

Introduction

VOCABULARY WORDS FOR PRIMARY GRADE STUDENTS

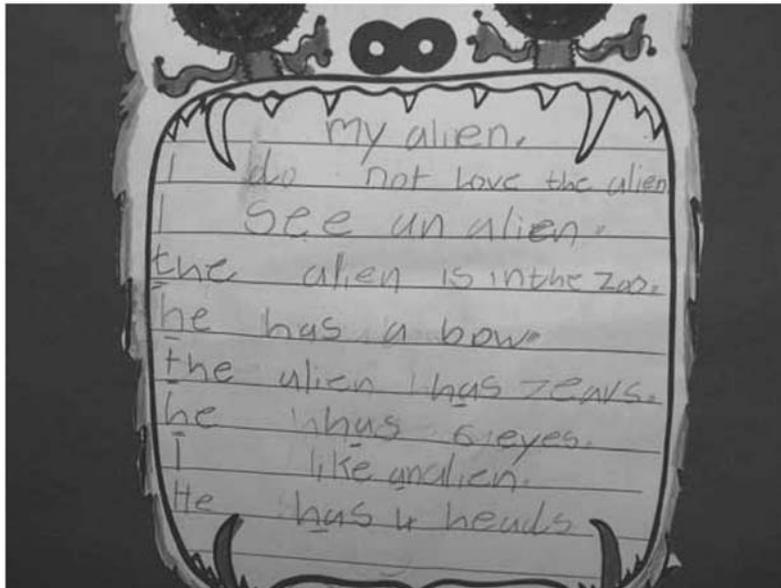
Vocabulary instruction that inspires such fascination needs to be robust: vigorous, strong, and powerful in effect. It also needs to be interactive and motivating.

~Beck, McKeown, & Kucan (2002, p. x)

Vocabulary is a tool to communicate known words with others (Harris & Hodges, 1995). A first grader, who wrote the story about the alien in Figure 0.1, uses descriptive vocabulary to communicate information about the alien, which the student “does not love.”

What captured my attention about this story was the way the young author explains his feeling about the alien in the first sentence. We know right away that the author does not love aliens. When children begin to have internal command of vocabulary, they begin to express thoughts and feelings confidently. Children

Figure 0.1



acquire or internalize words from the natural environment building from this repertoire of words to expand vocabulary through experiences with oral and written language. The vocabulary lists in this book are based on primary grade students' authentic writing samples. They are referred to as *authentic* because the teachers did not revise the writing samples, and they do not use writing prompts or require that the student fill in blanks. Which words in the lists are from the study? Which ones are added to supplement and extend the learning? The words from the study are presented in **bold** type. Additional words have been provided to supplement and extend the learning. Where appropriate, activities that include the use of high-quality children's books have been presented. The complete list of words from the study can be found in Chapter 7, List #38.

USING THESE LISTS TO DEVELOP VOCABULARY

Primary grade teachers who wish to develop children's vocabulary with the goal of improving reading instruction can use this book with integrated thematic units. Lists are organized around the everyday experiences of how children learn vocabulary:

- Through daily oral language engagements in the classroom, in social settings, and in the home environment
- By listening to adults read to them through storybooks and print-rich materials
- From independent reading using different types of literature, texts, and interactive reading tools

Educators will find the chapter topic themes valuable when planning curriculum for the school year or for quick lessons on theme-based word lists. The lists focus on needs of individual students. For example, with early primary grade children who are not yet reading, Part I will be valuable because the chapters focus on beginning word knowledge common to school literacy programs. Part II focuses on words they will encounter during read-aloud experiences. Part III presents words from text encounters using a variety of print-rich resources.

Teachers working in early childhood centers will benefit from the inclusion of strategically selected children's literature that supports each chapter's theme. Improving oral language development with early primary grade children is a goal in Early Reading First initiatives (Block & Israel, 2005). The book's research-based vocabulary activities are directly correlated with the children's literature and overarching part goals.

