



Selecting Words

Students must learn about 2,000-3,000 new words every year (Stahl and Nagy, 2006). There isn't enough time in the school day to explicitly teach that many words during the school year. It makes sense that when we choose to use instructional time to teach a skill, we choose items that students will be able to use in more than one context and more than just a few times. Beck, McKowen, and Kucan (2002) suggested a process for choosing words for vocabulary instruction. They suggest we analyze words in the text and sort possible vocabulary words into three tiers.

Tier 1 words are words that are the most common and students probably already understand. Words like *house, food, happy, dog*, would be tier 1 words. These words would not need to be explicitly taught except to the students with the most severe learning disabilities (Vaughn, 2004).

Tier 2 words are words that are high utility, students need to understand to comprehend the text, and will appear in many contexts. These are the words worth using instructional time. Examples: *investigate, avoid, opinion, discover, cycle*.

Tier 3 words are infrequent and may be associated with a specific discipline or topic. Explain these words quickly as needed for understanding. Some tier 3 words may include, *photosynthesis, helium, carburetor, sedentary, algorithm*.

Vaugh (2004) suggests considering the following questions when choosing words to teach:

- Is this work highly useful to students?
- What is the likelihood that the majority of the class already know this word?
- Do students know related words that are simpler or less sophisticated so they can relate to this word and use it when appropriate?
- Will this word help students understand text?

Example Text Excerpt

<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/4357/pg4357.txt>

THE GLASS DOG

An accomplished wizard once lived on the top floor of a tenement house and passed his time in thoughtful study and studious thought. What he didn't know about wizardry was hardly worth knowing, for he possessed all the books and recipes of all the wizards who had lived before him; and, moreover, he had invented several wizardments himself.

Possible Tier 1 words: lived, floor, house, thought, books, recipes

Possible Tier 2 words: accomplished, thoughtful studious, possessed, invented

Possible Tier 3 words: wizard, tenement, wizardry wizardments

