

## Vocabulary and the Common Core

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*including*

**The Significance of Vocabulary in the Common Core State Standards:  
An Overview of the Research Base and Instructional Implications**

*and*

**Which Words Do I Teach?  
Vocabulary Exercises**



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**The Significance of Vocabulary in the Common Core State Standards:  
An Overview of the Research Base and Instructional Implications**

## The Need for More Systematic, Intensive, and Efficient Vocabulary Instruction

Vocabulary has been empirically connected to reading comprehension since 1925 (Whipple 1925, NRP 2000, Snow 2002), and most recently in results from the 2009 and 2011 NAEP (NCES 2012). Yet, vocabulary instruction is neither frequent nor systematic in most schools across the country (Durkin 1979, Scott and Nagey 1997, Biemiller 2001).<sup>1</sup> For decades, vocabulary instruction has been ill-defined in state standards and assessments, as well as in core reading programs (Hiebert 2009, Marzano et al 2005, Biemiller 2005, Nagy et al 1989, Nagy and Scott 2000).

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) place a premium on vocabulary in the reading, writing, and speaking and listening strands. Anchor reading standard 10 requires students to “read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently” while reading standard 4 and language standards 4,5, and 6 all call for emphasis on vocabulary and word awareness at every grade level.<sup>2345</sup> We know that of the many features of complex text, difficult or uncommon vocabulary likely plays the largest role in causing student difficulty (Nelson *et al*/2012). We also know vocabulary is one of the primary causes of the

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<sup>1</sup> The most succinct summary of this research comes from the National Reading Panel’s review of hundreds of studies: “Vocabulary instruction leads to gains in comprehension” (NRP 2000); see also *Reading Next* (Snow 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Reading Anchor Standard 4: CCRA.R.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

<sup>3</sup> CCRA.L.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

<sup>4</sup> CCRA.L.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

<sup>5</sup> CCRA.L.6 Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

achievement gap (Becker 1977, Baumann & Kameenui 1991, Stanovich 1986), and many students from low-income households enter school with smaller vocabularies than their more affluent peers (Hart and Risley 1995, Biemiller 2010). For all of these reasons, vocabulary instruction in the era of the CCSS needs to be more systematic, intensive, and efficient than it has been to date. Fortunately, there is already some evidence this is happening (Beck and McKeown Webinar 2012).

The purpose of this paper is to provide teachers and administrators with efficient and effective research-based techniques that can be used with all texts, but especially the complex texts called for by the CCSS.

### **The Relationship between Text Complexity and Vocabulary in the CCSS**

In order to understand the central role of vocabulary in the CCSS, it is important to examine the relationship between vocabulary and text complexity. Anchor reading standard 10 of the CCSS explicitly calls for students in grades 2–12 to be able to read grade-level complex text “independently and proficiently.” This standard, like reading standard 1, “cite specific textual evidence” impacts the ability of teachers and students to meet all the other anchor standards in reading: students cannot meet standards 2–9 unless they are reading text of grade-level complexity. This standard is a direct response to a body of research, showing the relationship between text complexity and proficient reading (see ACT 2006). Students in grade 12 are now asked to read texts that are approximately four

years behind the complexity levels of average work manuals and first-year college texts (see CCSS Appendix A, 2010). Yet a 2006 ACT report<sup>6</sup> identified text complexity as the most important variable impacting whether students met the performance benchmark on the ACT for college readiness, more so than any factor related to question-type or student background (ACT 2006).

While many factors influence the complexity of a text,<sup>7</sup> research indicates that vocabulary is very likely the number one most important (Nelson et al 2012, Perfetti 2007, NCES 2012). Consequently, the CCSS place special emphasis on vocabulary. The CCSS acknowledge the relationship between engaging with complex text and vocabulary acquisition: an 8<sup>th</sup> grader might expand his vocabulary somewhat from reading a 5<sup>th</sup> grade text, but more growth would likely occur with texts written at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level. Meeting the levels of text complexity required by the CCSS demands significant attention to vocabulary acquisition. Likewise, vocabulary acquisition is aided by students engaging regularly with complex, grade-level text in addition to engaging in a volume of reading of texts they can read independently<sup>8</sup>. In this way, the different standards work together towards the goal of college-and-career readiness for all students.

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<sup>6</sup> *Reading Between the Line: What the ACT Reveals About College Readiness in Reading* (ACT 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Some other features of complex text: 1) subtle and/or frequent transitions, 2) multiple and/or subtle themes and purposes, 3) density of information, 4) less common settings, topics or events, 5) lack of repetition, overlap or similarity in words and sentences, 6) complex sentences, 7) lack of words, sentences or paragraphs that review or pull things together for the student, 8) longer paragraphs, 9) any text structure which is less narrative and/or mixes structures, 10) use of passive voice. This list is by no means complete, but intends to provide a sense of the range of these features.

<sup>8</sup> Keep in mind that students can read more complex text independently if it is connected to the topics that they are studying in school.

For additional information about text complexity and the CCSS, as well as the relationship between vocabulary and text complexity, here are some additional resources:

**Appendix A to the ELA/Literacy CCSS**

[http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix\\_A.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf)

An appendix that outlines the research base of the CCSS for ELA/Literacy.

**Supplement to Appendix A**

[http://www.corestandards.org/assets/E0813\\_Appendix\\_A\\_New\\_Research\\_on\\_Text\\_Complexity.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/E0813_Appendix_A_New_Research_on_Text_Complexity.pdf)

A document that provides new research on text complexity to support the implementation of the CCSS.

**Measures of Text Difficulty (Perfetti et al)**

<http://achievethecore.org/page/321/measures-of-text-difficulty>

A research study of text analysis tools that measure text complexity quantitatively.

**Why Complex Text Matters (David Liben)**

<http://achievethecore.org/page/62/why-complex-text-matters>

Essay on ACT research finding that the ability to read and understand complex text is the best way to distinguish students who are college and career ready from those who are not.

**Navigating Text Complexity**

[http://www.ccsso.org/Navigating\\_Text\\_Complexity.html](http://www.ccsso.org/Navigating_Text_Complexity.html)

Website created by ELA State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards that includes resources for evaluating text complexity, model text roadmaps (comprehensive text complexity analyses), and model text sets (backbones for units of instruction).

## Instructional Implications

So how do we teach the volume of words necessary for students to read grade-level text independently and proficiently?

