



Somerville Early Education (SEE)

Vocabulary

A Guide for Teachers

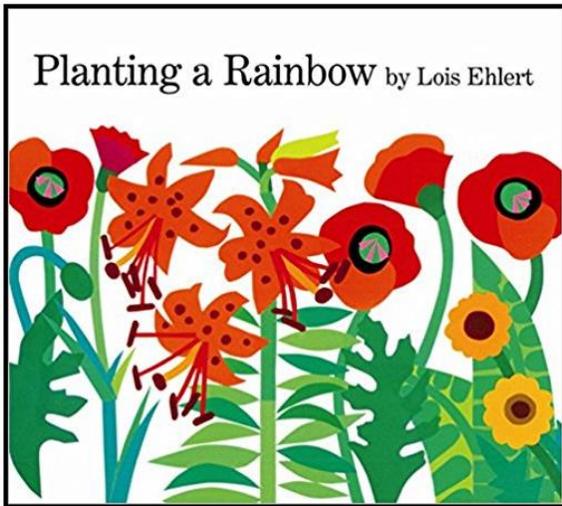


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Introduction: Fostering Word Consciousness

Fostering **word consciousness** builds awareness of words and their meaning (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2008). When children are conscious of words around them, they gain knowledge to communicate effectively and learn about new concepts. Children are naturally curious about words and motivated to say and write them. Invite children to be curious about words and build learning through high interest texts, children’s interests, and studies of Big Idea themes and topics.

What does it mean to know a word?

Young children, especially English Language Learners need to foster a **deep understanding of words** through play, talk, stories, visual cues, and text. This includes developing a memory for a word – the ability to integrate the word into daily use and retrieve it when needed, and understand that words have multiple meanings. Children may have little or some knowledge of certain words, but need deep understanding to use words in context.

Code-Based Competencies such as sound/symbol connections (sound and letter recognition), eventual ability to understand spelling patterns, and development of efficient reading skills are also important and are addressed in the Phonological and Phonemic Awareness Guide. However, these skills do not automatically lead to understanding.

Meaning-Based Competencies such as understanding word meaning in context or making meaning using **background knowledge** require ongoing experiences with words and the contexts in which they are used. Words represent concepts and strong meaning-based instruction supports children’s overall knowledge base.

As you think about the **Big Ideas** you will explore with children, consider the “**academic**” **vocabulary** you will pull out to increase children’s depth of knowledge. For example, when studying how things grow and change we want to go beyond “plant” and “flower” to “soil”, “petals”, and “germinate”. Study a small set of words deeply to **build children’s capacity** to understand and use new words.

Resources:

Graves, M.F. & Watts-Taffe, S. (2008) For the love of words: Fostering word consciousness in young Readers. *Reading Teacher*, v62 n3, pp. 185-193, November.

Lesaux, N.K. & Harris, J.R. (2015). *Cultivating knowledge, building language: Literacy instruction for English learners in elementary school*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Environmental Print: Words All Around Us

Children are surrounded by environmental print. They begin to 'read' this print at an early age through repetitive



exposure and use it to construct knowledge and make sense of their world.

Environmental print supports the development of a memory for words. It also inspires children to be writers and helps them produce readable text. To support children's engagement with environmental print create a print rich environment.

This does not mean charts, posters and labels on every surface of your classroom. Instead, carefully curate print that aligns with the current curriculum and is both teacher and child generated.



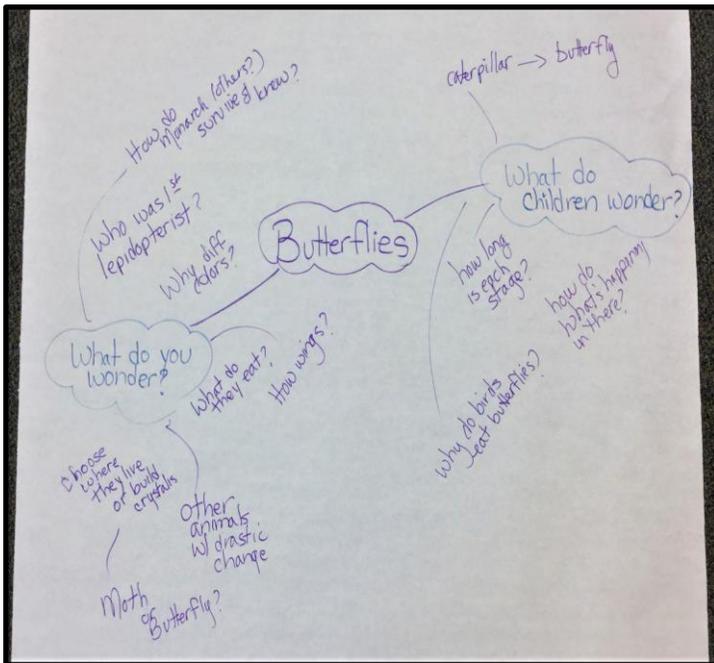
In your classroom:

- Encourage children to make their own word walls, classroom alphabet, and signs for areas of the classroom.
- Display children's work (drawing and writing) alongside photos of them engaged in the process.
- Create vocabulary rings and/or a poster of local businesses that children frequent.
- Include signs, maps and blueprints in the block area and attach local business icons to the blocks.
- Place cookbooks and menus in dramatic play
- Provide clipboards, index cards, paper, pencils and tape throughout the classroom so children can draw, write and make signs and labels.

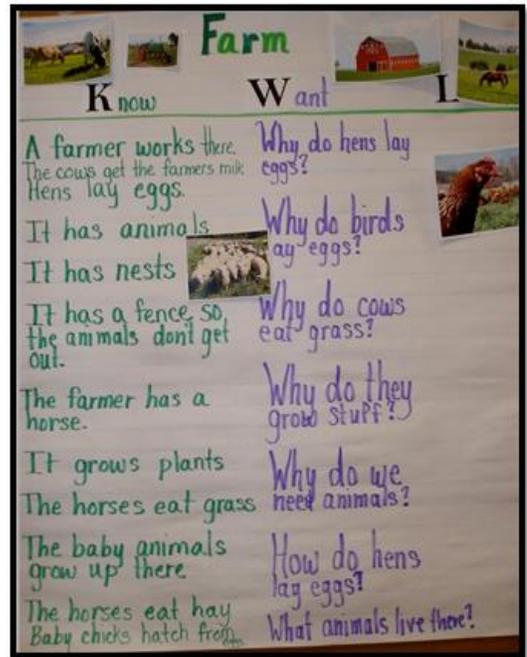


Surfacing the Big Ideas: A Pathway to Meaningful Vocabulary

Topics of investigation emerge from a variety of sources - children's interests and discoveries, observations and happenings in the world around us, teacher passions, and curriculum guides and frameworks. Determining the **Big Idea**, and thus the initial direction of a particular curriculum, is most effective when it is based on observed and discussed wonderings. This might be done through the development of a concept and question map and/or through the first stages of a K-W-L chart. The KWL chart helps surface what children already know about a topic (content and vocabulary) followed by what they are curious about-what they want to learn.



Concept Mapping or Webbing



KWL Chart

After spending some time surfacing prior knowledge and setting the stage through read-alouds, discussion and hands on exploration solicit children's questions and inquiry interests. This will help build curiosity and identify the **Big Idea**.

What are BIG IDEAS?

- Big Ideas can be framed as statements or questions.
- Big Ideas should be able to be applied to multiple content areas.
- Big Ideas should be engaging and support sustained and deep knowledge building.
- Big Ideas should provoke thinking and more questions.
- Big Ideas are abstract enough to promote further inquiry, and concrete enough to ground a study in.
- Big Ideas are relevant to children’s interests, and support their curiosity of the world beyond school and home.
- Big Ideas provide a contextual focus for connecting ideas and learning, shifting our work from standard past practices to concept and meaning-based learning.

Unit or Theme for Standard Practices	Unit or Theme for Advanced Instruction: The BIG IDEAS
Valentine’s Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People care about each other. People can send messages to each other to share their feelings.• How do people show they care about each other?
Winter/Snow	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When the weather changes, we have to adjust.• What do animals do when the weather changes?
Cars/Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People need to go from one place to another.• How do people get from one place to another?
Martin Luther King’s Birthday	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People want to be treated fairly.• What makes something fair? How can we include everyone?

Role of Literature: So how do I choose a book?

