

# How to Teach Essential Words in All Content Areas

**A presentation to accompany the *Middle School Matters Strategy Guide***

# About

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# A Common Challenge

**Students often have difficulty READING TO LEARN.**

**Think about:**

- What specific difficulties do students have learning new information from text?
- What are some ways you help students prepare to learn new information from text?

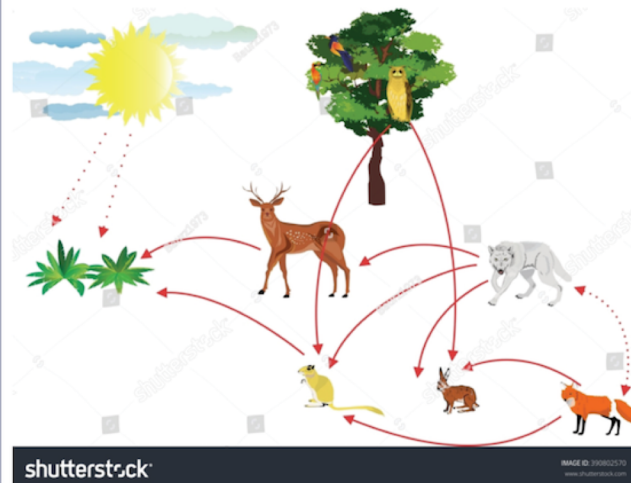
# One Research-Based Solution

## interact (*interactuar*)

When two or more things have an effect on one another

### Synonyms:

connect, influence, act together



### Example Sentences

1. One way to learn a foreign language is to **interact** with native speakers of that language.
2. The garden produced a lot of vegetables when it **interacted** with plenty of sunlight, rain, and warm temperatures.

### Turn and Talk

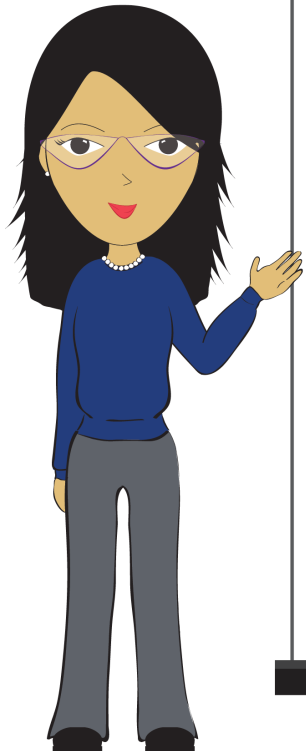
1. Tell your partner about a time when you **interacted** with someone and it influenced you in a positive way.
2. Tell your partner about how two animals **interact** in an ecosystem.

## Essential Words Routine:

Teachers preteach the meanings of important words using a simple graphic organizer and routine



# How is it done?



## How is it done?

**Step 1:** Teachers select the most essential words students need to know for the unit or the passage they are about to read.

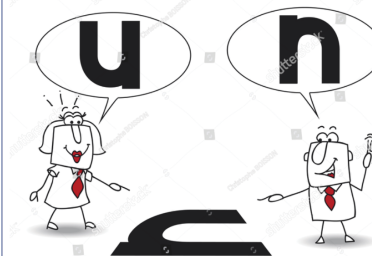
**Step 2:** Teachers prepare a graphic organizer, called a “vocabulary map,” for each word.

**Step 3:** Teachers show the vocabulary map to students and use it as a guide to present important information about each word.

### perspective (*perspectiva*)

A way of looking at things or thinking about something; “walking in someone else’s shoes”

**Synonyms:**  
point of view, interpretation, opinion



#### Example Sentences

1. Max’s **perspective** on going to the swim party changed when he found out that his friends weren’t going.
2. The Diary of Anne Frank describes what it was like during World War II from the **perspective** of a 13-year-old Jewish girl living in the Netherlands.

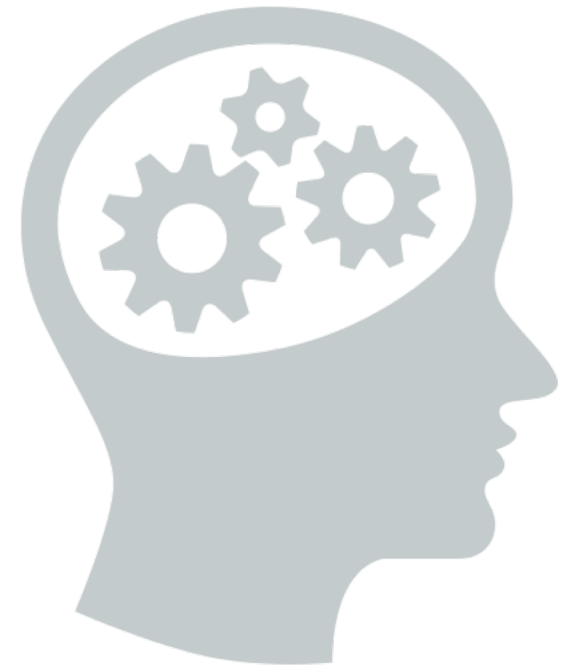
#### Turn and Talk

1. Tell your partner one way that you have a different **perspective** from someone in your family.
2. How do you think Anne Frank’s perspective of World War II is different from a soldier’s **perspective**?

