

Overview

After many years of teaching and after trying many different methods of teaching vocabulary, I still was not sure that I had found a way to successfully help students learn and remember those all important vocabulary words. Several procedures worked for short term remembering. Most of the students took a test on the words and then promptly forgot them. A few students remembered a few of the words for a while, but couldn't remember their meanings when they came across the words in a new passage.

So what is the point of learning new vocabulary words? We learn new words so that we can understand what we read and hear and so that we can communicate effectively. Building vocabulary should be one of the basic parts of reading instruction. Stahl and Fairbanks (1986) stated that direct vocabulary instruction can greatly improve comprehension. Better writing is one of the added benefits for building vocabulary in young readers. And of course, there are those dreaded state tests.

On most standardized tests, the students are asked to

1. figure out the meanings of words in context;
2. choose the right word to complete a sentence.

Just memorizing definitions from a list doesn't prepare students for these tasks. It also doesn't give them an opportunity to learn word attack skills. Students who have memorized word lists and definitions aren't prepared to figure out new words in context. Most importantly, lists are not individualized. Some advanced students may know most of the words on a given list already! When all students study the same list of words, those students who already know all of the words don't learn anything new. Finally, books that provide definitions of words right there in the margins don't help because students don't learn to figure out the definitions for themselves. The approach is entirely too passive to facilitate true learning. Research says that vocabulary instruction is more effective when students are actively engaged in the learning tasks (National Reading Panel, 2000).

With these understandings in mind, *Vocabulary: An Elementary Approach*, a literature-based, research-based series was developed. The program is effective and easy to use. For each book, students begin with 10-20 vocabulary words from the literature. These words are ones that students are likely to use and to find in other contexts. Words that students will probably never hear or read again are not included unless those words are essential for understanding the text. Although the book may contain many more than 20 words appropriate for study, research (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001) suggests that we should avoid teaching every unknown word in any given text. Direct vocabulary

instruction, while necessary, is time consuming; and if all instruction is direct, students don't learn to figure out any meanings for themselves.

In *Vocabulary: An Elementary Approach*, students take a pretest on the 10-20 target words before they begin reading the book. As they read, they look for the words they missed and record them on Word Logs. Students replace the words they got right with unfamiliar words they come across as they read, tailoring the learning to their own ability levels. Word Logs require students to do more than just learn definitions but also to figure out the meanings of new words in context, to use a dictionary, and to do their reading (carefully!) so that they can find the words in the literature. Students must learn about the new words, about their structures and their various forms, which research says is essential for authentic understanding (Graves, 2000).

Students study the root words, prefixes, and suffixes of each new word because doing so helps them to figure out the meanings of new words later (Carlisle, 2004). In fact, researchers estimate that 60 percent of English words have easily identifiable roots, prefixes, and suffixes (Nagy, Anderson, Schommer, Scott, & Stallman, 1989). Reproducible root, prefix, and suffix reference charts are available beginning on page 15. Students should refer to these lists when analyzing not only the words in this program but other unfamiliar words that they come across in their reading.

Finally, students practice using the new words through a variety of reinforcement activities (page 13), and the process ends with a posttest. Although the pretest and posttest assess students' knowledge of dictionary definitions only, the real thinking and learning take place on the Word Logs. You may choose to assess students on their Word Logs and on their reinforcement activities. In the next section, you will see step-by-step instructions for implementing the Elementary Approach Vocabulary program in your classroom.

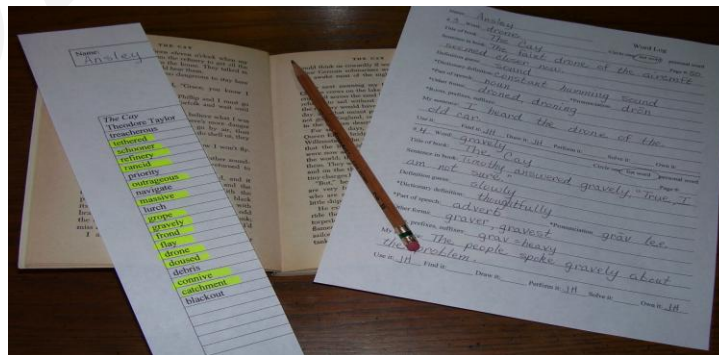
Process

Step 1: Before students begin reading *Maniac Magee*, give them the pretest, which consists of 20 vocabulary words taken from the book. Two versions of the pretest are provided in case you want to give every other student a different test. Each version includes the same vocabulary words, but the answers are in a different order. While the pretest is in matching format, there are more answer choices than vocabulary words to reduce the chance of correct answers by process of elimination. Run off one copy of the pretest for each student. Vocabulary words are listed in alphabetical order on the left side of the test, but they are not numbered. Leaving them unnumbered cuts down on confusion later when students fill in the Word Logs. The answer choices are numbered, however. In the small box next to each word, the students should write the number of the correct definition. (Directions are included on the top of each version of the test.) In order to obtain the most accurate pretest results possible, discourage students from guessing.

