

## Part 1

# What Is Good Vocabulary Development?

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## Why Vocabulary? Why Teach It?

The *Wordly Wise 3000* series focuses on improving students' vocabulary by furthering their understanding of new words and concepts. Studies have shown that word knowledge and reading comprehension are strongly correlated,<sup>1</sup> and researchers have found that reading comprehension is a key component of academic success.<sup>2</sup> Students need to be able to comprehend what they read, both in class and out, in order to succeed in high school and college. Limited vocabularies prevent students from comprehending a text.

Poor readers often read less, because reading is difficult and frustrating for them. This means they don't read enough to improve their vocabularies, which could help them comprehend more. This perpetuating cycle can mean that as students continue through middle school and high school, the gap between good and poor readers grows wider.

Direct instruction in vocabulary can help arrest this cycle. Good readers often acquire much of their vocabulary through wide independent reading, also known as incidental learning. However, explicit instruction can help students learn enough words to become better readers (and thus acquire even more words).

The average student learns about 3,000 words a year or six to eight words per day—a remarkable achievement! If students are taught new words at a rate of eight to ten words per week for 37 to 50 weeks, about 300 to 500 words per year can be taught through direct instruction.<sup>3</sup> This leaves a large portion of words to be learned through independent reading, which is essential to acquiring word knowledge.

Although the percentage of words learned through direct instruction may seem small, it is significant. Steven A. Stahl has pointed out that for students at the lower end of the vocabulary range, who learn perhaps 1,000 words a year, a gain of 300 words equals a 30 percent increase, and that for average students a gain of even 10 percent is educationally significant—especially if it is repeated year after year.<sup>4</sup>

## Part 2

# General Strategies and Specific Techniques for Teaching Vocabulary

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## Other Aspects of Good Vocabulary Development

Effective vocabulary development is a multifaceted process requiring a combination of direct instruction, discussion, and active encouragement of independent learning strategies. On their own and in the classroom, students draw on a variety of methods to learn the thousands of words they acquire each year. This part of the Guide will discuss the following general strategies and specific techniques to keep in mind as you teach vocabulary:

- encouraging wide reading
- emphasizing learning from context
- using prefixes, suffixes, and roots
- using graphic organizers such as semantic maps, concept of definition maps, semantic feature analysis, and Venn diagrams
- extending instruction through reading aloud and discussion

These approaches will enhance your vocabulary curriculum and can be used to supplement the direct instruction that *Wordly Wise 3000* provides.

## Volumes of Volumes: Encouraging Wide Reading

Getting your students to read more may be the most valuable thing you can do to improve their vocabulary. Most of the words your students learn will be acquired through incidental learning, as they read on their own. The average student learns about 3,000 words a year. Although direct instruction plays a crucial part in vocabulary growth, evidence shows that wide reading is the main avenue for student word acquisition. Researchers have demonstrated the effectiveness of wide reading as follows:<sup>12</sup>

- If, over a school year, a fifth-grader reads for an hour each day, five days a week, in and out of school at a conservative rate of 150 words per minute, the student will encounter 2,250,000 words in the course of reading.
- If 2 to 5 percent of the words the student encounters are unknown words, he or she will encounter from 45,000 to 112,500 new words.
- We know that students learn between 5 and 10 percent of previously unknown words from a single reading. Using the lower number given above for unknown words encountered during the reading program, we see that a student would learn at least 2,250 new words from context each year.

This estimate suggests that incidental learning is critical to vocabulary development. Again, the more students read, the more word meanings they will know and the more likely it is that they will read with pleasure and comprehension.

To be truly beneficial, wide reading should include texts at a variety of difficulty levels. Students reading at or below their current levels will not dramatically increase their vocabulary, but if they read texts that consist primarily of unknown words, they will only become frustrated. To help them get the most out of incidental learning, you should have them read some books for fun and others for a challenge.

Motivating students to read can be a difficult task in itself. Here are a few suggestions for making reading appealing to students at all ability levels:

- Devote some class time to independent silent reading. This time may be particularly helpful for students who have never done extensive reading for pleasure. Reading for a length of time in class will enable students to do this on their own outside of class.
- Make a variety of books available in class and recommend books for students to find in the library and to read outside of class. You might want to provide lists of books you think your students would like.
- Promote social interactions related to reading. Setting a time for regular book discussions will motivate students to read more and help them understand better what they have read. (The importance of discussion will be explored further in the final section of Part 2, page 24.)
- Model the importance you place on reading by telling students about books you are reading. When students have silent reading time, read a book of your own to show that reading is a valuable activity that you enjoy, too.

## Part 3

### Sample Lessons

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This part of the Guide provides instruction and modeling of how to teach sample lessons in Books 6 and 9. These instructions will help you introduce the basic concepts and approaches used in the lessons and will also help you extend the lessons, using the strategies and techniques discussed in Part 2. We have provided lessons from two different grade levels, but the approaches presented will work no matter what level you are teaching. If you have not taught your students a *Wordly Wise 3000* lesson before, please refer first to the Book 6, Lesson 1, sample lesson instructions on pages 26–31. The general instructions for this lesson will help you get started with all *Wordly Wise 3000* lessons.

#### Book 6, Lesson 1

##### Word List: General Instructions

Have students look at the word list for Lesson 1. Tell them that each lesson in *Wordly Wise 3000* opens with a list of 15 words that they will discuss and learn, and that the word list will be followed by several exercises.

Tell them that each word list provides definitions of the words as well as examples of how the words are used in sentences. Since this is the first lesson in the book, you may want to discuss the word list as a class. Point out that each word's pronunciation is given beneath it and that each definition includes the word's part of speech. Say that often a word will take more than one form, as in the twelfth word, *plumb*, which is defined as a verb and an adjective. Also tell them that the words will often have more than one meaning.

**plumb**  
plum

*v.* 1. To measure the depth of water.

[The lake was too deep for us to *plumb*.]

2. To reach the deepest part of.

[The bathyscaphe is a vessel designed to *plumb* the oceans of the world.]

3. To understand by examining closely; to solve.

[Her latest book of poems is a valiant attempt to *plumb* the human soul.]

*adj.* Straight up and down; vertical.

[The bricklayer keeps checking to make sure that the wall being built is *plumb*.]