



Somerville Early Education (SEE)

Vocabulary

A Guide for Teachers

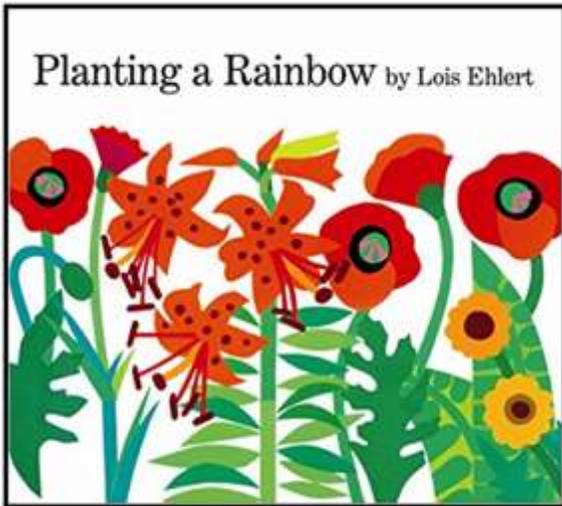


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Introduction: Fostering Word Consciousness

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.

Saul and Dieckman 2005; Shanahan et al. 2010)

The Language of School

Entering preschool is often children’s first schooling experience. For English Learners (ELs), it may also be their first experience in a predominantly English speaking environment. All preschool children have so much to learn. We cannot assume that entering children will know and understand the basic language and concept involved in “doing school.” As we establish and teach classroom routines, we must think carefully about how we will explicitly teach, practice, review and reinforce the language of school. Some key terms include:

- Walking in a line
- Sitting on the edge of the rug
- Raising a hand
- Making a choice
- Expressing personal needs (I need . . . , I want. . .)



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.

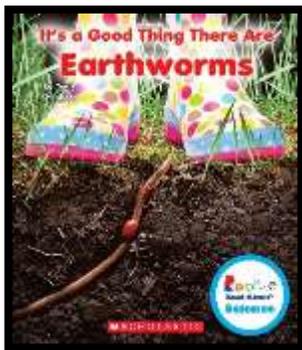
In your classroom:

- 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.

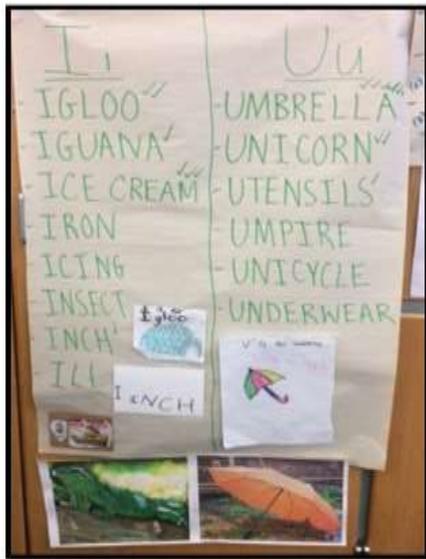


Bringing Words to Life

Words come to life when children experience the target vocabulary and content in many different ways. Your units of study (Big Idea) are the jumping off point and foundation for the vocabulary you will highlight. Providing word cards and inviting children to label real-world objects and displays deepens an understanding of new words.

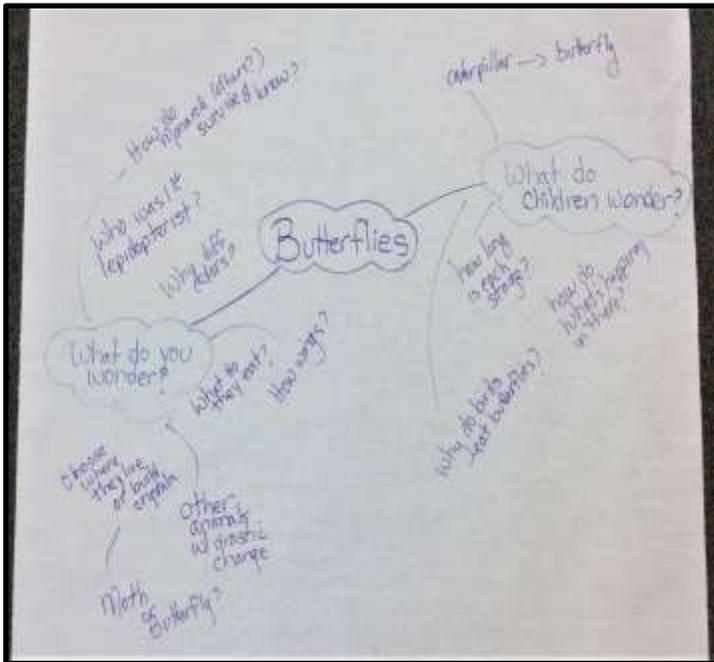


Many teachers engage in **Letter(s) of the Week** to introduce the letter names and sounds associated with words – some familiar and some new. Presenting letters and words in isolation are important code-based practices, but may offer little meaning for young children. Connect the letter of the week to meaningful vocabulary from your **Big Idea**. To make this a more authentic meaning-based experience, encourage children to add to the letter of the week word wall. Children can also draw or collage a picture and write the word to display alongside the teacher’s print. Vocabulary needs context and an anchor.

