



VOCABULARY

What is vocabulary?

'Vocabulary' refers to the words that a person knows. Vocabulary can be split into two areas:

-  receptive vocabulary (words that a person understands)
-  expressive vocabulary (words that a person uses)

A child's receptive vocabulary will typically be larger than their expressive vocabulary.

Why is vocabulary so important?

Vocabulary levels are **strong predictors of later literacy skills**. Without a good vocabulary, children will have difficulty with reading comprehension, understanding teaching, expressing their feelings, managing social situations and resolving conflicts.

Vocabulary level at age five has been found to be the **single best predictor** of whether a child brought up in poverty will escape poverty in adult life.

Children start school with extremely varied vocabulary knowledge. Poor vocabulary knowledge when starting school has a cumulative effect. To put this into perspective, if a child begins school with vocabulary knowledge in the lowest 20%, in order to reach an 'average' level in 3 years, they would have to learn 20 new words **every day** for those three years. This is why 'general exposure' to vocabulary as part of normal teaching will **not be enough** for those children from economically or linguistically deprived backgrounds and/or with speech, language and communication needs (SLCNs).

Typical vocabulary development

Age	Receptive	Expressive
1 - 1½	20-200	5 - 50
1½ - 2	200 - 300	50 - 100
2 - 3	500 - 1000	200 - 300
3 - 4	1200 - 2000	800 - 1500
4 - 5	10,000+	2100-2200
5-6	13,000+	2600+
Adult	30,000	

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Pre-teaching vocabulary groups

This is an effective way of supporting children with SLCNs to develop their vocabulary and access the curriculum. It gives children extra opportunities to explore new words and hear repetitions of words, and provides them with a framework that can be reinforced within the lesson.

Having a prior knowledge of words can be extremely rewarding for a child within a lesson when they are able to answer questions about a word, when previously they may have struggled to access any of the vocabulary.

Three to five children per group is optimal. Groups should run once or twice per week for approximately 20 minutes: ideally immediately before a lesson during which the new word is to be used.

Example topic is plants

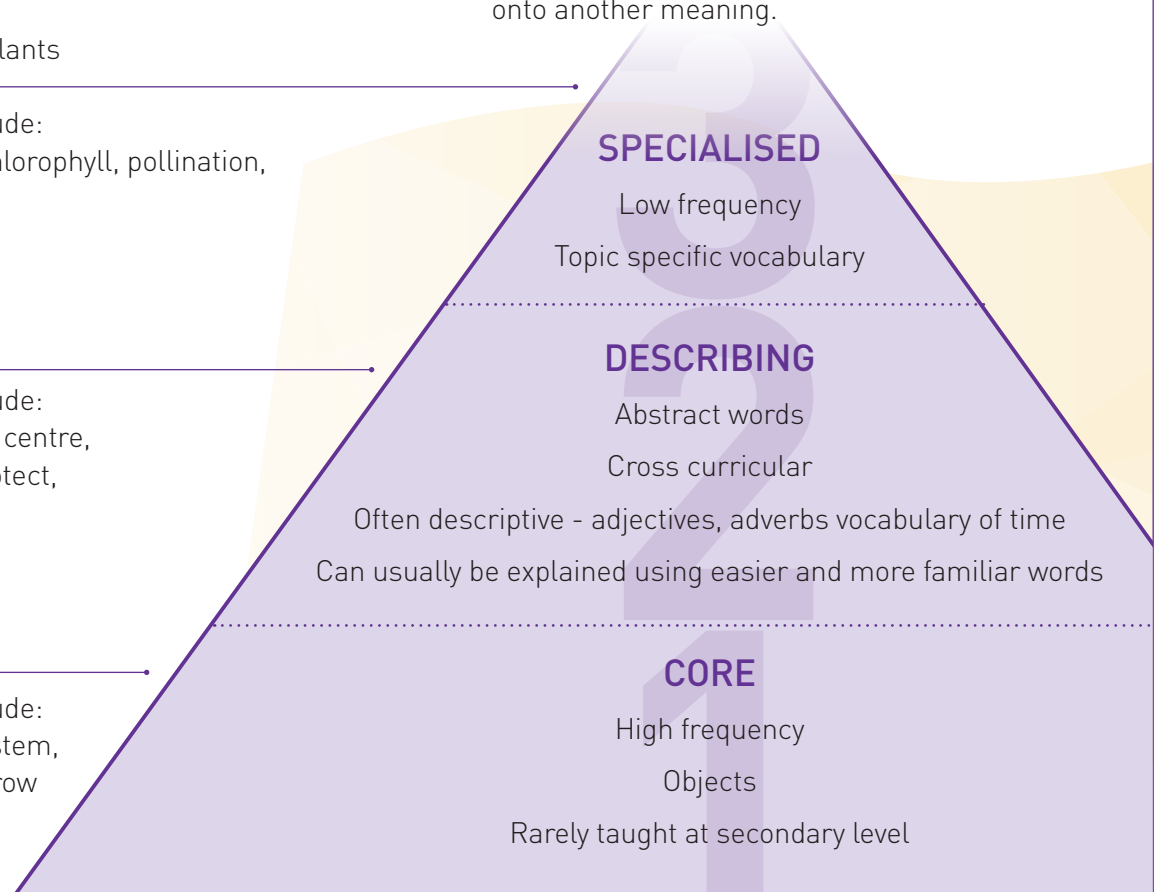
TIER 3 words include:
photosynthesis, chlorophyll, pollination, dispersion

