

## Vocabulary, Grade K-6

### English Learner

#### English Learners Considerations for Building Vocabulary

Vocabulary is acquired in two ways, through natural acquisition and formal instruction. Students learn new words naturally while playing with friends, doing classroom activities, and talking with other native English speakers. Formal instruction occurs through teacher-led lessons and classroom activities.

One way to teach both social language and language connected with classroom activities is to make classroom routines explicit and predictable. Be sure to use the same language every time you use the routines to make them easy to follow. Gradually support students in using the language learned through the routines as they interact with other students for other tasks so that they can begin to take ownership of the academic vocabulary used to describe the routines (Fassler, 2003).

Building the background knowledge and a context for students to learn new words is critical in helping students understand new vocabulary. Primary language can be a valuable tool for preteaching, concept development, and vocabulary. Cognates, or words similar in English counterparts, often provide an opportunity for bridging primary language and English. Also, students who have background knowledge about a topic can more easily connect the new information they are learning with what they already know than students without a similar context from which to work. Therefore, giving students background information and encouraging them to make as many connections as possible with the new vocabulary word they encounter will help them better understand the selection they are about to read.

In addition to building background knowledge, visual displays such as pictures, graphs, charts, maps, models, or other strategies offer unambiguous access to new content. They provide a clear and parallel correspondence between the visual objects and the new vocabulary to be learned. Thus, since the correlation is clear, the negotiation process must be constant and reciprocal between teacher and student if the student is to succeed in effectively interacting with language.

Keep in mind that English Learners require instruction in both basic vocabulary words (*book, page, paper, word*) as well as more sophisticated words (*visualize, summarize, evaluate*). These students will benefit in learning the more sophisticated words even though they are more abstract and difficult to teach (August, 2005; Collins, 2005). Just like native speakers, ELs need rich instruction which includes the definitional, contextual, and using information, as well as further elaboration as needed. These students also need plenty of practice using the words through acting out, talking with others, or answering engagement questions. Additionally, figurative language and idiomatic expressions should be explicitly taught as they are difficult for English Learners.

English Learners will need maximum support as they build their English vocabularies. Visuals and demonstrations can be very useful:

- **Real Objects and Realia:** Because of the immediate result visuals have on learning language, when explaining a word such as car, the best approach is simply to show a real car. As an alternative to the real object, you can show realia, if available. Realia are toy versions of real things, such as a plastic eggs or a toy car.
- **Pictures:** Supplement story illustrations with visuals such as those found in the ***SRA Photo Library, SRA Imagine It! Pictures Cards***, magazine pictures, and picture dictionaries. Videos, especially those that demonstrate an entire setting such as a farm or zoo, or videos in which different animals are highlighted in the natural habitat, for instance, might be helpful. You might also wish to turn off the soundtrack to avoid a flood of language that students might not be able to understand. This way, students can concentrate on the visual-word meaning.
- **Graphic Organizers:** Various kinds of graphic organizers and semantic maps can be very helpful.

- Pantomime: Language is learned through modeling within a communicative context. Pantomiming is one example of such a framework of communication. Some words, such as *run* and *jump*, are appropriate for pantomiming.
- If you use ***Open Court Reading*** ©2002, use the ***English-Language Development Guide*** and ***Workbook*** to preteach vocabulary. If you use ***SRA Imagine It!***, use the ***English Learner Support Guide*** and ***English Learner Support Activities***.
- Read stories related to the unit themes during Workshop to build vocabulary and help English Learners develop an understanding of book language.