



Words, words!
Robust Vocabulary
Instruction



Ten easy strategies!

Vocabulary Routines

These vocabulary routines owe a huge debt to the work of Robert Marzano and Isabel Beck, Margaret McKeown and Linda Kucan. I use these simple and easy-to-implement routines regularly, and they help all students learn and retain new vocabulary.

1 Vocabulary Interactive Notebook

Materials: Composition notebooks, scissors

Purpose:

The Vocabulary Log allows students to keep track of the words they have learned, add to their understanding, and access their learned words at any time.

Instruction:

There are many ways to structure the notebook, so use the method you like best. I like to have my students keep all of their work in a composition notebook. For the vocabulary section, we begin by folding each page in half, the hot dog way. Fold the page forward so that it “opens” near the binding. Then students open the page again and cut 4 times from the edge to the fold. This will give you 5 flaps. Fold the flaps in towards the binding again. On the outside of the flap, students write the word. They open the flap and write their ideas about the meaning on one half of the flap and draw a quick visual on the other half. If we do any additional work with the word (such as identify prefixes or suffixes, brainstorm metaphors and similes with the word or generate a list of synonyms or antonyms), that goes on the back of the page. Students can get five words per page. My students learn about 500 words a year, so I always plan for 100 pages.

I also keep track of all of the vocabulary words on a Word Wall in the classroom.

2 Capture the Word

Materials: student friendly definitions, Vocabulary notebooks

Purpose:

This routine works to capture the essence of a word and how it is typically used and explains the meaning in everyday language. This helps students make sense of word meanings and allows for a more nuanced understanding than a simple dictionary definition.

Instruction:

Introduce each word using the student friendly definition. It is important to structure this as a conversation or discussion. It is not important for students to memorize or copy down the exact definition. The goal is to build meaning. After a brief discussion of the word, students should record the word and key ideas about its meaning in their notebook.

3 Word Wonder

Materials: multiple sticky notes for each student, a copy of a text for each student (works great with non-fiction!), a chart paper labeled Word Wonders

Purpose:

This routine engages students in being curious about words and helps them focus on learning words from text. It also gives them a sense of ownership of the words that the class will study, and so it is a great routine to use at the beginning of a unit. Finally, it is a quick assessment for the teacher, allowing you to know which words your students want to know, and which words they already know (or think they know!)

Instruction:

As students read a passage, or listen to the passage being read to them, they underline any words that they wonder about. To help students take a risk, make it clear that any word is OK – and that students can underline a word they already know something about, a word they would like to learn more about, or a word that they have never heard. After the passage is finished, students choose the words that they want to record on their sticky notes and write the word and the sentence from the context on the sticky note. There is no minimum or maximum number of words that students can write. They place all of their sticky notes on the chart.

As a class, gather around all of the words, and ask students to categorize them. They will quickly put all of the stickies of the same word together, and you will get a clear idea of the words the majority of the class wants to study. Add in a few that you'd like them to learn, and you'll have a great list in no time!

For an extra challenge, ask them to work together to regroup the words. Can they find connections? I usually have them do this right on the white board, and then they start adding connecting lines with white board markers. They love it, and it challenges them to look at the words carefully!

4 Fist of Five

Materials: Fist of Five poster (included)

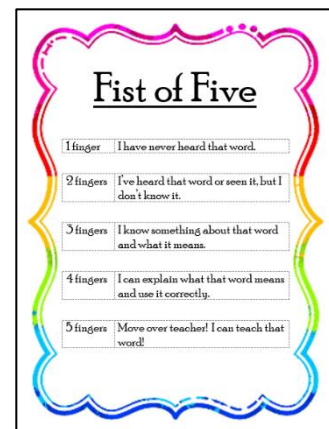
Purpose:

This activity activates students' knowledge of target words and helps them focus on the vocabulary.

Instruction:

The teacher goes through each of the target vocabulary words, and students hold up fingers to show their level of understanding of the word.

- 1 finger = I have never heard that word.
- 2 fingers = I've heard that word or seen it, but don't know it.
- 3 fingers = I know something about that word and what it means.
- 4 fingers = I can explain what that word means and use it correctly.
- 5 fingers = Move over teacher! I can teach that word!



5 Examples and Non-examples

Materials: none

Purpose:

This activity continues to build understanding of target vocabulary and gives students an opportunity to say the word and build their ability to use and remember the word.

Instruction:

The teacher presents, one by one, descriptions of situations. Students respond using the target word if the situation is an example. If it is not an example, students are quiet. For example:

- If I say something that sounds intriguing, say 'Intriguing'. If not, don't say anything.
 - Travelling by spaceship to the moon.
 - Sitting on a beach chair by the lake.
 - Reading a biography about your favorite person.
- Students may not agree on what is intriguing, so give them the opportunity to express their reason why. The justification is the most important. Also, it gives them another opportunity to use the target vocabulary!

6 Word Detective

Materials: none

Purpose:

Students will learn how to use context to teach themselves new words.