Step 2: Grade the pretests using the answer key provided. Note that the lines on the answer key line up with the lines on the tests to facilitate grading. Highlight each word the student misses on the pretest. Most students will know very few of the words!

Step 3: Cut off the left side of the pretest so that you're left with only the list of vocabulary words (no answers or answer choices) and return the lists to the students. Each student now has a list of words, with the ones he doesn't know highlighted, to use as a bookmark while reading the book. To make the bookmarks sturdier, consider laminating them or running the pretests off on cardstock.

Step 4: Give each student a Word Log. Make enough copies of the Word Log so that each student has space for 20 entries—basically 10 pages per student. Logs can be copied on the front and back of the paper. Alternately, you could have students create their own logs on notebook paper.



Step 5: As students read *Maniac Magee*, they will come across the words that are highlighted on their bookmarks. When they find a word, they will fill in the Word Logs. At the end of the unit, each student will have recorded 20 words on his log. If he missed only 10 words on his pretest, then he will have those 10 words plus 10 more *unfamiliar* words that he came across in his reading. If he missed 15 words on his pretest, then he'll have those 15 words plus 5 more *unfamiliar* words that he came across in his reading. And so forth. Students should fill in the fields on their logs as follows:

#: These spaces should be numbered sequentially, 1-20.

Word: Each student should fill in the words as he or she finds them in the text.

Circle one: Each student should indicate whether this particular word is one he or she missed on the pretest or whether this word is an unfamiliar one that he or she came across in the reading.

Title of book: In this space, the student should indicate where he or she found the word. Most likely students will find all of the pretest words in the literary work they are studying, but they should be allowed to find them in their personal reading as well.

Page #: Each student should fill in this space with the page number on which the word is found in the reading.

Sentence in book: The student should copy from the text the sentence in which he or she found the word.

Definition guess: Using context clues, but without looking the word up, the student should guess at the word's definition.

***Dictionary definition:** At this point, the student looks up the word and writes the "real" definition and compares it to his guess. Students need not go back and change their guesses. The asterisk indicates that this step should be completed with the help of the dictionary.

***Part of speech:** Based on the word's use in the sentence, the student should be able to figure out the word's part of speech. The part of speech can also be found in their dictionary. Again, the asterisk indicates that this step should be completed with the help of the dictionary.

***Pronunciation:** The student should write the pronunciation out phonetically. This respelling is usually found in the dictionary. Again, the asterisk indicates that this step should be completed with the help of the dictionary.

***Other forms:** Here the student should note other forms of the word. For example, if the word is *friend*, the adjective forms would be *friendly* and *friendless*. Again, the asterisk indicates that this step should be completed with the help of the dictionary.

***Roots, prefixes, suffixes:** In this space, the student should write any roots, prefixes, or suffixes that are in the word and that will be helpful in understanding

future words. Again, the asterisk indicates that this step should be completed with the help of the dictionary.

My sentence: The student should then write an original sentence using the word or one of its alternate forms. Remind students that the meaning of the word should be evident in the sentence.

The last row of each log entry provides a way to track additional experience your students have with each word. As Nagy, Anderson, and Herman (1987) prove in their research, vocabulary development is an ongoing process; in order to “own” a word, students need multiple encounters with the target word in verbal and in written contexts. You may require students to complete all six objectives, or you may allow them to select two or three per word.

Use it: Have the student (or you) initial here after he or she has used the word in a writing assignment, in a discussion, or in a vocabulary story. (See activity #2 on page 13.)

Find it: Have the student (or you) initial here after he or she has found the word in a second source.

Draw it: Have the student (or you) initial here after he or she has drawn a vocabulary picture of the word. (See activity #1 on page 13.)

Perform it: Have the student (or you) initial here after he or she has sung a song or performed a skit using the word. (See activities #3 and #4 on page 14.)

Solve it: Have the student (or you) initial here after he or she has created and/or solved a puzzle pertaining to the word. (See activity #5 on page 14.)

Own it: Have the student (or you) initial here after he or she has correctly defined the word on the posttest.

(See a sample entry on page 6 of this book.)

Step 6: At the end of the unit, administer the same test again as a posttest. Students’ personal words need not be assessed formally. Students will benefit just from putting them on the log and using them in the reinforcement activities. In fact, if students think you will test them over their personal words, they’ll be tempted to select words that they really already know. If you assure them that they won’t be tested, however, they will feel more comfortable selecting difficult or unfamiliar words.

Step 7: Repeat the process with new words from another book your students are reading. I recommend completing no more than five lists per year, for a maximum of 100 vocabulary words even if you read more than five books in a year. Research suggests that students can effectively learn no more than 400 words per year (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). Not all of those 400 words should come from direct instruction, however. Students will also learn words from other activities and experiences.