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How to talk about words

Four Problems

- So many words, so little time
 - How do you balance word learning and other aspects of literacy?
- Vocabulary knowledge is both a cause and a consequence of reading achievement
- Vocabulary differences begin at home
- Vocabulary growth requires word consciousness
 - What are the socio-cultural differences in word knowledge?

So many words, so little time

- One estimate found that “Printed School English” contains roughly 88,000 different words.
- The average child, by the end of high school, may know about half or 45,000 different words.
- If a child enters 1st grade knowing about 6,000 words, then they must learn about 3,000 new words per year.



Facts about Vocabulary

- One study found that, in fact, children did learn between 1,000 and 5,000 new words per year, or about 3,000 on the average.
- Even lower estimates suggest that children learn at least one new word per day, every day.

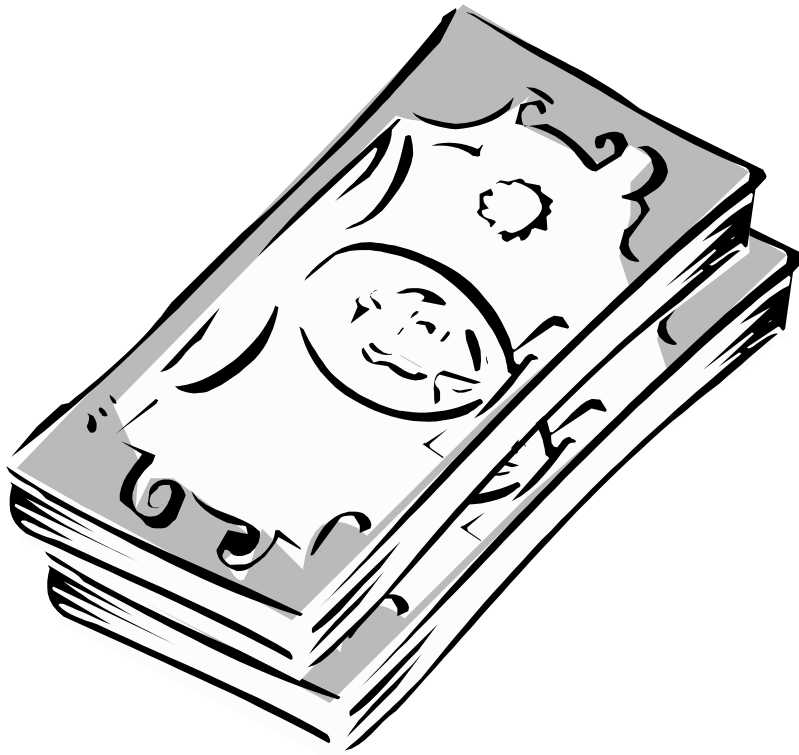
Where do these words come from?

- Our informal estimates suggest that active teaching can cover 6-10 words per week, or about 400 per year.
- We also estimate the average child can learn nearly 3000 words through ordinary reading of moderately challenging text (text with 95% of words known).

The Conundrum of Rich Instruction



- Snow, August, Carlo, etc.
 - Relatively small number of words
 - Rich, engaging passages
 - Strategies in how to infer meaning from context
 - Use of cognates and root words



- Time:
 - 20-30 minutes per day
 - 100-150 minutes per week
 - In some cases, teachers spent the minimum time, in other cases teachers often went beyond a half hour.
- Total time
 - 8 -12 minutes per word

Rich Instruction

- We know that rich instruction works.
- We also know that it is not practical to use it to cover the words that children need to know, roughly 1000 words per year.
- The question is how do we extract the richness of the instruction, like an extract from vanilla beans, to make instruction more efficient?

