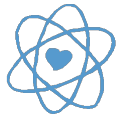




| White Paper

The World of Words: A Shared-Book Reading Program to Promote Vocabulary

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It's story time for a group of 5-year-olds. They are gathered around their classroom teacher, Ms. Simon, and are eagerly waiting to learn about insects and the world in which they live. To introduce the new topic and help build background knowledge, Ms. Simon explains, "This week we are going to read books and learn all about insects. Insects are small creatures that live all around us. Look at this picture. You'll notice some common features: Whether they are ants or moths or bees, all insects have six legs and three body segments."

Ms. Simon continues, "Today, you'll listen for three magic words in our book: katydid, ant and praying mantis." She opens the book. "This is a katydid, a type of insect that looks like a leaf." She then turns the page. "And here's an ant. I bet you've seen ants many times before." On a third page, she says, "Here's a third type of insect, a praying mantis. Can anyone tell me how the praying mantis might have gotten its name?" Ms. Simon begins to read the text, sometimes stopping to briefly discuss what is happening in the book and to highlight the three magic words. After reading, she engages children in a discussion about insects and their important features, such as their physical characteristics, what they need to live and survive, and their different habitats.



The next day, Ms. Simon reviews the magic words, and then reads a second book about insects. While reading this second book, she introduces additional words, giving children opportunities to make comparisons and build connections across texts. Over the course of the next two weeks, Ms. Simon continues to add new words and concepts while reading five different books on the “insects” theme, helping children make cumulative connections across texts and words. Throughout their discussions, the class will focus on some of the big ideas that run throughout all of texts: insects are living things; all insects have a life cycle; how insects protect themselves from enemies; and so forth. In doing so, children will have not only extended their content vocabulary knowledge by building upon previously taught information. They also will have formed important connections across texts that will help them build increasingly complex knowledge networks and support their comprehension abilities.

What you’ll notice in this example is that Ms. Simon used shared book reading time as a key opportunity to expand children’s content vocabulary knowledge in the context of teaching both words and conceptual big ideas. In other words, she used these fascinating books to help children connect their *word knowledge* with their *world knowledge*. And in so doing, she promoted the critical vocabulary and comprehension skills her students need to become highly proficient and engaged young readers.

The Importance of Developing Vocabulary and Knowledge Networks

It seems almost intuitive that developing a large and rich vocabulary is central to learning to read. Logically, children must know the words that make up written texts in order to understand them, especially as the vocabulary demands of content-related materials increase in the upper grades. Numerous studies (Beck & McKeown, 2007; Stanovich & Cunningham, 1992) have documented that the size of a person’s vocabulary is strongly related to how well that person will understand what he or she reads not only in the primary grades, but in reading comprehension in high school. Yet here’s the practical problem. Right from the beginning of schooling, there are profound differences in vocabulary knowledge among young learners from different socio-economic groups. Just consider the following statistics: By age 3, a child’s interaction with his or her family has already produced significant vocabulary differences across socioeconomic lines, differences so dramatic that it represents a “30-million word catastrophe,” according to Betty Hart and Todd Risley (2003). Recent studies suggest that environmental factors associated with vocabulary development and emergent literacy skills are already present among children as early as 15 months of age. By first grade, unfortunately, its repercussions become all too clear (Graves, 2006): children from higher-SES groups are likely to know about twice as many words as lower SES children, putting these children at significant risk for school failure.

Luckily, there is now a rich and accumulated new knowledge base that suggests a far different scenario. Consider these statistics:

- The highest rate of vocabulary development occurs during the early childhood years—therefore, it represents a crucial time when we can be proactive in promoting children’s vocabulary development
- Effective vocabulary intervention can essentially erase reading difficulties later on. With effective instruction, children can go on to achieve grade level expectations in fourth grade and beyond.
- The quantity, quality, and responsiveness of teacher talk can significantly improve children’s receptive and expressive vocabulary.

- Gains in vocabulary development can predict growth in comprehension and later reading performance.

Importantly, knowledge of words merely represents the tip of the iceberg. Words are related to concepts and it is this network of concepts that is so important for comprehension development. Children develop vocabulary knowledge by understanding the relationships between new words and their connected concepts. For example, it would be difficult to understand the importance of the words like “stem” and “root” without knowing something about its relationship to plants and their growth. Knowing a word’s meaning, then, implies that one understand a network of concepts that are connected with the word. And it turns out that shared book reading, in a sequence described below, is a perfect context for helping children develop vocabulary and knowledge networks.