Until relatively recently, debates about how to teach vocabulary centered on direct instruction versus learning from context through wide reading. Advocates for the context approach pointed to the number of words students need to learn as being impossible to teach directly within the school day, week, or year. Thus, emphasis needed to be placed on wide reading. This was the origin of the “25 books a year programs” prominent in the mid 1990’s and still present in some states’ standards. Direct instruction advocates argued that a focus on growing “word awareness” through instruction was essential.

The debate has been settled with a body of work showing that not all words are created equal (Nagy et al 1985, Cunningham and Stanovich 1988, Baker et al 1995, Beck et al 2002, Biemiller 2004, Moats 2005). Some words and classes of words appear far more frequently in texts students read. Learning these particular words makes students more likely to learn other words independently from context; this effect is strengthened if instructional methods are research-based (Nagy and Hiebert 2007, Moats 2005, Beck et al 2002, Snow 2007). Thus, teaching words directly enhances student capacity for learning from context: the more words a student knows, the more likely she is to be gathering new meanings from context. This is even more likely with words that appear in a wide range of text types and are expected to be seen frequently by the student reader. Thus,

both methods—direct instruction and learning vocabulary in context—are necessary components of vocabulary instruction.

The true challenge comes in choosing exactly which words to teach, how to teach them, and how long to spend on them. Hiebert (2009) describes three general criteria for determining which words to choose for intensive teaching:

- 1) words needed to fully comprehend the text,
- 2) words likely to appear in future texts from any discipline, and
- 3) words that are part of a word family or semantic network.

These criteria serve as useful guideposts, but truly knowing when to stop and teach in context, when to prepare students in advance, and when to teach words more intensively, is challenging for even the most seasoned educators. In preparing a text for instruction, teachers frequently find themselves asking, “Which words do I teach, and how much time do I give to them?”

Words that can be quickly explained should be explained in the moment of encounter. This often includes:

- 1) concrete words,
- 2) words with single meanings, and
- 3) words reflecting meaning or shades of meaning that are likely already part of the students’ experiences.

The explanation will enhance and not impede comprehension because it will be swift and unobtrusive (Biemiller 2010).

Words that need more explanation will ideally be taught in context, and then reinforced after, as these explanations will be more elaborate and time-consuming (Beck, McKeown and Kucan 2007, Biemiller 2007). This includes

- 1) words that are abstract,
- 2) words with multiple related meanings, and
- 3) words reflecting meanings or shades of meaning that are likely not part of the students' experiences.

Understanding how words are classified into tiers can help educators plan effective vocabulary instruction. Text can be broken down into three tiers of words (Beck and McKeown 2002), each with its own implications for instruction:

**Tier one words** are the words of everyday speech usually learned in the early grades or at home, though not at the same rate by all children (Biemiller 2007). These words are extremely important to early learning since teachers tend to use these very words to define more unusual words. Because they are learned largely through conversation, and are not often considered challenging beyond the early grades, students who don't in fact know them can easily be left behind. Biemiller's work shows that though many students learn these words in the elementary years, lower income students tend to learn them later. This delays these students' vocabulary growth and makes catching up to their more affluent peers extremely difficult if teachers are not alert to this phenomenon.

**Tier two words** are “words that characterize written and especially academic text—but are not so common in everyday conversation” (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan 2008). Tier two words appear in all sorts of texts: academic texts (*relative, vary, formulate, specify, accumulate*), technical writing (*calibrate, itemize, structure*), and literary texts (*misfortune, dignified, faltered, unabashedly*). Tier two words are far more likely to appear in writing than in speech. The Standards refer to tier two words as *academic vocabulary*.

These words require particular instructional attention. They are often vital to comprehension, will reappear in many texts, and are frequently part of word families or semantic networks. The challenge to teachers is to be alert to the presence of tier two words, determine which ones need to be taught, and which words deserve more time and attention for richer understanding. Tier two words can carry disproportionate weight in conveying the meaning of a text, and a reader who doesn’t understand even a single such weighty word might have his or her comprehension thrown off track. This is equally true of informational and literary texts. It is for these reasons that the Common Core State Standards for ELA / Literacy demand significant instructional attention to these words.

Instruction of tier two words might begin with careful examination of the key role these words play in the text, followed by examining the variety and shades of meaning each of these words possesses. This, in turn, would be followed by careful attention to the spelling and pronunciation, as well as any prefixes, suffixes and roots, i.e. the morphology or structure of the word. This focus on precise meanings in varied contexts combined with morphology will also provide some of the repetitions necessary for learning the word. Encounters with a word spread out over time will further increase the likelihood of retention.

**Tier three words** are far more common in informational passages than in literature. They are specific to a domain or field of study (*lava, fuel injection, legislature, circumference, aorta*) and key to understanding a new concept within the text. Because of their specificity, tier three words are often explicitly defined by the text and repeatedly used. Thus, the author takes care to have the text itself provide much support in the learning of tier three words. In addition, as they are the words that contain the ideas necessary to a new topic, teachers often define and reinforce tier three words prior to and after students encounter them in a text. Therefore, students' acquisition of tier three words is generally taken good care of by teachers as they know that the student has likely not encountered these terms before.

Now that we've examined tier two and three vocabulary, let's take a look at how we identify these words within a text passage. Immediately following the works cited of this paper is a vocabulary exercise that asks you to practice identifying tier two and three words in passages from Appendix B of the CCSS. The exercise includes both an informational passage and a literary passage for each of the following grade bands: 4–5, 6–8, 9–10, and 11–12. There are clean copies of each passage included so that this activity can be used for professional learning if desired. The model responses provide discussion around which words I selected and why, as well as how much time one might spend on instruction of different words. These examples may serve to make the ideas discussed in this paper more concrete.

It is important to note the very high number of words recommended for instruction in these passages, more than many of us have been used to teaching. This reflects the importance of vocabulary to comprehending complex text as called for by the CCSS. Students who are behind need to learn more words. This can only happen if we all make vocabulary and word study a priority in our materials and instruction. This means we must become comfortable with teaching word meanings efficiently; devoting more time and attention to those words that merit it, and less to those that can be learned with less time and attention<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Though essential to vocabulary development, this in itself is not sufficient. Students need to engage in a volume of wide-ranging reading of texts they can read independently. Nothing here should be construed as lessening the essential importance of a volume of reading to vocabulary acquisition.

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## **Which Words Do I Teach?**

*Practice Identifying Tier 2 and 3 Vocabulary for Instruction*

### **Vocabulary Exercise: Blank Worksheets**

## Which Words Do I Teach?

### *Practice Identifying Tier 2 and 3 Vocabulary for Instruction*

Grades 4–5

**Read** the two passages for this grade band below, one informational and one literary.

**Highlight** tier 2 words you'd teach for this passage in **yellow**. Remember, these are words likely to appear across many different types of texts—academic vocabulary, such as *relative* or *vary*.

