Vocabulary Instruction
Booster Session 1: Choosing Words to Teach Grades 5–8
Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Explicit and robust vocabulary instruction can make a significant difference when we are purposeful in the words we choose to teach our students. Our goal in explicitly teaching these words is to help students gain ownership of the words by developing a deep understanding of them, improving students’ ability to comprehend text.

Research Results

Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction (2nd Edition)
By Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown, and Linda Kucan
“Results of Frequent, Robust Instruction” (pp. 86–87)

Research was conducted wherein students receiving robust vocabulary instruction were compared to two additional groups of students—those not receiving instruction and those receiving traditional, definition-based instruction. Effects of frequency of encounters with vocabulary words were also compared.

Results showed that students receiving frequent, robust instruction did the following:

1. Responded more quickly to word meanings in timed tasks
2. Better comprehended stories containing target words
3. Engaged in complex thinking and knowledge of words being assessed
4. Put target words into context

Students receiving definition-based instruction could provide the basic definition of each word but could not make sense of all target words within the context of their reading.

Observations demonstrated “word ownership” for students who knew words well and used them easily and appropriately. These students appeared to take pride in their use of the target words and developed “word awareness” in both their environment and in general.
A Quick Note About Tier 2 vs. Tier 3 Words

The purpose of teaching Tier 2 words is to help students with reading comprehension. It is important to choose words to explicitly teach that will help students better comprehend text across multiple genres and content areas. Providing students with engaging deep-processing activities through which to explore a word allows students to develop a more fluid understanding of the word and its application in multiple contexts.

Often, people ask why we focus on teaching Tier 2 words through the explicit vocabulary routine learned during the *Vocabulary and Oral Language Development* training instead of focusing on Tier 3 words. The simple answer is that these words need to be explicitly taught, too! However, instead of teaching these words through the explicit vocabulary routine, Tier 3 words need to be taught in the context of classroom instruction. So, for example, when introducing the word *photosynthesis*, begin by saying the word and providing the definition. Then, students can make connections between this word and other concepts related to how plants convert light energy into food. This example shows how a student’s schema develops around a word in the context of the content being taught.

Tier 2 words are used often in written text, appear across a variety of domains, can be used in a variety of ways to connect to other words, and provide precision in describing a concept. For example, *convert* is a Tier 2 word that students see across a variety of contexts.

Tier 3 words are content-specific words. For example, *photosynthesis* is a Tier 3 word that students would study in science class.
Purpose

The following booster sessions were developed to support implementation of explicit vocabulary instruction of Tier 2 words, as presented during the Vocabulary and Oral Language Development training. The booster sessions break down the content learned during this training into manageable chunks that can be delivered to teachers as they begin the implementation process. Each session was developed by using classroom observation data and feedback from teachers to ensure that the explicit vocabulary routine and deep-processing activities are implemented correctly.

Booster Sessions

Session 1: Choosing Words to Teach
Session 2: Defining Vocabulary Words
Session 3: Examples and Nonexamples
Session 4: Deep-Processing Activities

Explicit Vocabulary Instruction: Week at a Glance

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To build presenter background knowledge prior to delivering these sessions, read the following:

Vocabulary Instruction Booster Session 1: Choosing Words to Teach
Grades 5–8

This booster session will take approximately 60 minutes to complete.

Presenter Materials

• Presenter handouts
• Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction (2nd edition)
  By Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown, and Linda Kucan
  Chapter 2
• Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching
  By Anita L. Archer and Charles A. Hughes
  Chapter 3, pages 63–64
• Grade-specific text: The Family Under the Bridge
  By Natalie S. Carlson
• Document camera
• Highlighter
• Pack of sticky notes

Participant Materials

• Bookmark (one per participant)
• Participant handout
• Highlighter
• Sticky notes
• Copies of text(s) that participants will use in upcoming instruction

Preparation

• Read Chapter 2 of Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction.
• Read the pages listed above from Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching.
• Make sure a document camera is available for use where you will present.
• Ask teachers to bring to the session copies of the text(s) they will teach in the
  upcoming week.
• Bring one highlighter and one pack of sticky notes per participant or ask partici-
  pants to bring their own.
• Copy and distribute the bookmark (one per participant) and participant hand-
  out.
Set the Purpose and State the Goal  
5 minutes

Materials: Page 28 of Bringing Words to Life (optional; consider displaying the chart on this page: “Some Criteria for Identifying Tier Two Words”), bookmark

As we all know, purposefully selecting the words to teach our students through explicit and robust vocabulary instruction can make a significant difference.