<https://greatmiddleschools.org/toolkits/reading/vocabulary-maps/>

# Why is it helpful?

- Activates students' background knowledge to increase comprehension
- Prepares students for learning new information
- Provides the “velcro” for new information to “stick to”



# What does the teacher do?

**STEP 1:** Examine your content and choose words that you need to preteach.

**STEP 2:** Create a vocabulary map for each word or concept.

**STEP 3:** Deliver instruction using the vocabulary maps.

# And after that...? (The Big Picture)

- Students read their text (or engage in a different learning activity)
- Students use what you've already taught them to help them learn
- Students engage in additional opportunities to practice these essential words

# Teacher Instructions



# Step 1: Select Words

- **Ask yourself:**

- What is most important for my students to learn?
- What are the main learning objectives for this unit or passage?

# Checklist for Selecting Words

## Words to Choose

- Essential to understanding the main idea of the text or unit
- Used repeatedly or frequently encountered
- Not part of students' prior knowledge

## Words NOT to Choose

- Concepts NOT central to the text or unit
- Proper nouns or Latin names
- Specific to a certain situation or topic (e.g., discussed only once in the unit)

# How many words should I pick?

- Single reading passage = approximately 2 or 3 words
- Entire unit = up to 5 words

**REMEMBER: You know your students best,  
so adjust instruction accordingly!**



# Step 2: Develop Vocabulary Maps

Tools available to assist you at  
<https://GreatMiddleSchools.org/words>

- Template
- Instructions for finding images

**TIP: Divide and conquer!**





Cognate or translation  
for English learners →

## compassion (*compasión*)

Student-friendly definition →

Showing great care or concern



Visual  
representation  
to make the  
word vivid →

Synonyms or related  
words →

**Synonyms:**  
tenderness, sympathy

First example relates to  
students' everyday lives →

### Example Sentences

1. The Red Cross workers showed great **compassion** toward the people of Haiti after the earthquake struck by providing food and shelter to many homeless people.
2. Mahatma Gandhi is known throughout the world for his **compassion**, dedication to peace, and commitment to nonviolence.

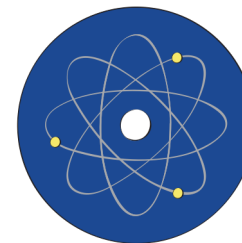
Second example relates to  
the unit of study or passage →

### Turn and Talk

1. Tell your partner about a time you showed **compassion** toward others.
2. Why do you think that Gandhi is known for his **compassion**?

First question  
relates to students'  
prior knowledge  
or experience →

Second question  
relates to your  
course content →



Cognate or translation  
for English learners →

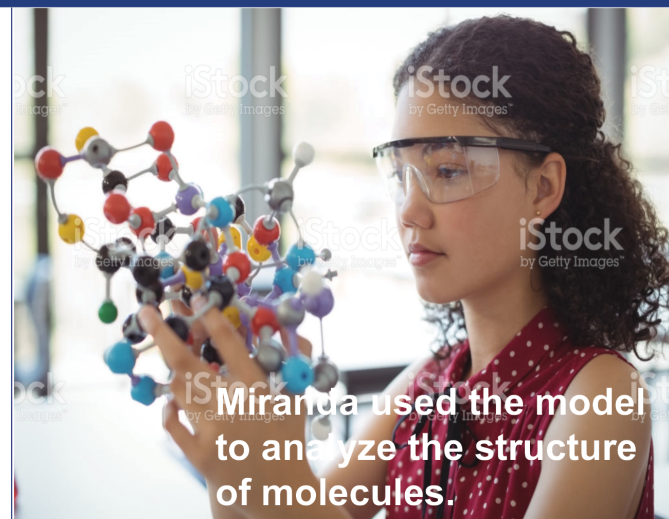
## analyze (*analizar*)

Student-friendly definition →

To study something closely and carefully

Synonyms or related  
words →

**Synonyms:**  
examine, interpret, break down



Visual  
representation  
to make the  
word vivid

First example relates to  
students' everyday lives →

- Example Sentences**
1. She **analyzed** the system of levers and pulleys to understand how the machine worked.
  2. After an experiment, scientists **analyze** the data to see if the hypothesis is true or false.

