

Getting  
Vocabulary  
to  
Stick

# Using Essential Words to Build Content Knowledge

October 4, 2019

Advancing Improvement in Education (AIE) Conference

# About

This resource was developed with funding from the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R305A170556 to The University of Texas. Use only with permission.

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# Who Are We?

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The Meadows Center  
FOR PREVENTING EDUCATIONAL RISK



TEXAS

The University of Texas at Austin

# The Middle School Matters Story

George W. Bush Institute  
education reform initiative



Institute of Education Sciences  
research study





# Our Focus

**PD practices &  
instructional  
materials based  
on high-quality  
research**



**Teacher  
perspectives and  
professional  
wisdom**



**PD that works for  
middle schools**



READING IN THE CONTENT AREAS

# What It's All About



# Session Objectives

Participants will:

- Learn the research base for explicit vocabulary instruction
- Receive an overview of the Essential Words strategy
- Develop a sample lesson
- Leave ready to share the strategy with your colleagues

# According to Research...

- Vocabulary is highly correlated with what other component of reading?
- What percent of instructional time is typically devoted to vocabulary instruction?
- How many exposures to words do students need to fully learn their meanings?
- What does vocabulary instruction typically look like in classrooms?

# According to Research...

- Vocabulary is highly correlated with **reading comprehension** – as high as .8 and correlations increase as students get older (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Torgesen & Wagner, 2006; Torgesen et al., 1997).
- **5% to 10%** of instructional time is typically devoted to vocabulary (Durkin, 1978/79; Roser & Juel, 1982; Scott, Jamieson, Noel & Asslin, 2003).
- Researchers estimate it could take **as many as 17 exposures** for a student to learn a new word (Ausubel & Youssef, 1965).

# What Does Vocabulary Instruction Typically Look Like?

- Copying vocabulary definitions from textbook glossary = 18.3% of class time in 8<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies classrooms (Swanson, Wanzek, Vaughn, Fall, Roberts, Hall, & Miller, 2017)
- Definitions, context clues (Watt, 1995)
- Rarely observed (Watt, 1995):
  - Multiple exposures
  - Activation of prior knowledge
  - Strategies for independent word learning

## **REFLECT:**

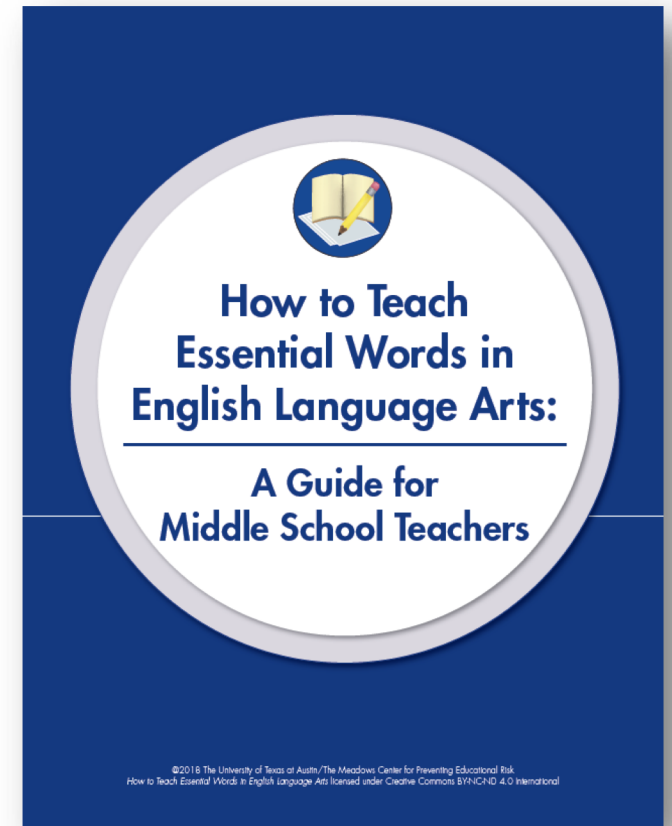
- How does this compare to your campus/district?
- How would you like to see vocabulary taught?