**Highlight** tier 3 words you'd teach for this passage in **blue**. These are domain-specific words, such as photosynthesis or legislature.

**Note** at the bottom of the page which words would require more time and attention versus less time and attention for students to learn. Jot a few thoughts about why. Is the word abstract or concrete? Does it have multiple meanings? Is it part of a word family?

### Passage 1—Informational:

Simon, S. (2006). *Volcanoes*. New York: HarperCollins.

#### *Excerpt*

In early times, no one knew how volcanoes formed or why they spouted red-hot molten rock. In modern times, scientists began to study volcanoes. They still don't know all the answers, but they know much about how a volcano works.

Our planet is made up of many layers of rock. The top layers of solid rock are called the crust. Deep beneath the crust is the mantle, where it is so hot that some rock melts. The melted, or molten, rock is called magma. Volcanoes are formed when magma pushes its way up through the crack in the Earth's crust. This is called a volcanic eruption. When magma pours forth on the surface, it is called lava.

Notes:

More Time & Attention

Less Time & Attention

**Passage 2 – Literary:**

Lin, G. (2009). *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*. New York: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

*Excerpt from Chapter 1*

Far away from here, following the Jade River, there was once a black mountain that cut into the sky like a jagged piece of rough metal. The villagers called it Fruitless Mountain because nothing grew on it and birds and animals did not rest there.

Crowded in the corner of where Fruitless Mountain and the Jade River met was a village that was a shade of faded brown. This was because the land around the village was hard and poor. To coax rice out of the stubborn land, the field had to be flooded with water. The villagers had to tramp in the mud, bending and stooping and planting day after day. Working in the mud so much made it spread everywhere and the hot sun dried it onto their clothes and hair and homes. Over time, everything in the village had become the dull color of dried mud.

One of the houses in this village was so small that its wood boards, held together by the roof, made one think of a bunch of matches tied with a piece of twine. Inside, there was barely enough room for three people to sit around the table—which was lucky because only three people lived there. One of them was a young girl called Minli.

Minli was not brown and dull like the rest of the village. She had glossy black hair with pink cheeks, shining eyes always eager for adventure, and a fast smile that flashed from her face. When people saw her lively and impulsive spirit, they thought her name, which meant *quick thinking*, suited her well. “Too well,” her mother sighed, as Minli had a habit of quick acting as well.

Notes:

More Time & Attention

Less Time & Attention



## Which Words Do I Teach?

### *Practice Identifying Tier 2 and 3 Vocabulary for Instruction*

Grades 6–8

**Read** the two passages for this grade band below, one informational and one literary.

**Highlight** tier 2 words you'd teach for this passage in **yellow**. Remember, these are words likely to appear across many different types of texts—academic vocabulary, such as *relative* or *vary*.

**Highlight** tier 3 words you'd teach for this passage in **blue**. These are domain-specific words.

**Note** at the bottom of the page which words would require more time and attention versus less time and attention for students to learn. Jot a few thoughts about why. Is the word abstract or concrete? Does it have multiple meanings? Is it part of a word family?

### Passage 1 – Informational:

Freedman, R. (2006). *Freedom Walkers: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott*. New York: Holiday Press.

*Excerpt from the Introduction: "Why They Walked"*

Not so long ago in Montgomery, Alabama, the color of your skin determined where you could sit on a public bus. If you happened to be an African American, you had to sit in the back of the bus, even if there were empty seats up front.

Back then, racial segregation was the rule throughout the American South. Strict laws—called “Jim Crow” laws—enforced a system of white supremacy that discriminated against blacks and kept them in their place as second-class citizens.

People were separated by race from the moment they were born in segregated hospitals until the day they were buried in segregated cemeteries. Blacks and whites did not attend the same schools, worship in the same churches, eat in the

same restaurants, sleep in the same hotels, drink from the same water fountains, or sit together in the same movie theaters.

In Montgomery, it was against the law for a white person and a Negro to play checkers on public property or ride together in a taxi.

Most southern blacks were denied their right to vote. The biggest obstacle was the poll tax, a special tax that was required of all voters but was too costly for many blacks and for poor whites as well. Voters also had to pass a literacy test to prove that they could read, write, and understand the U.S. Constitution. These tests were often rigged to disqualify even highly educated blacks. Those who overcame the obstacles and insisted on registering as voters faced threats, harassment and even physical violence. As a result, African Americans in the South could not express their grievances in the voting booth, which for the most part, was closed to them. But there were other ways to protest, and one day a half century ago, the black citizens in Montgomery rose up in protest and united to demand their rights—by walking peacefully.

It all started on a bus.

Notes:

More Time & Attention	Less Time & Attention



## Passage 2 – Literary:

Paterson, K. (1990). *The Tale of the Mandarin Ducks*. New York: Lodestar Books.

### *Excerpt*

Long ago and far away in the Land of the Rising Sun, there lived together a pair of mandarin ducks. Now, the drake was a magnificent bird with plumage of colors so rich that the emperor himself would have envied it. But his mate, the duck, wore the quiet tones of the wood, blending exactly with the hole in the tree where the two had made their nest.

One day while the duck was sitting on her eggs, the drake flew down to a nearby pond to search for food. While he was there, a hunting party entered the woods. The hunters were led by the lord of the district, a proud and cruel man who believed that everything in the district belonged to him to do with as he chose. The lord was always looking for beautiful things to adorn his manor house and garden. And when he saw the drake swimming gracefully on the surface of the pond, he determined to capture him.

The lord's chief steward, a man named Shozo, tried to discourage his master. "The drake is a wild spirit, my lord," he said. "Surely he will die in captivity." But the lord pretended not to hear Shozo. Secretly he despised Shozo, because although Shozo had once been his mightiest samurai, the warrior had lost an eye in battle and was no longer handsome to look upon. The lord ordered his servants to clear a narrow way through the undergrowth and place acorns along the path. When the drake came out of the water he saw the acorns. How pleased he was! He forgot to be cautious, thinking only of what a feast they would be to take home to his mate. Just as he was bending to pick up an acorn in his scarlet beak, a net fell over him, and the frightened bird was carried back to the lord's manor and placed in a small bamboo cage.

### Notes:



## Which Words Do I Teach?

### *Practice Identifying Tier 2 and 3 Vocabulary for Instruction*

Grades 9–10

**Read** the two passages for this grade band below, one informational and one literary.

**Highlight** tier 2 words you'd teach for this passage in **yellow**. Remember, these are words likely to appear across many different types of texts—academic vocabulary, such as *relative* or *vary*.

