

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #68: K.I.M. (High Five Strategy #2)

Hope you are enjoying the Middle School High Five so far. Now that your students have practiced Read Around the Text for two weeks, it is time to focus on a vocabulary strategy. Let's start off the new quarter with some staggering statistics.

The Need for a Print-Rich Environment

45,000,000 is the number of words that a 4-year old will hear from a print-rich, literary environment. 13,000,000 is the number of words a toddler learns in an environment void of print. Students starting kindergarten with this kind of vocabulary gap make teaching reading even more of a challenge.

Exposure to New and Unusual (Rare) Words in Context

- 11 in every 1,000 words are rare in adult-to-child conversations.
- 17 in every 1,000 words are rare in adult-to-adult conversations.
- 22 in every 1,000 words are rare in prime time TV.
- 30 in every 1,000 words are rare in children's books.
- 53 in every 1,000 words are rare in comic books.
- 68 in every 1,000 words are rare in newspapers.
- 128 in every 1,000 words are rare in expository text like scientific papers, etc.

Source: Gallagher, Kelly. *Reading Reasons*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse, 2003.

So what can we do? The best way to move into rare words is through print because authors know the importance of word choice and work hard at it. Developing a vocabulary is largely achieved through repeated exposure to unfamiliar words in context. Because of this, we need to devote as much time as we can to extensive reading. Did you notice in the above table how powerful comic books and newspapers are for exposure to rare words?

Amount of Time spent Reading and Reading Achievement of Fifth Graders

[This attachment gives the results of a study](#) done by Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding in 1988. Students who read the most not only develop mature vocabularies, but they also perform better on reading tests.

K.I.M. Sheet

This vocabulary activity does not rely on the use of a dictionary right away. We know that when students are sent to a dictionary to look up an unknown word, they often choose the shortest definition to read, which is not necessarily the correct one. Also dictionary "language" is not student-friendly, so most students have trouble comprehending the



definition. Instead rely on a group discussion of new words eliciting prior knowledge that students might already have. Refer to the context in which the word is found. Use prefixes, roots, and suffixes to help predict the word's meaning. Discuss the characteristics of the word's meaning and the characteristics of what the word is not. Consult the dictionary to validate student predictions and to clarify the meaning.

[The K.I.M. sheet](#) is easy for students to navigate. **K** stands for the key word, and students simply record the vocabulary word to be learned. **I** stands for important information. Encourage students to record what they have learned about the key word in "their own words." **M** stands for memory device or mnemonic. Ask students to draw something to help them remember the meaning of the word. Sometimes drawing weird connections helps the brain to remember new information longer. An example is with the word defeat. A student might actually draw a foot stomping out something to show it winning. The silly connection with an oversized foot can be a useful memory aid. Another idea is to add color cues since they can serve as a strong memory link.

To cement the meaning of the word, students need to practice using it in context. Yes, this means students need to write a sentence using the word embedded in meaningful context. And this is no easy task! Getting the part of speech correct is a challenge for all of us when using a new word for the first time. Model a well-constructed sentence using the key word. Then ask students to imitate it by substituting their own thoughts but keeping the sentence structure the same. Need some well-written sentences for your vocabulary words and don't want to write them yourself? The following on-line dictionary provides such sentences in most of their entries:

<http://dictionary.cambridge.org>

[Step Up to Writing has a blackline master](#) that helps students understand the difference between meaningful sentences and other versions. Use 6-20 to teach students the difference between sentences that are pointless, replacements, dictionary restatements, and meaningful.

Choosing Words

How do you know which words to choose for vocabulary study? Don't just default to the bold-faced words. Choose your words wisely. Avid readers benefit from studying unusual/rare words because they already have a well-developed vocabulary from their wide reading. On the other hand, struggling readers benefit from studying high-utility words. Here is an example.

The boys banked the canoe to the lee side of the rock.

Most of us might be tempted to teach the word *lee*, and for avid readers this is a good choice. For struggling readers, the word *banked* used in this context might cause trouble, and it's possible the word *canoe* might not be familiar either.

Source: Beers, Kylene. *Elements of Literature*. Holt, 2005.



**Amount of Time Spent Reading and
Reading Achievement of Fifth Graders**

Percentile Rank on Reading Tests	Minutes of Reading Per Day	Estimated Number of Words Read Each Year
98%	90.7	4,733,000
90%	40.4	2,357,000
70%	21.7	1,168,000
50%	12.9	601,000
20%	3.1	134,000
10%	1.6	51,000

Name: _____

Period: _____

K. (K = Key Vocabulary Word)	I. (I = Information/Definition)	M. (M = Memory Cue/Picture)
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Your Sentence:

K. (K = Key Vocabulary Word)	I. (I = Information/Definition)	M. (M = Memory Cue/Picture)
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Your Sentence:

K. (K = Key Vocabulary Word)	I. (I = Information/Definition)	M. (M = Memory Cue/Picture)
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Your Sentence:

K. (K = Key Vocabulary Word)	I. (I = Information/Definition)	M. (M = Memory Cue/Picture)
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Your Sentence:

Meaningful Sentences

Pointless ➡ No value: doesn't reflect understanding of the word

I don't like the word *anthem*.
I can spell the word *governess*.
Ajar is an interesting word.

Replace ➡ Looks good, but doesn't prove understanding of the word

On Monday, we enjoyed singing the *anthem* in class.
The *governess* walked into the room and asked to speak
with the mistress of the house.
The door was left *ajar*.

Dictionary ➡ Just rephrases the definition

An *anthem* is a sacred song.
A *governess* is a woman who works for a family by
taking care of the children.
A window or door is *ajar* if it is left open just a little bit.

Meaningful ➡ Full of meaning; creates a "mind movie" and paints a picture; demonstrates understanding

Miami's Pro Player Stadium erupted with cheers as Cher belted out the last lines of our national *anthem* at Super Bowl XXXIII.
Walking onto the grass in our back yard, Ms. Howard, our *governess*, quickly interrupted our soccer game and directed us to the library so we could complete our math lesson.
When I heard noise in the basement, I hurried down the stairs only to find the door to Hector's cage *ajar*; my hamster was on the prowl again.