# The Essential Words Routine

Teachers pre-teach the meanings of important words using a

- (1) simple graphic organizer and
- (2) instructional routine

- Research-based (really!)
- Strategy Guide developed with teachers



# Why is the Essential Words Routine Effective?

- Explicit
- Brisk pace
- Careful word selection
- Engaging
- Immediate student practice
- Activates background knowledge
- Used across content areas

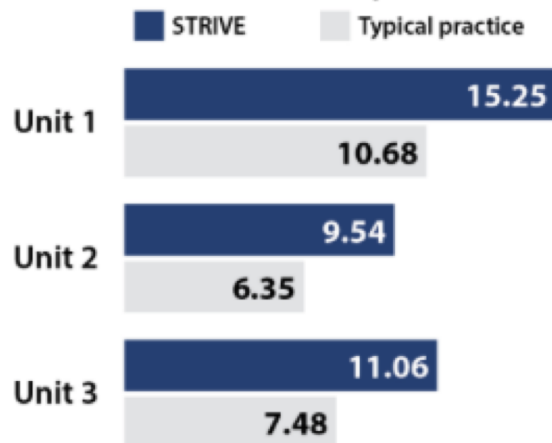




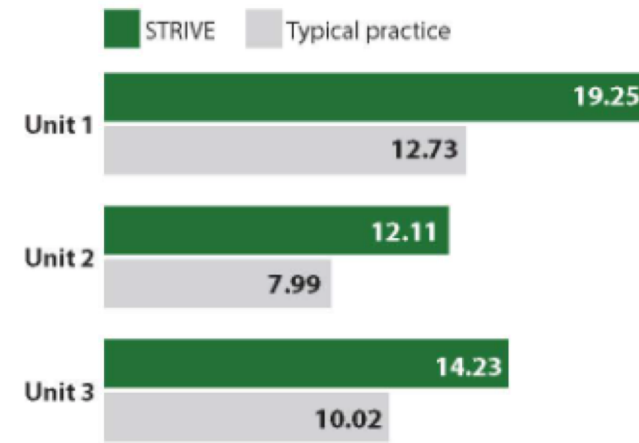
# How Do We Know its Effective?

- Part of teacher-directed explicit instruction, which research indicates has an influence on vocabulary acquisition (e.g., Elleman et al., 2009; Harmon et al., 2005)
- RCTs with three cohorts of students who received social studies instruction with a vocabulary map/explicit vocabulary routine outperformed students receiving typical instruction on measures of vocabulary. (STRIVE Project: <https://www.meadowscenter.org/projects/detail/strategies-for-reading-information-and-vocabulary-effectively-strive>)

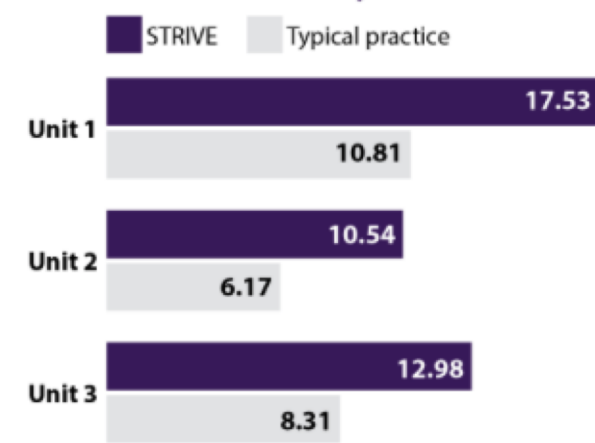
**Social Studies Vocabulary: Mean Scores**



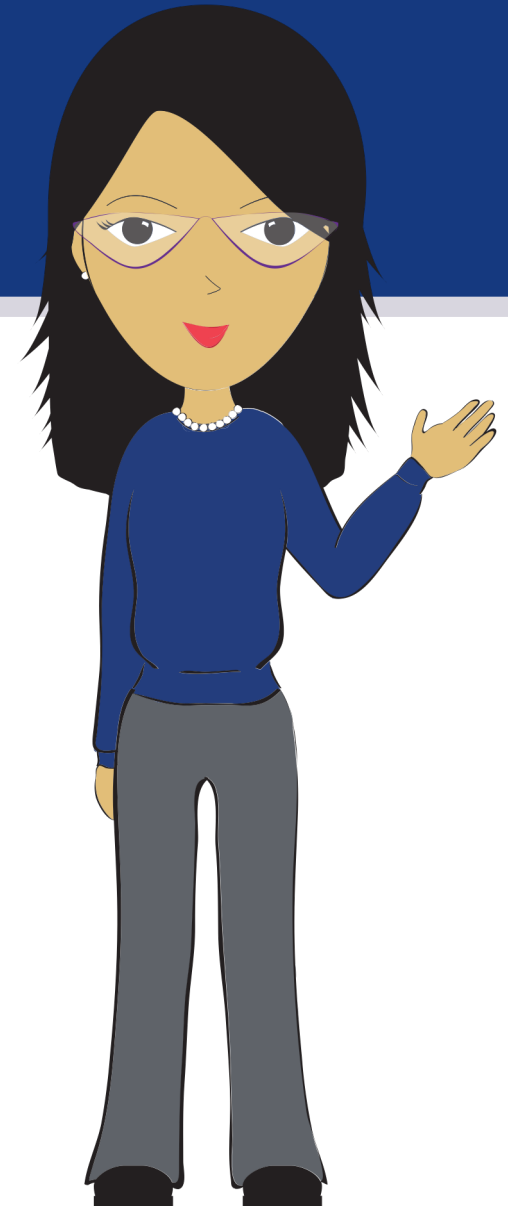
**Social Studies Vocabulary: Mean Scores**



