

**Title:** *Teaching Vocabulary in All Classrooms*

**Full Citation:** Blachowicz, C., & Fisher, P. (1996). *Teaching Vocabulary in All Classrooms*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

**Subject(s):** Comprehension, Nonfiction/Informational Text, Vocabulary

**Grade Level:** All grades

**Synopsis:** This book provides suggestions for teaching vocabulary at all grade levels and in all content areas.

### The Research

Studies have shown that students learn new vocabulary when meanings are explicitly taught and when learners are active in relating words to each other and making word meanings visible and personal. Devices such as semantic webs, maps, organizers, concept hierarchies, and other relational charts are powerful ways to help students learn new words.

“Numerous studies . . . support the notion that teaching definitions results in learning (Kameenui et al., 1982; Pany & Jenkins, 1978; Stahl, 1983). However, instruction that combined definitional information with other active processing . . . all exceeded performance of students who received only definitional instruction.” (p. 10)

“Many studies have shown the efficacy of putting word meanings into graphic form such as a map or web (Heimlich & Pittleman, 1986), a semantic feature chart (Anders, Bos, & Filip, 1982; Johnson, Toms-Bronowski, & Pittleman, 1982), advanced organizer (Herber, 1978), or other graphic form.” (p. 8)

### Integrating vocabulary and reading strategy instruction

When teaching reading strategies, vocabulary can be used as part of prereading instruction. Vocabulary can be used to drive prediction and develop, activate, and assess prior knowledge. To use vocabulary as a part of prereading instruction, do the following:

- “Select important vocabulary”—words that are important to the selection and that can be used to discuss the selection.
- “Design an activity that will activate what kids already know and will help them make predictions about the selection.” (p. 40) This might involve writing, drama, mapping, or charting. It should be followed by discussion by the whole class or small cooperative groups. Include words the students already know, so that they have a handle in prior knowledge for making predictions.
- “Remind students to gather data as they read.” (p. 41)
- “Design postreading for drawing inferences, monitoring, and refining.” (p. 41) Return to the vocabulary words after reading—if they were chosen carefully, they will naturally be used in summarizing and responding to the selection. Use questions to help students refine and monitor their understandings of the word meanings. “Use contextual ‘look backs’ and semantic analysis to help students refine and monitor their understanding of words that are still unclear after prediction, reading, and discussion/response.” (p. 42)
- “Set up activities for meaningful use and response.” (p. 42) For example, students can dramatize the selection using the vocabulary words.

Graphic organizers to use in reading strategy instruction:

- ∞ Vocab-o-Grams: uses story structure for organizing and remembering vocabulary words (see pp. 43–47). (Blachowicz, 1986)
- ∞ Story Impressions: Students look at a set of vocabulary words and write their own version of the story before reading. This is a way for students to do extensive writing as a way to predict story content before reading. (see pp. 47–49) (McGinley & Denner, 1987)
- ∞ Word Play: Give students a set of words from the story and ask them to work in small groups to prepare a play using the words. This works well with younger students and ESL students. (see pp. 49–51)
- ∞ Knowledge Rating Sheet: Students get a list of words and rate their own level of knowledge of each term. They discuss the word meanings in small groups. (This is a way to activate prior knowledge and build background.) They make predictions about the text. They read the text to “gather data” about the words and their predictions. After reading they monitor and refine their predictions and knowledge. They then respond and use the words. (see pp. 51–54)

#### Learning vocabulary in literature-based reading instruction

Some strategies that can be used to teach vocabulary through literature include:

- Character Mapping: graphically displaying words that describe characters. (see pp. 60–61)
- Comprehension Court: Students are given an “evidence sheet” after reading, with questions about the characters. Students must reread and write on the evidence sheet whatever evidence they find for answering the questions. Then the teachers holds a “Comprehension Court,” in which students must defend their answers using the evidence on their evidence sheet. They are not allowed to look back in the book itself. (see pp. 62–63) (Sentell & Blachowicz, 1989)

#### Specific strategies for teaching vocabulary in the content areas:

##### Words with multiple meanings

- ∞ “Typical-to-Technical” meaning: discuss the common meaning of the word and then the specialized meaning.
- ∞ Illustrate the common and technical meanings
- ∞ Vocabulary-focused K-W-L
- ∞ clarify misconceptions

##### New words

- ∞ Frayer Model (Dorothy Frayer, University of Wisconsin): 7 steps, including define, discriminate the relevant from irrelevant properties of instances of the concept, give example, give non-example, relate to a subordinate and a superordinate concept, etc.
- ∞ Semantic Feature Analysis: list positive, negative, or possible attributes
- ∞ possible sentences: give them sentences and ask whether each one is possible or not

- ∞ semantic gradients: map out relationships among synonyms or antonyms
- ∞ maps: brainstorming maps, semantic maps, structured overviews
- ∞ knowledge rating
- ∞ concept guides

**Quote(s):** “Numerous studies . . . support the notion that teaching definitions results in learning (Kameenui et al., 1982; Pany & Jenkins, 1978; Stahl, 1983). However, instruction that combined definitional information with other active processing . . . all exceeded performance of students who received only definitional instruction.” (p. 10)

“Many studies have shown the efficacy of putting word meanings into graphic form such as a map or web (Heimlich & Pittleman, 1986), a semantic feature chart (Anders, Bos, & Filip, 1982; Johnson, Toms-Bronowski, & Pittleman, 1982), advanced organizer (Herber, 1978), or other graphic form.” (p. 8)