

CHAPTER 1

The Importance of Academic Vocabulary

A great deal is known about early language development, and in particular about the importance of having older family members immerse young children in oral language and model the value of language. It is also true that throughout life it is much easier for children to expand their vocabularies when they encounter new terms in engaging oral contexts, with many repetitions and concrete referents. Yet, in order to become competent language users, children need to increase their vocabularies far beyond what they use in oral exchanges at home or with friends. In fact, the majority of the words they need are ones they will encounter through reading and learning new content. These are often words that they find in written materials or hear used in school, but may seldom have the opportunity to use orally themselves. This is where teachers have a real responsibility: in helping students build their awareness of and interest in unfamiliar terms, in developing strategies for helping students learn new words and phrases, and in providing settings for using these.

ATTENDING TO ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

In school, science, mathematics, social studies, literature, and humanities classes regularly afford students new opportunities and challenges with language as they learn. A significant challenge is that many of the terms they encounter are not ones that they have ever heard spoken, and the concepts are often new and complex. These terms are generally what are referred to as *academic vocabulary* or *content-area vocabulary*. Academic vocabulary is developed best when teachers attend to the important terms directly, providing guidance to students in identifying and learning these words and phrases. Most of us learn academic vocabulary through reading, writing, and exploring new topics. Students need regular opportunities to learn strategies for identifying and learning words they encounter in their academic work as they read and listen (*receptive vocabularies*); they

also need support in being able to use those words as they speak and write about the content (*expressive vocabularies*). An added challenge in content-area learning is that not only are there large numbers of new concept terms, but the ways in which ideas are expressed vary among academic disciplines. So both the vocabulary and the forms of discourse are central aspects of language development.

Recent work with teachers (Ogle, 2011) illustrates how unfamiliar words create hurdles for students as they try to navigate informational textbooks, magazine articles, and Internet resources. In one unit for third and fourth grades on simple machines, each book contains challenging text. For example, in the “Axes and Plows” section of one book (Glover, 1997), students need to comprehend the following:

An axe is a sharp metal wedge that is fixed to a handle. The handle lets a farmer swing the axe head to hit a log with great force. The sharp wedge-shaped blade of the axe cuts into the wood and splits it apart. (p. 12)

You might want to pause for a moment and check off all the terms that might be new or used in new ways in just these three sentences. Which words are ones that students might encounter in several contexts? Which are most likely to be related specifically to a study of simple machines? Some terms, like *sharp*, *metal*, *head*, *handle*, *swing*, and *fixed*, are general academic terms that students may encounter in many contexts. Others, like *wedge*, *axe head*, *great force*, and *wedge-shaped blade*, are more specific terms that are used to explain simple machines and actions. Some of the seemingly easy words are part of more complex concepts, like *fixed to a handle* and *sharp wedge-shaped blade*. This short paragraph thus contains many challenging terms, phrases, and concepts students need to understand before they can comprehend the passage. This type of dense vocabulary that carries the meaning is common in informational texts used in our schools. These texts clearly pose challenges—both for students reading and trying to learn from the materials, and for teachers who want students to master the concepts and the words that are the labels for these concepts.

The demands placed on elementary students in reading and understanding informational texts and resource materials are compounded as students move up the grades. Several years ago, I (Donna) worked with a high school industrial arts department as part of an all-school literacy effort. I asked the teachers to examine the texts they were using with their students, most of whom took the shop and woodworking classes because they were not particularly interested in “college-bound” courses. However, when we looked at the chapters of these texts, they were filled with diagrams and technical terminology. Each short chapter in the textbook on woods and woodworking had over 30 new words students needed to

learn and master in order to work with the tools. In fact, there were more unfamiliar terms per page of text in this book than in the more traditional academic textbooks. In addition, the terms were used with great specificity in the explanations and directions for specific tasks. For example, one short chapter on sanding woods included these terms and many more: *grit, finish, moldings, delamination, burnished, prep sanding, endgrain, grain rise, compressed air, and card scraper*. It made me realize the tremendous challenge it is for novice learners to understand new content; each discipline demands that students attend to and learn the specific meanings of key words and phrases, and to ways of using that information in speaking and writing. It is part of teachers' responsibilities to help students anticipate the need to attend to, identify, and develop understanding of important academic discourse.