Vocabulary Knowledge is a Consequence of reading

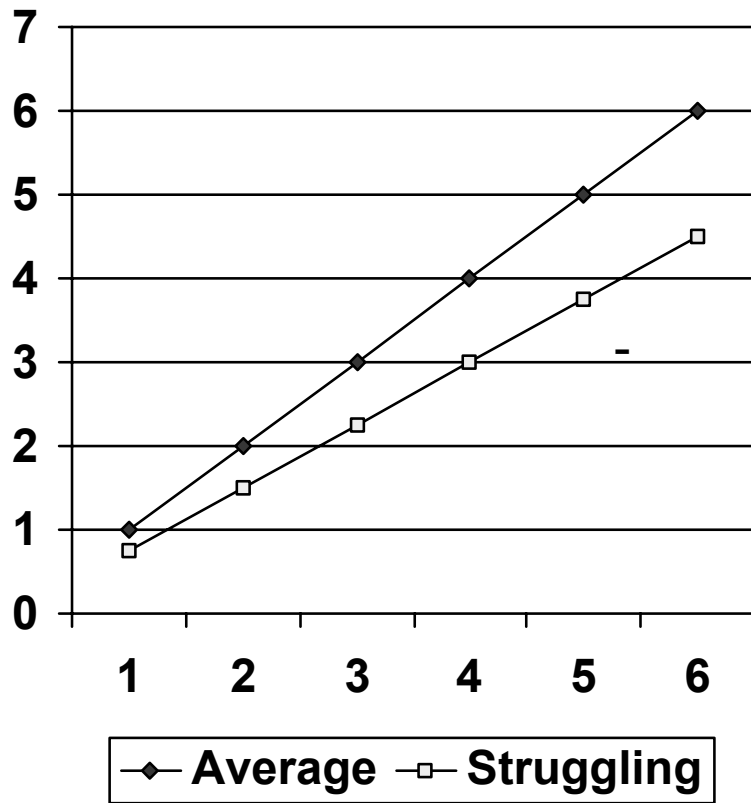
- Children learn most words from wide reading.



Matthew Effects

- Children with reading problems read less than proficient readers.
- Children with reading problems read less challenging texts than proficient readers
- The result is that children with reading problems read even less and even less challenging materials.

Matthew Effects



- The more words a child knows, the more complex text that child will be able to read.
- The more complex texts a child can read, the more words they will learn.
- The reverse is also true.
- Thus, the “rich get richer and the poor get poorer.”

Matthew Effects

- The result is that the vocabulary gap between children with reading problems and proficient readers grows wider every year!!!

Children's books are where the words are

Vocabulary Difficulty of Various Sources of Language

	Average Rank Difficulty of Words in Text	Average Number of Rare Words per 1000
Newspapers	1690	68.3
Adult Books	1058	52.7
Comic Books	867	53.5
Children's Books	627	30.9
Children's TV	543	20.2
Adult TV	490	22.7
Mr. Rogers	413	2.0
Cartoon Shows	598	30.8
Conversation between Two College-educated Adults	496	17.3

From Hayes & Ahrens (1988)

Vocabulary Growth and Fluency are Related

- Children need early growth in reading skill to gain access to the books they need for vocabulary growth.
- Early reading books cover already known topics.
 - Pets, family, etc.
- Do children need more knowledge (informational) text in the early grades?

Three solutions

- Not all words need rich instruction
 - Some need less
 - Some need more
- Children need redoubled exposure to children's books
 - Fluency Instruction
 - Reading to children
- Children need to be word conscious

Kinds of words

- Simple words
 - Words that the child knows the concept for
 - Examples -- crimson, flawless, comment
- Goldilocks Words
 - Words that are “not too easy, not too difficult”
- Complex words
 - Words that require concept development
 - Examples -- liberty, hormone, referendum

Simple words

- May need no more than a quick definition if context is supportive and a synonym works well
 - Dick the dog cried in the dark night, a strangely escalating ululation that started at two in the morning.
 - Ululation = howling or wailing

“Goldilocks” Words

- Not too hard
- Not too easy

dome

amber

beret

sparkling

stroll

nocturnal

wade

embarrassed

emerge

liquid

Three principles of effective vocabulary instruction

- Include both definitional and contextual information
- Have children actively process the information
- Provide multiple exposures

Definitional approaches

- Synonyms
- Antonyms
- Explaining definitions in your own words
- How are two words similar? How are they different?

Making distinctions

- How is a villain like an embezzler? How are they different?
- How is crimson like scarlet? How are they different?

Problem

- Definitions

- Follow a strict discourse pattern, one not easily understood by many children
- Genus - Differentiae



- Dazzling - bright enough to deprive someone of sight
- Strange - no expected, normal or ordinary
- Exhausted - extremely weak or tired
- Nuisance - an annoying or irritating person or thing

solution

- Explanations
 - Putting meaning of word into one's own words

If something is *dazzling*, that means that is so bright that you can hardly look at it.

Strange describes something different from what you are used to.

Exhausted means feeling so tired that you can hardly move

When someone is a *nuisance*, he or she is bothering you.

