



Vocabulary Development

A reader's level of vocabulary is the best predictor of ability to understand text. Therefore, developing the vocabulary knowledge of students is critically important to improving their literacy skills. Activities focused on improving vocabulary knowledge will have a direct impact on word recognition, fluency and comprehension. Below are ideas for planning and implementing high-quality literacy activities in vocabulary development.

Foster Word Consciousness

Word consciousness is being aware of and intrigued by the words and language in one's environment. Being word conscious can increase reading comprehension and help students become more engaged and motivated to read. Here are some simple ways to get students more word conscious:

- Collect, catalog or post examples of vivid or meaningful new terms.
- Have students locate and share new and interesting words used outside of learning activities. Simply creating an avenue for them to pay attention to the language around them heightens awareness.
- Assign students roles as language detectives, asking them to notice and describe ways people express similar thoughts.
- Look for interesting word choices in books and have students discuss how meaning would be changed if the author had chosen a different word or phrase.
- Award points to students "caught" using chosen words in conversation or writings.

Extend word consciousness into the arts with the Y4Y [Vocabulary Collage, Grades 7-12](#) activity.

Play With Language

Students who understand that words and sentences can have more than one meaning are able to think flexibly about language, which is a crucial component of making sense of text. Students learn to monitor their reading more carefully because they understand that more than one meaning is possible and they have to consider the particular context where the word appears. This ability to think about and manipulate language is crucial to being a proficient reader.

- Use jokes, riddles or multiple-meaning sentences to help students explore the flexibility of language and its impact on meaning.
 - The chicken was ready to eat. (What does this mean if a farmer says it? What about a chef?)
 - I saw her duck.
 - Did you ever hear the story about the blind carpenter who picked up his hammer and saw?
- Play with idioms.
 - Learning idioms is a piece of cake! Introduce the idiom with a picture. Provide a definition and describe the origin of the idiom, if known. Here's an example: When something requires little effort to finish, it's a piece of cake. The origin for this idiom is from the 1870s, when cakes were often given as prizes for winning competitions. Then make sure to put the idiom into context by using it in a variety of situations, so students understand subtleties of meaning.
- Explore newspaper or magazine headlines, or advertisement copy.

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- Discuss the meaning of newspaper headlines like this one from the *New York Times*: “Balloons have become a high flying business and sell at inflated prices.” Or talk about ad copy such as this from Volkswagen: “If gas pains persist, try Volkswagen.”

Explore Word Meanings

Students who understand word meanings at a deep level are more easily able to access words and use them to convey or understand subtleties of meaning. Models that help students explore word meanings from a number of different aspects encourage deep understanding. Two models that require students to analyze, synthesize and apply information are described on these linked Y4Y tools:

- Use a [Frayer Chart](#) to explore different aspects of a word.
- Use a [Semantic Map](#) to go deeper into what a word means.

Extend word meanings into the arts with these Y4Y activities: [Vocabulary Parade for Grades K-6](#) and [Vocabulary Collage for Grades 7-12](#).

English Learners

Acquiring vocabulary in the second language is one of the primary goals of literacy instruction for English learners. Here are some tips to facilitate vocabulary acquisition:

- Identify language within the text that may be particularly difficult for English learners. Examples include prepositional phrases, homonyms, idioms and slang.
- Preteach essential vocabulary and phrases, using images and objects from everyday life — realia — as teaching aids. Include academic words that they might hear at school but not on the playground, like *analyze*, *summarize*, *forthcoming* and *therefore*.
- Look for language cognates — words that look and sound similar in English and in the student’s first language.