There are simply too many words out there—we shouldn’t focus on as many words as possible or randomly select vocabulary. The words we choose to teach should support text comprehension. Our goal in explicitly teaching these words is to help students gain ownership of the words by developing a deep understanding of them.

Therefore, today we will learn how to select vocabulary words to explicitly teach to our students. Remember, the goal is to choose words that support comprehension.

By the end of today’s session, we will understand the criteria for identifying Tier 2 words, or words that have high utility, have high instructional potential, and are important for conceptual understanding. These criteria are identified and defined more thoroughly in Chapter 2 of Bringing Words to Life, specifically in the chart on page 28. Also, your bookmark is a handy tool that summarizes these criteria. Refer to it today and take it with you to use during planning with your colleagues.

Let’s start by reviewing these criteria for identifying Tier 2 words. Then we will begin our activities.

Criteria for Identifying Tier 2 Words

Importance and Utility

Words that are used often in written text and appear across a variety of domains: Is this a word students will see in a variety of texts?

Instructional Potential

Words that are multidimensional and, therefore, can be used in a variety of ways to connect to other words and concepts: Is this a word that can help students express themselves?

Conceptual Understanding

Words that provide greater precision in describing a concept: Is this a word that will allow students to more specifically describe a concept?

Words that are important to the conceptual understanding of the selected text: Is this a word that is critical to comprehending the text?
I Do

Materials: Document camera, blank article and key, bookmark, highlighter

I will start by modeling how to use the bookmark to choose Tier 2 words.

For this activity, you will need your bookmark, a highlighter, and a copy of “Not Grass-Fed, but at Least Pain-Free,” an article from The New York Times.

Imagine that I am a ninth-grade teacher preparing to read this article as part of our nonfiction genre study.

First, you will read the text. Then, you will be ready to begin the steps for identifying Tier 2 words. Begin reading now.

**Pause for participants to read the article. Then, introduce Step 1 below.**

Step 1:
Highlight words in the text that are likely to be unfamiliar to your students.

Now, as I reread the article, I will highlight the words that I think may be unfamiliar to my students.


Step 2:
Circle the words that could be categorized as Tier 2 words.

First, I’ll consult my bookmark to remind myself of the Tier 2 criteria. The criteria are: importance and utility, instructional potential, and conceptual understanding.

From here, I have to decide which of the highlighted words are Tier 2 words. Let’s quickly review the words I have categorized as Tier 2.

Circle the following words: “confined,” “faulty,” “improperly,” “steady,” “affective,” “stimulus,” “subsequent,” and “preserved.”

There is some subjectivity involved in this exercise, so it is not a problem if we disagree slightly on a few of the selected words.

Let’s take a closer look at a word I selected that could be categorized as Tier 2, so that you can understand the rationale for my selection. The word is confined.
• **Importance and utility:** Students will see *confined* across a variety of genres.

• **Instructional potential:** The instructional potential of the word is high, as *confined* can be used in a variety of ways to connect to other words and concepts.

• **Conceptual understanding:** Without an understanding of *confined*, students will not know why the cows have painful bone and joint problems.

**Step 2a:**
**Decide which of the Tier 2 words will need thorough attention.**

From this list of circled words, I have decided to explicitly teach the following: *confined, stimulus,* and *subsequent*. Again, this selection is subjective. I have chosen these words because they are important for my ninth-graders to both understand and use in their writing. Also, I think the words are critical to the conceptual understanding of the story.

**Step 3:**
**Underline additional words, other than the Tier 2 words you selected in Step 2a above, necessary for your students to understand the text.** Decide how you will teach these words (e.g., pairing/parallel language, showing a picture). Add these notes to the text.

I have selected a few words to show you as examples. In thinking about the conceptual understanding of the text, I have underlined the following words: *veal calves, gestating sows, feedlots,* and *anterior cingulate cortex*.

I will pair *veal calves* and *gestating sows* with the more familiar language *baby cows* and *pregnant pigs*. For *feedlots*, I will show a picture. For *anterior cingulate cortex*, I will emphasize the description provided in the text: “part of the brain that senses pain.” Remember, these are just a few examples.

### We Do 15 minutes

**Materials:** Document camera, grade-specific text, *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching*, bookmark, sticky notes

We will now use *The Family Under the Bridge* by Natalie S. Carlson and *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching* by Anita L. Archer and Charles A. Hughes to practice the process and the thinking behind these instructional decisions together.

For this activity, you will need your bookmark and sticky notes. I will use the document camera to display the content from the chapters.

Imagine that I am a fifth-grade teacher preparing to read the first chapter of *The Family Under the Bridge* as part of our realistic fiction genre study.