TIER 2 words include:
sufficient, usually, centre, vertical, adapt, protect, anchored, spread

TIER 1 words include:
flower, leaf, root, stem, soil, water, sun, grow

Selecting vocabulary

- 🚩 See the tiered model by Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2002), below.
- 🚩 A child requires a sound understanding of words in the tier below in order to support their learning of words in the tier above. Therefore we must **ensure understanding** of words in lower tiers before moving on.
- 🚩 Select key curriculum words that are not only fundamental to the child's understanding of the upcoming topic, but also for life in general.
- 🚩 The most useful words will often be **concepts**. NB Children with SLCN find concept words difficult to remember as they are usually abstract.
- 🚩 **One** word should be focused on per session to avoid confusion.
- 🚩 Do not teach opposites in one session, eg if working on 'heavy', compare with 'not heavy' (rather than light).
- 🚩 If a concept has multiple meanings eg 'light', focus on one meaning first, exploring this thoroughly before moving onto another meaning.



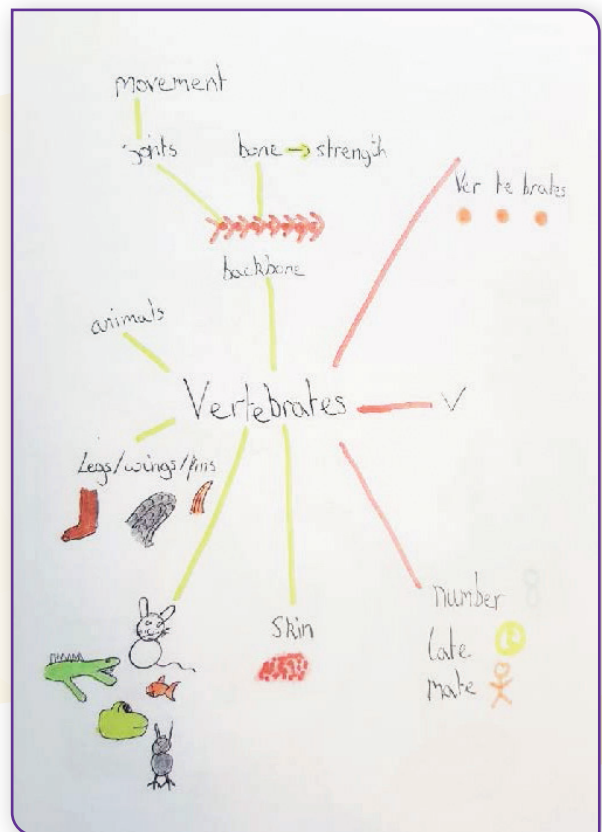
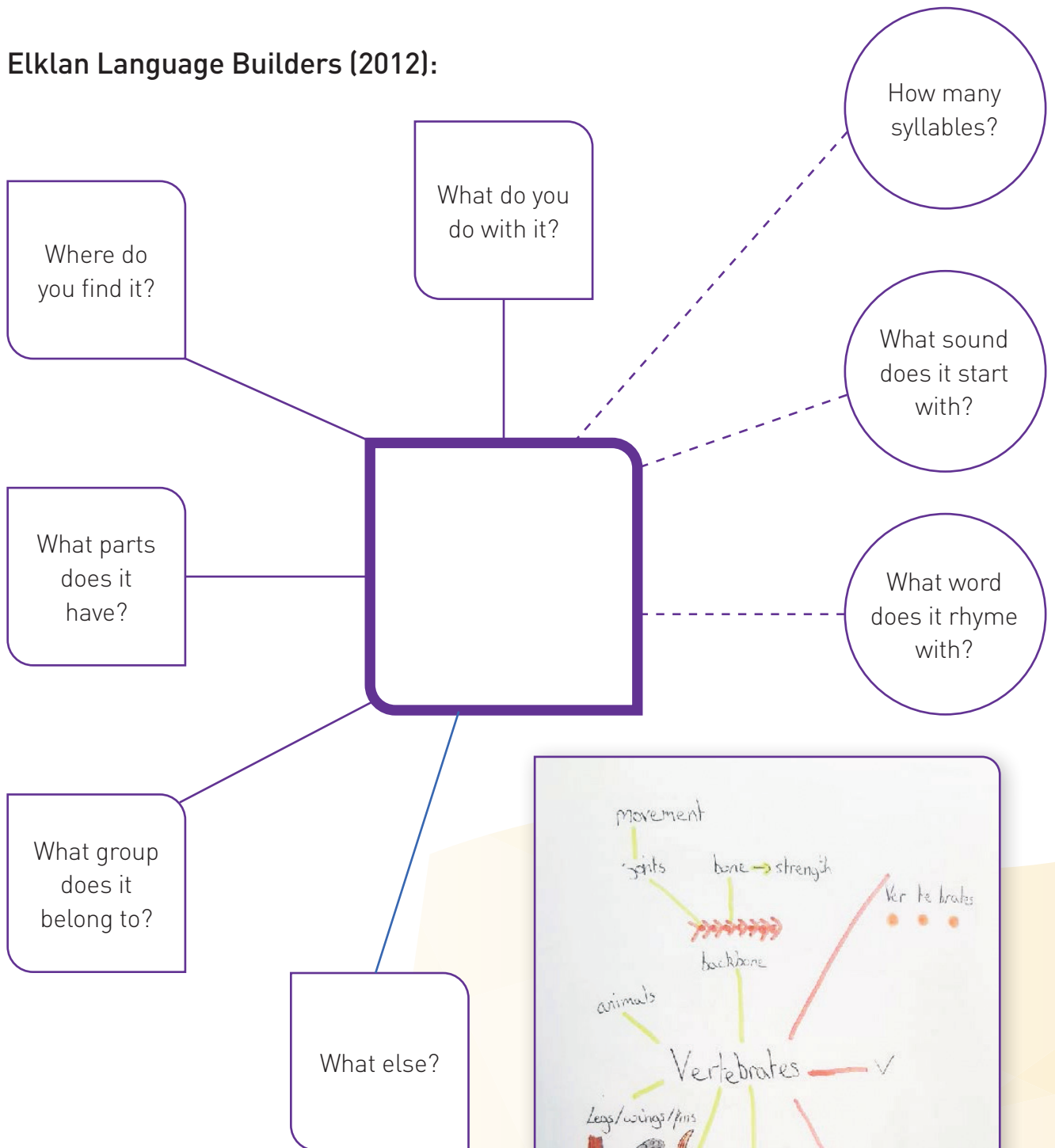
What to work on in a vocabulary group

Use a Word Map (see page 4). Fill it in as you work through the following:

- 🚩 Introduce the word and say it several times. Write it on the Word Map.
- 🚩 Show a picture, symbol or drawing of the word being taught, or of something the word relates to eg for 'disgusting' use a picture of maggots.
- 🚩 Explore the word structure (phonological awareness):
 - Is it a short or long word?
 - What sound does it start with?
 - Can you hear any other sounds in the word?
 - What does it rhyme with? (real or nonsense)
 - How many syllables does it have? (clap them out)
- 🚩 Explore the meaning of the word (semantic awareness):
 - What do children know already?
 - Describe the word
 - What does it do?
 - What else can you do with it?
 - Where might you find it?
 - What group does it belong to?
 - What else is like this?
 - What else does it make you think of?
- 🚩 Practical activities - use multi-sensory learning wherever possible, eg
 - Nouns: present the real object and allow children to feel/explore it
 - Sorting games eg for the word 'pebble' - pebble vs not a pebble
 - Take turns describing the object
 - Verbs: model the action with your body/act it out
 - Link the action to objects
 - Use small world play to demonstrate
 - Adjectives: link to objects
 - Sort objects into groups that can be described by the adjective vs things that cannot eg for 'round' - round vs not round
 - Word walk - walk round school and find things that can be described using the adjective eg all the things that are round
- 🚩 Prepare children to listen out for the word in class and encourage them to show the rest of the class what they have learnt
- 🚩 See example Vocab Group session plan by Word Aware (Appendix A)