**Highlight** tier 3 words you'd teach for this passage in **blue**. These are domain-specific words.

**Note** at the bottom of the page which words would require more time and attention versus less time and attention for students to learn. Jot a few thoughts about why. Is the word abstract or concrete? Does it have multiple meanings? Is it part of a word family?

### Passage 1 – Informational:

Hoose, P. (2004). *The Race to Save Lord God Bird*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

*Excerpt from Chapter 1: "Specimen 60803"*

Any species in nature, from the tiniest insect to the Blue Whale, is a collection of design experiments, field-tested and remodeled again and again over thousands of years. By looking carefully at the way a bird is built and then thinking backward—asking questions like “Why would a wing be so long? Or “Why are its eyes on the side of the head instead of the front?”—it’s possible to get some sense of how the bird got its food and defended itself, how widely it traveled, and what role it might have had within its ecosystem.

Of course my attention goes first to the amazing bill. It’s not really made of ivory like an elephant’s tusk, but of bone, covered by a sheath of a special protein

called keratin. It's broad at the base, and rooted deep into the bird's thick-boned skull to absorb the shock of pounding a tree. Its slit-like nostrils are fringed with hair to keep out sawdust. An Ivory-bill needed this big, stout crowbar of a bill to pry strips of bark off a tree, because its favorite food lay just underneath.

The Ivory-bill ate some fruits and berries when they were in season, but mostly it ate grubs—the larvae of beetles.

Certain kinds of beetle would attack a dying or injured tree by boring through the bark to lay their eggs, which hatched into stout, wormlike creatures—the grubs. Ivory-bills used their bills to peel bark away from the tree and get at these fat delicacies—which were then exposed under the bark—like thieves robbing a safe.

Notes:

More Time & Attention	Less Time & Attention

## Passage 2 – Literary:

Shaara, M. (1974). *The Killer Angels*. New York: Ballantine.

*Excerpt from “Longstreet”*

“. . . have no doubt,” Fremantle was saying, “that General Lee shall become the world’s foremost authority on military matters when this war is over, which would appear now to be only a matter of days, or at most a few weeks. I suspect all Europe will be turning to him for lessons.”

Lessons?

“I have been thinking, I must confess, of setting some brief thoughts to paper,” Fremantle announced gravely. “Some brief remarks of my own, appended to an account of this battle, and perhaps others this army has fought. Some notes as to tactics.”

Tactics?

“General Lee’s various stratagems will be most instructive, most illuminating. I wonder, sir, if I might enlist your aid in this, ah, endeavor. As one most closely concerned? That is, to be brief, may I come to you when in need?”

“Sure,” Longstreet said. Tactics? He chuckled. The tactics were simple: find the enemy, fight him. He shook his head, snorting. Fremantle spoke softly, in tones of awe.

“One would not think of General Lee, now that one has met him, now that one has looked him, so to speak, in the *eye*, as it were, one would not think him, you know, to be such a *devious* man.”

“Devious?” Longstreet swung to stare at him, aghast.

“Oh my word,” Fremantle went on devoutly, “but he’s a tricky one. The Old Gray Fox, as they say. Charming phrase. American to the hilt.”

“Devious?” Longstreet stopped dead in the road. “Devious.” He laughed aloud. Fremantle stared an owlish stare.

“Why, Colonel, bless your soul, there ain’t a devious bone in Robert Lee’s body, don’t you know that?”

Notes:

More Time & Attention	Less Time & Attention

## Which Words Do I Teach?

### *Practice Identifying Tier 2 and 3 Vocabulary for Instruction*

Grades 11–12

**Read** the two passages for this grade band below, one informational and one literary.

**Highlight** tier 2 words you'd teach for this passage in **yellow**. Remember, these are words likely to appear across many different types of texts—academic vocabulary, such as *relative* or *vary*.

**Highlight** tier 3 words you'd teach for this passage in **blue**. These are domain-specific words.

**Note** at the bottom of the page which words would require more time and attention versus less time and attention for students to learn. Jot a few thoughts about why. Is the word abstract or concrete? Does it have multiple meanings? Is it part of a word family?

### Passage 1 – Informational:

Tocqueville, A. D., Translated by Reeve, H. (1835). *Democracy in America*. New York: Saunders and Otley (London).

*Excerpt from Chapter 2: "The Origins of the Anglo-Americans"*

The remarks I have made will suffice to display the character of Anglo-American civilization in its true light. It is the result (and this should be constantly present to the mind of two distinct elements), which in other places have been in frequent hostility, but which in America have been admirably incorporated and combined with one another. I allude to the spirit of Religion and the spirit of Liberty.

The settlers of New England were at the same time ardent sectarians and daring innovators. Narrow as the limits of some of their religious opinions were, they were entirely free from political prejudices. Hence arose two tendencies, distinct

but not opposite, which are constantly discernible in the manners as well as in the laws of the country.

It might be imagined that men who sacrificed their friends, their family, and their native land to a religious conviction were absorbed in the pursuit of the intellectual advantages which they purchased at so dear a rate. The energy, however, with which they strove for the acquirement of wealth, moral enjoyment, and the comforts as well as liberties of the world, is scarcely inferior to that with which they devoted themselves to Heaven. Political principles and all human laws and institutions were moulded and altered at their pleasure; the barriers of the society in which they were born were broken down before them; the old principles which had governed the world for ages were no more; a path without a turn and a field without an horizon were opened to the exploring and ardent curiosity of man: but at the limits of the political world he checks his researches, he discreetly lays aside the use of his most formidable faculties, he no longer consents to doubt or to innovate, but carefully abstaining from raising the curtain of the sanctuary, he yields with submissive respect to truths which he will not discuss. Thus, in the moral world everything is classed, adapted, decided, and foreseen; in the political world everything is agitated, uncertain, and disputed: in the one is a passive, though a voluntary, obedience; in the other an independence scornful of experience and jealous of authority.

These two tendencies, apparently so discrepant, are far from conflicting; they advance together, and mutually support each other. Religion perceives that civil liberty affords a noble exercise to the faculties of man, and that the political world is a field prepared by the Creator for the efforts of the intelligence. Contented with the freedom and the power which it enjoys in its own sphere, and with the place which it occupies, the empire of religion is never more surely established than when it reigns in the hearts of men unsupported by aught beside its native strength.

Religion is no less the companion of liberty in all its battles and its triumphs; the cradle of its infancy, and the divine source of its claims. The safeguard of morality is religion, and morality is the best security of law and the surest pledge of freedom.