From Beck, McKeown, & Kucan (2003)

"A synonym is a word you use when you can't spell the word you first thought of."

Burt Bacharach

Definitional Information is not enough

- Smoke (v.t. to inhale burning matter)
- The same word means something different in different contexts.

Contextual Approaches

- Contextual Information
 - How a word's meaning changes in different contexts
- Scenarios
- Comparing what the word means in two different sentences.
- Generating sentences
- Silly sentences

Providing Contextual Knowledge

- Generating sentences
 - Make sure the sentences really tell about the word
- Generating scenarios
- Silly questions
- Describe, draw
- Possible sentences

Engage children in meaningful analysis

- Merely memorizing definitions (or seeing a word in context) is not enough for a child to learn a word
 - 217-244-9896
- Instead we need to engage children in meaningful learning
 - debris

Efficient Vocabulary Teaching

- Anticipation
 - Sets up children to look for words in the story
- Pre-reading
 - Uses word meanings to set the themes of the story
- Point of contact teaching
 - Simple words
 - Provides synonym
 - Goldilocks words
 - Provides efficient teaching
- Consolidation
 - Provides review and secures the meanings of the words

Anticipation

- Anticipation Guide
 - Given day before
 - 8-10 words (including nonsense words)
 - Know well (can define, write good sentence)
 - Know something about
 - Never seen

Pre-reading

- Theme-based mapping
 - Semantic map developed by teacher and student
 - Must strongly relate to theme of the story
 - No Birdwalking!!!!
 - Brainstorming (5-10 minutes) about theme of story (not general knowledge)'
 - Teacher and students develop a map together
 - Not fill in blank of map

Pre-reading

- Possible sentences
 - Teacher provides 8-10 words on board
 - Of these words, 6 are unknown or not well known (from anticipation guide) and 2-4 are well known
 - Children write sentences containing two of the words from the list, which might be found in the story.

Pre-reading

- Picture Walk
 - Teacher does a short review of pictures in the story
 - As teacher encounters a picturable word, teacher stops and gives a brief explanation or a sentence containing that word

Pre-Reading

- Story Impressions

- Teacher makes an ordered list of words from a story that is about to be read
- Children are given words, discuss new words
- Children are to make a story of their own (in group or individually) using those words
- Words in children's story must be in the same order as on list. (Other sentences can intervene.)
- After reading, children re-read their stories and discuss how they are the same and how they are different.

Story Impressions

- sail better than anyone
 - |
 - gust
 - |
- caught the sail
 - |
 - boom
 - |
- hit the boy's head
 - |
 - on a beach
 - |
 - two boats
- sailing above the water|
 - sailor
- learn to sail
 - |
 - new sails
 - |
- took the till
 - |
 - fly
- evening wind
 - |
 - bow
 - |
- began to lift
 - |
- over the village
- Ifell to the ground

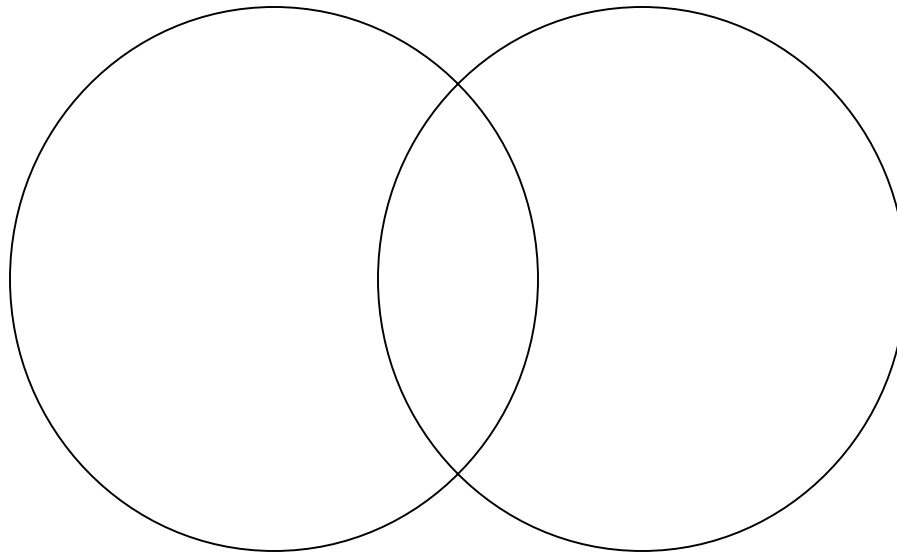
Venn Diagrams

- Venn diagrams are useful to show two contrasting categories.
- Again, use these only if the them suggests them.

