

Crafting Student Friendly Definitions for Teaching Vocabulary:

For an upcoming lesson, if you're planning to use implicit vocabulary instruction—quick teaching or reinforcement of words *during* reading—having a student friendly definition planned in advance is key.

Which Words?

The first step is deciding which words. Ask yourself the following questions to determine which words to prioritize when teaching implicitly during reading:

- Which words deserve the most attention because they are crucial to understanding the text or related to key ideas in the story?
- Which words are students likely to encounter again (either in the story or in other readings)?
- Where does the word occur with respect to other questions that you'll stop reading to ask?

Drafting Definitions

Not all definitions are created equal. Consider these three definitions for the word vanquish:

- Vanquish: to eliminate something
- Vanquish: victorious with permanence and/or finality as in a hard-fought conflict
- Vanquish: to defeat completely in a battle

Which do you think is the most useful definition? Why?

What makes the others less useful?

Our thoughts on the three definitions:

- The third definition is both strong and student-friendly.
- The other two definitions exemplify common pitfalls of definitions:
 - The first definition (to eliminate something) is inaccurate.
 - The second definition (victorious with permanence and/or finality as in a hard-fought battle) is too long and contains other vocabulary that students may not be familiar with.

Criteria for Drafting Definitions

A student friendly definition should be:

- Planned in advance.
- Student friendly.
- A consistent part of speech.
- Capture the common use and nuance.
- Double-checked for accuracy.

Practice!

1. Pick a text that you'll be reading next year with your students, or if you're a parent, that you might read with your own child this summer.
2. Pick three pages and use the "Which Words" questions to help you identify which words to teach using implicit vocabulary instruction.
3. Draft your student friendly definitions.