How do good teachers do this? Our hope, as authors, is that you will continue to ask that question as you read through this book and identify the chapters that are most pertinent to your own context and needs to support the students you are teaching. We also encourage reading this book with colleagues in your school because the development of students who are avid vocabulary learners takes a schoolwide effort. Students need to develop interest in language, to become attentive to variations in ways to express ideas, to look for associations among terms, and to become aware of the foundations of English in other languages.

THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

The recently published Common Core State Standards (CCSS) constitute an important new component of teachers' planning for vocabulary instruction. These standards, which are now central to educational conversations, prioritize the reading and learning of content in social studies, sciences, and technical subjects, in addition to traditional literature. The CCSS anchor standards for vocabulary acquisition and use state that students should be able to do the following:

4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
6. Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression. (National Governors Association [NGA] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010, p. 25)

DEFINING ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

Some of you may be confused about the use of terms associated with the study of vocabulary. We often hear teachers ask:

“What’s the difference between *content-area* vocabulary and *academic* vocabulary?”

“So just what distinguishes *academic vocabulary* from general vocabulary?”

“Why does the new CCSS framework use the terms *general academic vocabulary* and *domain-specific vocabulary*? What differentiates *general academic* from *domain-specific*?”

We believe that the distinctions among these various terms, and particularly between *general academic vocabulary* and *domain-specific vocabulary*, are useful to recognize in order to structure effective instruction. These distinctions have been used for many years by secondary educators, but the more general term *content-area vocabulary* has often been used by elementary teachers and reading educators. Although identifying the vocabulary demands in content areas is important, it is also helpful to make a finer differentiation within these, because the tasks in learning and using general academic terms and domain-specific terms are different.

General Academic Vocabulary

General academic terms are used across many contexts, and students are much more likely to encounter them as they read and listen. Because they are not used in everyday language, these terms deserve attention. When teachers focus on them, this pays off for students over the long term. In the short selection about axes given above, there are several of these terms, such as *sharp*, *metal*, *blade*, *force*, *handle*, and *split*. These are words that students will find in several school contexts—especially in science and mathematics, but also in literature.

Domain-Specific Vocabulary

In contrast to general academic terms, domain-specific terms are found in much more limited contexts. They are also more likely to be highlighted and repeated frequently in content-area texts and resource materials. There are several of these words in the paragraph on axes: *axe*, *axe head*, *wedge*, and *wedge-shaped blade*.

Vocabulary Tiers

In making the distinction between general academic terms and domain-specific ones, the work of Isabel Beck and her colleagues (Beck & McKeown, 2007; Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013) is helpful. Beck and colleagues have differentiated vocabulary into three tiers, or groups. This framework is also used in Appendix A of the CCSS to explain the differences in general academic and domain-specific vocabulary.

Tier One Words

Tier One words are common, everyday words that most adults know and use regularly and that children develop in informal discourse. These words are useful but not conceptually hard to understand. English learners (ELs) often develop mastery of Tier One vocabulary, and their oral communication abilities cause many teachers to overlook the need to focus more attention on the difficult academic vocabulary.

Tier Two Words

With respect to academic vocabulary, Tier Two words include terms encountered in school learning that appear across several topics and content areas; these are words with real utility for students. Their meanings many vary by context; for example, the word *operation* has one meaning in mathematics, another in medicine, and yet another in work with machines. The root word *operate* also can take on varied meanings—for instance, to manipulate a game board's joystick, to drive a motor vehicle, or to move strategically in social situations. These terms are not used generally in conversational English; they are more abstract and are more likely to pose challenges to students. Therefore, there is real benefit in teaching Tier Two words, so that students can become familiar with the terms and develop strategies that help them unlock meanings in a variety of contexts.