*Before reading the book, you may want to provide participants with a short synopsis of the overall story.*
Today, we will read only the first page of the book.

**Step 1:** Highlight words in the text that are likely to be unfamiliar to your students.

For this activity, we will modify the steps on the bookmark. Instead of highlighting the text, you will write on a sticky note all of the words that you think may be unfamiliar to your students. Please write the words as I read.

*Read the first page of the book.*

*When you are done, ask for a participant to share his or her words and rationale for inclusion.*

Although we do not have time to review the entire chapter, let’s look at the words that the authors of *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching* selected as likely to be unfamiliar to our students.

*Show only the top of page 63 on the document camera.*

Those words are: monsieur, cathedral, cowered, hidey-hole, hyacinths, can’t abide, dignity, Gypsy, fastidious, loitering, adventure, and quay.

**Step 2:** Circle the words that could be categorized as Tier 2 words.

Next, from the list on your sticky note, circle the words that you think could be categorized as Tier 2 words.

Remember that the criteria for Tier 2 words, summarized on your bookmarks, include the following:

- **Importance and utility**
  Words that are used often in written text and appear across a variety of domains: *Is this a word that students will see in a variety of texts?*

- **Instructional potential**
  Words that are multidimensional and, therefore, can be used in a variety of ways to connect to other words and concepts: *Is this a word that can help students express themselves?*

- **Conceptual understanding**
  - Words that provide greater precision in describing a concept: *Is this a word that will allow students to more specifically describe a concept?*
  - Words that are important to the conceptual understanding of the selected text: *Is this a word that is critical to comprehending the text?*

Please circle the words now.
Choosing Words to Teach
Grades 5–8

Step 2a:
Decide which of the Tier 2 words will need thorough attention.

From this list of circled words, you will decide which words to explicitly teach. In making these decisions, again think of the following:

• Is this a word students will see in a variety of texts?
• Is this a word that can help students express themselves?
• Is this a word that will allow students to more specifically describe a concept?
• Is this a word that is critical to comprehending the text?

When they are done, ask participants to share their words and their rationale.

Let's look at the words identified in Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching as possibly requiring thorough attention: cowered, dignity, and loitering.

Display the rest of page 63 and page 64 and the rationale for each word.

Step 3:
Underline additional words, other than the Tier 2 words you selected in Step 2a above, necessary for your students to understand the text. Decide how you will teach these words (e.g., pairing/parallel language, showing a picture). Add these notes to the text.

Review the rationale in the text for the remaining words. For example, point out how the authors describe the vocabulary instruction needed for the word “cathedral”—pairing the word with familiar language and showing a picture.

You Do

Materials: Texts that participants will use in upcoming instruction

Now, take out the texts you will teach next week. Working with a partner, select one text and complete the three steps on your bookmark for choosing vocabulary words. I will come around to provide support. Remember that there is not one right answer, but it is important to have a rationale.

After you have completed these steps with all of your texts, share your Tier 2 words and decide together which words to put through the explicit vocabulary routine.

When they are done, ask participants to share their words and their rationale.
Close the Lesson

What is important to consider when identifying Tier 2 words?

*Discuss participants’ responses.*

Please bring your bookmarks to subsequent planning sessions. We will use this tool as we identify words to teach.
Vocabulary Instruction
Booster Session 1:
Choosing Words to Teach
Grades 5-8

Presenter Handouts
Choosing Words to Teach

Criteria for selecting Tier 2 words:
1. Importance and utility
2. Instructional potential
3. Conceptual understanding

Step 1
Highlight words in the text that are likely to be unfamiliar to your students.

Step 2
Circle the words that could be categorized as Tier 2 words.

Step 2a
Decide which of the Tier 2 words will need thorough attention.

Step 3
Underline additional words, other than the Tier 2 words you selected in Step 2a above, necessary for your students to understand the text. Decide how you will teach these words (e.g., pairing/parallel language, showing a picture). Add these notes to the text.

Adapted from Beck, McKeown, & Kucan (2002).
Not Grass-Fed, but at Least Pain-Free

February 19, 2010
By Adam Shriner
Op-Ed Contributor

More animals than ever suffer from injuries and stress on factory farms. Veal calves and gestating sows are so confined as to suffer painful bone and joint problems. The high-grain diets provided in feedlots cause severe gastric distress in many animals. And faulty or improperly used stun guns cause the painful deaths of thousands of cows and pigs a year. Because the amount of red meat that Americans eat per capita has held steady at more than 100 pounds a year as the population has increased, we are most likely stuck with factory farms. But it is still possible to reduce the animals’ discomfort—through neuroscience. Recent advances suggest it may soon be possible to genetically engineer livestock so that they suffer much less.

