



NSW Centre for Effective Reading

Middle Years



Vocabulary- Pre-teaching

Introduction

The primary consideration for pre-teaching vocabulary should be which words need to be clarified for students so that those words don't get in the way of comprehension (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2008). Teachers can introduce both the more unfamiliar specialised content area words that will be used in the lesson as well as non-specialised academic words used when talking about the content or during or after the reading of a text.

Purpose

Pre-teaching vocabulary facilitates the reading of new text by giving students the meanings of the words before they encounter them. This practice reduces the number of unfamiliar words encountered and facilitates greater comprehension.

Teaching steps

1. Teacher previews text/topic to select words to pre-teach (as well as words to be taught during and after reading). Usually no more than three to five words should be selected for pre-teaching.

The following guidelines can be used when selecting vocabulary to pre-teach:

- Importance of the word for understanding the text.
- Students' prior knowledge of the word and the concept to which it relates.
- The existence of multiple meanings of the word (e.g., metre in poetry, mathematics, and science).
- Opportunities for grouping words together to enhance understanding a concept.

Once vocabulary words have been selected for pre teaching the attention they get before reading should be brief. The kind of work that is needed for students to 'know a word' may distract student's attention from the text that is about to be read. Also, when words are taught before reading, instruction cannot take advantage of the context in which the word is used. If too many words are presented without being contextualised they may appear to be a random set of words (Beck et al, 2008).

2. Pronounce the word if the pronunciation is difficult.

3. Provide the word's meaning through a student friendly definition (Beck & McKeown, 2002). Think about how the word is typically used and provide a meaning in everyday language. Dictionary definitions are not always helpful in providing a clear definition of a word for students.

For example:

Target Word	Dictionary definition	Student friendly definition
devious	straying from the straight course; not straightforward	If someone is devious, he is using tricky and secretive ways to do something dishonest.
vicarious	felt by sharing in others' experiences	If someone is getting a vicarious feeling, she is sharing an experience by watching or reading about it.
jaded	worn out; tired; weary	If someone is jaded, he has done or has seen so much of something that he begins to dislike it.
exotic	foreign; strange; not native	Something that is exotic is unusual and interesting because it comes from another country far away.

Beck, McKeown & Kucan (2008)

4. Use the word in a sentence to clarify the meaning in context.

Target word	Sentence
devious	Steven was devious when he told his friends different reasons for the lost ball.
vicarious	Sally had vicarious pleasure in watching a video of the concert she could not attend because she was sick.
jaded	We had both become jaded, disinterested and disillusioned.
exotic	She looked very exotic in the brightly coloured dress bought when she was overseas.

5. Read the text and clarify words that have been the focus of pre-teaching if necessary.

Technology Tip

The following online dictionaries provide student friendly definitions of words.

<http://dictionary.reverso.net/english-cobuild/>

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>

References

Beck, I.L. & McKeown, M.G. (2002). Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction, The Guilford Press:NY.

Beck, I.L., McKeown, M.G. & Kucan, L. (2008). Creating Robust Vocabulary: Frequently asked questions and extended examples. The Guilford Press: NY.