Three Instructional Principles for Building Content-rich Vocabulary and Knowledge Networks

Today, there is a superabundance of good books awaiting children and teachers due to a virtual explosion in publishing for young children. *World of Words* helps teachers in Pre-K, Kindergarten and First Grade, take advantage of this panoply of books by strategically organizing collections to best support children’s developing vocabulary and comprehension skills.

World of Words organizes books and lesson plans through a series of text sets. In each text set, books that are unified by the big ideas that they explore. The five books in each text are carefully organized to provide children with repeated exposure to content-rich vocabulary different types of text. But what sets our materials apart from all other thematic resources is our systematic focus on building children’s vocabulary knowledge, their understanding of key concepts related to these words, and their comprehension of conceptual big ideas. To do so, *World of Words* utilizes three critical principles: (1) use text genre to children’s advantage; (2) highlight key skills with easy-to-use lesson plans; and (3) connect learning both within and across topics to create knowledge networks.

Principle #1: Use text genre to children’s advantage

World of Words uses different types of texts to build word knowledge and comprehension. These types of text, or *genres*, create unique opportunities for learning. For example, try reading one of our favorite books, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Children will naturally participate in reading along with you as they become familiar with common lines and the cadence of the language. Now try reading an information book about insects. You’ll find that this book has more dense vocabulary, develops more concepts, and often uses diagrams or specific illustrations to convey meaning. The information book may be very interesting to children, but it can also be more challenging for them to understand.

In *World of Words*, we have developed a specific strategy to help children comprehend different kinds of text by using particular genre features to our advantage. Rather than



“leveling” text, which is based on matching children’s instructional level to the text, we instead utilize the challenging nature of the text to encourage children to move forward. Each text set starts with more familiar text genres. These books help children build critical background knowledge, and give them the skills necessary to successfully engage with the more challenging information genre introduced later in the text sets.

Here’s how *World of Words* does it.