Books should promote deep thinking, discussion and learning around the **Big Idea**. The anchor text would likely be a short informational book with varied sentence structures and word choice and include photographs, illustrations and charts. High quality children's literature can also serve as the anchor text.

Teacher read-alouds support active listening, oral language comprehension, and vocabulary development. Utilizing **CROWD** strategies promotes active participation in the book. The **CROWD** prompts help engage children in an exchange of ideas about the book. Research tells us that a rich discussion of text builds deeper understanding of new concepts.

C - **Completion Prompts** - Leave a 'blank' at the end of the sentence and invite the child (ren) to fill it in. Focus on language structures (rhyme and repetition).

R - **Recall Prompts** - Ask questions about what happened in the book, or earlier in the book. Focus on plot and sequencing.

O - **Open-ended Prompts** - Invite children to express their ideas by asking questions that have no clear answers. Focus on the pictures ("Tell me about...") and predictions and hypotheses ("I wonder...").

W - **Wh Prompts** - Ask what, where, when, why and how. Focus on questions that start with WHY and HOW.

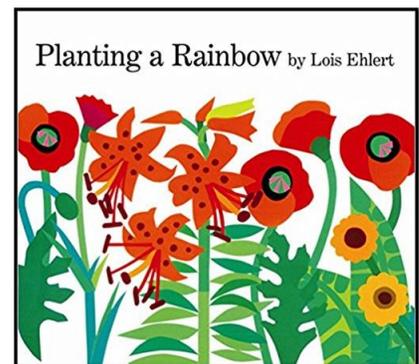
D - **Distancing Prompts** - Ask children to relate pictures and words to their own experiences in the world ("Have you ever...").

Using Literature to Promote Vocabulary Development: An Example

Topic: Growing and Changing (children, plants, insects)

Big Ideas:

1. Living things grow and change.
2. We grow and change.
3. Plants and animals grow and change.
4. There is a relationship between seasonal change and the life cycle.

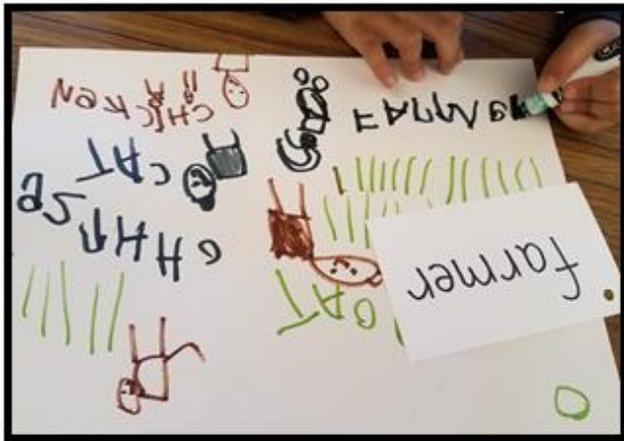


Anchor Text: Planting a Rainbow by Lois Ehlert

Key Vocabulary: plant, bulbs, sow, seedlings, catalogs, soil, and sprout.

Vocabulary in the Writing Center

There are many ways for children to engage with and get to know a word. Providing children with varied opportunities to build, trace, copy and use words in multiple contexts often leads to self-initiated labeling and invented spelling. **High interest words** such as familiar places in children's environment, as well as key words, such as: mom, dad, cat, and rainbow should be accessible. Children are likely to use a word if it is meaningful and relevant to their lives.



Adding **word cards** to stencils makes the connection between drawing, letters and the word. The words encourage children to label their own work. Placing the materials in a tray lets children to see what is available and helps them make a choice.



Place words connected to the **Big Idea** in a pocket chart or on rings so children can see them and access them as needed.



Another way for children to engage with words is to provide opportunities for them to build them. Letter tiles, magnetic letters and clothespins are fun, low risks ways for children to move letters around and experiment with building a word.