Second example relates to  
the unit of study or passage →

### Turn and Talk

1. What kind of information do you **analyze** before buying a new electronic device?
2. Why is it important to **analyze** the data you've collected during a lab session?

First question  
relates to students'  
prior knowledge  
or experience

Second question  
relates to your  
course content



Cognate or translation  
for English learners →

Student-friendly definition →

Synonyms or related  
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## imagery (*la imagería*)

**Descriptive language** that can appeal to any of the five senses (see, smell, taste, hear, feel).

**Synonyms:**  
figurative language, descriptive words

### Example Sentences

1. My favorite song's lyrics are filled with **imagery** and describe what it feels like to be a teenager.
2. The author's use of **imagery** was so vivid that I felt like I was watching a movie instead of reading a book.



Visual  
representation  
to make the  
word vivid →

### Turn and Talk

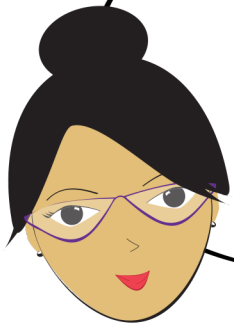
1. Brainstorm some words that would provide **imagery** to your reader if you were describing your favorite food.
2. How does the narrator in the following probably feel, and how do you know?  
*I could hear the footsteps of doom nearing.*

First question  
relates to students'  
prior knowledge  
or experience →

Second question  
relates to your  
course content →

# **Step 3: Deliver Instruction**

# Set the Purpose for Instruction



Today I am going to teach you some important words before we read this chapter in our novel.

**When preteaching essential words before reading a text**



Today I am going to teach you some important words and concepts for our unit on the American Revolution.

**When preteaching essential words before starting a new unit**

# Teach Using the Vocabulary Maps

- Display the vocabulary map and deliver instruction one word at a time.
- Students:
  - Should NOT take notes during instruction, but can record a “connection” or their own notes about the word immediately after instruction.
  - Should track the teacher with their eyes during instruction.
  - Should respond to all teacher prompts and demonstrate understanding of the words during turn-and-talks.
- Teach with a BRISK PACE (3-5 minutes per word).



# Turn-and-Talks

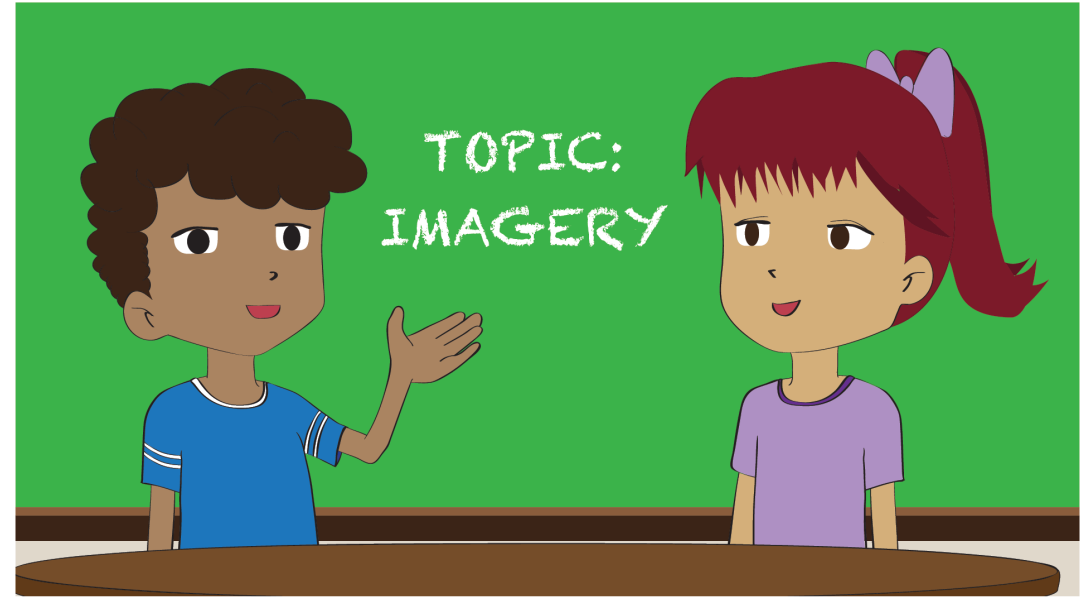
## HOW TO STRUCTURE TURN-AND-TALK ACTIVITIES

1. Provide a prompt for students to discuss. It should be relatable for students so that they can draw on their prior knowledge or life experience.

