

Vocabulary and comprehension go hand in hand. If children don't understand important words in a text, they won't be able to make sense of what they are reading. If children don't have the right words to express their ideas, they will have trouble communicating their thoughts to others.

Children learn vocabulary through repeated exposure to new words and from explicit vocabulary instruction. Use your Intentional Read Aloud to expose children to rich vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Carefully choose words that help children understand the book, that children can use in speaking and writing, and that are easy to incorporate into the daily life of the classroom. Here are some ways to make the most of your vocabulary instruction:

Planning for Vocabulary

- Look through your Read Aloud and choose high-utility vocabulary words that students can use again in speaking and writing. Choose one to three words to teach during each Read Aloud.
- Write vocabulary words in black ink on white index cards or sentence strips (so they look different from word wall words). Display the words where children can see them during the read aloud.
- Prepare a child-friendly definition for each word. Use language that children already know and will understand.
- Decide if you will introduce the words before or during the reading. Teach vocabulary words before if the words are central to understanding the book or if teaching the words during the read aloud will distract from the pace and flow of the lesson. Otherwise, you may choose to teach the vocabulary words during the reading time.
- Plan if and how you will revisit the vocabulary word after the reading. This might be the time you and your children go deeper into the meaning of some words and relate the vocabulary to the central ideas of the book.

Teaching Vocabulary

- Introduce the vocabulary words one at a time. Ask children to repeat the word at least one time, so they have practice with pronunciation. Make sure to use the word in context as well as give the definition.
- Use props and pictures to help teach the words. For example, if the character in the story looks "morose," use the illustration to show the children the meaning of morose.
- Choose teaching strategies that require children to interact with words in meaningful contexts.
- Point out vocabulary words when you encounter them in the book. You can check children's understanding or remind them of the word's meaning.
- Think aloud to model strategies readers use to figure out new words. These strategies include using context clues, or using familiar word parts to figure out new words. Choose some Read Aloud lessons where vocabulary is the primary literacy objective.
- Encourage children to practice saying new words and expressions. Teach them how to pronounce the words and how to use them in different grammatical constructs.

Strategies for Teaching Vocabulary Words

Use these strategies to help children interact with new vocabulary words in meaningful ways. You can use these to introduce new words before your Read Aloud, or to reinforce vocabulary after the Read Aloud and during other instructional practices.

Word Associations

Ask which words go with which sentences and follow-up with why they decided on that connection.

- For new words accomplice and philanthropist, ask students: Which word goes with crook? Which word goes with “gift to build a new hospital”?

Have You Ever?

Ask students to associate words with context and activities from their own experience.

- For the new words urge, commend, and banter, ask students to describe a time when you might urge someone, commend someone, or banter with someone.

Applause, Applause!

- Ask students to clap in order to indicate how much they would like to be described by a word. Follow-up with why they feel that way.

Idea Completions

Provide students with sentence stems that require integration of the word's meaning.

- The audience asked the virtuoso to play another piece of music because ...
- The skiing teacher said Maria was a novice on the ski slopes because ...

Questions, Reasons, and Examples

Ask children to interact with the target word by explaining examples of the word in use.

- If you are walking around a dark room, you need to do it cautiously. Why? What are some other things that need to be done cautiously?
- What is something you could do to impress your teacher? Your mother?

Making Choices

- List examples of situations that do and do not apply to the target word and ask children to respond to those situations that do apply.