Notes:

More Time & Attention	Less Time & Attention

## Passage 2 – Literary:

Lahiri, J. (2004). *The Namesake*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

### *Excerpt from Chapter 5*

One day he attends a panel discussion about Indian novels written in English. He feels obligated to attend; one of the presenters on the panel, Amit, is a distant cousin who lives in Bombay, whom Gogol has never met. His mother has asked him to greet Amit on her behalf. Gogol is bored by the panelists, who keep referring to something called “marginality,” as if it were some sort of medical condition. For most of the hour, he sketches portraits of the panelists, who sit hunched over their papers along a rectangular table. “Teleologically speaking, ABCDs are unable to answer the question ‘Where are you from?’” the sociologist on the panel declares. Gogol has never heard the term ABCD. He eventually gathers that it stands for “American-born confused deshi.” In other words, him. He learns that the *C* could also stand for “conflicted.” He knows that *deshi*, a generic word for “countryman,” means “Indian,” knows that his parents and all their friends always refer to India simply as *desh*. But Gogol never thinks of India as *desh*. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India.

Gogol slouches in his seat and ponders certain awkward truths. For instance, although he can understand his mother tongue, and speak it fluently, he cannot read or write it with even modest proficiency. On trips to India his American-accented English is a source of endless amusement to his relatives, and when he and Sonia speak to each other, aunts and uncles and cousins always shake their heads in disbelief and say, “I didn’t understand a word!” Living with a pet name and a good name, in a place where such distinctions do not exist—surely that was emblematic of the greatest confusion of all. He searches the audience for someone he knows, but it isn’t his crowd—lots of lit majors with leather satchels and gold-rimmed glasses and fountain pens, lots of people Ruth would have waved to. There are also lots of ABCDs. He has no idea there are this many on campus. He has no ABCD friends at college. He avoids them, for they remind him

too much of the way his parents choose to live, befriending people not so much because they like them, but because of a past they happen to share. “Gogol, why aren’t you a member of the Indian association here?” Amit asks later when they go for a drink at the Anchor. “I just don’t have the time,” Gogol says, not telling his well-meaning cousin that he can think of no greater hypocrisy than joining an organization that willingly celebrates occasions his parents forced him, throughout his childhood and adolescence, to attend. “I’m Nikhil now,” Gogol says, suddenly depressed by how many more times he will have to say this, asking people to remember, reminding them to forget, feeling as if an errata slip were perpetually pinned to his chest.

Notes:

More Time & Attention	Less Time & Attention



## **Which Words Do I Teach?**

*Practice Identifying Tier 2 and 3 Vocabulary for Instruction*

### **Vocabulary Exercise: Model Responses**

## Which Words Do I Teach?

*Practice Identifying Tier 2 and 3 Vocabulary for Instruction*

Grades 4–5

## Passage 1 – Informational:

Simon, S. (2006). *Volcanoes*. New York: HarperCollins.*Excerpt*

In early times, no one knew how volcanoes formed or why they spouted red-hot molten rock. In modern times, scientists began to study volcanoes. They still don't know all the answers, but they know much about how a volcano works.

Our planet is made up of many layers of rock. The top layers of solid rock are called the crust. Deep beneath the crust is the mantle, where it is so hot that some rock melts. The melted, or molten, rock is called magma. Volcanoes are formed when magma pushes its way up through the crack in the Earth's crust. This is called a volcanic eruption. When magma pours forth on the surface, it is called lava.

## Commentary:

This passage contains 115 words with eleven tier two words and phrases that might cause problems to some students in this band, though not all are equally likely to do so. It contains six different tier three words related to volcanoes and earth science, highlighted in blue. Let's start with the tier three words.

As noted in the introduction, tier three words often repeat. Except for *mantle*, each of these words repeats at least once; *volcano* repeats four times, or five if *volcanic* is counted. The text often provides the reader with generous support in determining the meaning of these words, as with *molten* and *magma* in sentence

seven: “The melted or *molten* rock is called *magma*.” Both *molten* and *magma* are defined by the context. The same is true for *crust*, *mantle* and *lava*. It is clear that in order to comprehend this passage all of these tier three words need to be understood, but the text itself offers much support for building this understanding. This is often the case with tier three words.

There are also tier two words necessary to understanding the passage. The most direct would likely be *layers* in sentence 4. An understanding of *layers* is necessary to fully grasp and visualize the structure of the crust: “The top *layers* of solid rock are called the crust.” Perhaps equally important would be *spouted* in sentence 1 and *pours forth* in the last sentence, needed to help visualize the action of a volcano. *Pours forth* helps define *eruption*, too. The same is true of *surface* in the last sentence.

Both *layers* and *surface* are tier two words likely to appear in middle and high school academic texts, and thus would justify more intensive instruction, though neither is particularly abstract nor part of a word family. Additionally, a firm understanding of these words will support students when they appear in their metaphorical, and hence, more abstract forms in texts at later grades as in, “on the surface this would seem”, and “layers of meaning”.

*Early times* and *modern times* could be thought of as tier two phrases. They are tier two in that they could appear in a variety of historical, literary or science texts. It is reasonable that many students in this band will have only a vague notion of the meaning of either term. Though not essential to understanding this passage, their likely appearance in a variety of texts would argue for more intensive instruction of both terms.

*Formed* in sentences one and eight and *red-hot* in line one are easily explained quickly; *formed* with the more common synonym “made” and *red-hot* with illusions to fire first being yellow and then red as temperature increases.

There is at times uncertainty as to which definition fits certain words: why, for example, would *erupted* not be a tier three word in a passage on volcanoes?

*Erupted*, though associated frequently with volcanoes, can be used in other cases: for example, skin erupting in hives, and teeth erupting from the gums.

## Passage 2 – Literary:

Lin, G. (2009). *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*. New York: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

### *Excerpt from Chapter 1*

Far away from here, following the Jade River, there was once a black mountain that cut into the sky like a jagged piece of rough metal. The villagers called it Fruitless Mountain because nothing grew on it and birds and animals did not rest there.

Crowded in the corner of where Fruitless Mountain and the Jade River met was a village that was a shade of faded brown. This was because the land around the village was hard and poor. To coax rice out of the stubborn land, the field had to be flooded with water. The villagers had to tramp in the mud, bending and stooping and planting day after day. Working in the mud so much made it spread everywhere and the hot sun dried it onto their clothes and hair and homes. Over time, everything in the village had become the dull color of dried mud.