Word Maps examples

Elklan Language Builders (2012):



Word Aware (2017):

Word Wizard

New word

b, c, t It starts with ...

It rhymes with ...

It has ... syllables

Say the word to your partner

Use the word in a sentence

.....

Symbol/picture

Action

Song or Rap

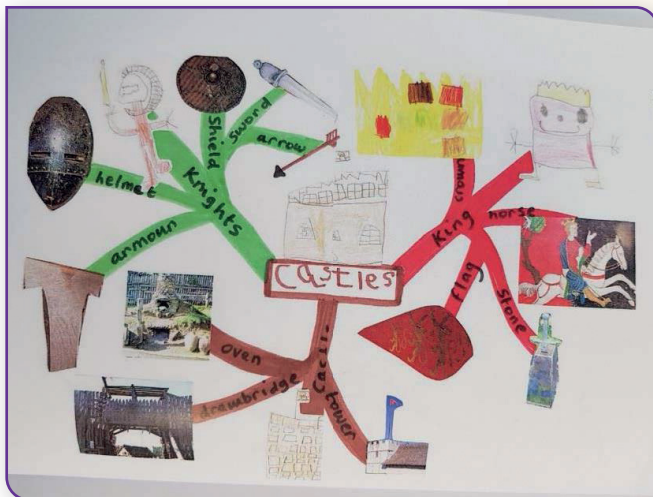
Word Wall

Word Pot

Speechmark WORD AWARE © Stephen Parsons & Anna Branagan. This page may be photocopied for instructional use only.

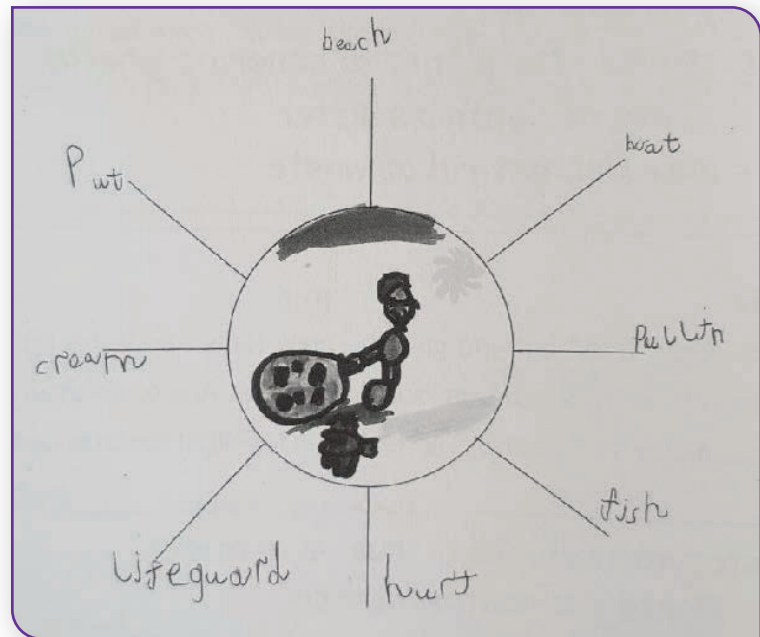
New vocabulary should be revisited once the topic has finished in order to aid retention. This could be worked on in a variety of ways:

Mind Maps: Incorporate vocabulary covered throughout the topic. Write the topic in the middle. Identify major categories and use different coloured branches per category. NB children may find it tricky to categorise words so will likely require support with this. Use colour and pictures to support learning and retention.