Scientists have learned to genetically engineer animals so that they lack certain proteins that are important to the operation of the anterior cingulate cortex, a part of the brain that senses pain. Prof. Min Zhuo and his colleagues at the University of Toronto, for example, have bred mice lacking enzymes that operate in affective pain pathways. When these mice encounter a painful stimulus, they withdraw their paws normally, but they do not become hypersensitive to a subsequent painful stimulus, as ordinary mice do.

Given the similarity among all mammals’ neural systems, it is likely that scientists could genetically engineer pigs and cows in the same way. Because the sensory dimension of the animals’ pain would be preserved, they would still be able to recognize and avoid, when possible, situations where they might be bruised or otherwise injured.

If we cannot avoid factory farms altogether, the least we can do is eliminate the unpleasantness of pain in the animals that must live and die on them.

If we cannot avoid factory farms altogether, the least we can do is eliminate the unpleasantness of pain in the animals that must live and die on them. It would be far better than doing nothing at all.

Adam Shriner is a doctoral student in the philosophy-neuroscience-psychology program at Washington University.
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Adam Shriver is a doctoral student in the philosophy-neuroscience-psychology program at Washington University.
Participant Handouts

Vocabulary Instruction
Booster Session 1:
Choosing Words to Teach
Grades 5-8
Not Grass-Fed, but at Least Pain-Free

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References


Review Points
Planning Session 1:
Choosing Words to Teach
Review Points Planning Session for Booster Session 1: Choosing Words to Teach

The purpose of this planning session is to practice key concepts learned in Booster Session 1: Choosing Words to Teach with teachers who continue to struggle with choosing appropriate Tier 2 words and to help these teachers apply this knowledge to plan for upcoming instruction. It is anticipated that this planning session will include a small number of teachers. The decision to provide this planning session should be based on classroom observations of vocabulary instruction and discussions with teachers about choosing Tier 2 words to teach, as described below.

Observation of Tier 2 Vocabulary Instruction

Use the provided Vocabulary Instruction Observation Form to collect classroom observation data. Ideally, observe teachers on multiple occasions to determine the need for additional support. The three dotted sections below focus on the key concepts learned in Booster Session 1: Choosing Words to Teach.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: _____________________ Grade level: _____________________ Date: _____________________ Time: ____________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXPLICIT VOCABULARY ROUTINE**

- The teacher introduces the words: “Today we will learn the word _____."
- Students say the words: “Let’s say the word together: _____."
- The teacher provides student-friendly definitions: “We will study a definition for the word _____."
- The teacher provides examples and nonexamples of the words that help students connect the words to prior knowledge and experiences: “An example of the word _____."
- Students interact with the words: “Let’s talk with our partner about the word _____."

Throughout the week, the teacher provides activities to deepen students’ understanding of the words by having students do the following:

- Use the words
- Explore facets of word meaning
- Consider relationships among words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V oc abulary Words</th>
<th>Student-Friendly Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use these words to facilitate your discussions with teachers about choosing Tier 2 words.</td>
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</table>
Debriefing Sessions With Teachers About Tier 2 Vocabulary Instruction

Meet with teachers to determine whether they have a clear understanding of Tier 2 words. Teachers should answer “yes” to all of the following questions about each of the Tier 2 words they selected to teach (use the list of words collected on the observation form to facilitate this discussion):

❑ Is this word critical to comprehending the text?

❑ Can this word help students to express themselves? Will this word enhance students’ writing?

❑ Will this word allow students to more specifically describe a concept?

❑ Will students see this word in a variety of texts?

Preparation

To prepare for this session, start by reviewing the content from Booster Session 1. Copy the bookmark for distribution to each participant. Ask teachers to bring copies of the texts they will teach in the upcoming week. Remember, the purpose of this session is to choose the Tier 2 words that will be used in upcoming instruction.

To save time, ask participants to read the selected texts prior to the session. You may also want participants to select Tier 2 words before the session.

Decide how much time to spend on the session components, described below, based on your implementation data (approximate times are provided for each session component on the following pages):

• **Review of Key Concepts**: Review the key concepts from the booster session with participants prior to planning.

• **Planning**: The goal is to enable participants to apply what they have learned as they plan their explicit vocabulary instruction lessons for the week. Keep in mind that the participants should do most of the work, as they will plan actual lessons to implement in the classroom. As the presenter, your role is to ensure that participants understand the content, keep participants on task, and answer any questions regarding planning or implementation.
**Review of Key Concepts**

During the first booster session, we learned how to select Tier 2 words.