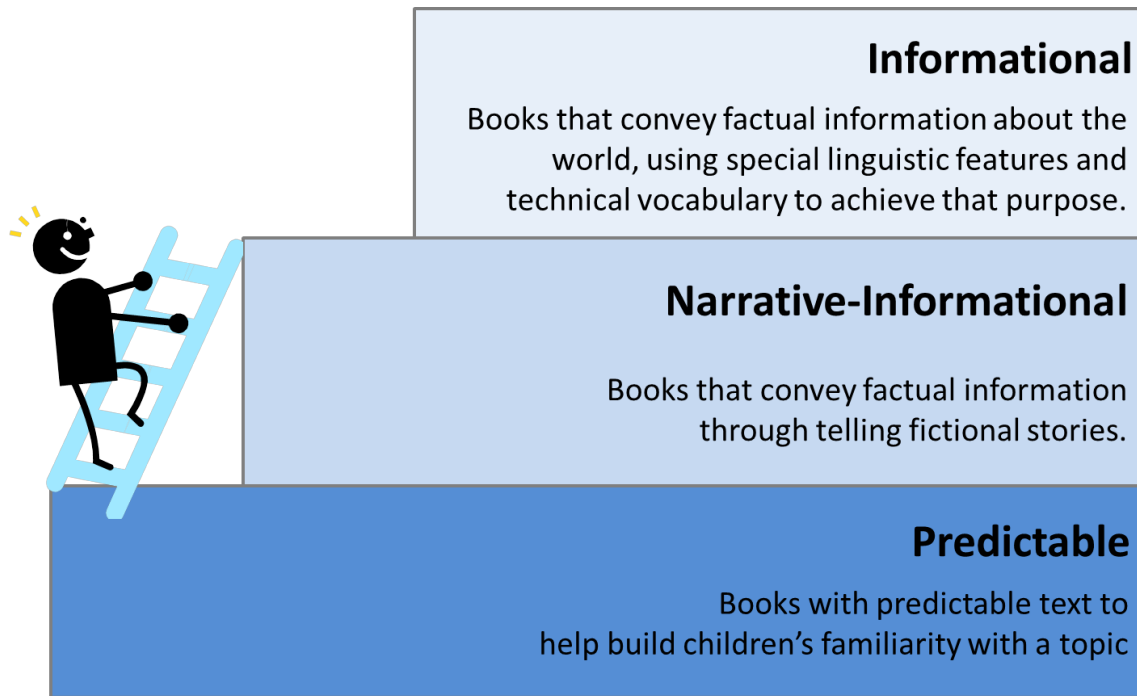


Figure 1. *World of Words* text sequence

Start with predictable books. Predictable books typically have memorable rhyming or repetitive word patterns that enable children to anticipate words, phrases, and events in the story. For example, *The Three Bears* (Galdone, 1972) repeatedly uses the classic “too hot-too cold-just right” pattern throughout the story of Goldilocks and the three bears. These predictable books tend to be short and perfect for re-reading. After reading a predictable book about three times, you’ll find that children will remember the key words and begin to use them in meaningful contexts.

Move on to rhyming books. The text set then moves on to another type of memorable book, ones that use rhyming as a pattern. Rhyming books are especially useful for helping children hear the distinctive sounds within academic words. For example, *Have You Seen Bugs?* (Oppenheim, 1996) identifies the key characteristics of insects through colorful rhymes. For example:

Like warning signs,
bold markings say:
I’m poison! I smell!
I sting! Stay away! (p. 9).

These rhymes give children a more vivid account of certain terms, such as *markings*, through lively language. In addition, rhyming words and phrases often act as a memory cue, helping children to remember key terms introduced in the book.

Introduce storybooks. Next, **WOW** introduces children to storybooks, a slightly more complicated text genre. Good storybooks introduce children to characters, settings, episodes, and resolutions. This predictable “story grammar” helps children remember these wonderful tales. In World of Words, we use a special type of storybook, called narrative informational, or narrative non-fiction, texts. These books use a familiar storybook format to provide children with important information about the key concepts and big ideas of the text set. For example, *Little Pink Pup* (Kerby, 2010) teaches children about the needs of baby animals, such as food and shelter, through the story of Pink the piglet. These storybooks discuss topics in a fun way and give students a chance to meet interesting characters in many new contexts.

Challenge with information books. To prepare children for the challenges of information books, World of Words first focuses on predictable, rhyming and narrative informational books. This sequence gives children the opportunity to build familiarity with key words and concepts. Information books are introduced at the end of the sequence because they require children to have a good handle on the vocabulary and concepts related to the topic. Although these information books are still challenging, children can understand them because we have set the groundwork in advance. This is what distinguishes World of Words from other shared book-reading materials.

Because children have begun to develop a knowledge network of words and concepts through each step text set sequence, children’s reading of information books is deeper and more meaningful. These information books capture children’s interests and foster their desire to learn more about the topic. Furthermore, information books will introduce children to the critical features of information text genre, including diagrams, captions, and glossaries.

With World of Words, our technique is to provide text sets with a clear sequence, from predictable books through information books. Introducing books in this sequence makes it easier for children to acquire the key academic vocabulary and concepts necessary to meet the expectations required of the Common Core. World of Words provides a systematic, scaffolded approach that enhances children’s opportunity to engage with text and learn complex words and concepts. Plan to read the World of Words books in the order that has been provided so that children can get the greatest benefit from shared-book reading activities.

Principle #2: Highlight key skills with easy-to-use lesson plans

We’ve designed easy-to-use lesson plans to accompany the five books in each of the World of Words text sets. These lesson plans are based on the understanding that YOU make the difference in helping children get the most out of reading these delightful and interesting books. Studies have shown that how teachers read books and the types of interactions they build around shared-reading make an important contribution to what



children learn from their book reading experiences. But just like the text type, there are different types of conversations and interactions that are likely to help scaffold children's comprehension and learning.

When reading a predictable book, for example, you might start with helping children identify the key words, or magic words, introduced in the text. You'll want to give brief, child-friendly definitions of these words. You might then ask children to listen closely and raise their hands when they hear these words in the story. Predictable books are especially ideal for identifying and defining new words. At the same time, because they most often lack a story structure, predictable books are often less than ideal for re-telling or asking open-ended questions.