Tier Three Words

Tier Three words, in distinction from Tier Two words, are more specialized terms confined to particular academic domains or content topics. They are often the labels for key concepts being taught in a content area. These terms are often introduced and highlighted in the printed materials and textbooks students read. Teachers generally also introduce these terms as they are needed for specific content development. As the example from the woodworking textbook illustrates,

there are often many such terms, and it is the teacher's task to focus students' efforts on those that are most essential to the content being learned and that have the highest overall utility for the students.

Benefits of Using the Three-Tier Framework

Teachers can use these three tiers of words to think about which words to teach. Tier One words are usually (though not always) learned through conversations with others at home and school, and do not require much direct teaching. Tier Two words are those that we consider *general academic terms* and that require attention by teachers. However, because they often are well known by adults, many teachers think that students understand these terms better than is often the case. These words thus deserve teachers' careful attention.

Tier Three words can be associated with the terms *domain-specific vocabulary*, *content-specific vocabulary* (Hiebert & Lubliner, 2008), or *technical vocabulary* (Fisher & Frey, 2008). In this book, we use the term *domain-specific vocabulary*; this use fits the distinction in the CCSS documents between academic and domain-specific vocabulary. The domain-specific words have less general applicability, but are often central to the concepts and ideas in content-area instruction.

Other Dimensions of Academic Vocabulary

Attention to academic vocabulary has led some researchers to further differentiate some categories of words that are helpful for teacher consideration. Both Hiebert and Lubliner (2008) and Baumann and Graves (2010) extract a set of words that are most useful in school tasks and in thinking about state and national standards. Hiebert and Lubliner call these *school terms*, and Baumann and Graves use the word *metalanguage* to identify this set of terms, which includes words like *genre*, *estimate*, *summarize*, *draft*, *compare and contrast*, and *punctuate*. These terms are particularly important for students in the upper elementary grades to learn, as they are used regularly on standardized tests and other performance tasks. Many students have fairly "fuzzy" ideas of what they may be asked to do on such tasks and do less well than they are able to, simply because they don't fully understand the tasks' demands.

It is worthwhile to mention "up front" the difference between how general academic vocabulary works in literature and how it works in other disciplines. In literature, Tier Two and Tier Three words (general academic terms and domain-specific terms) don't occur as major concept terms, but are likely to be words that describe characters, settings, or aspects of conflict and style. Hiebert and Lubliner (2008) distinguish these terms because these are words authors of

children's and young adult literature use in their work to "describe characters, their actions and settings in which the actions occur" (p. 111). These specific descriptive words (often adjectives and verbs) are often essential to understanding basic elements of a piece of literature, yet don't occur frequently within any one text. For example, the teachers' guide (Harcourt Brace, 1995, p. 640) for a third- to fourth-grade Encyclopedia Brown story by Donald Sobol ("The Case of the Million Pesos") suggests teaching these key words: *international*, *double*, *discouraged*, *fielded*, *testify*, and *framed*. These words help describe the setting and the problem, but are not repeated frequently in the story. The challenge such words pose to teachers of literary works is real: The words need to be taught, but they are often not related to each other and occur infrequently. In Chapter 4 of this book, we elaborate on how to address this challenge.

Identifying Important Academic Terms

Academic terms are identified and defined in various ways in textbooks and supplemental materials. Students need to learn how to use these different types of supports: italicized and boldfaced terms, footnotes or side notes, glossaries, lists of key terms with some activities to focus students' attention on the initial pages of each chapter, and so on. Some newer science programs include vocabulary cards with key academic terms and online games to help reinforce word learning. Reading and literature programs often focus on vocabulary to be learned, and some even teach students how to look at word families and make connections among terms. Teachers need to take advantage of these resources when they are available.

If you are not using a text-based or commercial approach to teaching, then some more general resources can be helpful in determining which words deserve focus. A useful, if somewhat dated, corpus of words was compiled by Marzano (2004) after the first round of state and content-area standards. Marzano analyzed the standards documents and compiled a list of academic terms that occur most frequently, organized by grade bands and content areas. This resource is still useful to check to see whether widely used academic terms are being taught in your classroom and school.