*Ask participants to take out their bookmarks.*

*Review the criteria for identifying Tier 2 words, which are adapted from page 28 of “Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction” (2nd Edition).*

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**Criteria for Identifying Tier 2 Words**

**Importance and Utility**

Words that are used often in written text and appear across a variety of domains: *Is this a word students will see in a variety of texts?*

**Instructional Potential**

Words that are multidimensional and, therefore, can be used in a variety of ways to connect to other words and concepts: *Is this a word that can help students express themselves?*

**Conceptual Understanding**

Words that provide greater precision in describing a concept: *Is this a word that will allow students to more specifically describe a concept?*

Words that are important to the conceptual understanding of the selected text: *Is this a word that is critical to comprehending the text?*

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As an example, we looked at the word *confined* and noted that it is critical to understanding the article. Without it, students would not know why the cows suffered from painful bone and joint problems. We also talked about how students would see the word *confined* across a variety of genres and how it could be used in a variety of ways to connect to other words and concepts. In addition, the word *confined* could enhance the way students express themselves through writing—for example, instead of using the word *stuck*, students could use the word *confined*.

So, I could answer “yes” to all of the following questions:

- Is this word critical to comprehending the text?
  
  Yes, students need to know what caused the cows to suffer from painful bone and joint problems

- Can this word help students to express themselves? Will this word enhance students’ writing?
  
  Yes, this word will enhance students’ oral and written expression. Instead of using the word *stuck*, students could use the word *confined*. 

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Will this word allow students to more specifically describe a concept?
Yes, the word *confined* provides a more nuanced level of specificity than, for example, *stuck*. Students can use the word *confined* when describing small spaces, being unable to leave a location, or a person’s limited ability to respond to a situation.

Will students see this word in a variety of texts?
Yes, students will see *confined* in a variety of texts—for example, historical texts about internment camps and texts about current events, such as famous prisoners or zoo animals.

**Planning**

Now we will apply what we just reviewed to choose the Tier 2 words you will teach next week.

Take out the texts you will teach next week.

*If teachers already have chosen the words they plan to teach, skip the following step.*

Select one text and use the three steps on your bookmark to identify two to three words that you consider to be Tier 2 words.

**Provide time for participants to identify Tier 2 words.**

Now, share with a partner the Tier 2 words you selected for instruction. As your partner shares the Tier 2 words, ask the following guiding questions:

- Is this word critical to comprehending the text?
- Can this word help students to express themselves? Will this word enhance students’ writing?
- Will this word allow students to more specifically describe a concept?
- Will students see this word in a variety of texts?

You should answer “yes” to all of the questions for each selected word. When the first partner is done sharing, switch roles.

**Provide time for partners to work.**

Did you both agree on the selected words? Why or why not?

*Have participants share their responses, clarifying that all criteria should be met when selecting Tier 2 words.*

*Continue the process until Tier 2 words have been selected for all available texts.*

*Have partners share their final list of Tier 2 words with the group. Decide together which Tier 2 words will be taught in upcoming instruction.*
Vocabulary Instruction Observation Form

Review Points
Planning Session 1: Choosing Words to Teach
### EXPLICIT VOCABULARY ROUTINE

- The teacher introduces the words.
  
  "Today we will learn the word _____."  

- Students say the words.
  
  "Let's say the word together: _____."  

- The teacher provides student-friendly definitions.
  
  "We will study a definition for the word _____."  

- The teacher provides examples and nonexamples of the words that help students connect the words to prior knowledge and experiences.
  
  "An example of the word _____."  

- Students interact with the words.
  
  "Let's talk with our partner about the word _____."  

### DEEP-PROCESSING ACTIVITIES

Throughout the week, the teacher provides activities to deepen students' understanding of the words by having students do the following:

- Use the words
- Explore facets of word meaning
- Consider relationships among words

### NOTES

- All vocabulary words and definitions are posted.
Review Points
Planning Session 1:
Choosing Words to Teach
Choosing Words to Teach

Criteria for selecting Tier 2 words:
1. Importance and utility
2. Instructional potential
3. Conceptual understanding

Step 1
Highlight words in the text that are likely to be unfamiliar to your students.

Step 2
Circle the words that could be categorized as Tier 2 words.

Step 2a
Decide which of the Tier 2 words will need thorough attention.

Step 3
Underline additional words, other than the Tier 2 words you selected in Step 2a above, necessary for your students to understand the text. Decide how you will teach these words (e.g., pairing/parallel language, showing a picture). Add these notes to the text.

Adapted from Beck, McKeown, & Kucan (2002).