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Moving Beyond the Words in Bold:
10 Quick Ways to Engage Students in Content-Area Vocabulary Learning

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1. List-Group-Label

Provide students with a root [bases work best]. Then invite a 2-3-minute brainstorming session. Ask students to generate all the words they can that contain that root. List these on the board/ chart paper. Now ask pairs of students to organize the words by grouping words into categories and labeling the resulting groups. As an alternative to the group—label portion of list-group-label, students can create word webs by placing the root in the center of a piece of paper and developing a graphic representation of the relationship among the words. Invite students to share their results with the whole class. Here, for example, are some words using the base theo- [which means god]:

apotheosis	theocracy	theological
atheology	theocrat	theologist
atheological	theocratic	theology
pantheology	theocratical	
pantheologist	theologian	

2. Word Sorts

Start with 12-20 words. Ask students to a) find 2 words that belong together; others guess the relationship; b) find 3-4 words, 2-3 of which belong together and one that doesn't belong. Others try to guess which one doesn't belong and why; c) sort words into categories you determine; or d) sort words into categories of their own choosing, which they explain to others.

3. Divide and Conquer

Develop a chart that scaffolds students as they pull words apart into morphological roots. Guide them toward understanding what each of the roots means. Help them see how combining these meanings can provide clues about the meaning of the words.

Word	Prefix	Base	Base	Suffix	Word Means
Pantheon	XX	pan = all	theo= god	XX	???

4. Important Words

Ask students to reread a portion of text in order to identify XX (1—3 depending on length of the text) most important words. Invite volunteers to share these words and to explain the selection criteria. Write several of these words on the board or chart paper.

Then ask pairs of students to consider the listed words and to select the 1-3 most important of these. Invite sharing.

5. 20 Questions

Students take turns asking questions that help them figure out a “mystery” word. If you want to build a little competitive spirit, you can divide the class into two teams for this activity. (Notes: You can change the number of questions that students ask, e.g., play 15 questions instead of 20 questions. Also two students can be “It” simultaneously and can confer before answering questions. This is a good adaptation for struggling readers or ELLs.)

6. Word Riddles

Give pairs of students a list of words being learned. Each pair’s job is to devise riddles for other students to solve. Example: photograph. 1. I have three syllables. 2. I have two word parts. 3. One means “light.” 4. The other means something written or drawn. 5. I am a picture of something else. What am I?

7. Sketch to Stretch

Provide words written on slips of paper. Distribute these to students. Ask them to sketch something that reveals the word meaning. Then they share these with others who try to guess what they have drawn.

8. Charades

Make slips of paper with words (or words containing a targeted word part). Students make teams. In turn, students select a word, act it out. Team members guess.

9. WORDO

Make 4 X 4 game cards. Select at least 15 vocabulary words. Play the game like bingo. Students can use dry beans or pennies or slips of paper as markers. Each player selects a “free” space and then writes the vocabulary words in other spaces. Teacher calls out definitions or other clues; students mark their cards with responses. Winner is first person to have a line of words (across, down, or diagonal).

10. Word Games

Use one of these WWW sites to develop or have students develop crossword puzzles or word searches. (Sites active, January 2011)

Discovery School’s Word Search Puzzlemaker:

<http://puzzlemaker.school.discovery.com/WordSearchSetupForm.html>

Instant Online Crossword Puzzlemaker: <http://www.varietygames.com/CW/>

Superkids Wordsearch Puzzle: <http://www.superkids.com/aweb/tools/words/search/>

The Pantheon*

Although the ancient Greeks and Romans were polytheists who believed in many gods, they usually worshipped them separately in temples dedicated to each one. But in the first century B.C., the Romans built a new kind of temple, one dedicated to all the gods at once.

Thanks to their invention of concrete, the Romans were able to make the shape of this building a circle. It had a round roof, or dome, with a hole in its center so that light could pass through and illuminate the interior. This hole at the top of the dome was called an oculus.

Because the Romans were polytheistic, they dedicated their temple to all the gods. It was named the Pantheon. Inside, the walls of the Pantheon had twelve niches, one for each of the gods of Mt. Olympus. Each niche held a small statue of one of the gods. Every day, as the sun's rays came through the oculus of the Pantheon, light would shine on each statue, rotating niche by niche during the day. Since their design allowed the sun to shine on each god's statue individually, the Romans believed they were honoring all the gods.

* adapted from *Building Vocabulary from Word Roots*, Level 7, p. 111.

References (and resources for further learning)

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