passing out three words and asking children or to consider how an author could use the words.

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2. Link Vocabulary Study to the Writing Workshop

Children should be taught reading and writing as interconnected processes. Word consciousness can develop when a child reads a text, adopting first the stance of a reader, and then the stance of a writer.

Linking craft mini-lessons in the Writing Workshop to vocabulary development is an important and valuable approach to expanding children's reading and writing vocabulary. It is a natural link and helps children to make reading and writing connections.

Craft mini-lessons can develop vocabulary in a number of ways. Beginning with word-level descriptive elements of language (e.g. precise nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs) and guiding children to notice how an author uses these elements to craft a setting, a character or an important event, can help them see that such descriptive elements enable the reader to visualise and connect with a text. Moving beyond the word level to more advanced elements such as similes, metaphors and alliteration can help children appreciate the power of apt language to stir reader emotions and convey the writer's intentions more vividly. Exploring a wide range of quality literature with a writer's eyes provides opportunities for children to think like a writer and to begin to consider the precision of their own word choices.

As children are introduced to a range of genre over the course of a year, craft mini-lessons can be used to help children develop the appropriate language register and structure of a particular genre. Through think-alouds, teachers can draw attention to tier three vocabulary, to how authors begin sentences in diverse ways and how they signal the structure of a text with precise language. This introduces children to a range of more interesting and sophisticated transitional phrases and connectives and can lead them to assess their own sentences and revise accordingly.

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3. Incidental word learning

Good vocabulary instruction excites children about words. Teachers can develop curiosity and interest in words and promote word play by:

- providing opportunities for children to **self-select and discuss interesting vocabulary** words used by authors and record these in **vocabulary logs**
- **modelling** the use of more complex vocabulary when communicating with children throughout the day and within reading and writing workshops
- encouraging children to use newly acquired vocabulary in **conversation**

- incorporating **discussion and active participation** into developing Tier 3 vocabulary in all **curricular areas**
- setting up a system whereby **children are commended** for bringing in evidence of hearing, seeing or using target words in the classroom and beyond.
- involving **parents** in reinforcing understanding of word meanings and encouraging them to exploit opportunities to introduce new vocabulary to children
- facilitating **wide reading** through an on-going, structured and long-term silent reading programme such as DEAR time (Drop Everything and Read). Children should have the opportunity to self-select books for independent reading (i.e., with 95-100% accuracy).

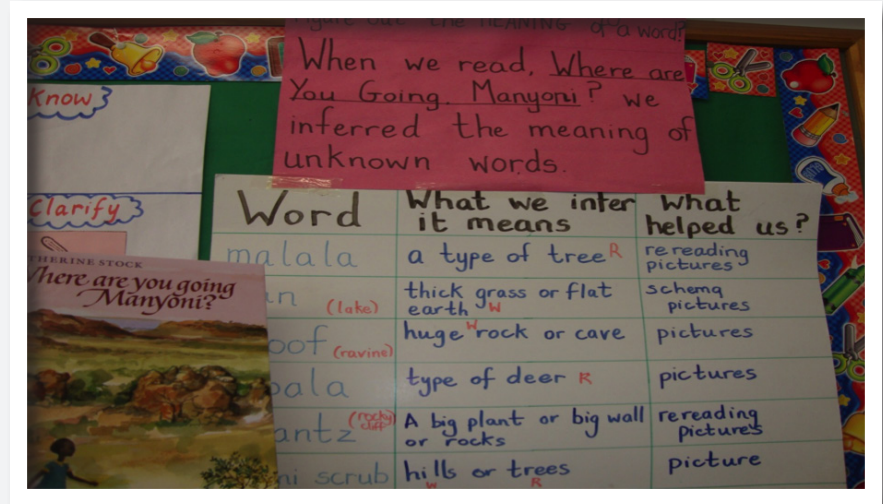


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3. Teaching word-learning strategies

Teaching children to use specific word-learning strategies is also important because it helps them to independently learn the meaning of words they come across in texts. This can be achieved through:

- teaching how to use grapho-phonetic (letter-sound) cues to decode unknown words and morphemic analysis (word parts, including prefixes and suffixes) to unlock the meanings of unfamiliar words.
- teaching about the structure of a dictionary and thesaurus, how to use it to discover a word's multiple forms and meanings and how to match a meaning to a specific context.
- explicitly teaching how to use context cues embedded in the text to infer the meanings of unknown words. This needs to be modelled using the gradual release of responsibility model. The teacher models with one or two examples by thinking aloud how the meaning of a new word can be inferred from the context, from the picture, by re-reading or by reading ahead. The teacher can also model how to check if the inference was right or wrong by checking the dictionary or online. Creating visual displays in the classroom can remind children about the strategies that they can use to clarify an unknown word.



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