Another useful list is one compiled by Coxhead (2000). Her Academic Word List was derived from her analysis of 3.5 million words used in texts across content areas. (One caveat is that these were college-level texts; another is that the texts were from England and New Zealand.) Words found in the first 2,000 most commonly used terms in English were omitted, and then the terms that occurred at least 100 times were grouped into 570 word families (the stem, inflected forms, and forms with prefixes and suffixes). These words constitute about 10% of the words in content-area texts, so Coxhead's list remains a useful reference. The

list has been used widely as a guide to academic vocabulary development and to determining the difficulty of materials. However, Scott, Flinspach, and Vevea (2011) found that only 12% of the academic terms identified as important in fourth- and fifth-grade science and math textbooks were on this list. Therefore, it is important to use the Marzano and Coxhead lists as starting points, but to be most attentive to the particular concepts and terminology used in your own context.

In this book, we too provide several valuable tools you can use to determine which words are worth teaching at particular levels and in specific contents. Because there are varied criteria for what is important across the content areas, these issues are addressed in the specific content chapters.

Why Academic Vocabulary Deserves Attention

You may be reading this book because you have become aware of just how much students' understanding of the content you are teaching depends on their command of the vocabulary in the materials you use and in the activities you develop. Research over many years has confirmed your perceptions: There is a strong correlation between students' vocabulary knowledge and their success as readers and learners. However, this topic may be fairly new to you. Our hope is that you will both read these chapters closely, and also reflect on the vocabulary knowledge and learning your students need to be successful in your classroom and school.

How Do Students Develop Rich Vocabularies?

One clear avenue for vocabulary development is wide reading. Nagy, Anderson, and Herman (1987) found that students who read the most were those whose vocabularies grew most over their elementary school years. However, Nagy (1988) also concluded from his research that students only learn about 1 of every 20 new words they encounter while reading. Cunningham (2005) explains this impact on students' learning:

For example, the average fifth-grader reads approximately one million words of text a year and approximately 2 percent of these words are "unfamiliar" to the child. If 1 out of every 20 of those unfamiliar words is incorporated into the child's lexicon then the average fifth-grader learns approximately 1,000 words a year through reading. (p. 48)

Although this is impressive, it does not provide the depth of vocabulary learning students need to be successful learners in social studies, science, math, and

all the specific areas they pursue in elementary grades. This is why Nagy (1988) concluded that the best vocabulary learning comes when students connect words with similar roots and base words, think of related terms, and use word knowledge (structure, affixes, and histories) to unlock unfamiliar terms. We agree that building students' awareness of how words function gives them keys to a vast array of words they would not otherwise be able to understand.

How Do Teachers Develop Students' Academic Vocabulary?

Although research studies confirm the importance of building students' academic vocabularies as a foundation for their learning content, most teachers don't seem to give much support to this critical area in their instruction. An observational study of fourth- and eighth-grade classrooms found that teachers spent almost no time teaching the academic vocabulary (1.4% of their time), although 12% of the time involved literacy activities focused on vocabulary (Lesaux, Kieffer, Faller, & Kelley, 2010; Scott, Jamieson-Noel, & Asselin, 2003; Scott & Nagy, 1997). Wright (2012) also found no direct attention to vocabulary in her recent study of hundreds of kindergarten classrooms. These studies may not reflect your own experiences, and it is very possible that the landscape for vocabulary instruction has improved. That is certainly our hope.

Given the small amount of time most teachers seem to devote to helping students develop their vocabularies, it is important to make that time most productive for students. Throughout this book, you will learn ways to maximize vocabulary teaching so that students can learn content more deeply. Both general academic and domain-specific terms require attention because they must be learned for the objectives of the content-area teaching to be realized.