In *World of Words*, our lesson plans have been carefully calibrated for each type of book. We have attempted to save you time by suggesting the kinds of discussions, questions, and interactions that will be most beneficial when reading these books with children. In our lesson plans, we use an easy guide to remembering the types of interactions that will work best with each type of book (see Figure 2): Talk together; Read Together; Reflect Together. This simple strategy is based on both research and reviews of best practice suggesting that effective vocabulary and comprehension instruction needs to:

- Be systematic and explicitly provide children with plenty of opportunities to use words during classroom interactions;
- Involve a good deal of practice that is active, guided and extensive;
- Incorporate periodic review and practice;
- Include progress-monitoring to ensure that children are learning.

We know that attempting to include all of these teaching practices are likely to be hard to do in an average day. In *World of Words*, lessons are organized to highlight certain key skills and practices in each book.

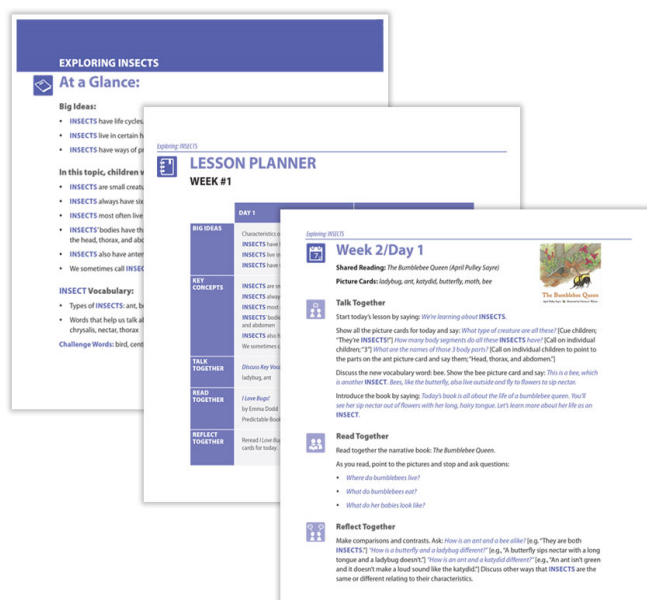


Figure 2. *World of Words* contains a variety of lesson planning tools for each topic. At a Glance, weekly and daily views are available.

Let's show you how the INQUIRE process works. Along the way, we'll discuss examples from a text set, Baby Animals. These examples are intended to help illustrate the kinds of questions, responses, and dialogue you might elicit from children when discussing the *World of Words* materials.

Step 1: Talk together by introducing the book and the topic of the lesson. It's a good idea to introduce children to the book, as well as the specific topic you are going to read about and discuss. Children listen more purposefully when they understand why they are reading a particular book.

This step is especially important when reading the predictable books. In the lesson plan for *Let's Go Visiting* (Williams & Vivas, 1998), this step is clearly highlighted. You might introduce the book and the lesson topic by saying:

TEACHER: "Today we are going to talk about baby animals. Our book is called *Let's Go Visiting*. It was written by Sue Williams and illustrated by Julie Vivas."

After introducing the book and the topic of the lesson, you will want to expose children to the new words introduced in the book. At the beginning of each topic, we focus specifically on introducing and naming new words. This provides children with information that is foundational to their vocabulary acquisition and comprehension. In the Talk Together section, key words that are topically related to the lesson. These key words are suggestions of words included in the book that might be challenging for children. In general, we suggest introducing children to at least three of the key words. Provide children with a simple definition for each key word. For the book *Does a Kangaroo Have a Mother, Too?* (Carle, 2000), you might point to the illustration of the mother and baby kangaroo and say:

TEACHER: "Look at this animal! This is a kangaroo. Kangaroos are animals that carry their babies in pouches. Let's say kangaroo together."

ALL: "Kangaroo!"

This step helps place all the children on a level playing field by providing them some basic information. Choral responses, such as asking children to label the kangaroo with you, are a good way to review the vocabulary and definitions, and allow children to participate in the lesson.

Step 2: Read Together: As the books become a bit more challenging you will want to encourage children to recall information and begin to think deeply about the things they have been learning. Asking open-ended questions, or wh-questions, will engage children in thinking more about what is included in the text. In the Common Core, this is often described as "close reading" or helping children to scrutinize the text for more detail.



