Vocabulary Instruction for Gifted Students

What does the gifted student need?

* The gifted student needs to read a variety of genres

Reading choices must contain a variety of genres. Although choice and self-selection are important, students must also experience a wide range of text to gain increased levels of comfort and proficiency. Reading skills and use of literature need to be built into the regular curriculum and have a rich content base.

* The gifted student needs opportunities to pursue areas of interest

Using an interest inventory to determine your case study’s preferences, you will develop lessons with those interests in mind and provide ample opportunities for them to select literature based on these interests.

* The gifted student needs guidance in critical and literary analysis

Students need to build upon their knowledge, be given opportunities for analysis, and appreciation for ideas and people. Also, many gifted students prefer reading and reflecting non-fiction selections. In addition to responding to text individually, students need opportunities to engage in both free and guided discussion with others.

Many gifted students slog through the typical vocabulary contract week after week. Help your students learn to explore the depth and complexity of words by deepening your word studies with the following strategies:

**Multiple Meaning Words & Homophones**

Teach students about the art of wordplay using puns:

* + bands that were banned
  + vain veins
  + gorillas serving as guerrillas
  + and hoarse horses

Be sure to push your students beyond simple examples and encourage them to learn new meanings. Provide them with lists so they can explore and develop their own “punny” examples.

**Etymology & Greek and Latin Roots**

Classes can study Greek and Latin word origins by developing names for creative inventions or words that “should” exist. Each creation should be constructed with at least two Greek or Latin roots, prefixes, or suffixes.  Some examples include:

* Acubible – a sharp book
* Aquacrat – a person who lives in water

**Idioms**

Students may find it interesting to explore the origins of idioms and aphorisms and discuss why these sayings find their way into our cultural knowledge.

**Antagonyms**

Antagonyms are words that have the two opposing meanings. For example, “bound” is an example since it means moving (“My train was bound for Portland”) and immobile (“I was bound and gagged.”).

**Unusual Word Walls**

Students self-select and post unusual words in a designated area; students discuss words with teacher and other students, and can provide illustrations or examples to go along with the postings. Gifted students often already have a firm understanding of academic vocabulary, so allowing them to explore other interesting words in their reading is an apt extension.

**Word Families**

Gifted students can explore the words taught to the entire class more deeply by researching the “family” of the word and creating a chart or graphic organizer exploring words related to the key term. For example, if the key word was “Impetuous,” students could add out other related words such as rash, impulsive, reckless, etc. Students should explain how the related words are subtly different from the key word.

**Word Continuums**

Students begin with two opposite words and research words that demonstrate various degrees of those antonyms. They can record these continuums in their vocabulary journals and begin incorporating them into their writing.

**Word Races**

Assign groups of students a simple word for which there are many synonyms, and see which group can come up with the most synonyms in a given amount of time.

**Make a New Word**

Ask students to take a long vocabulary word and see how many words they can make from its letters in an allotted time.

**Fit the Category**

Provide students with a longer topical word or phrase, such as “The Harlem Renaissance.” Students should work with a partner to generate as many words as possible that begin with the letters of the given word and fit the category. The players with the most unique words at the end of the time limit win.

**Creating bi- or trilingual (or more if there are more than two first languages other than English represented in the class) dictionaries for classroom use.** This activity helps all the students become aware of the cultural vocabulary of each student in the classroom. Students create dictionaries by listing the English vocabulary word to be learned in the first column and them placing translations in the next column or columns.

**Analogies**

Working with analogies promotes problem solving and recognizing relationships while drawing attention to word meanings, nuances and choice.

**Vocabulary Journals**

Students should track unfamiliar words they encounter in their reading – vocabulary journals can take many forms, but should generally include some mention of the grammatical function of the word, notes on how it is used, and some form of figurative language or non-linguistic representation.

**Final Thoughts**

Almost all vocabulary strategies can be modified to effectively challenge Gifted learners. For example, choosing more advanced vocabulary for the “Possible Questions” strategy can provide students with the opportunity to experiment with less-familiar words and make educated predictions about the content of the text they are preparing to read.