

# Introduction

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When we first read *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction* by Beck, et al., many of us were instantly inspired by this new and lasting vocabulary-teaching model that can work for most, if not all, children. We know that just because children are language disordered or delayed, that doesn't mean they can't learn new words, or more importantly, learn words that are rich in meaning and usage. Beck's model shows that they can IF the instruction is divided into three tiers.

## Tier Words

**Tier One Words**—These are words the student doesn't need to be taught; they're in her personal vocabulary and are words she uses on a daily basis. This vocabulary is the foundation on which to introduce Tier Two words.

**Tier Two Words**—These words appear frequently in a variety of written and oral texts but are not a part of the student's day-to-day vocabulary. The student is likely to recognize Tier Two words and is usually able to describe what the word means.

**Tier Three Words**—Words that are of low frequency or limited to specific domains make up Tier Three words. Examples might be *isotope*, *cerebellum*, and *psychogenic*.

*Word Feast Middle School* concentrates on teaching Tier Two words that expand a middle schooler's basic vocabulary to allow them more expressive and varied word choices in their reading and writing.

## Selecting the Tier Two Words to Teach

I chose the new Tier Two words for each lesson based on the following recommendations from Beck:

1. Importance and utility—words that appear frequently across a variety of domains
2. Instructional potential—words that have rich meanings and connect the student to other words and concepts
3. Conceptual understanding—words that provide specificity and precision of use and are words that students already know

Another guiding principle of Beck's that I used whenever possible was to select words that are not abstract concepts but that have familiar synonyms and can be easily defined. Language-delayed students often don't go beyond using simple descriptive words like *good*, *hate*, or *sad*, so their speaking and writing often sounds flat and imprecise because of the repetition of those broad descriptors. In *Word Feast Middle School*, I've attempted to provide richer synonyms for familiar and tired words, by introducing more accurate and rich ones, such as *astounding*, *abhor*, and *despair*.

I also tried to select words that I thought kids would have fun learning and would more likely use and explore because of their sounds or unique connotations. That's why words like *giddy*, *fiasco*, and *naive* are included. Too often, our vocabulary teaching is perfunctory and dry; introducing unique words to students that invite play and experimentation is a great way to add zest to instruction.

Verbs are presented in their various tense forms in both reading passages and activities. Words from previous lessons also appear throughout and are listed on the first page of each lesson.

### Learning Tasks

Each lesson contains a consistent pattern of reading and thinking exercises that enhances learning by removing any question of unpredictability. The lessons follow this formula:

- Page 1: New words, Words from Previous Lessons, Activating Knowledge
- Pages 2-3: Two to four reading passages
- Page 4-5: Definitions
- Page 5: Making Associations
- Page 6: Finish the Thought
- Page 7: Antonyms & Synonyms, Yes or No?, or Is That Right? and In Your Own Words

*A Note on the Tasks:* Your students might find some of the Making Associations and Antonyms & Synonyms tasks to be particularly challenging, as it is possible that more than one word could be used as an answer for an item. Urge your students to carefully consider their choices and always choose the *best* word as a response, not just one that *might* fit. A challenge of learning new vocabulary is understanding the most precise use of a new word.

### Chapter Progression and Content

I selected chapter topics from grade level-appropriate curricular and general interest topics that would be appealing to middle school-aged students. Chapters progress in difficulty regarding general knowledge, readability, and word knowledge. Readability was calculated by substituting a Tier One vocabulary word for the Tier Two word to be taught in each passage to give a better idea about the readability of the surrounding text. Readability of this book's passages ranges from 3.5 to 7.5.

### The SLP as Teacher

Although a student might want to read some of the passages in each lesson to herself, it is important that, initially, you read the passages aloud. Silent reading doesn't allow for the crucial tone-of-voice and prosodic clues as reading aloud does. These passages are loaded with emotion-inducing words, so when reading aloud to your student, make sure you pour on the inflection and ham it up. These cues will help your student get the context of the passage so she can better figure out the words' meanings.

Read each passage all the way through without stopping to explain any of the words or context. Afterward, ask your student if she'd like you to reread the passage aloud as she reads along silently, or if she'd like to read it to herself. Either way, allow her to stop and ask questions about the vocabulary and context clues. Rather than giving her direct answers, ask her questions to allow her to probe the text for clues. For instance, in Lesson 1, The Grand Canyon, the first passage introduces the new word, *drab*, in this sentence: "This is so different from the **drab** sidewalks and buildings back home." Rather than tell the student what the word *drab* means, ask her if anything in the sentence or the previous one gives her any clues about what *drab* describes. Does it have something to do with the color, texture, or size? What about something's appearance makes it *drab*? These questions will help your student become an independent questioner for many future words.

Have fun feasting on new words together! — Paul

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