Venn Diagrams

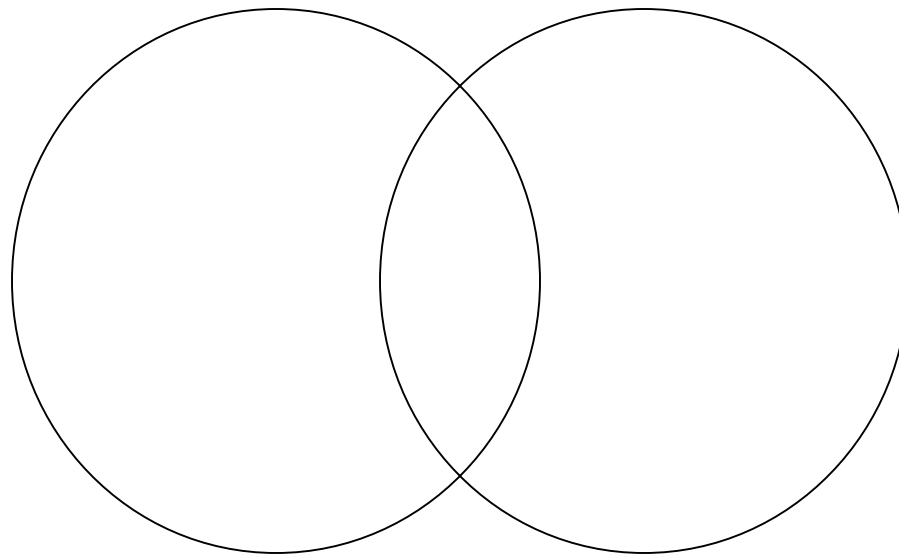
Pets

Mammals



Venn Diagrams

Protest Rebellion



From a unit on the origins of the American Revolution

Point of Contact Teaching

- For “simple words”
 - Teacher mentions synonym or cognate
 - “amble” is a kind of walk
 - “blouse” is a loose-fitting shirt
 - ‘truly’ means that the _____ is true.

Point of Contact Teaching

- For “Goldilocks” words
 - Teacher provides definition.
 - Asks what the sentence means with the word
 - Asks students for other sentences that the word could fit into. (2-3)
 - Asks students to put the definition in their own words.

Consolidation

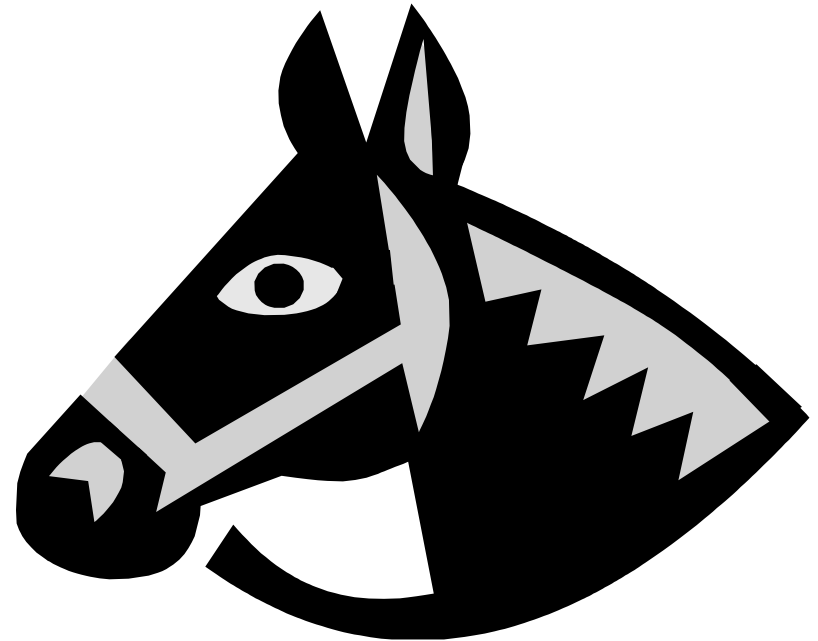
- Class reviews anticipation guide
- These words should have been the words from the theme teaching, possible sentences, or picture walk as well as the Goldilocks words in the point of contact teaching.