The Academic Language in Which Academic Vocabulary Is Embedded

Students may sometimes have difficulties with academic vocabulary, but they may also struggle to make sense of some of the language in which that vocabulary is embedded. The languages of home and school are different, and it is part of our job as teachers to introduce students to the academic discourses of the various disciplines. They need to learn how scientists, mathematicians, historians, and so on write and speak about their subjects. Take, for example, this passage from a sixth-grade science text:

Although water ecosystems, like biomes, have dominant plants, they are most often identified as freshwater ecosystems or saltwater ecosystems. (Watkins & Leto, 1994, p. 63)

It is unlikely that you would come across a sentence structure like this anywhere but in an academic discipline. If you were asked to identify the main idea, you might give it as follows: *Water ecosystems can be divided into freshwater and saltwater.* But notice how far apart the subject and object of this sentence are, and the information about *dominant plants* seems almost incidental. In Chapter 2, we look more closely at academic language structures and how best to address them. At this point, we simply want to draw your attention to the idea that students need to learn academic language in addition to academic vocabulary.

ELEMENTS OF A STRONG VOCABULARY PROGRAM

Basic Components

Some basic components of a strong vocabulary program are applicable across most content areas. A few of these are shared below, so that you can begin your engagement with this book knowing some of the foci that we elaborate more fully in later chapters.

First, it is important to analyze each vocabulary task both for the students and for the content you plan to teach. From the potential words, select those that have the highest utility within the lesson or unit, and those that have generalizability across other units and other contexts.

Second, you will need to help students assess their levels of familiarity with the terms and help them attend to those that are most important, so that they can devote their energy to learning those that have been identified as central to the content. You can do this in various ways including having students rate their knowledge of the terms; the goal is to draw students' attention to the most essential terms at the beginning of a lesson or unit of study, to help the students focus their cognitive resources where these will be most needed.

Third, you will need to use the opportunity at the initial stages of a unit to give students some instruction with the words. The nature of the activities will depend on what will benefit students most as they encounter the terms and discriminate their individual meanings. If there are many related terms, you might want to lead a lesson creating a semantic matrix highlighting specific attributes of each term. Or you might pair students and ask them to do a word search—locating the key terms in the textbook, and then sharing the uses of each orally. From this preview of the text, students could then construct working definitions of these words. This might also be a good time to do a lesson on morphology: Have students find words with the same root (e.g., *demo: democracy, democratic, undemocratic, demography*, etc.) and then decide on what the root (here, *demo*) means. Finally, students often benefit from a lesson on how to use context

to build partial meanings of terms, and how to use the actual definitions texts provide.

Fourth, you will need to help students develop strategies for keeping these terms before them, for rehearsing them, and for deepening their understanding of their varied uses and meanings. Some academic terms also have more common meanings, and these different definitions need to be brought to conscious attention (e.g., see our *operation* example earlier in this chapter). These terms need to be used orally in useful contexts, so that students will develop access to both the written and oral forms of the terms. The interplay between using academic terms orally and encountering them in print is another important aspect of academic vocabulary development. Students need several opportunities to use new terms orally, to build a familiarity with the terms, and to experiment with the contexts in which they are best expressed.

Additional Dimensions

Activities that help students construct fuller understandings of terms than simply learning their basic dictionary definitions are needed for the students to really know these terms. Definitions or descriptions, attributes, examples, ways to distinguish a term from similar ones, and nuances of when and how the terms are used are all important. When students have opportunities to explore varied uses of terms, to both see and hear these words used in several contexts, and to explore online resources for the terms, students become more aware of how “slippery” definitions are and how important context is to word use.

Many academic terms have their origins in Greek and Latin, so helping students attend to morphology and word histories will build their understanding. It is useful to help students connect several terms with a common root. As Nagy (1988) explains, vocabulary development depends on students’ knowledge about these morphological families and on their ability to use this knowledge.

In some content-area materials, visual diagrams of concepts provide important information about the academic terms and need to be studied. Students should learn to match new concept terms with their visual representations, and to create diagrams or drawings if texts don’t provide them.

