

Title: “Storybook Reading: Improving Vocabulary and Comprehension of English Language Learners”

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Grade Level: 1–2, 3–6

Synopsis: (Abstract) “The purpose of this article is to describe a strategy teachers can utilize to systematically build language skills of English language learners, specifically in the areas of vocabulary and comprehension, through daily read alouds of stories and texts. Vocabulary and comprehension are documented areas of literacy development that are critical to students’ academic success. By implementing the read-aloud strategy presented here, teachers not only offer English language learners opportunities to hear and discuss authentic and relevant stories and texts, but they also expose students to challenging and stimulating vocabulary that is crucial to their comprehension of and engagement with text.”

(Details) Choose books (narrative and nonfiction) that are one to two grade levels above students’ grade placement. Group 3 or 4 books according to a specific theme in order to provide opportunities to hear vocabulary words more than once and gain deeper content knowledge. Break the text into passages of 200–250 words. Read for about 30 minutes a day. It usually takes 3–5 days to read the entire book. On the last day, the entire book is re-read and 4 or 5 of the most challenging vocabulary words from the text are reviewed.

Teach words that are high utility, the “Tier Two” words described by Beck, McKeown, & Kucan (2002) that go beyond familiar or basic (Tier One) words, but are not the abstract, technical, rare (Tier Three) words. Select 3 or 4 words and develop simple explanations of their meanings. The read-aloud format follows these steps:

1. Preview the story and introduce 3–4 new words: Say the word, give a definition, show the word written on an index card.
2. Read aloud without stopping, using intonation and enunciation to focus on meaning. Discuss the passage, focusing on literal and inferential comprehension. Ask for retellings and then ask inferential questions.
3. Reread the passage, focusing on the vocabulary words. Tell students to show their “thumbs up” when they hear one of the vocabulary words while they listen to the reading. Stop to ask students to define words as they come up.
4. Deep processing of vocabulary knowledge, for example through sentence building from model sentence stems.
5. Summarize the text and any content knowledge.

A chart lists examples of appropriate books for read-alouds, along with sample vocabulary words and definitions.

Quote(s): “Teacher read-alouds are perhaps the most consistent activity used by classroom teachers that provides frequent, if not daily opportunities to enhance the oralcy and literacy of English language learners by integrating effective vocabulary development practices.”

“Students who are ELLs will require effective and ongoing instruction in vocabulary and comprehension to improve their oralcy skills and to increase the likelihood that they will read with meaning and learn from text. Teachers have many opportunities throughout the day to provide structured instruction in vocabulary and comprehension to these students. One of the most available and valuable times is during storybook reading.”