UNDERSTANDING EARLY READING FIRST AND READING FIRST VOCABULARY INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

The following section defines vocabulary instructional goals of the Early Reading First and Reading First initiatives. Both initiatives are supported by

findings from the *Report of the National Reading Panel* (NICHD, 2000). Vocabulary is essential to reading and reading comprehension. Increased vocabulary acquisition occurs indirectly or directly. Before children attend kindergarten, oral language experiences enhance overall word meanings learned. Children listen to adults before they are able to talk and communicate. Hearing vocabulary used in the context of conversations is the indirect beginning of vocabulary knowledge. Listening intently to adults during reading is another aspect of how children acquire vocabulary indirectly. As adults read to children, it is particularly effective when they stop and elaborate on new words or interesting words, discussing meaning in the context of the story. Once children are able to read independently, they learn more words as they encounter them. Unfamiliar words disrupt meaning construction; therefore, teaching children vocabulary strategies to use during independent reading is necessary. Direct instruction is another method to introduce word meaning and independent word building strategies.

Vocabulary instruction deepens when done effectively; it reinforces word learning. Specific strategies recommended through research from the National Reading Panel include the following:

- Introduce new words prior to reading.
- Teach students to use prior knowledge to make connections with new words.
- Provide extended instruction with repeated occurrences of vocabulary to help children learn new words.
- Teach new words in contexts that students encounter frequently.
- Use active engagement based on individual learning needs to promote word learning.
- Reinforce learning connections of new words by teaching specific words related to topics or organized around themes.
- Teach writing to help children understand more deeply the meaning of new words.
- Teach efficient use of vocabulary resources such as dictionaries, thesauruses, and glossaries to help students increase their knowledge of the meanings of words and to make connections with other words and multiple meanings.
- Teach the etymology, as well as affixes (prefixes and suffixes), and base words and root words to enhance vocabulary acquisition.

Choosing Words to Learn

Primary grade teachers should choose words carefully. There are three categories of words that can be taught: words particularly useful to the text, words that are very important to reading comprehension, and words that are difficult to read and understand. Often students find it difficult to decode words that have more than one meaning.

Many students will begin school with their own repertoire of vocabulary. One simple assessment that primary grade teachers can use with all the lists is to find out their students' level of word knowledge. For instance, teachers can

invite students to generate lists of words they know. Teachers can establish levels of word knowledge and focus instructional time on learning related words, such as synonyms and antonyms or words that are more challenging. Word knowledge can be placed in the following levels:

- Unfamiliar words
- Somewhat familiar words
- Very familiar words

Based on the implications presented by Fry (2004), more common or higher frequency word correspondences should be taught first. Therefore, in this book initial chapters within each part build on words from the primary writing study that teachers should teach initially. As teachers begin to provide different literacy experiences, such as read-alouds, vocabulary knowledge builds if intentionally taught by the teacher.

SUMMARY

There are three primary goals of this book. The first goal is to integrate the findings based on an analysis of a national word study investigation of word utilization with primary grade children in the United States with natural word learning strategies. The second goal of this book is to communicate effective methods of building word skills through oral language, storybook reading, and independent reading. The third goal of this book is to utilize high-quality literature to help teachers of primary grade children integrate new vocabulary during the normal course of the day.

Exemplary literacy teachers use rich literacy materials during daily read-alouds and use these experiences as a way to motivate and engage students in literacy learning (Block, Oakar, & Hurt, 2002; Block & Mangieri, 2003). According to the *Report of the National Reading Panel* (NICHD, 2000), greater emphasis needs to be placed on vocabulary development. As Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) stated in the beginning quote of this chapter, “Vocabulary instruction that inspires such fascination needs to be robust: vigorous, strong, and powerful in effect. It also needs to be interactive and motivating.” Educators concerned with building primary grade children’s vocabulary will find that the word lists inspire and fascinate children. The research-based instructional strategies combined with high-quality literature are robust and will motivate children to learn words and be inspired along the way.