Word Work Wednesday

A Simple, Effective, Low-Cost Activity to Use in Your Classroom

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The activity

The purpose of the activity is two-fold: 1) To show students that building vocabulary in a highly engaging way (hand gestures, etc.) is the most effective outlet to expand independent dictionaries (hand gestures); 2) That working with words in such a routine-style way (students have become very familiar with this activity since we do it once a week) is a constant way to review and learn new words while instilling the importance of academic vocabulary.

This activity is great for building classroom culture, rituals and routine, community building, thinking routines.

Students will learn

- Build and expand academic vocabulary (important as we make a shift toward common core standards.)
- Use context clues to help figure out unfamiliar vocabulary (beneficial for GED or college admission examinations)
- Recognize the importance of teamwork and people skills as an important aspect of collaborative learning
- Learn new words to expand academic vocabulary
- Understand and appreciate that “reading is a process” and good readers take time to think about what they are going to read before they do it (Balanced Literacy).
Here’s what you do

Resources needed:
- White board and markers
- Word work scaffold sheet (although if students are able to write on reading material this isn’t even necessary)
- Dictionary or phone with internet
- Tiered vocabulary

Approximate time:
- This lesson should take 30-45 minutes depending on pace of teacher, level of students and difficulty of words students are working with.

Instructions

1) Pre-Activity:
- Preview 4-5 words from a reading or book you are working on with students that you feel are appropriately difficult for the group. (** see success tips) and write them on the board with the page number of where they are found in the reading.
- Split students up into groups of 3 or 4 depending on class size. Groups can be established based on various factors (** see success tips). Assign each group a word.

2) Activity:
- Once assigned, have students read and write down the sentence and page number that the word came from. Have students guess what the word means using context clues before they look it up.
- Students will look up words in a dictionary or phone and write down formal definition. After looking up the formal definition, students will define the word in a way that makes sense to them.
- Students will come up with a hand motion that will help them remember the meaning of the word.
• Students will come up with a catchy slogan or phrase that will help them remember the definition of the word. (I sometimes skip this if the other parts take too long...this is meant to be a pre-reading activity, NOT the bulk of class.)

• Once all groups have finished working independently, come back together as a whole class. One group will go first and will ask the whole class to read the sentence where their word came from and see if the other students can guess the definition of the word before a student from that word group writes the definition on the board. Other students will then write down that definition. That group will share their slogan and their hand gesture.

• Repeat this process until all groups have shared.

• Everyone stands up and does hand gestures and slogans together. Add words to “word work wall” under “tier 2” and have students call out “tier 1” equivalents. Teacher writes these on charts.

• We go right into our reading after this and I usually pause and get excited when we then read this word and we know fully what it means. Sometimes I pause and we all do the hand gesture together once again!

Success Tips

• It is vitally important that you consider level of words when doing this activity. I often choose the same words for all three of my classes knowing that each will be able to handle working with them differently. However, this activity allows you, the instructor, to have the chance to differentiate. I sometimes choose more engaging and “fun” words for a class that needs to let loose a little or as a reward after a hard week the week before.

• I like to split the groups up differently each week. There are a few classes that request to be with the same people each week because of the momentum and vibe they have created within the group. Go with what feels right!