Supporting English Learners

ELs often are still developing their general, or Tier One, vocabularies while they are learning Tier Two and Tier Three vocabularies along with their English-dominant classmates. Because of this added learning challenge, it is helpful for teachers to provide sheltered English supports for them (Echeveria, Vogt, &

Short, 2012). ELs who have Greek or a Latinate language as their first language have a special resource that can help them learn academic vocabulary. Many English academic terms (Tier Two and Tier Three words) have Tier One analogues in these languages. For example, words like *absurdo* (*absurd* in English), *mesa*, *arroyo*, and *pacífico* (*pacific* in English) are common terms in Spanish, but not in English. Such analogues make learning domain-specific words easier for EL students when teachers invite them to connect both languages and use their first-language resources.

The importance of encouraging students to think in both languages is supported in a recent research study by Scott, Miller, and Flinspach (2012), who found that in their identified academic terms for fourth- and fifth-grade science and math, about 70% were Spanish–English cognates. With teacher encouragement, students can learn to draw on their first-language resources and find connections among vocabulary. Often what are more esoteric terms in English are more common forms in Spanish or French, as in the Spanish examples above. Simply asking students to make charts of the new words with the English and the home-language versions side by side can help both teachers and students find connections.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Teachers who are serious about helping students expand their academic vocabularies also create classroom and school contexts where attention to words is a regular part of school life. Being serious about language development also means enriching students' background knowledge about vocabulary, making it personal, and connecting it to their lives beyond school. Three aspects of engaging, overarching language culture are described in this section.

Teachers' Modeling of Continued Language Development

Students need your help and encouragement in attending to and learning academic vocabulary. Teachers are role models and guides in helping students learn how to be “vocabulary-smart.” It is up to you to regularly note new and interesting words, as well as new uses of somewhat familiar terms, and to “think aloud” about these with students. For instance, bringing in a magazine article or a brochure and highlighting for students some unfamiliar terms as you read it orally to them can help students become more willing to do the same. As students move from primary to intermediate grades, some become hesitant to express their lack of familiarity with new words and concepts. Teachers can help students

overcome this hesitation by bringing in words that are new to the teachers themselves, modeling how they noted the terms, and then showing students how they sought out the terms' meanings or engaging the class in trying to determine the meanings intended by the authors.

Teachers can also explain to students their own strategies for learning new words that are important. Some teachers may explain that they connect each new term to an already familiar word or experience, make a rhyme for the new word with something familiar, or connect the term to a person for whom it can be associated. For other teachers, holding onto a new word so it can be learned may involve creating a word card for the new term, putting the context in which it was encountered on the card, and then putting a description, definition, or illustration on the back side of the card. Some teachers like to keep a collection of words they are learning on their computers or smartphones. Showing students how terms are not just identified and defined, but then kept handy so they can be practiced, is a part of modeling how teachers as adults attend to new terms, develop understanding of their meaning, and then utilize strategies to retain them. Modeling how to practice and try out new words is important; many less confident students think that "smart" people learn new words immediately when they see them or hear them. If students are going to get into the fun of building vocabulary, they need to know that it takes many exposures and attempts to use new terms. Some students may be surprised that teachers also need and use strategies to learn words; it makes word learning a genuinely shared adventure.

Teachers can also encourage students to take risks in the classroom by bringing in and sharing words the students encounter in their own reading. This may involve taking time at the beginning of a class period to ask students to share any new terms they have recently found, and to explore the context in which the terms were used and what they may mean. Students can then use their own resource tools (hard-copy or online dictionaries and glossaries) to develop definitions for the terms. A class bulletin board or website of new and interesting words keeps the importance of vocabulary growth fresh and personal for students.

Still another way teachers can model for students their own attention to vocabulary is to read books about words and language orally (Braun, 2010; McKeown & Beck, 2004; Neugebauer & Currie-Rubin, 2009). At every grade level, there are both fun and informative books that can nurture students' interests in language. Some introduce interesting names and words, such as *Stereo-book: Dinosaurs* (Schatz, 2009); some deal with the history of words and changing usages, such as *Americanisms* (Luke & Quinn, 2003); some expand students' knowledge of specificity of usage, such as *A Cache of Jewels* and *Kites Sail High* (Heller, 1987, 1988); and some foster students' urge to create new words, such as *Baloney (Henry P.)* (Scieszka, 2001) and *Miss Alaineus* (Frazier, 2000).