Consolidation

- For theme-mapping, add other words to the map from the story
- For possible sentences, review children's sentences
- For picture walk, have class review the walk in writing, using the words in the list

Silly Questions

- Can a giraffe cough?
- Can a pig swim?
- Can a rooster swim?
- Can a mouse waddle?
- Does a horse canter?
- Does a gosling have feathers?
- Does a cygnet swim?
- Does a sow run?



Silly Questions



- Can an actuary add?
- Is an actuary amorous?
- Can an actuary be a philanthropist?
- Can a hermit be an actuary?
- Can a hermit be a philanthropist?
- Can a hermit be amorous?

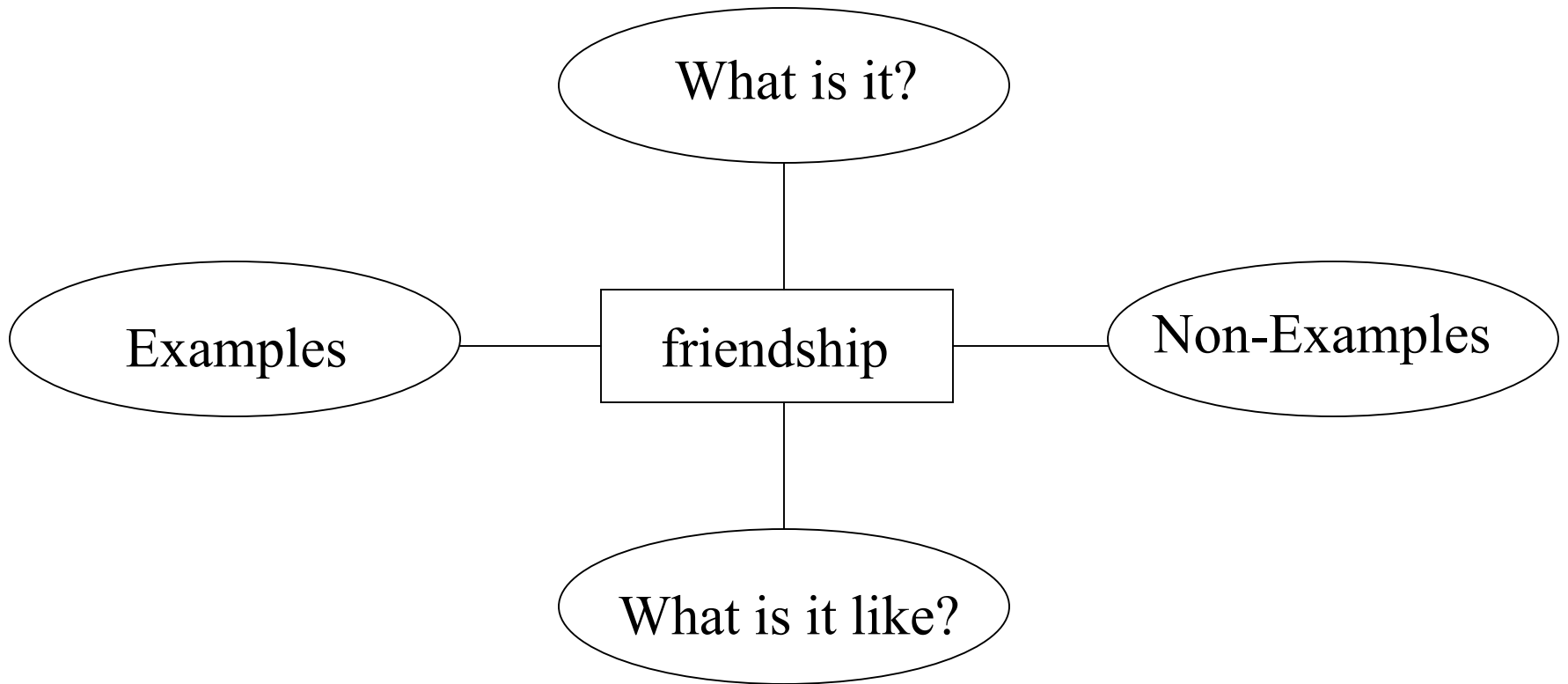
Complex words

- For concepts, children need examples, non-examples, “criss-crossing the landscape” of the word’s meaning
- Immune system
 - What it is: part of the body which protects against disease
 - What is in it: antibodies, white blood cells (including T-cells)