These questions encourage children to participate in discussion. The emphasis is not finding the “right” answer. Rather, this step focuses on children’s rationale and guiding their explanations. Using familiar formulations, such as asking children to observe how things are alike or different, will encourage critical thinking. As the text sequence progresses, children will begin to provide explanations that draw more richly on the key concepts and big ideas of the text set.

When reading *Baby Animals: Pets* (Wilson & Butler, 2011), you might have a discussion like this one:

TEACHER: “Pets are animals that live with people. How are pets different from family members, like your brothers and sisters?”

CHILD: “I have a mom!”

TEACHER: “How does having a mom make you different from your pet?”

CHILD: “My brother and I have the same mom, but my dog has a dog mom.”

TEACHER: “How are pets the same as family members?”

CHILD: “Live in the same house.”

TEACHER: “Yes, pets often live in the same house as their human family.”

Enabling and supporting children to think critically about ideas introduced in text, respond to open-ended questions, and provide rationale for their answers will put them on the road to successfully using text as a knowledge-building support in the primary grades and beyond.

Step 3: Reflect Together. Each text set is organized around a single theme, such as *Baby Animals*. Within each theme, books not only focus on vocabulary words, but also the key concepts related to the topic. These interrelated concepts help children create knowledge networks, which in turn help scaffold their comprehension and future learning.

In the *Baby Animals* text set, children learn five key concepts: (1) baby animals are living things; (2) living things have babies, or offspring; (3) pets are animals that live with people; (4) baby animals need help from their families; and (5) baby animals grow and change during their life cycle. During Reflection, children relate what they have learned in the book to the key concept of the lesson. After reading *Little Pink Pup* (Kerby, 2010), for example, children are encouraged to think about the ways in which baby animals need help to survive and grow. You might say something like:

TEACHER: “Today, we’ve explored how baby animals need help from their families. Think helped protect both her puppies and Pink the piglet. What are some of the ways that parent animals protect their offspring?”

Similarly, you might ask children:

TEACHER: “In the book, the owner gave lots of things to Pink and the dog family, like blankets and puppy food. How else can people help animal families?”

Each of these examples gives children the opportunity to relate the story of Pink the piglet to the key concept of the lesson, as well as the big ideas running throughout the text set. Learning these key concepts is so important because they help children generalize their knowledge, which can lead to making good inferences. When you help children consolidate their words into key concepts, you are preparing them to comprehend text, which is essential to real reading—that is, reading with understanding. Understanding key concepts can also be a self-teaching device. By knowing the essential properties of a certain category or concept, it is easier to learn new information about category members. For instance, if a child knows that birds have wings and lay eggs, she can infer that an unfamiliar type of bird, the pukeko, also has wings and lays eggs – even without having seen or specifically being taught about pukekos. In addition, during Reflection, children are encouraged to extend what they have learned to the big idea introduced in the text set. Each text set has a single big idea that serves as a connective thread between all of the books and their interrelated key concepts. More specifically, big ideas are those concepts that transfer beyond the immediate lesson topic. This is where you can help children clarify their thinking about what they have learned and applied to other contexts.

As you progress through the *World of Words* materials, you will notice that the big ideas introduced in each text set are closely related and build upon one another. In Baby Animals, for example, the big idea is that living things need certain things to grow and survive. Children are encouraged to think about how animals need food, water, air and shelter, and how these needs might be satisfied. In subsequent text sets, these big ideas are reintroduced and reinforced. Some text sets continue to explore the needs of different types living things, such as Insects and Plants, whereas other text sets focus on particular needs, such as Food.

Big ideas are broad concepts that cut across all of the *World of Words* text sets and help children build connections and draw comparisons between them. As we get to the end of each text set, children are increasingly asked to think carefully about these topics, which enable them to further extend what they are learning to the other broader ideas that go beyond these books. By the end of the sequence, children will have the words, concepts, and content knowledge that will enable them to successfully engage with information text.

Using these selections of best-loved books, the *World of Words* shared reading approach teaches words and their meanings through engaging children in cognitively-demanding language activities using academic vocabulary. These words are semantically clustered to help students develop concepts and form big ideas, which enable them to have the background knowledge essential for reading development.



