



## Introduction

What do you think about when you hear the term *swimming pool*? The deep blue color of the water? The smell of chlorine? The hot concrete under your bare feet? You likely didn't think, "a swimming pool is an open structure filled with water in which people swim," even though that's what a swimming pool is. You know that already—you know it so well that you don't even have to think about it when you hear the term *swimming pool*.

Learning new vocabulary can be difficult. No one wants to sit down with a stack of flash cards and memorize the meanings of terms like *text feature* and *prior knowledge*.

You won't do that in the *TextConnections* course. Instead, you'll learn each new term by creating your own description of its meaning, rather than copying someone else's from the dictionary. Then you'll create a symbol, a picture, or even a comic strip to show your interpretation of what the term means. Finally, you'll judge how well you think you understand the term.

# Introduction

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This is the vocabulary-journal process. It may seem strange at first. After all, what can you draw to represent *prior knowledge*? Don't worry. Your teacher will model drawings of each new term and suggest ideas for your own drawings to help you get started. Drawing the terms will help you build associations (connections) to them. This is because coming up with images helps you tap into all your senses, in the same way the familiar term *swimming pool* calls to mind images, smells, and feelings.

After you have described each new term with words and pictures, you'll have an opportunity to indicate your level of understanding. Be honest about what you do and don't understand. You may not always understand new terms as soon as your teacher introduces them. Ask your teacher and your classmates to help improve your understanding of a difficult term. Sometimes just looking at a classmate's drawing will show you the meaning of a term more clearly than all the dictionary definitions in the world.

In *TextConnections*, you will

- learn new vocabulary that will help you better understand and connect to what you read and hear in your English language arts, reading, science, and social studies classes
- learn useful terms that will help you as you participate in classroom conversations
- learn skills that will help you figure out the meanings of unknown words

The vocabulary-journal process will give you a personal connection to each new term. You may not think about each term you learn in the *TextConnections* course as often as you think about a familiar term like *swimming pool*. But if you work at it, you'll remember each new term just as well.

English is a wonderful language filled with all sorts of unusual words. As such, you are sure to come up against unfamiliar words from time to time. Whether an unknown word appears when you are reading for enjoyment or while you are taking a test, you need a plan of attack. Read on to learn strategies for answering vocabulary questions, even when you don't know the meanings of the words.

**Step 1. Circle the unknown vocabulary word in the passage.**

Whenever you come across a vocabulary test question that you can't answer off the top of your head, go back and find the word in the passage. Circle it so that you can easily find it again. Then reread the sentence in which it appears.

A fearful man, all in gray, with a great iron on his leg, seized me by the chin.

"Don't cut my throat, sir!" I begged in terror.

"Tell us your name!" said the man. "Quick!"

"Pip. Pip, sir."

"Show us where you live," said the man.

I pointed to a mile or more from the church.

The man, after looking at me for a moment, turned me upside down and emptied my pockets. There was nothing in them but a piece of bread. He sat me on a high tombstone, trembling while he ate the bread ravenously.

—from *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens

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**Step 2. Look for context clues. (See sidebar below for more information about context clues.)**

After reading the part of the text containing the unknown word, go back to reread the surrounding sentences. You will probably notice all kinds of clues to the word's meaning.

For example, reread the sentence in which the word *ravenously* appears.

He sat me on a high tombstone, trembling while he ate the bread ravenously.

Notice that the man is trembling while he eats the bread. Ask yourself why he might be trembling—perhaps he's angry, afraid, or hungry. If he's hungry, *ravenously* might mean that he's eating the bread very quickly.

### KINDS OF CONTEXT CLUES

#### Synonyms

Sometimes the text will include other words that have meanings that are similar to the word you are trying to figure out.

Example: The kitten stepped *gingerly* along the narrow branch, cautiously adjusting his balance.

#### Antonyms

Sometimes the text will include other words that have meanings that are opposite to the word you are trying to figure out.

Example: Monique used to be very *talkative*, but now she doesn't talk much at all.

#### Examples

Very often, the text will include examples of the word you are trying to figure out.

Example: *Celestial bodies*, such as the sun, moon, and stars, are governed by predictable laws.

**Step 3. Look within the unfamiliar word for smaller words, roots, or affixes that you know.**

Sometimes an unknown word will contain smaller words, roots, or affixes that you already know. This can help you figure out the meaning of the unknown word. For example, reread the sentence in which the word *ravenously* appears.



He sat me on a high tombstone, trembling while he ate the bread ravenously.

Perhaps you have seen the word *raven* before, and you know that a raven is a bird. You might even know that a raven is a black bird that is kind of like a crow. Have you ever seen a raven or a crow eating a dead animal off the road? Ravens and crows eat very hastily and greedily with fast, jerking movements. Making this connection to the word *ravenously* provides evidence that eating ravenously means eating hungrily or greedily.

**Step 4. If you are answering a multiple-choice test question, plug in the answer choices in place of the unknown vocabulary word.**

Read the following vocabulary question, but don't answer it yet.

1. What is the meaning of the word *ravenously* as it is used in the passage?
  - A. cheerfully
  - B. greedily
  - C. lazily
  - D. quietly

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Now plug each of the choices into the original sentence where the unknown word occurs:

- A. He sat me on a high tombstone, trembling while he ate the bread *cheerfully*.
- B. He sat me on a high tombstone, trembling while he ate the bread *greedily*.
- C. He sat me on a high tombstone, trembling while he ate the bread *lazily*.
- D. He sat me on a high tombstone, trembling while he ate the bread *quietly*.

Think about the details in the passage, and connect to what you already know. The man has “a great iron on his leg”—maybe he is an escaped convict. And he is trembling, perhaps out of fear, anger, or hunger. The word *ravenously* is describing the way he is eating the bread. And we know that a raven eats food hungrily or greedily. After connecting these details, which answer choice makes the most sense when plugged into the original sentence? Go back to question 1, and circle the letter of the correct answer.

**Step 5. Add your new vocabulary word to this journal.**

Once you have determined the meaning of a new unknown word, check it out in the dictionary to be sure you are on the right track and to get even more details about the word's meaning. Then create a vocabulary-journal entry for the word with your own description and a unique drawing that will help you remember the meaning of the word.

Term: Ravenously	My Understanding: 1 2 ③ 4
Description: <u>Do something, like eating, greedily</u>	
_____	
_____	
Drawing:	
	
Sentence: _____	
_____	
_____	

Review your vocabulary-journal entries every once in a while. Add sentences, additional drawings, synonyms or antonyms, word origins, and any other information that will help you build associations (connections) to the terms. Then, update your understanding to reflect how well you understand each new term.

**Term:**

**My Understanding:** 1 2 3 4

**Description:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Drawing:**

**Sentence:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_