Complex concepts

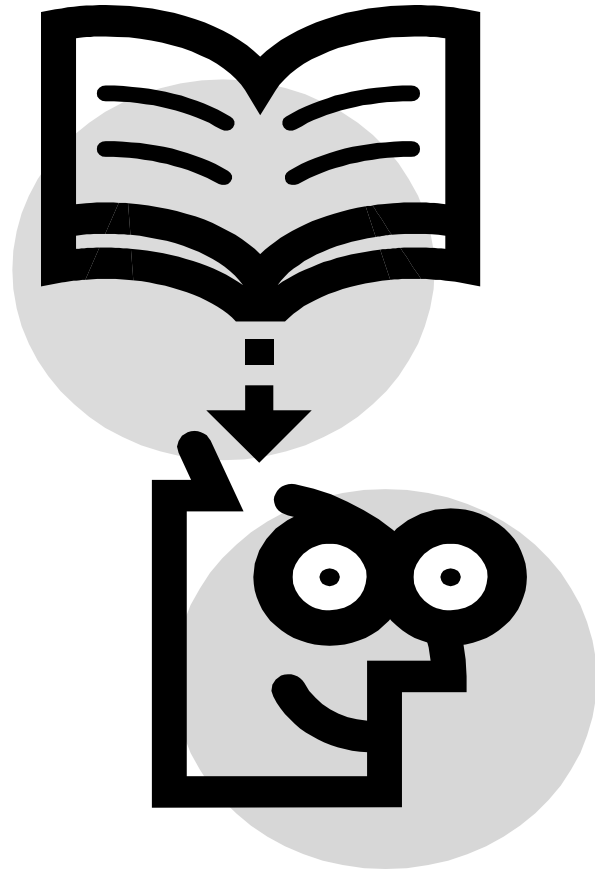
- Examples, non-examples, categories, contrasting it to other concepts