**Social Studies Vocabulary: Mean Scores**



Let's Try It



# Moofing

- **M**obile **O**ut of **O**ffice-ing
- Away from the office but in touch via cellphone and email

Synonyms: *multitasking, working on-the-go*

## Example Sentences

- 1. Moofing has been made possible by technology such as smartphones and tablets.**
- 2. Many professionals feel that moofing has changed their work-life balance.**



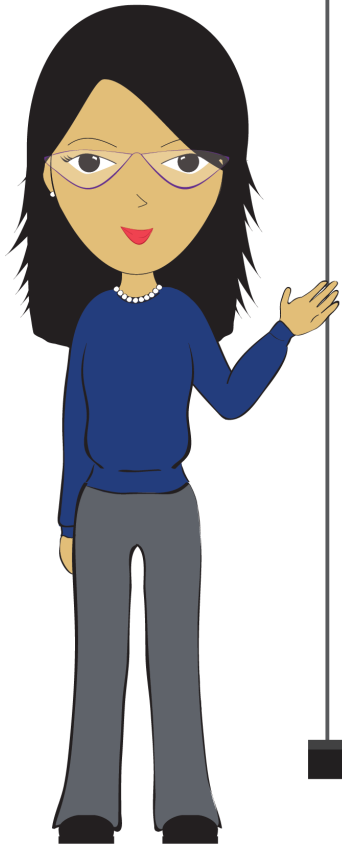
## Turn and Talk

- 1. When you are at a conference, do you engage in moofing? Why or why not?**
- 2. Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of moofing.**

# What Did You Notice?

- What did the teacher do?
- What do the students do?

# 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.

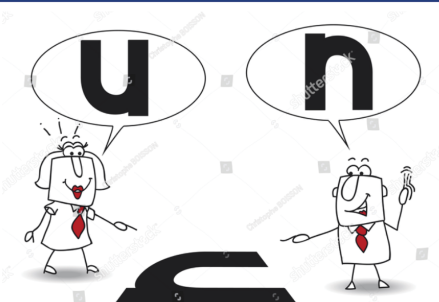
**Step 2:** Teachers prepare a graphic organizer, called a “vocabulary map,” for each word.

**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 that allows new information to stick



A Cl

## The word (+ cognate/translation)

student-friendly  
definition

picture: the simpler, the better!



Synonyms:

words that students are likely  
to know already

### Example Sentences

1. Simple sentence containing the targeted word.
2. An excerpt from the text you're reading that contains the word.

### Turn and Talk

1. A question to spark students' discussion that is something relatable to their prior knowledge or experience
2. A question to spark discussion that relates the word to your course content

# Student Expectations

Students:

- Track the teacher
- Respond to prompts
- Participate in Turn and Talks

Students do NOT:

- Take notes
- Guess at the definition
- Make their own vocabulary maps





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

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

## REMEMBER:

- **Essential Words Routine is ONLY used to PRETEACH important vocabulary before reading/learning!**
- **It is a BEFORE READING activity.**

# IMPLEMENTATION



# Digital Materials

- Essential Words Strategy Guide
- Blank vocabulary template
- Notes page
- Google Image search tips

[greatmiddleschools.org/words](https://greatmiddleschools.org/words)

# 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?

# Selecting Words



## 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)

Examples	Non-examples
tyranny conflict tactic	any proper noun  excommunicate mercenary
equation inequality	onomatopoeia coordinate plane
conserve mutate	allele autotroph

# Sample Words

Social Studies	Science	Math	ELA/General
conflict	conserve	equation	distinguish
character	mutate	inequality	interdependence
conflict	variable	proportion	
tactic	ecosystem		

# How Many Words Should I Pick?

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

You know your students best,  
so adjust accordingly!

# Step 2: Develop Vocabulary Maps

Tools available

- [GreatMiddleSchools.org/words](http://GreatMiddleSchools.org/words)
  - Template
  - Instructions for finding images

TIP: Divide and conquer!





# A Note on Visuals

- The simpler the better
- Search and copyright issues—see handout
- Try synonyms





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**?