*Example:* Brainstorm some words that would provide imagery to your reader if you were describing your favorite food.

2. Have students turn to their partner and discuss the prompt (10 to 20 seconds). Monitor students' conversations to check for understanding.
3. Select students to share thoughts and ideas from their discussion with the whole group (30 seconds).
4. Repeat steps 1 to 3 with a second prompt that sparks discussion related to your course content.

*Example:* How does the narrator probably feel, and how do you know?





# Mercantilism

**Definition:** The idea that if a country imports cheap raw materials and exports finished products, it will become rich

**RELATED WORDS:** Trade, import, export



## Example Sentences

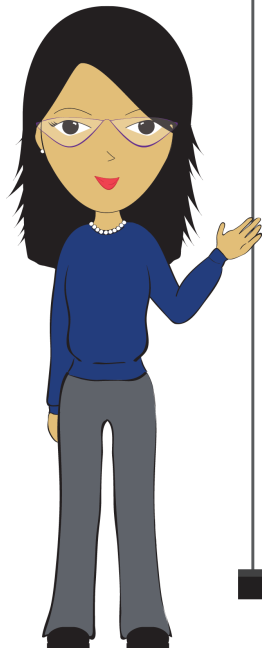
1. **Mercantilism** was the European economic policy from the 1500s to the 1700s
2. **Mercantilism** was a cause of frequent European wars and led countries to expand their colonies.

## Turn and Talk

1. If you lived during this time and wanted to become rich, would it be better to be a colonist or to live in England? Why?

# **Ideas for Additional Opportunities for Practice**

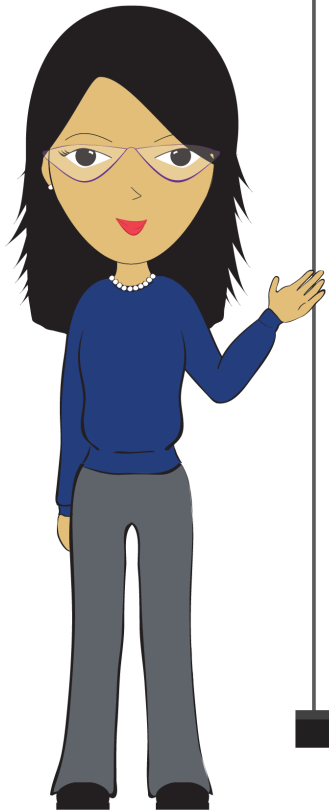
# The Frayer Model



Definition	Characteristics
<p>People moving from one place, region, or country to another</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Involves major change (long distance or large group)</li><li>• Could be forced by natural disaster, economy, or warfare</li><li>• Could be choice</li><li>• Permanent or semi-permanent, not temporary</li></ul>
Examples	Nonexamples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Moving from Der el Salam in Tanzania to Zanzibar</li><li>• Moving from rural areas in the southern United States to cities in the north</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People staying in one place all their lives</li><li>• Geese flying from Canada to Mexico</li><li>• Driving from home in the suburbs to a job in the city</li></ul>

human migration

# Example or Nonexample Questions

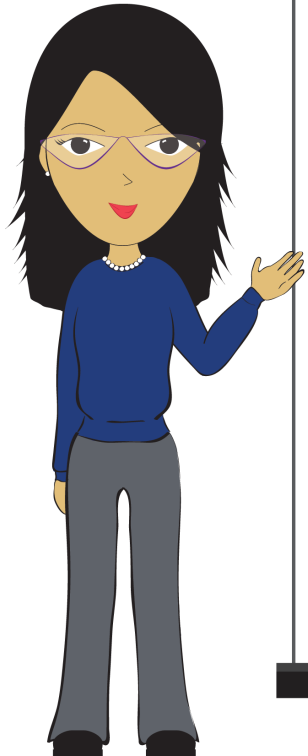


## Examples or Nonexamples?

**Target word:** *dialogue*

1. One character in the story tells another how to operate a machine. Is this a dialogue?
2. The coach yells at the team because they missed an easy goal. Is this a dialogue?
3. Two characters in the story have a meeting to discuss how to take care of their aging grandfather. Are they having a dialogue?

# Sentence Creation Prompts



## Prompt and Possible Responses

**Teacher:** We have learned the word *analyze*. Now I'd like you to turn to your partner and use the word in a sentence. You will have 30 seconds, and then I'll call on you to share with the class.

### Students:

- I had to analyze the facts for my science project.
- We had to analyze the data from our experiment to know whether it came out right.
- The teacher asked us to analyze the facts to understand why the environment is changing.