One of the houses in this village was so small that its wood boards, held together by the roof, made one think of a bunch of matches tied with a piece of twine. Inside, there was barely enough room for three people to sit around the table—which was lucky because only three people lived there. One of them was a young girl called Minli.

Minli was not brown and dull like the rest of the village. She had glossy black hair with pink cheeks, shining eyes always eager for adventure, and a fast smile that flashed from her face. When people saw her lively and impulsive spirit, they thought her name, which meant *quick thinking*, suited her well. “Too well,” her mother sighed, as Minli had a habit of quick acting as well.

## Commentary:

This literary selection contains 301 words with 18 tier two words that might cause some problems for students in this band, though not all words are equally likely to do so. This is too many words to teach intensively for such a small selection. Many of these concrete words can be taught quickly in context without recourse to additional activities or exercises. Such brief teaching, as discussed in the body of the paper, has been shown to be effective (Biemiller). For example, *jagged* in the second line can be explained as sharp, pointed and uneven, like a piece of broken glass. This approach could be taken with *stooping*, *twine*, *flashed* and *sighed*. *Dull* and *glossy*, though not as concrete, benefit from being antonyms. Thus, if *glossy* is explained with its more common synonym *shiny*, *dull* is then readily explained as its opposite. *Barely* and *eager*, also not as concrete, are close enough to their more common synonyms *hardly* and *excited* to be approached similarly; the same could be done for *rough* using its more common antonym *smooth*.

Students should have the opportunity to practice defining words from context (CCSS Reading 4) and some of the already identified words could be approached this way as well, especially *twine* and *barely*. *Fruitless* in the first paragraph is also defined well by the context.

This leaves 7 words (*shade*, *faded*, *coax*, *stubborn*, *flashed*, *impulsive*, *spirit*) that are candidates for more intensive teaching.

To fully comprehend this piece, a student would need to understand the contrast between Minli and the rest of her village. This is developed by the author through description: *glossy* hair, a *flashing* smile, and an *impulsive spirit*, in contrast to her village being described as a *shade* of *faded* and *stubborn*.

*Glossy*, *flashed*, and *eager* have already been discussed, thus we are left with *impulsive*, *spirit*, *shade*, *faded* and *stubborn*. Five words, from the eighteen we began with, would merit more intensive study based on their importance to the text. In addition to being more important to the text, these words are more abstract than the others. *Impulsive* and *spirit* are part of word families (impulse-

impulsive, pulse, pulsate; spirit– spiritual, spirited, inspire). The third criteria—the likelihood of appearing in future texts—is more difficult to determine. It is reasonable to expect that *impulsive* and *stubborn* will reappear in literary texts at the middle school level. Similarly *spirit*, *shade* and *faded* might appear in informational texts.

*Coax*, though fairly abstract, is not essential to the understanding of the passage or part of any word family. It is, however, a word likely to appear in middle school and high school literary works, and could be included on this basis.

## Which Words Do I Teach?

### *Practice Identifying Tier 2 and 3 Vocabulary for Instruction*

Grades 6–8

#### Passage 1 -- Informational:

Freedman, R. (2006). *Freedom Walkers: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott*. New York: Holiday Press.

*Excerpt from the Introduction: "Why They Walked"*

Not so long ago in Montgomery, Alabama, the color of your skin **determined** where you could sit on a public bus. If you happened to be an African American, you had to sit in the back of the bus, even if there were empty seats up front.

Back then, **racial segregation** was the rule throughout the American South. Strict laws—called “**Jim Crow**” laws—enforced a system of **white supremacy** that **discriminated** against blacks and kept them in their place as **second-class** citizens.

People were separated by race from the moment they were born in **segregated** hospitals until the day they were buried in **segregated** cemeteries. Blacks and whites did not attend the same schools, **worship** in the same churches, eat in the same restaurants, sleep in the same hotels, drink from the same water fountains, or sit together in the same movie theaters.

In Montgomery, it was against the law for a white person and a Negro to play checkers on public property or ride together in a taxi.

Most southern blacks were denied their right to vote. The biggest **obstacle** was the **poll tax**, a special tax that was required of all voters but was too costly for many blacks and for poor whites as well. Voters also had to pass a **literacy** test to prove that they could read, write, and understand the U.S. Constitution. These tests were often **rigged** to **disqualify** even highly educated blacks. Those who

overcame the **obstacles** and insisted on **registering** as voters faced threats, **harassment** and even physical violence. As a result, African Americans in the South could not express their **grievances** in the voting booth, which for the most part, was closed to them. But there were other ways to protest, and one day a half century ago, the black citizens in Montgomery rose up in protest and united to demand their rights—by walking peacefully.

It all started on a bus.

## Commentary:

This excerpt contains 321 words: nine tier three words and phrases and ten tier two words. Understanding of all nine tier three words is necessary to fully comprehend this passage. As noted in the introduction, these words are often repeated and defined in context. *Segregated* is introduced in the second paragraph, though determining its meaning from this paragraph might be difficult without a clear grasp of *discrimination*. The next paragraph, however, provides more context as well as repetition.

The second paragraph contains a high proportion of tier three words not repeated later in the text, as well as one tier two compound word. When this many words students might struggle with are packed together, determining meaning from context becomes more difficult. It is possible that these terms were described earlier in the book, but not likely given that this excerpt was taken from the introduction. In these situations, if students are to have the opportunity to read independently and learn from their reading, some words (especially tier three) might need to be introduced before reading. The remaining tier three words, *poll tax* and *registered*, are well supported by the context of the last paragraph, and would not likely need any pre-teaching.

Introductions in general are more likely to need support before reading, but even here, a third of the tier three words could be determined from context.

The first tier two word, *determined*, indicating that much of what follows in the passage is based on skin color, is essential to understanding the passage. The power of *determined* here lies in the notion that skin color in Montgomery, Alabama at that time was the causal agent for all that follows. The power of the word and its connection to the topic merits intensive instruction. It is also a word with multiple meanings, likely to appear in future texts, and part of a word family (determine, determination, determined, terminate, terminal).

*Second-class, worship,* and *obstacle* are more concrete and supported by the text. Though *literacy* is less concrete, as well as part of a word family (literate, literature), it is not central enough to the meaning of the passage to warrant intensive instruction.

*Rigged, disqualify, harassment,* and *grievances* are more central to the text and the topic in general, and are likely to appear in future social science texts. On this basis, they would merit more intensive discussion.

## Passage 2 -- Literary:

Paterson, K. (1990). *The Tale of the Mandarin Ducks*. New York: Lodestar Books.

