

Words, Words, Words: Teaching Vocabulary in Grades 4-12

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Stenhouse Publishers, Portland, Maine, 1999

Selecting Vocabulary Words for Instruction (page 7)

“These questions helped me plan vocabulary instruction at the beginning of a thematic unit or before starting the shared reading of a novel. My first step was to determine which words were critical to understanding the text. I then had to decide which of those critical words could be connected to students’ prior knowledge or learned through context and which would have to be bridged with direct instruction. For words that needed bridging, I then had to decide what form that bridging would take: teaching strategy lessons, suggesting concept connections, exploring multiple meanings, and/or introducing activities that provided repetition and integration into students’ lives.”

1. Which words are most important to understanding the text?
2. How much prior knowledge will students have about this word or its related concept?
3. Is the word encountered frequently?
4. Does the word have multiple meanings (is it polysemous)?
5. Is the concept significant and does it therefore require preteaching?
6. Which words can be figured out from the context?
7. Are there words that could be grouped together to enhance understanding a concept?
8. What strategies could I employ to help students integrate the concept (and related words) into their lives?
9. How can I make repeated exposures to the work/concept productive and enjoyable?
10. How can I help students use the word/concept in meaningful ways in multiple contexts?