



CERTIFIED RESEARCH
REPORT

The Smart Word System

Closing the Vocabulary Gap

The Imperative and the Promise

Word Knowledge is at the Heart of Learning Success

When we think of successful learners, we think of students who are able to read sophisticated texts in order to gain insight, information, and understanding. These students demonstrate their knowledge in clear and thoughtful ways, both orally and in writing. Vocabulary acquisition lies at the heart of these hallmarks of success. The rich listening and speaking vocabulary that young children acquire provides the foundation upon which new words build and expand as they develop into proficient readers, writers, and speakers.

The words we master for conversation and reading are the words that empower us for success in school and throughout life. As the contexts in which we learn change, so do the words we need for success in our new environments. As a result, vocabulary growth is one learning processes that never ends.

Seminal research in the field of vocabulary learning advocates systematic and focused instruction. This instruction also needs to be multi-faceted, interactive, and dynamic if students are to retain new words and use them in varied contexts for reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

A Critical Finding: Untended, the Gap Only Widens

Rich and robust instruction is especially critical for students who come to school with limited oral language. The statistics are clear—these students start out with a deficit that continues to widen if they are not part of a solid vocabulary program. According to Biemiller (2005), the bottom 25 percent of students begin Kindergarten with 1,000 fewer root-word meanings than average students. Without the right instruction, this gap will expand, because the lower quartile students only acquire an average of 1.6 word roots per day compared to average students who acquire 2.4. As a result, by the end of grade 2, there is a vocabulary gap of about 2,000 words between average and lower-quartile students.

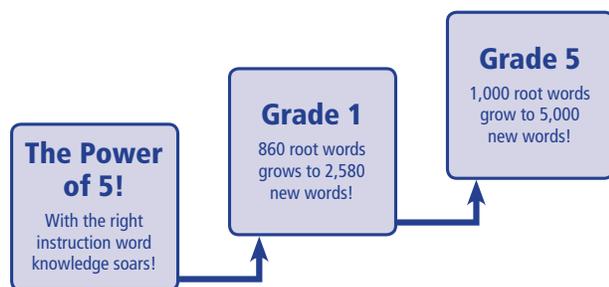
GRADE	AVERAGE STUDENT (at 2.4 root words per day)	BOTTOM 25% (at 1.6 root words per day)
End of Pre-K	3,400	2,400
End of K	4,300	3,016
End of Grade 1	5,160	3,592
End of Grade 2	6,020	4,168

Diamond and Gutlohn, Vocabulary Handbook, CORE: 2006, p. 9

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Reasons for Optimism

The widening vocabulary gap between lower quartile and average students is daunting, but there is promise. After grade 2, students in the lower quartile acquire new words at about the same rate as other students. And, when they learn to expand on root words by studying meanings of related words and affixes, their word knowledge soars by a factor of 3 in grade 1, and 5 in grade 5! With the right instruction the gap can be closed, and all students can acquire the rich and varied vocabularies they need for academic success.



Diamond and Gutlohn, *Vocabulary Handbook*, CORE: 2006, p. 8

The right instruction is key—as Kamil (2004) states: ‘Once students know what is expected of them in a vocabulary task, they often learn rapidly.’ To learn rapidly, students need:

- Engaging, robust instruction of at least two new, high-impact ‘Tier 2’ words per day—**because building vocabulary builds learning power.**
- Strategies for unlocking unknown words—**so students have a way to independently negotiate meaning during reading.**
- Support for developing Word Consciousness—**so students learn to seek new and novel words to add to their repertoires.**
- Effective independent reading programs—**because learning new words incidentally is critical to acquiring a solid and rich vocabulary.**

Smart Word—Powerful Word Study Routines With Every Leveled Book

Every Sundance/Newbridge leveled book is accompanied by a four-sided, engaging and effective vocabulary card. These cards translate best vocabulary practices into routines and activities students can engage in with partners or small groups.

As a value add—a dedicated section of each card offers Spanish speaking English-language learners a linguistic support system that impacts their growth well beyond the activities. These features together mean teachers can now accelerate the vocabulary growth of all their students with a program that dovetails their existing reading instruction.

Conclusion

Smart Word is critical for students who come to school with limited oral language skills. Practical and effective four-sided cards give students the rich, robust vocabulary instruction they need for success in the classroom, and in life.

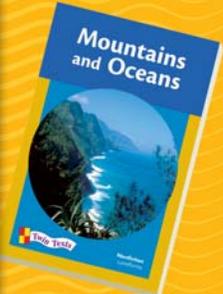
Student-friendly definitions make word meanings accessible and memorable.

Features high-impact, Tier 2 words—words that have rich applications in listening, speaking, reading, and writing and require active instruction.

Work With Your Teacher

Name and Talk About Your Words

- peak** (p. 2): the very top of a mountain
- covered** (p. 4): have something all over or on it
- alone** (p. 2): without others nearby
- Canada** (p. 8): the country to the north of the United States
- volcano** (p. 10): an opening in the Earth in which hot lava, gases, and ash shoot out



THE Smart Word SYSTEM

Mountains and Oceans

1000 TALK

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Interactive word explorations link vocabulary to reading comprehension by supporting students as they apply their new words to each leveled text.

Explore Your Words

Your teacher will read a sentence. Show what your face would look like for each situation.

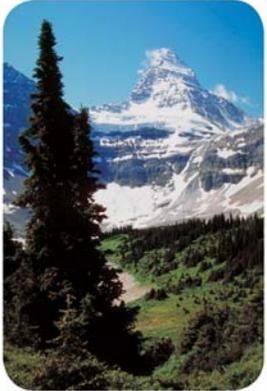
- After a very long climb, you finally make it to the top of a mountain **peak**.
- You discover the mountain is **covered** with snow.
- You suddenly realize you are **alone** and it is starting to get very dark.
- A group of hikers from **Canada** reach the **peak** and tell you they'll take you home.
- In the distance, you see a fiery **volcano** begin to erupt in a burst of flames.

Open-ended activities inspire students to put their new words to use in dynamic ways.

Use Your Words in a New Way

Talk about these questions with a partner.

- 1 Can a mountain **peak** be **covered** with snow?
- 2 If you went to **Canada** would you be all **alone**?
- 3 When a **volcano** erupts, can it make a mountain **peak**?
- 4 When the ground is **covered** with ants, are the ants **alone**?



A thorough Linguistic Support System helps your ELLs use their Spanish skills to learn new words in English. They'll learn cognates, false friends, shades of meaning, and more.

Tips for Spanish Speakers

Cognates These words from the book might already be words you know in Spanish. They look alike, and they share the same meanings.

English	Spanish
mountains (p. 2)	montañas
covered (p. 4)	cubierto
rocks (p. 4)	rocas
United States (p. 8)	Estados Unidos
North America (p. 8)	América del Norte, Norteamérica
volcanoes (p. 10)	volcanes

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