

Can a Clown Be Morose...

And Other Provocative Questions to Help Teach Vocabulary

Subject: English/Vocabulary

Grade(s): 7 and up

Overview

These four research-based word-building activities can be used across the curriculum to help take students advance from rote memorization of new words and their definitions to a total integration of the new words into their personal lexicon.

Objectives

Students will:

0. • Create “student-friendly” definitions of new words, using language and examples which are already familiar to students
0. • Relate new words to something they are already familiar with, using metaphors and similes; examples and non-examples
0. • Explain connections and answer deeper processing questions involving the new word
0. • Practice strategies for learning new words, using higher-level thinking skills

IRA/NCTE Standards for the English Language Arts

Standard 3: Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

Materials Needed

0. • Vocabulary list from content area instruction

0. • WordTeasers: College Prep

Background

According to R. J. Marzano in his paper “Building Background for Academic Achievement: Research on What Works in Schools” (2004), “Direct teaching of vocabulary might be one of the most **underused** activities in K-12 education.” The reason, says Dr. Marzano, is that there is a misunderstanding of what it really means to teach vocabulary. “There is a belief,” he says, “that teaching vocabulary means teaching formal dictionary definitions.”

While learning the definition of a word is obviously important, many researchers believe that asking students the question “Does anybody know what the word ___ means?” or instructing students to “look it up” in the dictionary are two of the least effective strategies for teaching vocabulary at the secondary level. (Copying the word several times follows close on the heels of “least effective,” as well.)

What, then, are the hallmarks of good vocabulary instruction? According to Anita L. Archer, Ph.D., author of “Dynamic Vocabulary Instruction in Secondary Classrooms,” there are at least four key elements:

0. • Actively involve students
0. • Provide multiple exposures to words in different contexts
0. • Encourage deep processing of new words, connecting with and relating to prior knowledge when creating their own sentences
0. • Discuss new words together with related words

There are numerous word learning activities that support these strategies and that can be adapted for any curriculum or content area, while also serving to introduce “academic vocabulary.” Here are four of those activities, which use, as examples, the SAT-level vocabulary taken from WordTeasers: College Prep. You can easily adapt your own relevant vocabulary to these activities.

Yes/No/Why Activity

In this activity students are challenged to provide an answer to a question in which two or more key vocabulary words are juxtaposed in the same sentence. Be sure to tell students that there is no right or wrong answer to the question, but that they must provide a full and thoughtful explanation for their answer.

Can you **aspire** to something you are **ambivalent** about?

Is a **salubrious** activity ever **deleterious**?

Can you be **frugal** and **benevolent** at the same time?

Does someone you **venerate** have to be a **luminary**?

Extension: Distribute the WordTeasers game box and let students select pairs of words to construct their own Yes/No/Why sentences.

Idea Completion Activity

In this activity students are given partial sentences that include key vocabulary words and are challenged to complete the sentence. Examples of sentences using words from WordTeasers: College Prep might be:

José had a **contrite** look on his face after he...

Vanessa was **reticent** to talk about why she came home late because...

Derek was willing to **condone** Peter's bad behavior because...

It is **ludicrous** to think that I...

Extension: Have pairs of students work together. One writes the first part of an Idea Completion sentence, using a word from WordTeasers: College Prep (or words you assign from a text or content area); the other then completes the sentence.

Meaningful Sentence Writing

When writing sentences using new vocabulary words, encourage students to connect or relate their prior knowledge or experience. Sentences should answer three or four *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, or *how* questions. Suggest that they identify something from their

personal life experiences the term reminds them of.

Poor Meaningful Sentence Example

Luke is **gregarious**.

Better Meaningful Sentence Example

I like Luke because he is always so friendly and **gregarious** when we are together.

Extension: An essential part of this “elaboration process” in writing meaningful sentences is having the students explain the connection. For example, the students should not only say what personal experience the term makes them think of, but also why it reminds them of it.

Examples and Non-Examples

When introducing a new word, such as *proponent*, give students an opportunity to distinguish between “examples and non-examples” of the word and then encourage them write their own examples.

Is [name of school coach] a **proponent** of our soccer team? (*Yes*)

How do we know she is a **proponent**? (*She is our coach.*)

Is [name of rival school] a **proponent** of our soccer team? (*No.*)

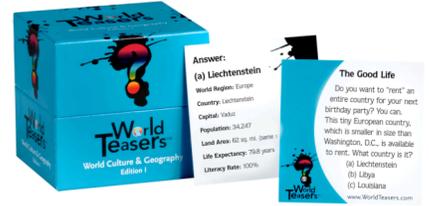
Why is [name of rival school] not a **proponent**? (*They are an opponent or rival.*)

Our soccer team has many other proponents. Can you name some? (*Parents, teachers, siblings.*)

Extension: Ask deeper processing questions, such as: “How do we know if or when someone is a **proponent** of something?”

By implementing some of these word learning strategies at the beginning of a new lesson, you can help students not only improve their vocabulary, but also actually enjoy and have fun learning new words.

For more **Teacher Lesson Plans** with WordTeasers/WorldTeasers, go to www.wordteasers.com and click Teacher Resources.



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