Concept Map

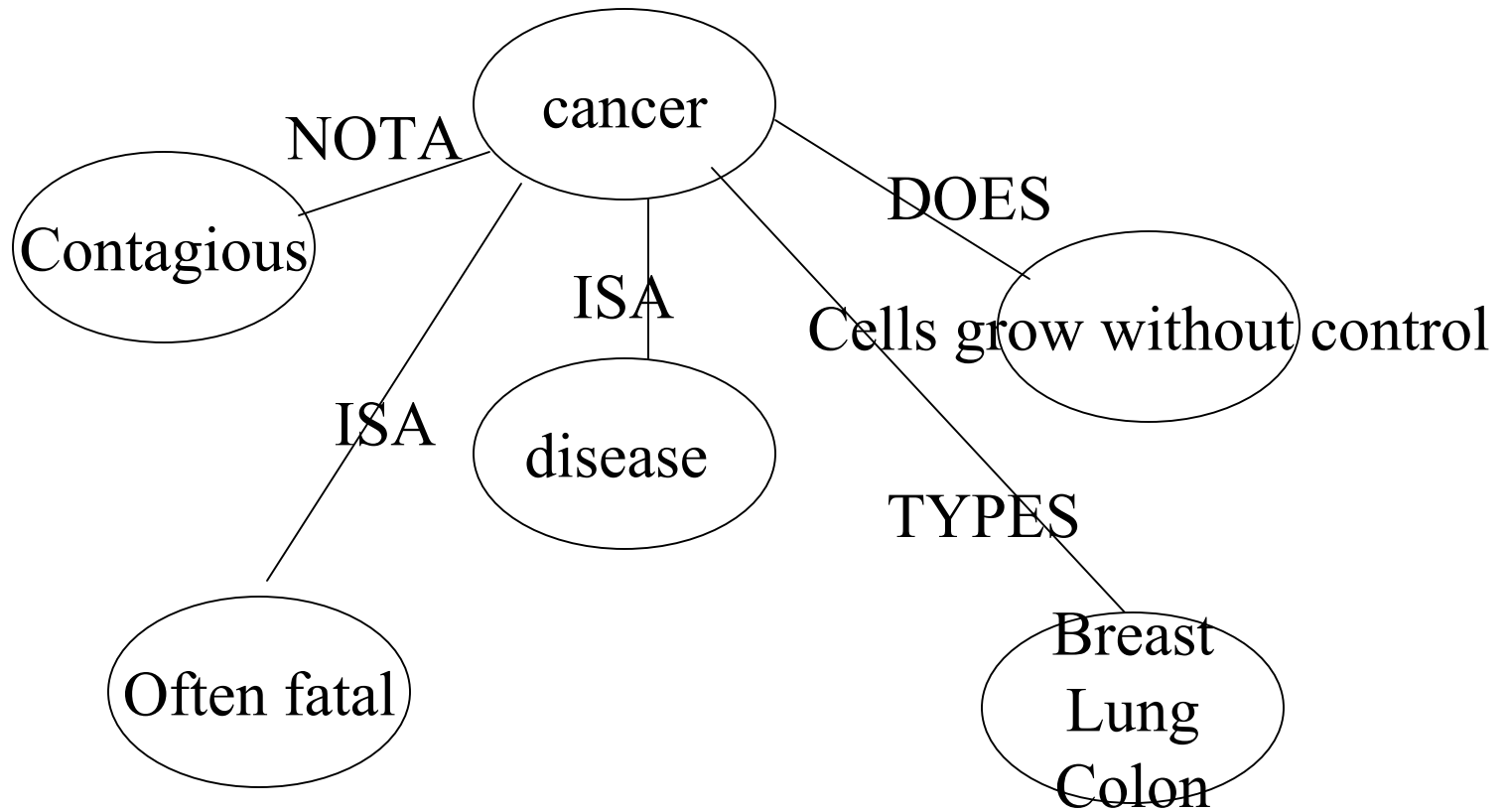


ISA

- ISA
- LIKEA
- LOOKSLIKEA
- NOTA
- HASA
- DOES
- TYPES

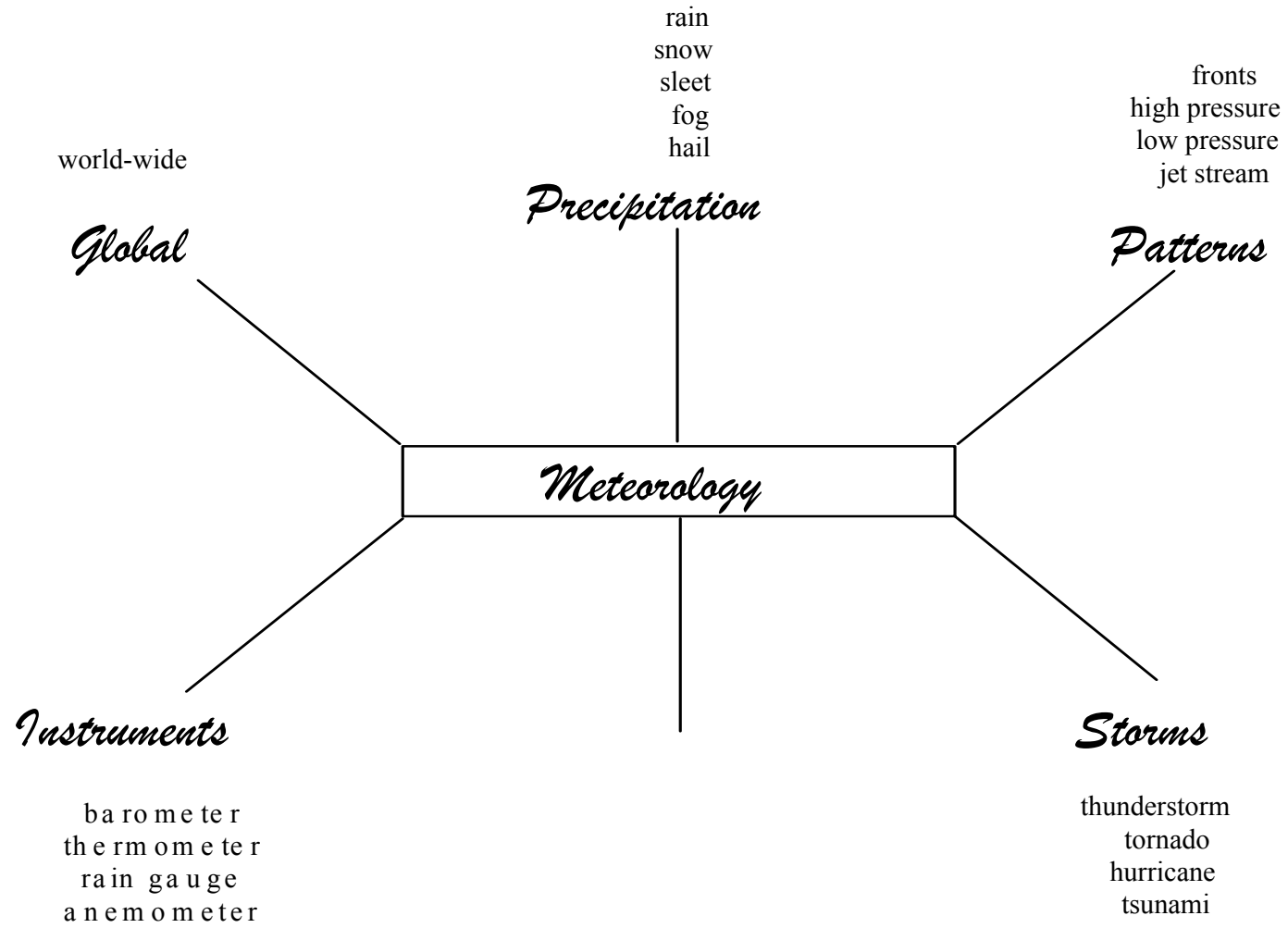


Cancer



Semantic Mapping

- Brainstorm words that go with a central concept
 - Write on board
 - Add words to be taught, discussing as you go
- Create a map, linking concepts to categories



Semantic Feature Analysis

- Use a grid
- Add features (descriptions) along the top
- Name objects in a category along the rows

	2 wheded	4 wheded	Land	Sea	Air	
bicycle	+	-	+	-	-	
Airplane	-	-	-	-	+	
Velocepede	+	-	+	-	-	
biplane	-	-	-	-	+	
cruiser						

Word Consciousness

- Word Wizard
- Word of the day
- The Gift of Words
- How English gets words
 - Word parts
 - Borrowed words
 - Changed words
 - Word stories

Word Wizard



- Teacher or children pick “school” words
- When children hear or see words, they tell teacher
- Teacher puts a Post-It™ note after child’s name
- When children get 5 Post-its, they are Word Wizard

Word Wizard



• Jamel

• Eric

• Brittney

• Alex

• Charlie

• Laqueesha

Teaching word parts

- Prefixes and roots account for a large portion of the growth of word meaning between grades 3 and 5.
- Teaching word parts can dramatically increase children's word knowledge

Common prefixes

- Un-
- Re-
- In-, il-, ir- (not)
- Dis-
- En-, em-
- Non-
- In-, im- (in)
- Over-
- Mis-
- Sub-
- Pre-
- Inter-
- Fore-
- De-
- Trans-
- Super-
- Semi-
- Anti-
- mid-
- Under-

Some prefix activities

- Making new words
 - Not blue = unblue
 - Not cola = uncola
- Sentences
