

Using Word Walks to Build Vocabulary

Summary: Teaching vocabulary in the context of storybooks is an effective strategy, but doing so can often be too complicated, especially for younger students. In an article for *The Reading Teacher*, two professors discuss “Word Walks” as a way to provide impactful vocabulary instruction (ways to use this strategy for older students are also discussed in this writeup).

Practical Applications

Research has established that students need to be exposed to the same word multiple times if they are to truly understand it. Word Walks are an adapted version of Text Walks that work best for younger students such as those in kindergarten or Pre-K. In a Word Walk, one to two words are chosen to focus on during two days of reading the same story out loud (any more and either students could not hold the information or vocabulary instruction took too much time out of the reading block). The components are as follows:

- “Before reading on the first day of the Word Walk, the teacher introduces one or two vocabulary words by showing the written word(s) on a small paper or sentence strip and making the word(s) come to life by showing a picture or prop or acting out the concept.” The teacher should provide the definition up front so that students aren’t guessing, and the teacher should also prompt the students to listen for the words in the story.
- During reading, the teacher pauses at each vocabulary word and reiterates the definition.
- After reading, there is a teacher-led discussion about the words, with the teacher going back to the places in the book where the words appeared and also providing examples of other contexts where the word might be used (e.g. for the word enormous, “Other things can be *enormous* too ... elephants are enormous animals.”)
- The second day follows a similar before-, during-, and after-reading structure, but is much more student-centered, with students asked to talk about how the words are used in the story or to give examples of other contexts in which they might use the words.
- Throughout the two days, the students are led to repeat the words to gain familiarity.

For older students, Word Walks can be adapted to resemble the more traditional Text Walks, in which:

- More words are used per story (3-4 words).
- Instruction on those words occurs only over one day of reading.
- The before- and during-reading components might be (but are not necessarily) de-emphasized, with most of the focus on the after-reading components.

Conclusion and Citation

Embedding vocabulary instruction in read-alouds and other story reading through the use of Word Walks is a promising strategy for building students’ vocabulary knowledge.

Beauchat, K. & Blamey, K. “Word Walk: Vocabulary Instruction for Young Children.” *The Reading Teacher*, 65.1 (2011), pp. 71-75. <http://bit.ly/rtzvEb> (subscription only).