Instruction:

The teacher reminds students that authors often leave clues to help them learn new words. Ask students to look for the target words in the text and underline any clues before or after the word that help them know what the word means. Students should then work with a partner to devise a definition. The teacher gathers several examples of definitions from pairs, and then all students add the word to their vocabulary logs with the class derived definition.

If this is a new routine, the teacher may want to model a think aloud to help students know how to find and use context clues. Eventually, this routine will become student-led and transfer to independent reading. The goal is to give students many opportunities to practice using context clues, a key strategy in learning new vocabulary.

7 Categories

Materials: Word Cards

Purpose:

This activity gives students a chance to talk to a partner, use the words, and find relationships between the words.

Instruction:

The teacher passes out the word cards and helps students divide themselves into pairs. Each pair should spread the words out and then organize them in categories of words that belong together. Each category must contain at least 2 words. There is no right or wrong here. The goal is for students to have rich conversations, use the target vocabulary and provide a justification for their thinking about the relationships between words. For example:

- A student puts these three words together in a group: consequence, maintaining and disgusting. When asked to justify their group, they say, "If my bedroom gets too disgusting I will receive a consequence from my mom. I'm going to avoid a consequence by maintaining a clean room!"
- Students will often find thematic relationships as well. The goal is to have rich conversations and build connections that work in their brain.

Sometimes as a fun variation, I go to the Word Wall and randomly pull 2 or 3 word cards off of it. I challenge the students to come up with a relationship. No matter how random the words, someone always comes up with something, and we generally have a few good laughs along the way!

8 Tic-Tac-Toe

Materials: Paper, pencil, list of target words

Purpose:

This activity gives students a chance to practice spelling the words and using them in sentences. They also have to reflect on their partner's sentences to see if the words were used correctly.

Instruction:

This is a great sponge activity for those spare moments or as a quick review. Write a list of target words on the board. Make sure there are at least nine words, although you can include more. Help students pair up, and then ask each pair to draw a tic-tac-toe board. They then write one word in each square. The students take turns using the word in a sentence. If their partner agrees that they have used the word correctly, they put an x or an o in the square. Three in a row wins the game!

various	ceremony	culture
region	abundance	migrate
majestic	soaring	natural resource

9 Pictionary

Materials: Paper and pencil

Purpose:

This activity works really well for social studies and science vocabulary and is a really great strategy for reviewing lots of vocabulary right before a big test. It forces the artist to visualize the word, and it forces the guessing student to review the words. A list of at least 25 words is a good size.

Instruction:

Divide students into groups of four so they can play in teams of two. Ask students to write each target vocabulary word on small square of paper. Then, shuffle all the words and place them in a pile face down. One student turns over a card and begins to draw it. Their partner tries to guess the word. I time the students using my cell phone under the doc camera, or use any other timer that you have in class. If the partnership guesses the word within a minute they get a point.

10 Hot Seat

Materials: Whiteboard or projector

Purpose:

This is a fun, energizing game for reviewing vocabulary words. It works with a pretty large list, so is great for review after several units.

Instruction:

Help the students pair up in groups of two. One of the pair sits with their back to the board, in the Hot Seat. The teacher writes one of the target words on the board. The student in the Hot Seat should not be able to see the word. Their partner has 30 seconds to get them to say the word. They cannot say the word, or any variation of the word. But they can give examples, make connections, or give clue. If the student in the Hot Seat guesses the word, including the correct form (democracy, not democratic), that team gets a point. Students switch places and the game continues. In about 10 minutes, you can review as many as 20 words!

Fist of Five

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4 fingers I can explain what that word means and use it correctly.

5 fingers Move over teacher! I can teach that word!

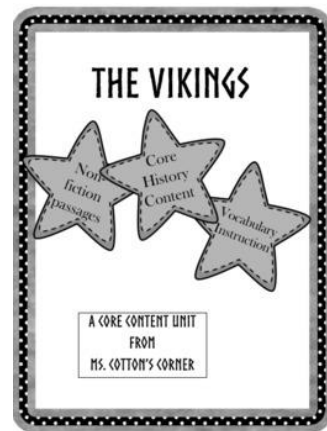
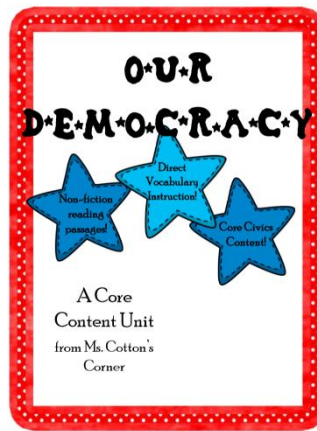
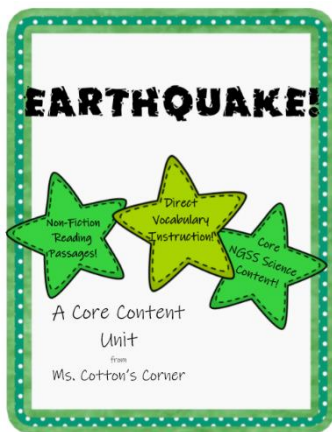
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