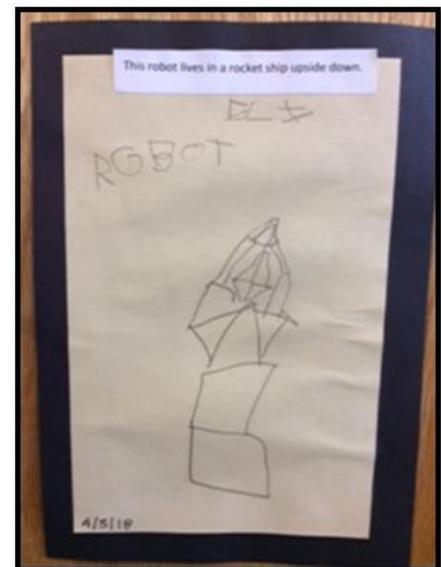
As children manipulate letters to form words, they develop an understanding of how letters are ordered and organized to make a word. For example, words go from left to right, first sounds go first.

Vocabulary across the Classroom

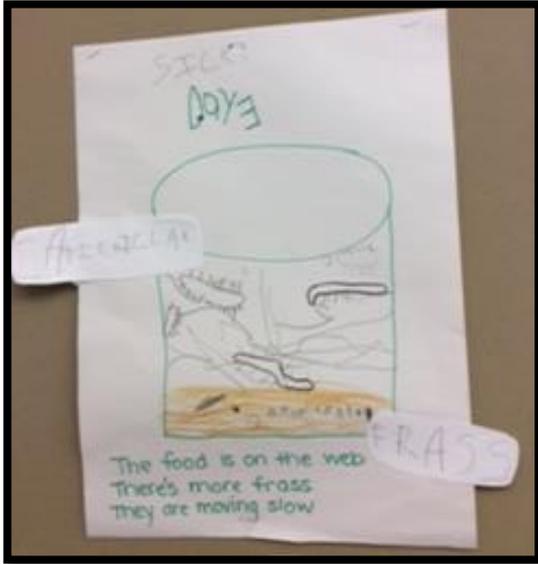


Dramatic Play brings vocabulary to life for young children. Integrating the **Big Idea**, and the concepts and vocabulary associated with it, provides children meaningful opportunities to hear, use and apply new words. Providing labels and word cards allows children to copy and practice the words they are hearing in the context of play. Designing dramatic play areas with children allows them to practice with meaningful vocabulary and label areas.

The Block Area offers a low risk entry point for children to engage with vocabulary. Children make plans, talk about what they are building and can then draw and label their structure. The teacher can take dictation and add the story to their pictures. Displaying children's work so they can see it validates their efforts and inspires their friends.

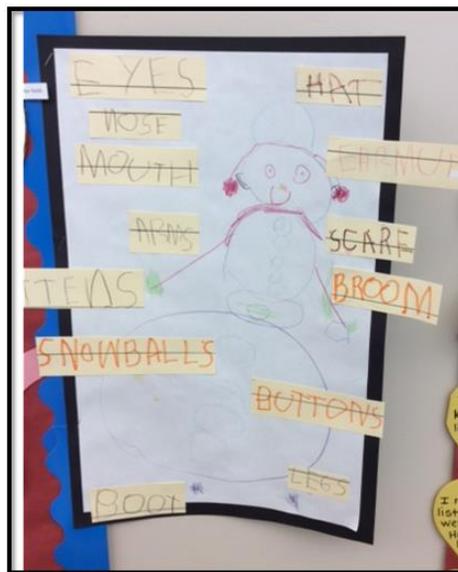
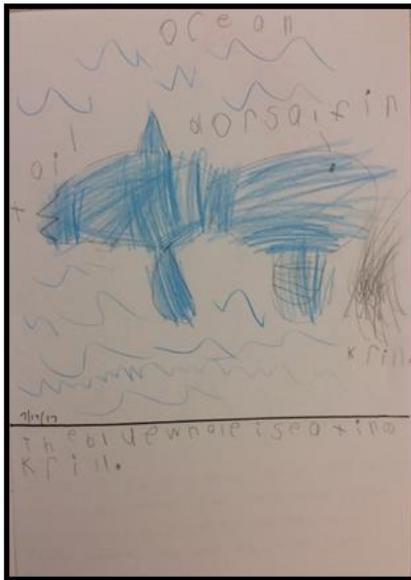


Science Area:



Children learn, use and begin to internalize content vocabulary when they have the opportunity to observe, engage and talk about it over an extended period of time. Observational drawing offers children opportunities to focus on details and helps them observe and reflect on what they see.

More Opportunities to Use Vocabulary



Offer children opportunities to label their work. This includes labeling pictures in their journals or on a chart or poster they have made.