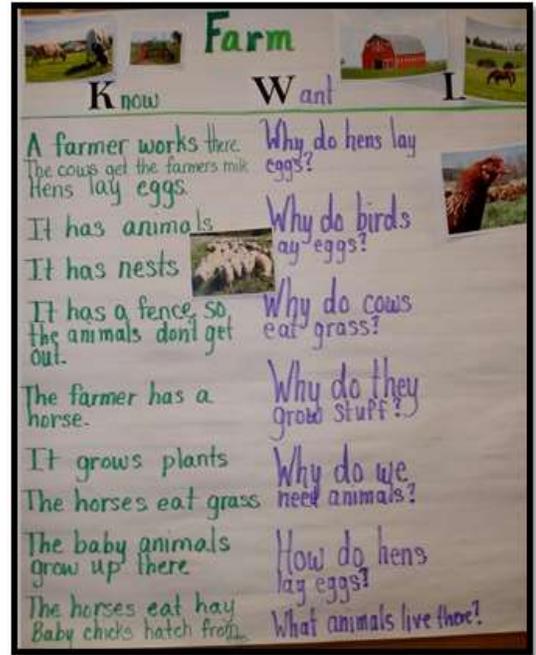


Surfacing the Big Ideas: A Pathway to Meaningful Vocabulary

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**.
- Help children build connections between school and their home lives.
- Reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the children in the class.

The anchor text can 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.

Previewing and Decision Making – Previewing a text to determine how and why it will be used is essential. *Will the book support children’s social understanding and language development? Will it support the learning of target vocabulary words and key curricular concepts?*

- 1. Selecting Key Vocabulary** - Given that many of the words in a book may be new to children, it is important to determine which words are most important for children’s functional language in the classroom and understanding of curricular content. *What words will they need again as they explore materials, play with peers, and discuss and make sense of classroom experiences related to the text?*
- 2. Facilitating discussions and asking higher-level questions** – Inviting children to participate in authentic discussions support both listening and speaking skills. Conversation should be supported throughout the day, including during read-alouds.

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.

Q - **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.

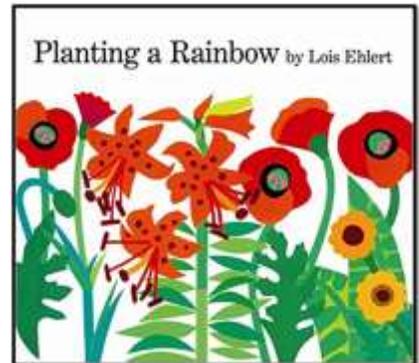
D - **Distancing Prompts** - Ask children to relate pictures and words to their own experiences in the world (Have you ever . . .).

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.

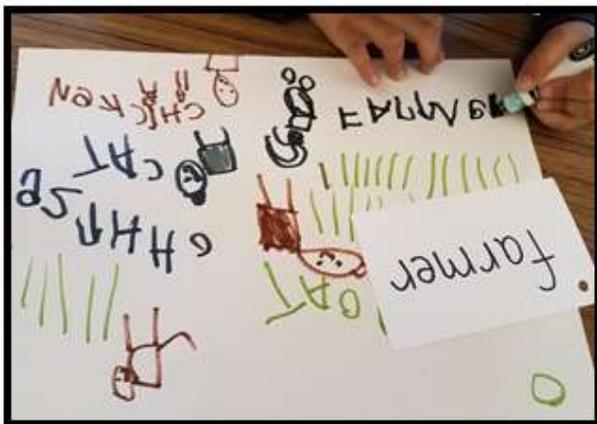


Anchor Text: Planting a Rainbow by Lois Ehlert

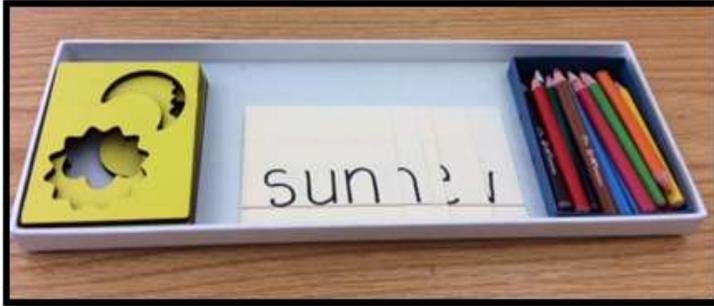
Key Vocabulary: plant, bulbs, sow, seedlings, catalogs, soil, and sprout.