 - The _____ was a train that went underground.
 - Our _____ wrote the Constitution.
 - The candy was _____.

Other Useful Prefixes

- Number Prefixes

- Mono-
- Bi-
- Tri-
- Quad-
- Penta-
- Hexa-
- Deca-
- Cent-
- Mill-

- Science

- Bio-
- Chemo-
- Photo-
- Geo-
- Astro-
- Anthro-
- Psych-

Common Roots

- Aud (hear)
- Dict (speak)
- Meter (measure)
- Min (little, small)
- Mit (send)
- Max (large)
- Phon (sound)
- Scrib, script (write)
- Spect (see)
- Struct (build)
- Logy (study)
- Graph (draw)

Word Consciousness

- Words are social class markers
 - Slang and jargon defines what groups you belong to
 - “What up, dog?”
 - Versus
 - “Phonological awareness, metacognition”
- Word use may be limited by class and racial boundaries
 - “Acting [talking] White”



What does all of this have in common?

- You need to think about vocabulary and make it a part of your talk about text.
- You need to go beyond the “writing definition” approach to vocabulary and move toward a discussion of how words fit into contexts.

What does all this have in common?

- Children learn words through interactions with them.
- This may mean less formal instruction and more talk about words
 - Text Talk
 - Gift of words
 - Vocabulary talk throughout the day, rather than just pre-reading

Word Consciousness

- The Gift of Words
 - You need to go beyond your teaching and let students discover the gift that authors provide
 - Just as we receive this gift everyday, we need to give the gift of words to our children.

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