

Introduction

In 2011, we published the vocabulary training manuals *Word Feast Elementary* and *Word Feast Middle School* to immediate and continued popularity. The approaches in those books were inspired by the fine work of Isabel Beck and her colleagues in *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. That book contained a new and effective vocabulary-teaching model that we knew could work for not only normally-developing students, but also for children with developmental deficits. And based on the enthusiastic responses of our customers, our initial assumptions were correct! 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.

We've extended the original model that addressed individual vocabulary terms to include the exploration of figurative language. Without a basic understanding of the mechanics of figurative language, many language-delayed students are lost in conversation and remain unable to express themselves in the colorful ways that reflect the language of their peers.

Beck's instructional model stressed the importance of teaching individual words that exhibited these criteria:

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

In *Word Feast Middle School for Figurative Language*, I've also adhered to another guiding principal of Beck's: whenever possible, select figurative language terms that are not abstract concepts but that have familiar synonyms and can be easily defined. Language-delayed students need to make concrete connections between new concepts and familiar meanings. Whenever possible, I've selected figurative language expressions in this book that can be connected to either familiar definitions or other idiomatic expressions with similar meanings.

Choosing figurative language expressions to teach is a tricky business. Many expressions become outdated, have regional usage, or are obscure in origin. The philosophy I followed when selecting the terms in this book was twofold: overall enrichment of the language experience and introducing expressions that are naturally connected to familiar concepts and themes. Each lesson is a collection of expressions that contain either the vocabulary of the theme or that are commonly used when describing a concept associated with that theme.

I also tried to select expressions that I thought kids would have fun learning and would more likely use and explore because of their sounds or unique connotations. That's one of the main reasons I included several onomatopoeias throughout the book.

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 Expressions, Expressions from Previous Lessons, Activating Knowledge
- Pages 2-3: Reading passages that contain two examples of each figurative language expression and expressions from previous lessons
- Page 4-5: Definitions of the expressions and examples of their correct and incorrect usage
- Page 5: Making Associations

- Page 6: Finish the Thought
- Page 7: Same or Opposite, Yes or No?, Is That Right?, or Match It and In Your Own Words

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

Chapter Progression and Content

I selected lesson 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 figurative language abstraction. Readability is controlled to a general range of 3.5–5.5, although the necessity of some technical vocabulary use increases readability in isolated passages beyond that range.

The SLP as Teacher

Although a student might want to read some of the passages in each lesson to himself, 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 figurative language expressions—many of which will be new and initially confusing to students—so when reading aloud, make sure you pour on the inflection and ham it up. These cues will help your student get the context of the passage so he can better figure out the meanings of the new expressions.

Read each passage all the way through without stopping to explain any of the expressions or context. Afterward, ask your student if he'd like you to reread the passage aloud as he reads along silently, or if he'd like to read it to himself. Either way, allow him to stop and ask questions about the expressions and context clues. Rather than giving direct answers, ask him questions to allow him to probe the text for clues. For instance, in Lesson 1, *Destined for Success!*, the new expression *old hand* is introduced in this passage: "Monique, how did you learn to draw like that? You're an **old hand**." Rather than tell the student what the term *old hand* means, ask him if anything in the sentence or in the previous sentence gives him any clues about what *old hand* describes. Does it have something to do with ability, experience, or skill? What could make someone an *old hand* at something? These questions will help your student become an independent questioner for many future expressions. The ultimate goal is getting students to not only learn the meanings of the figurative language expressions contained in this book but to generalize new terms and expressions as they are encountered in everyday discourse.

Have fun feasting on figurative language together! — Paul

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