



ILA CHAPTER AFFILIATE

September 2018 - Literacy Strategy Spotlight

### Vocabulary Support for Special Populations

Some students require explicit vocabulary instruction to improve academic achievement in reading ability and the content areas. Typically, this includes struggling readers, students with language and/or learning disabilities, and English language learners (Conley, 2012).

Visual aids such as semantic maps, word webs, mnemonic devices, and other types of graphic organizers are excellent tools for helping students learn and understand new words and concepts. Graphic organizers are a beneficial instructional tool for students who face the dual task of learning the forms and structures of the English language as well as the domain-specific vocabulary needed to understand the material in the content areas (Conley, 2012).

Mapping/Webbing that requires learners to think of antonyms, synonyms, and/or related words for the target word helps to expand students' word knowledge as well as help to reinforce and connect new words to familiar words (Wendling & Mather, 2009) (Conley, 2012). Organizers, such as the Frayer Model, that also require students to provide examples and non-examples help to clarify the meanings of unfamiliar words. These visual strategies help learners connect new information to prior knowledge, which deepens the understanding of the content, and promotes critical thinking (Wendling & Mather, 2009).

When working with students who need additional support, it is recommended that teachers:

- Use clear, simple, student-friendly language when providing definitions and explanations of new words.
- Identify and use clear synonyms, examples, non-examples, and concrete representations (as appropriate) for each word to increase the likelihood that students will be able to understand and recall word meanings.
- Provide repeated exposures to words and their meanings in context.
- Engage students in a variety of interactive instructional activities that make connections between words. Use multiple modalities.
- For struggling learners, explicit instruction is better than implicit instruction.
- When possible, teach new words in association with a visual image.

(Beach, Sanchez, Flynn, & O'Connor, 2015) (Wendling & Mather, 2009)

Resources:

All About Adolescent Literacy ([adlit.org](http://adlit.org)) provides classroom strategies for vocabulary instruction before,

during, and after reading.

ReadWriteThink.org has a strategy guide series on developing academic vocabulary as well as related resources.

#### References

Beach, K. D., Sanchez, V., Flynn, L. J., & O'Connor, R. E. (2015). Teaching Academic Vocabulary to Adolescents With Learning Disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 48(1), 36-44.

Conley, M. W. (2012). *Content Area Literacy: Learners in Context* (2 ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Wendling, B. J., & Mather, N. (2009). *Essentials of Evidence-Based Academic Interventions*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

This literacy spotlight has been brought to you by Stephanie Jenkins. Stephanie is starting her 17th year in education, and currently works as educational diagnostician for the Windham School District in Huntsville, Texas. Stephanie earned a doctor of education in curriculum and instruction with a focus in literacy education from the University of Houston. Her research interests include literacy instruction and intervention for students with reading disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and emotional-behavioral disorders. For more information, contact Stephanie at [sjohnson-jenkins@uh.edu](mailto:sjohnson-jenkins@uh.edu).

If you would like to share a literacy strategy or highlight something your school is doing, please email Matthew Panozzo, the Community Involvement Committee Director, at [talecommunityinvolvement@gmail.com](mailto:talecommunityinvolvement@gmail.com)

If your school is interested in applying for the International Literacy Association's Exemplary Reading Program Award, please visit their online [application](#) for more information.