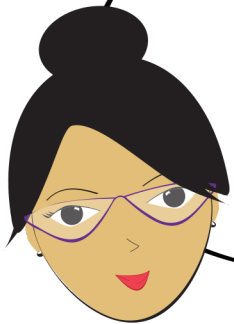
First question  
relates to students'  
prior knowledge  
or experience →

Second question  
relates to your  
course content →

# Step 3: Deliver Instruction

- Display the vocabulary map and deliver instruction one word at a time.
- Students:
  - Should NOT take notes
  - Should track the teacher
  - Respond to prompts and show understanding during turn-and-talks.
- Teach with a brisk pace (3-5 minutes per word).

# 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**

# Turn-and-Talks

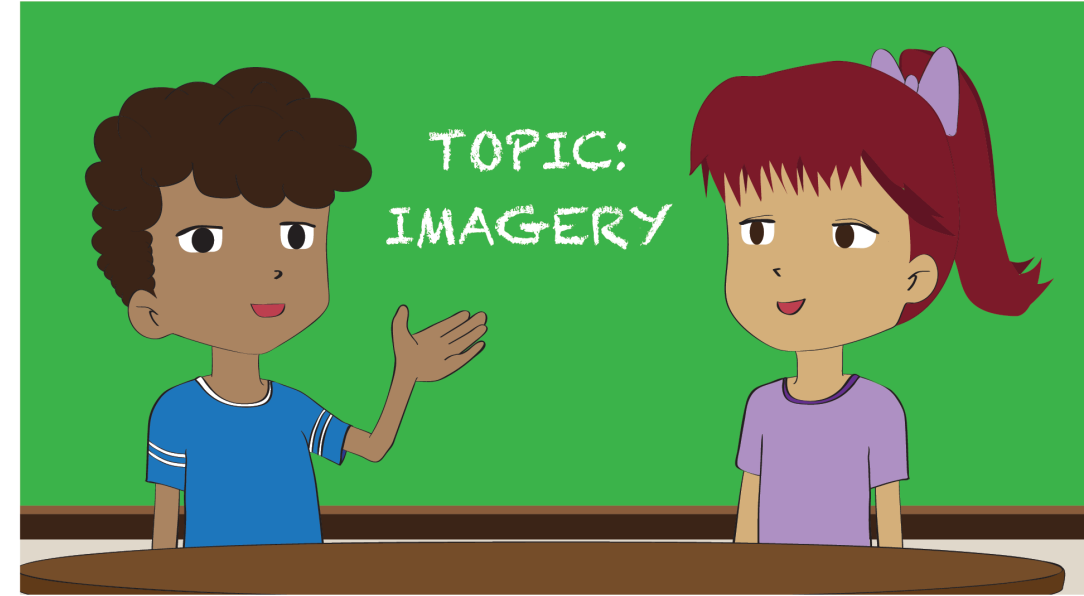
## HOW TO STRUCTURE TURN-AND-TALK ACTIVITIES

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.

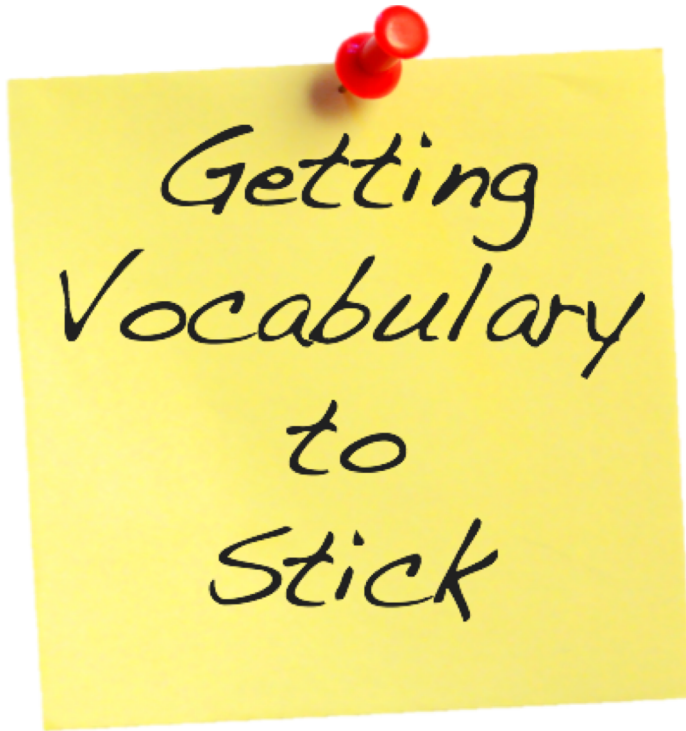
*Example:* Brainstorm some words that would provide imagery to your reader if you were describing your favorite food.

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?



# In Closing



- This is just the first step!
- Provide additional practice opportunities—See Strategy Guide
  - Warm Ups
  - Frayer Model
  - Writing Prompts
- [Greatmiddleschools.org/words](https://Greatmiddleschools.org/words)