

THE FAITHFUL READER

Vocabulary Instruction Part I: Where Do I Begin?

We all know how important vocabulary knowledge is. We notice when students don't comprehend what they are reading, and we can often point to a lack of vocabulary knowledge as the culprit. (Certainly there are other causes of poor comprehension, but often a lack of vocabulary knowledge is the main reason.) With so many words for students to learn, it is critical to prioritize the ~7 words that are the most important. These most important words are rarely the ones that the basal or anthology directs you to teach. Consider your current students and what they need - what they NEED to understand the text. Don't focus on the interesting or "exotic" words. Focus on the most important words that students must understand fully in order to comprehend the texts they will read.

1. Pre-Teach The Most Important Words (psst - don't overdo it)

Before launching into a new text or text set, there are ~7 key words/phrases students must know in order to understand what they will read. (The younger the students, the closer to 7 words. If you teach 8th grade, you can be closer to 10 words. Never go beyond 10.) If it is a mystery unit, students may need to know the meanings of *mystery*, *red herring*, *suspense*, *suspect*, *solve* (*detective? case?*) and for all novels, *climax* and *conclusion*. These are words/phrases that we must pre-teach BRIEFLY before the unit begins. This may take 15 minutes before the start of the unit - and then launch right into the reading. Do not kill the excitement over a new unit by spending more than 30 minutes on this. Here are a few ideas to pre-teach the most important vocabulary before a unit:

Have a "Tea Party"

Write each vocabulary word and its definition on individual index cards (or just fold a plain piece of paper into fours and cut, or create a table with four boxes in Word or Google docs.) Have students at St. Catherine's work with 3-5 others and discuss - what do we think this word as it is defined on this index card has to do with the mystery unit called "Midnight on the St. Catherine Express?"

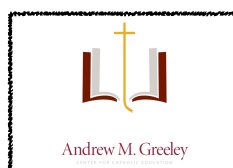
I Know, I Think I Know, I Have Heard of It

Write each vocabulary word on individual index cards (or see page 3 of this newsletter for an example). This should take about 4-5 minutes for students to discuss the ~ 7 words you provide. Come back together as a whole class and take a poll for each word - which group put an X in "I know this word?" and so on. Then ask the groups who know the word and can use it in a sentence to tell you a definition and a sentence. This would be a great opportunity to slow down, get out the reading notebooks, write down the word, the definition, and the sentence. MODEL THIS so you get what you want: once students know your format for the reading notebook, it will take less time.

Probable Passage

Post the words that students must know on the board or add them to the Probable Passage sheet on page 4 of this newsletter. Then students write the word in the box where they think it fits best. For younger students, type the words larger enough on a separate sheet of paper so they can cut out the individual words and move them around the page before they decide where the word goes - and then they can glue it down. Page 5 of this newsletter is a template for nonfiction.

In February, I will share the next steps for vocabulary instruction: **Part II: How Will They Learn the Words?**



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What's a text set?

The whole-class novel is a tough sell - it is often done in straight rows with the teacher as the keeper of all knowledge, no discussion, and all round robin reading. We know this does not help any of the students in your class, from the most successful readers to the most struggling readers. There's a better, more connected way to get students to read.

A text set is a set of readings that students tackle in a variety of ways - you may read a short text as a class (no round robin or popcorn, of course) with you modeling, showing, and telling how to comprehend. Then students in small groups read novels they chose from your options ("controlled choice"). You may read aloud from a text, either a short text or an entire book. All texts are related to the same topic, ideally a topic that students are currently studying in another subject.

Below is an example of a text set that is taught at the same time as a study of 1960s history on science exploration. Notice that there are fiction novels, nonfiction narratives, graphic novels, and short texts.

Full Cicada Moon by Marilyn Hilton

I Love You, Michael Collins by Lauren Baratz-Logsted

Margaret and the Moon: How Margaret Hamilton Saved the First Lunar Landing by Dean Robbins, Illustrated by Lucy Knisley

Welcome to Mars by Buzz Aldrin and Marianne Dyson

Hidden Figures, Young Readers' Edition by Margot Lee Shetterly

"Space Junk" <https://www.readworks.org/article/Space-and-Space-Travel/6931feb1-1851-4db9-a2b2-791a00fd6e3a#articleTab:content/contentSection:f4d334cc-e77b-43ad-b1c0-8bf5b7efe207/>

Book Recommendations

I Love You, Michael Collins written by Lauren Baratz-Logsted

Mamie chooses to write a letter to Michael Collins when the rest of the class chooses either Buzz Aldrin or Neil Armstrong. She gets it - someone needs to stay behind and take care of the ship. If not, how will they all get home? Written through letters by Mamie, one of three sisters in a family in 1969 who are all named after first ladies, this book shares the bittersweet story of how Mamie stays behind and holds the fort down, so to speak, in her family.

Independent Reading Level grade 4-5 (Lexile 800)

Genre historical fiction

Margaret and the Moon: How Margaret Hamilton Saved the First Lunar Landing by Dean Robbins, illustrated by Lucy Knisley

Margaret Hamilton had lots of questions. She wanted to know everything. Eventually she earned a BA in Mathematics, taught at MIT, and wrote software Apollo and SkyLab, including error detection and recovery software. This book is written in a graphic novel style though it is narrative nonfiction. Great introduction to an unknown scientist who went on to win the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2016 as well as an early coder.

Reading Level grade 3 (Lexile 630)

Appropriate for age 6 and up

Genre graphic narrative nonfiction



Greeley Center Mission

We are Catholic educators who challenge Catholic schools to be excellent because they are essential in preparing students for the future.

I Know, I Think I Know

Word	I Know It! (so well that I can use it in a sentence)	I think I know it/ I kinda know it	I have seen this word before but I don't know/not sure what it means	I don't know this word

Example:

Word	I Know It! (so well that I can use it in a sentence)	I think I know it/I kinda know it	I have seen this word before but I don't know/not sure what it means; I know parts of this word	I don't know this word
square	X			
quadrilateral			X (I know quad means 4)	
quadrangle			X (I know quad means 4)	
rectangle	X			
rhombus				X
triangle	X			
parallel				X

I think this unit will be about...

Names _____ Date _____

Probable Passage- *Home of the Brave* by Katherine Applegate

Sort the following words into the boxes below. Then use the information to make a prediction: what do you think this novel will be about?

helping man

outside

snow

questions

America

gloves

Kek

stick out

hard work

Setting	Characters	Problem
Solutions	Unknown Words	Things to discover

Story Prediction

This probable passage was created by Meredith Fisher,
Probable passage can be found in the book *When Kids Can't Read, What Teachers Can Do* by Kyleene Beers.

Probable Passage - **NonFiction**

Who

What

When

Gist Statement

Where

Why

How

I Now Know...

Probable passage can be found in the book *When Kids Can't Read, What Teachers Can Do* by Kyleene Beers.