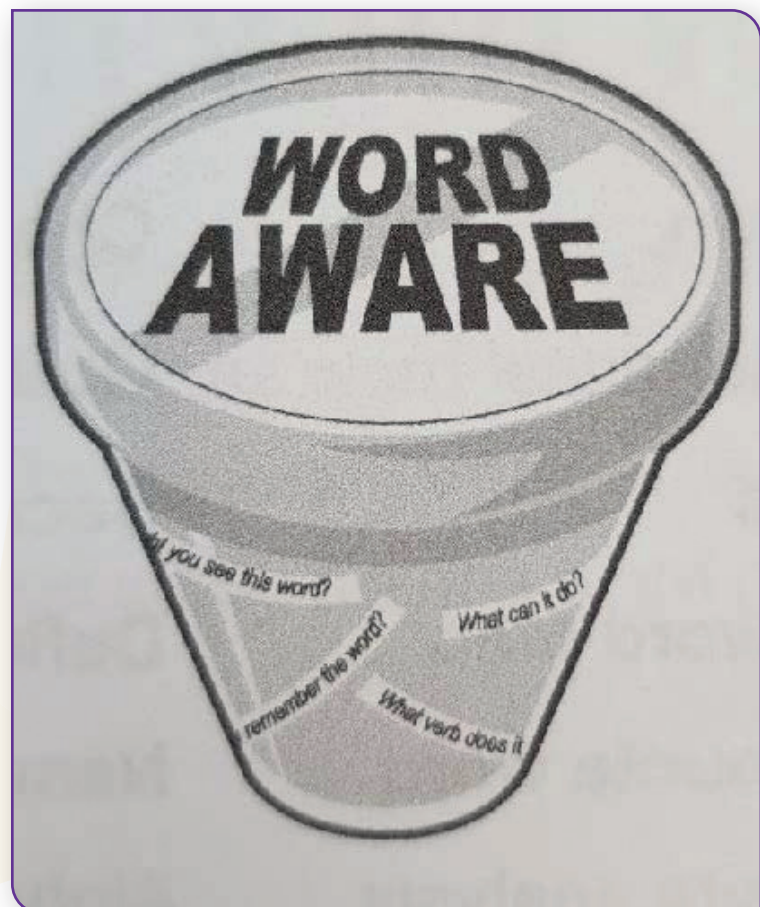
// VOCABULARY

Attribute Webs: Write the topic word in the middle. Think of words related to that word and write them on the spokes. This visual could then be used to support a piece of independent story writing.










Word Pot: Write words on card and post into a tub/box. When you have a spare few minutes (eg before the bell at the end of the day), select a word from the pot and ask children questions eg:

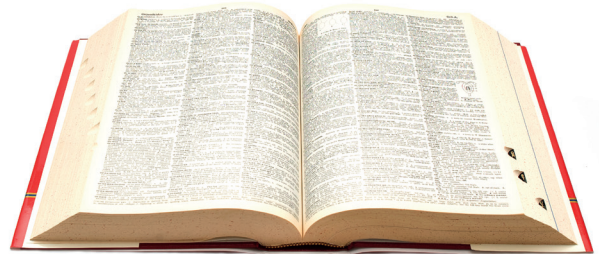
- 🚩 What can it do?
- 🚩 What does it look like?
- 🚩 Describe it to your friend
- 🚩 When might someone do this?
- 🚩 Say it in a sentence
- 🚩 Play guessing games using prompts (see Appendix B)



Encourage independence in Word Learning

Encourage children to evaluate their own knowledge and learning. If they do not understand a word, they should have some ideas of what they could do to find out eg:

-  Ask a teacher
-  Ask a peer
-  Ask someone at home
-  Look it up in the dictionary
-  Look it up on the internet
-  Look it up in the thesaurus
-  Look it up in the glossary







Visuals could be placed around the classroom as a reminder of things to try.

Self-rating scales, such as the example below from Word Aware can be useful, particularly for older children to assess their knowledge of words and identify what they know already.

Vocabulary Self-rating Scale

Name: Date:

Tick the box to show how well you know each word.

Word	 I Know this word well	 I know a little bit about this word	 I don't know anything about this word	 If you ticked either of these, write what you know

Word finding difficulties

Word finding difficulties are difficulties in accessing words in order to name an object or construct a sentence. It is important that children identified with word finding difficulties are given additional time to answer questions and encouraged to describe the item or show the item where the word cannot be accessed.