Principle #3: Connect learning both within and across topics to create knowledge networks

Children need time and opportunity to develop a deep understanding of key concepts and big ideas. Too often, we have seen that curriculum focuses more on breadth rather than depth, giving students a scattershot of information on lots of different, unrelated things. However, children develop a great sense of efficacy when they are allowed to become experts in something—whether they are dinosaur experts or sports fanatics or budding artists, children want to be interested in and knowledgeable about their world. Furthermore, increasing evidence suggests that integrating high-priority content in children’s daily instruction better prepares them for academic success in the primary grades and beyond.

To do so, children need to become immersed in highly interesting, relevant topics over a period of days and weeks, instead of encountering a series of ‘stand-alone’ texts and materials. In this way, *World of Words* supports the development of both breadth and depth of knowledge. We do this by integrating our topics across a broader context of conceptually-related information. Children are cumulatively exposed to relationships between words and concepts across topics, relating what they already know to new knowledge.

The connections between the *World of Words* text sets are illustrated in Figure 3. As you can see, children will learn the essential characteristics of living things, including different types of animals (i.e., mammals, reptiles, insects) and plants. They will also learn about what living things need in order to grow and survive, including food, habitat, and a climate suited to their needs.

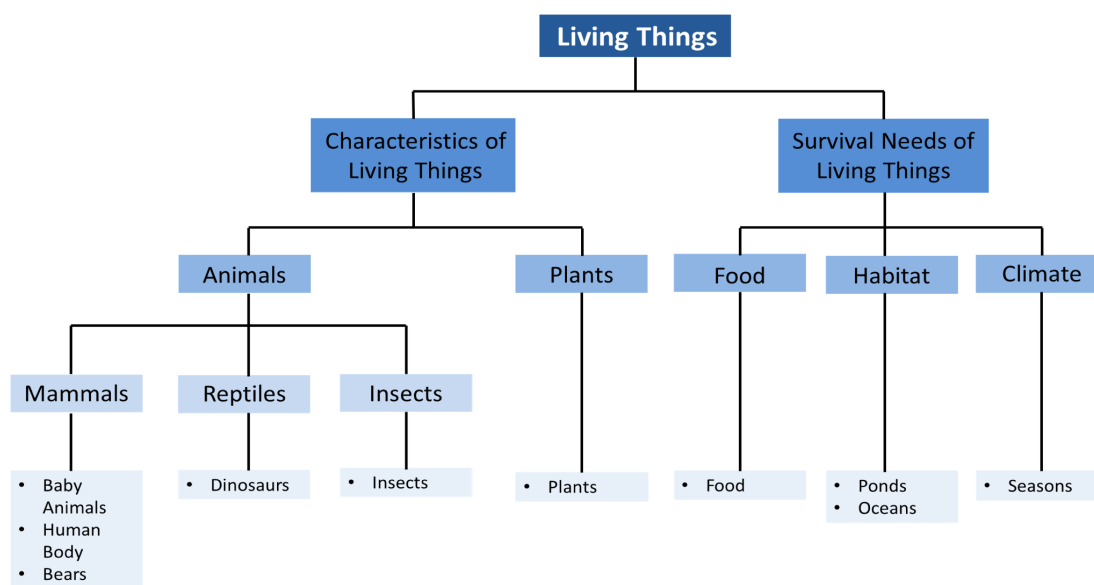


Figure 3. Conceptual connections between *World of Words* text sets.

Because big ideas can serve to anchor the concepts by which smaller ideas can be taught and studied in depth, children will receive repeated exposure to key words and concepts in different contexts, in which they will be applied in different ways. In other words, you don't have to plan for review and practice. It's built in the *World of Words* program. Not through redundant practice and endless worksheets, however, but by tying the various topics together in an overall knowledge network. By strategically aligning the topics in ways that will help children build knowledge, we have used children's natural interest and engagement in the world to enhance their understanding of how it works.

World of Words is a research-based shared book reading that has proven to be highly effective for children at the preschool, kindergarten and first-grade level. Furthermore, it has been tested with great success with special populations such as English language learners and special education students. What we've learned through over five separate trials now is that our success is built on the systematic instructional sequence. You'll find that children will not only learn many new words and concepts, they will build critical background knowledge about the ways in which the world works. Through these wonderful, motivating texts, you will build an exciting *World of Words* that will ensure children's success in reading.

