

Introduction

Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction by Beck, et al., opened my eyes to a new and lasting vocabulary-teaching model that can work for most, if not all, children. While our children are language disordered or delayed, that doesn't mean they can't learn new words. 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 Elementary concentrates on teaching Tier Two words with an occasional Tier Three word introduced, if the context of the lesson warrants its inclusion. For example, in Lesson 15, The U.S. Constitution, I introduce the word *ratify*. While *ratify* isn't a word we use frequently, its use is germane to the U.S. Constitution, and no other word seemed to be a suitable substitution.

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

I also included a handful of phrases that added richness to some lessons. These bonus phrases contain Tier Two words.

Learning Tasks

Each lesson contains a consistent pattern of reading and thinking exercises, which enhances learning by removing any question of unpredictability. The lessons follow this formula (with a few exceptions):

Page 1: New words, teaching tips, and activating knowledge

Page 2: One or two reading passages

Page 3: One or two reading passages

Page 4: Definitions

Page 5: Making Associations and another thinking activity

Page 6: Finish the Thought and another thinking activity

Page 7: Antonyms & Synonyms and In Your Own Words

Introduction, *continued*

As you can see, the lesson formula gives your student ample practice in investigating and using the new words and bonus phrases. The lessons also progress from comprehension to expressive activities.

Chapter Progression and Content

I selected chapter topics from grade level-appropriate curricular topics from today's current curricula. Occasionally, I chose a topic that was appealing to an age group but didn't necessarily have curriculum relevance. These topics are The Great American Sport (baseball) and Heroes.

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 to be taught in each passage. That gave me a better idea about the readability of the surrounding text. Readability of this book's passages ranges from 2.4 to 8.

The SLP as Teacher

Although a student may 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. Which brings up a good point: when reading aloud to your student, make sure you pour on the emotion; ham it up; over-act. 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 Black Widow Spider, the first passage introduces the new word, *prey*, in this sentence: "The black widow spider is hungry. She looks for *prey* like flies, mosquitoes, and grasshoppers." Rather than tell the student what the word *prey* means, ask her if mosquitoes, flies, and grasshoppers give her any clues. Are they the spider's friends? Are they her helpers? Are they what she catches in her web? These questions will help your student become an independent questioner for many future words.

Linda

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