Nurturing Students' Interest in Words and Expanding Their Awareness of How Language Functions

Helping students become interested in words and language, and attentive to new words, phrases, and uses of language, is an essential foundation for vocabulary development. Students need to be interested in and knowledgeable about words and how they function as they encounter increasingly content-specific vocabulary. This involves teachers throughout the grades, from preschool onward. All teachers need to consciously check to be sure that they entice students with their own curiosity about words and help them explore unusual, new, and interesting uses of language. Although in later chapters we suggest many ways to do this, a good starting place is to check the collection of books in your classroom and tag those that deal with language and words. For instance, abecedarian or alphabet books abound in almost any content area. Examples include *The Butterfly Alphabet Book* (Cassie & Pallotta, 1995); *Q Is for Quark* (Schwartz, 2001); *S is for Scientists* (Verstraete, 2011); *Jazz A-B-Z* (Marsalis, 2005); and *D is for Dancing Dragon: A China Alphabet* (Crane, 2006). Brian Cleary's Words Are CATegorical series (e.g., *A Lime, a Mime, a Pool of Slime*; Cleary, 2006) is also very helpful.

Some teachers use magazines and contemporary culture to awaken older students to the creativity involved in creating new terms and revising uses of others. They involve students in thinking about vocabulary expansion by letting them find the most current words used for clothing, colors, hair styles, sports, and music. Teachers often have middle-grade students write a glossary of terms for their favorite fantasy series. In these ways, teachers alert students to the reality that vocabulary is not static, but constantly growing and changing.

The joy of exploring books, magazines, and newspapers with interesting words and with information about language should be possible in all classrooms, at all levels. With all the online and graphic resources now available, it is quite easy to build a collection that will entice your students and open new worlds to them.

Making Vocabulary Learning a Shared Classroom and School Activity

Several schools we know have weekly words that the whole school population learns together. These are usually words that have general utility across subject areas, but they help reinforce and develop students' curiosity about words and the wealth of words in our language. Some schools put these words on the school marquee where all can see them; others send the words home so parents can post them on their refrigerators. Many schools have students describe these words and use them in the morning public address system announcements. Teachers who post the words on their classroom walls help students maintain their attention to

expanding their vocabularies. These are just a few ways in which vocabulary can become visible in a school.

In the following chapters, we share many ideas for making vocabulary exploration a lively part of classroom and school life. This is an essential starting place for all that we discuss as we focus on the central role of vocabulary learning. You may want to make a list of ideas that you have already implemented in your classroom and see how you can build on those, making them as effective as possible for all your students.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this first chapter, we have set the context and furnished some common vocabulary for what follows in the rest of the book. As you read on, think about how you can support your students in expanding their general academic vocabularies—helping them attend to, explore, and use an increasing range of academic language in their oral and written discourse. By identifying general academic terms as well as domain-specific words needed for learning particular content, you can then decide which words to select for more focused instruction because of their importance and general utility for your students. We hope that this introduction has also helped stimulate your own thoughts about the vocabulary-learning opportunities you can provide in your classroom and throughout the school.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The CCSS include specific attention to vocabulary development. Examine the anchor standards shown on page 3, and think of ways you can both observe students' attention to vocabulary and assess their abilities to meet these expectations.
2. With a colleague or small group, examine a short section from an informational text (textbook or resource article). Then make a list with two columns: one for general academic terms, and the other for vocabulary terms that are specific to the content being described. Explain your choices to each other. Does the grade level or expertise of the learners influence these choices?
3. Reflect on the elements of vocabulary instruction discussed on pages 10–12. How do these parallel your own commitments and practices? What areas are different? What would you add or replace in this set of suggestions?