



BEST PRACTICES FOR USING VOCABULARY WORKSHOP ACHIEVE IN THE CLASSROOM

By Sarah Ressler Wright, Series Consultant,
Head Librarian, Rutherford B. Hayes High School, Delaware, OH

Classroom Environment

Classroom experience and research have shown that repeated exposure to and varied application of vocabulary words embed meanings in students' minds. The more teachers and students utilize vocabulary in the Language Arts class period, the more likely students are to understand and use new vocabulary themselves.

To encourage students' use of vocabulary, teachers may post vocabulary words in the classroom—on bulletin boards, walls, or chalkboards and whiteboards. Students and teachers may bring in examples of vocabulary from print sources to be displayed in the classroom. Additionally, students may create visual representations or drawings of vocabulary words that can be posted in the classroom. Discuss which visual representations are the most appropriate and accurate representations of the vocabulary words.

Differentiation may be achieved through choice. Create a vocabulary choice menu of extension exercises, such as using vocabulary words to write a poem, or create an interactive presentation that appeals to different learning modalities.

Students may share experiences in which they hear or use vocabulary outside of the classroom. Whether it is another teacher who has used a vocabulary word, a television show or movie that incorporated vocabulary, or the students themselves who embedded words in their assignments, it is important to recognize the use of academic vocabulary.

Daily Discussion and Review

Teachers may model vocabulary usage by including vocabulary words in their instructions or conversations with students. The more frequently the teacher uses a word, the easier it becomes for students to understand its meaning and usage.

Teachers can have "Words of the Day" that students must incorporate into classroom exercises. Whoever correctly uses the words the most might receive a reward.

During debates, discussions, or at other times when students are conversing, teachers should require them to use the learned vocabulary words. A set minimum number of words can be established, and students who go above the minimum should be recognized for their efforts.

When there is extra time, the class may review vocabulary words. See the following "Vocabulary Projects and Games" section for suggested exercises.

Writing with Vocabulary

Students should incorporate at least one or two vocabulary words into their daily writing prompts, reading journals, or other forms of informal communication. Use pictures or photographs from magazines as inspiration for writing.

Whenever students write formally for class (essays, stories, etc.), teachers may require a set minimum number of vocabulary words to be used, check to make sure that the usage is appropriate, and provide feedback. Students should highlight the vocabulary words in the writing. Read aloud essays and review the use of vocabulary for correct usage. Point out instances where the forms of the words have been changed or a secondary meaning is used. Suggest ways for students to check their usage, such as replacing the vocabulary word in the sentence with its definition to see if it makes sense.

Teachers may also:

- Ask students to write poems for individual words. Example: “There once was a word called _____.”
- Ask students to write a “Where I’m From” poem that explains both a word’s origins and use and that also traces its relationship to words in the same family.
- Have students write myths about the origins of individual words or groups of words.

Vocabulary Projects and Games

Students may create advertisements for a word to “sell” its uses. For example: “Race to your local dictionary and pick up the word _____. Whether frustrated with your social life or unhappy with a school assignment, this word can be used in a variety of ways.” Alternatively, teachers may have students sell a product by using as many vocabulary words as possible to describe the item’s attributes.

Students often learn words best when setting them to music. Students may write lyrics incorporating all (or most) of a Unit’s vocabulary words and definitions and then perform, videotape, or record their songs. Create a library of the videos and recordings for future classes to use.

Do a review of the words and their definitions. This activity can be teacher-directed or student-led. To begin, a student names a vocabulary word, a second student defines it, then another gives the kinesthetic gesture the class has given the word, and a fourth student puts the definition in his or her own words or provides a synonym or antonym. Another student uses the word in a sentence, and then another student finishes the activity by giving feedback on how the word was used in the sentence. Allow time after the activity for follow-up questions.

Create a “deck” of review cards, consisting of the word, the definition, a sentence with a blank where the vocabulary word would go, and the image for the word selected by the class. Have teams go head-to-head to see who can complete the sentence with the correct vocabulary word first.

Groups of students can act in skits or pantomimes that demonstrate a word’s meaning; the rest of the class must guess the word being acted out.

Student groups may tell stories using vocabulary words. Create groups according to the students’ abilities and levels.