### *Excerpt*

Long ago and far away in the Land of the Rising Sun, there lived together a pair of mandarin ducks. Now, the drake was a magnificent bird with plumage of colors so rich that the emperor himself would have envied it. But his mate, the duck, wore the quiet tones of the wood, blending exactly with the hole in the tree where the two had made their nest.

One day while the duck was sitting on her eggs, the drake flew down to a nearby pond to search for food. While he was there, a hunting party entered the woods. The hunters were led by the lord of the district, a proud and cruel man who believed that everything in the district belonged to him to do with as he chose. The lord was always looking for beautiful things to adorn his manor house and garden. And when he saw the drake swimming gracefully on the surface of the pond, he determined to capture him.

The lord's chief steward, a man named Shozo, tried to discourage his master. "The drake is a wild spirit, my lord," he said. "Surely he will die in captivity." But the lord pretended not to hear Shozo. Secretly he despised Shozo, because although Shozo had once been his mightiest samurai, the warrior had lost an eye in battle and was no longer handsome to look upon. The lord ordered his servants to clear a narrow way through the undergrowth and place acorns along the path. When the drake came out of the water he saw the acorns. How pleased he was! He forgot to be cautious, thinking only of what a feast they would be to take home to his mate. Just as he was bending to pick up an acorn in his scarlet beak, a net fell over him, and the frightened bird was carried back to the lord's manor and placed in a small bamboo cage.

### Commentary:

This text contains 341 words with fourteen tier two words that might cause some problems for students in this band, though not all are equally likely to do so. Because the setting of this text is feudal Japan, it also contains eight tier three words connected to the topic with four of them repeated. It is worth noting that even in a literary text, half of the tier three words and phrases are repeated.

The passage focuses on the Lord's desire to surround himself with beauty. *Adorn*, used to help show this, is thus necessary to understanding the text. This can be briefly taught with reference to the more common synonym *decorate*, which students in this band are likely to know. Its meaning is also well supplied by the context. Words to describe the beauty of the *drake*, such as *magnificent* and *gracefully*, would need to be taught for the same reason. Both are words likely to appear in literary texts students read in middle and high school and both are fairly abstract. Thus, both merit more intensive instruction. *Envied* is important both in understanding the emperor's motivation and in shedding light on his character. It could easily be taught with use of the more common synonym *jealousy*. *Surface* is not essential to understanding the passage and its meaning in this context is clear. This is a word, however, that can appear in so many contexts that if time allows, it would merit intensive instruction. The final word connected to the drake's appearance, *scarlet*, is easy to describe as a darker red.

The only other tier two word that merits intensive instruction is *spirit*. Part of the drake's beauty is its spirit, and much of the pathos of the story involves the capturing of this wild spirit. *Spirit* is a highly abstract word likely to appear in literary texts; it is also part of a word family (spirited, spiritual, inspiring, inspiration). On every count this word merits intensive teaching.

None of the remaining tier two words are good candidates for more intensive instruction. *Captivity* is important to the story, but fairly concrete and easily taught. The same is true for *undergrowth* and *bamboo*, though these are not as important to the story. *Despised* and *cautious*, though not as concrete, can be accessed through their more common synonyms *hated* and *careful*, though a

discussion of the difference between *despise* and *dislike*, perhaps placing it on a continuum with *dislike*, *hate*, *despise*, and *detest*, would be a useful exercise.

All of the tier three words highlighted are needed to understand the passage. Since this is an excerpt from a full length novel, it is likely these words are explained in context in earlier chapters.

## Which Words Do I Teach?

### *Practice Identifying Tier 2 and 3 Vocabulary for Instruction*

Grades 9–10

#### Passage 1 – Informational:

Hoose, P. (2004). *The Race to Save Lord God Bird*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

*Excerpt from Chapter 1: “Specimen 60803”*

Any species in nature, from the tiniest insect to the Blue Whale, is a collection of **design experiments**, **field-tested** and remodeled again and again over thousands of years. By looking carefully at the way a bird is built and then thinking backward—asking questions like “Why would a wing be so long? Or “Why are its eyes on the side of the head instead of the front?”—it’s possible to get some sense of how the bird got its food and defended itself, how widely it traveled, and what role it might have had within its **ecosystem**.

Of course my attention goes first to the amazing bill. It’s not really made of ivory like an elephant’s tusk, but of bone, covered by a **sheath** of a special **protein** called **keratin**. It’s **broad** at the **base**, and **rooted** deep into the bird’s thick-boned skull to absorb the shock of pounding a tree. Its slit-like nostrils are **fringed** with hair to keep out sawdust. An Ivory-bill needed this big, **stout** crowbar of a bill to **pry** strips of bark off a tree, because its favorite food lay just underneath.

The Ivory-bill ate some fruits and berries when they were in season, but mostly it ate **grubs**—the **larvae** of beetles.

Certain kinds of beetle would attack a dying or injured tree by **boring** through the bark to lay their eggs, which hatched into **stout**, wormlike creatures—the **grubs**. Ivory-bills used their bills to peel bark away from the tree and get at these fat delicacies—which were then exposed under the bark—like thieves robbing a safe.

## Commentary:

This passage contains 267 words with eight tier two words and seven tier three words that might cause some problems for students. Looking at the tier two words, however, they do not seem very difficult—this is because they are fairly concrete and common. The text provides significant support for *stout*, *sheath*, *pry*, and *boring*. Thus, the difficulty of this passage for ninth or tenth graders would likely not come from the tier two words. None of these words would merit intensive teaching.

The tier three words, with the exception of *field-tested* and *design experiments*, are also quite concrete. *Grub* and *larva* are supported by the text; *keratin* is clearly defined. Although knowing what a *protein* is would be helpful, it is not necessary to understanding the text. (It should, however, always be kept in mind that anytime a student does not know a word, especially in an informational text, it might produce some degree of dissonance, which can only hurt comprehension). *Broad*, *base* and *rooted* are not well supported by the text, and a student not knowing these words might have trouble visualizing the bill. As noted in the last passage, having these words clustered in one sentence makes determining meaning from context more difficult. They are, however, very concrete and hence easily teachable words.

The difficulty in this passage comes from the terms *design experiment* and *field tested*. A full understanding of the passage requires familiarity with the concept of adaptation. Without this familiarity, the descriptions and functions of the beak's features (thick boned to absorb shock, fringed to keep out sawdust, stout to pry bark, etc.) become meaningless.