On occasions, the child with word finding difficulties may access a word which is incorrect. Therefore, try not to tell the child the answer is wrong before they have a chance to change it if they wish.

Additional work on vocabulary supports the semantic links between words and aids word finding.

Here are some strategies that you can encourage children with word finding difficulties to think about in order to support word retrieval and assist listener understanding:






How can parents help?

Read with your child. Stop and talk about the book as you read together, make comments and ask questions about the story and ask if they can find certain things in the pictures.



Read to your child. Expose them to lots of reading materials, try reading books to your child that are slightly above their own reading ability to expose them to slightly more complex vocabulary.

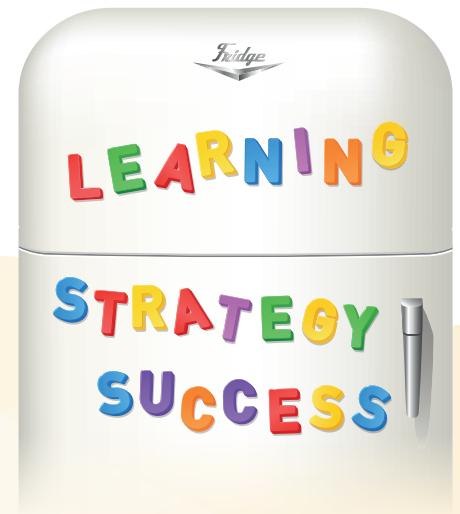
Watch TV together. Set your child a task whilst watching TV such as:

-  listening out for a new word
-  listening out for a word that you may not know
-  describe a character or compare two characters



Talk to your child's teacher to find out what topics they are working on at school and what key vocabulary they are learning. Play word games with new vocabulary to reinforce understanding.

Choose some 'words of the week' This could be three to six words from school or words you have chosen at home eg relating to an experience you have had or words from a book you are reading. Stick the words somewhere in the house eg on the fridge. Talk about the words. Can you tell your child what any of them mean? Can you or your child use any of the words in a sentence?



Talk to your child about the environment around you, describe things that you can both see, how you feel, what you can hear etc.

Talk about what you are doing as you are doing it and what your child is doing as they do it. Describe what you/they are holding, actions you/they are doing, how you/they feel, what you/they see, hear, smell, taste etc. Repeat new words many times and in different situations so that your child hears lots of alternatives. The more times your child hears a word, the more likely they will be to understand it and start using it!

*Holly is stirring!
Would Tom like to stir?
Yummy, it smells sweet!*



Appendix A

Pre-teaching Vocabulary Group Small Group Planning Sheet

Children's names: Date:

Word:

Definition (written by class teacher):

Part of speech (please tick): noun verb adjective

Activity

Warm-up game



Introduce the word

Word

Picture of symbol



Listen to the sounds of the word

'b', 't', 'c'

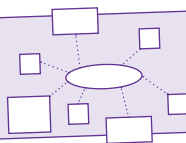
Focus on the meaning



Practical activity



Semantic (meaning) map



Review sound and meaning



Sing a song



Make a connection between the group and class



WORD AWARE: Stephen Parsons & Anna Branagan. This page may be photocopied for instructional use only.

Appendix B

Clap the syllables.



What sound does it start with?

b, c, t

What word does it rhyme with?



What do we do with it?



Where can it be found?



What category is it?



Describe it.



Define it.
What is a?
What do you know about the word?



Other useful cue cards for intervention:

Who might use it?



When might you see it?



It is a bit like...
How is it similar to and different from that item?

HUGE
Enormous
Massive
GIANT

What is something very special about this time?



References / Useful Resources

Black Sheep Press: Categories by Helen Rippon

Black Sheep Press: Vocab Builder (1 & 2) by Helen Rippon

Elklan Language Builders: advice and activities to encourage children's communication skills (2012) by Henrietta McLachlan & Liz Elks.
<https://www.elklan.co.uk/5-11s/language-builders>

Rhodes to Language by Anna Rhodes

Sematic Links (1992) by Sadie Bigland-Lewis & Jane Speake
<https://www.elklan.co.uk/5-11s/semantic-links>

Word Aware (2017) by Stephen Parsons & Anna Branagan
<http://thinkingtalking.co.uk/word-aware/>

Ask your speech & language therapist for further information or resources.