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.



Add word cards to stencils to make the connection between drawings, individual letters and words. The words encourage children to label their own work. Placing the materials in a tray allows children 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 and access them as needed.



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

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 and sounding out a word.



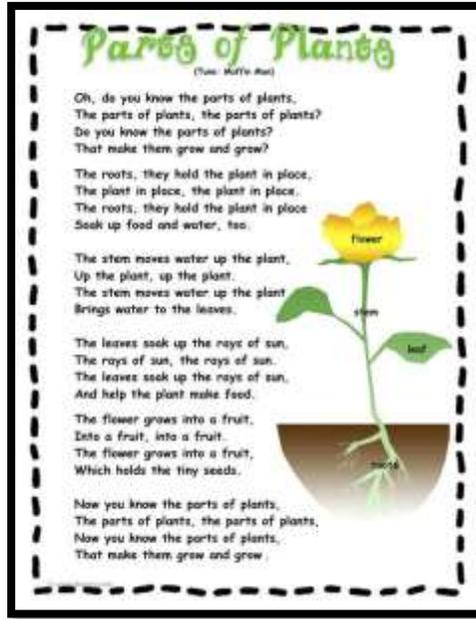
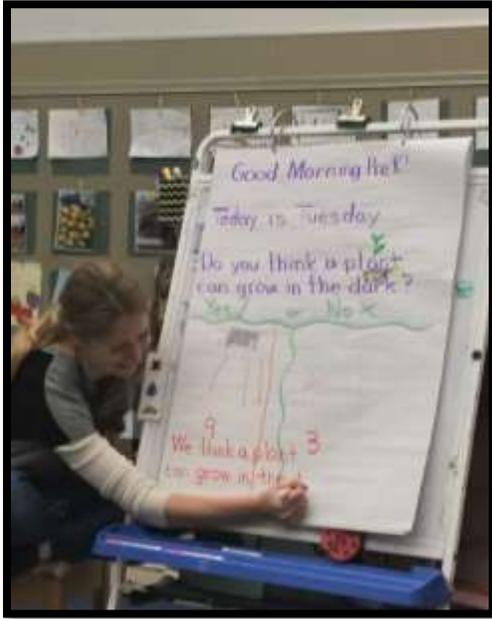
As children manipulate letters to form words, they develop an understanding of how letters are ordered and organized to make a word. For example, words go from left to right, initial sounds go first.

Building Vocabulary Connections Across the Classroom

Children acquire new words and develop word consciousness through repeated exposure and experiences that build connections and integrate learning across contexts. Using **Big Idea** vocabulary throughout the day and in various areas of the classroom provides opportunities to revisit and use the language of school and learning. Conversations around purposeful activities build connections between words and concepts and develop strong language skills.

Morning Message (Question of the day)

Reading a structured morning message (see the Morning Meeting Guide) provides practice with the language of greeting, time, and date. Adding a thoughtful question of the day, provide a link to the daily curriculum – setting the tone for the day.



Songs and poems (shared reading)

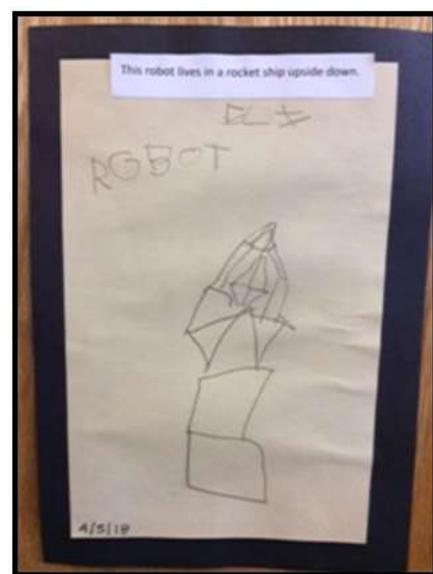
Shared reading experiences, using illustrated and color-coded song and poem charts, support children's memory for language. The structured repetition of songs and poems provides repeated opportunities to hear, learn and understand new and familiar words. Using songs and poems that connect to the Big Idea gives children another tool for learning key vocabulary.

Dramatic Play

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. Creating play scenarios and inviting children to co-plan play, supports the application of new language. Designing dramatic play areas with children allows them to practice meaningful vocabulary as they create labels for areas. Providing labels and word cards allows children to remember and practice the words they are hearing in conversations through the context of play.



The Block Area offers a low risk entry point for children to engage with vocabulary. Children can draw and label what they built. 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.



Sensory Experiences – Sensory activities support children’s learning through multisensory experiences. They are most powerful when children are able to explore real materials and real phenomena, as it is being taught through the curriculum. Give children plenty of time to explore and discuss a materials before asking them to then use it in a more structured and purposeful way.



Children can play with soil and worms for days before planting seeds in row, and labeling the rows.