This is why so much research has shown that background knowledge correlates with comprehension, but especially comprehension of informational text. This begs the question of *how much* background knowledge is necessary. A student completely unfamiliar with the concepts of adaptation and ecosystem would have great trouble generating a meaningful understanding of this text. A student with

some degree of this knowledge, however, would be able to deepen and expand her knowledge by close reading of this passage. This close reading would also solidify the student's understanding of the term *design experiment*, as well.

Background knowledge is necessary for comprehension of informational text. Comprehension of informational text will in turn improve background knowledge.

## Passage 2 – Literary:

Shaara, M. (1974). *The Killer Angels*. New York: Ballantine.

*Excerpt from “Longstreet”*

“. . . have no doubt,” Fremantle was saying, “that General Lee shall become the world’s **foremost** authority on military matters when this war is over, which would appear now to be only a matter of days, or at most a few weeks. I suspect all Europe will be turning to him for lessons.”

Lessons?

“I have been thinking, I must confess, of setting some brief thoughts to paper,” Fremantle announced **gravely**. “Some brief remarks of my own, **appended** to an account of this battle, and perhaps others this army has fought. Some notes as to **tactics.**”

**Tactics?**

“General Lee’s various **stratagems** will be most **instructive**, most **illuminating**. I wonder, sir, if I might enlist your aid in this, ah, **endeavor**. As one most closely concerned? That is, to be brief, may I come to you when in need?”

“Sure,” Longstreet said. **Tactics?** He chuckled. The tactics were simple: find the enemy, fight him. He shook his head, snorting. Fremantle spoke softly, in tones of **awe**.

“One would not think of General Lee, now that one has met him, now that one has looked him, **so to speak**, **in the eye**, as it were, one would not think him, you know, to be such a **devious** man.”

**“Devious?”** Longstreet swung to stare at him, **aghast**.

“Oh my word,” Fremantle went on **devoutly**, “but he’s a tricky one. The Old Gray Fox, as they say. Charming phrase. American **to the hilt.**”

“Devious?” Longstreet stopped dead in the road. “Devious.” He laughed aloud. Fremantle stared an owlish stare.

“Why, Colonel, bless your soul, there ain’t a devious bone in Robert Lee’s body, don’t you know that?”

## Commentary:

This passage contains 271 words, including fifteen tier two words and phrases that might cause difficulty for students in this band, though all are not equally likely to do so. *Devious* is essential to understanding what is happening and would need to be taught briefly before students read the passage. In addition to its importance to the text, *devious* is part of a word family (deviate, deviation) that is likely to appear in future texts (literary and informational). Thus, it should also be taught intensively after a first reading of the passage.

A full understanding of the passage requires grasping Fremantle’s strong beliefs about Lee’s military prowess. Students would need to know *foremost*, *tactics*, *stratagems*, *instructive* and *illuminating*. *Foremost* is well supported by the text and relatively easy to explain by its more common synonyms: *leading*, *chief*, or *principal*. *Stratagem* (a tactic *based on deception*) is a more abstract word easily confused with its close relatives *tactic* and *strategy*. This and the importance to the passage of all three words (*strategy* is not present in the passage but becomes important because of confusion with *stratagem*) justify intensive teaching. Two related word families are involved (tactic, tactical) and (strategy, stratagem, strategic, strategically). In a similar vein, the difference between *illuminate* and *instruction* is nuanced and sheds light on the meaning of both terms. Both would benefit from more intensive instruction.

To fully appreciate the strengths of Fremantle’s beliefs about Lee, students would need to understand *awe*, *devoutly* and possibly *gravely* as well. *Gravely* is easily explained as “very serious.” *Awe* and *devoutly* are abstract words, important to the passage, and part of word families (awe, awesome) (devout, devotion devoutly). Both would merit intensive instruction. The relation of each to the other would further understanding.

The phrases *so to speak*, *looked him in the eye, to the hilt* and the use of *owlish* to describe Fremantle’s stare are best explained in the context of the passage.

The three phrases are likely to appear in literary texts students would read at this band level and above.

It is worth noting that this passage has a very low Flesch Kincaid (4.8). This reflects the fact that most of the words are not very difficult. But as this analysis points out, the more difficult words are essential to understanding the text. This pattern of a few words carrying disproportionate weight emerges often with literary works in these later bands. Thus, although the overall vocabulary as measured by traditional readability measures might indicate a lower band, the few more difficult words would counteract this; one reason for putting texts such as this in a higher band despite the lower lexile score, though not the only reason.

It is also worth noting that when a group of these words appear together in one or two adjacent sentences, determining meaning from context becomes far more difficult. This can be seen above in the sentences beginning “General Lee’s various...” This one sentence contains four of these more difficult words.

## Which Words Do I Teach?

### *Practice Identifying Tier 2 and 3 Vocabulary for Instruction*

Grades 11–12

#### Passage 1 – Informational:

Tocqueville, A. D., Translated by Reeve, H. (1835). *Democracy in America*. New York: Saunders and Otley (London).

#### *Excerpt from Chapter 2: “The Origins of the Anglo-Americans”*

The remarks I have made will suffice to display the character of Anglo-American civilization in its true light. It is the result (and this should be constantly present to the mind of two distinct elements), which in other places have been in frequent hostility, but which in America have been admirably incorporated and combined with one another. I allude to the spirit of Religion and the spirit of Liberty.

The settlers of New England were at the same time ardent sectarians and daring innovators. Narrow as the limits of some of their religious opinions were, they were entirely free from political prejudices. Hence arose two tendencies, distinct but not opposite, which are constantly discernible in the manners as well as in the laws of the country.

It might be imagined that men who sacrificed their friends, their family, and their native land to a religious conviction were absorbed in the pursuit of the intellectual advantages which they purchased at so dear a rate. The energy, however, with which they strove for the acquirement of wealth, moral enjoyment, and the comforts as well as liberties of the world, is scarcely inferior to that with which they devoted themselves to Heaven. Political principles and all human laws and institutions were moulded and altered at their pleasure; the barriers of the society in which they were born were broken down before them; the old principles which had governed the world for ages were no more; a path without a turn and a

field without an horizon were opened to the exploring and **ardent** curiosity of man: but at the limits of the political world he checks his **researches**, he discreetly lays aside the use of his most **formidable faculties**, he no longer consents to doubt or to innovate, but carefully abstaining from raising the curtain of the **sanctuary**, he yields with submissive respect to truths which he will not discuss. Thus, in the moral world everything is **classed**, adapted, decided, and foreseen; in the political world everything is **agitated**, uncertain, and disputed: in the one is a passive, though a voluntary, obedience; in the other an independence scornful of experience and jealous of authority.

These two tendencies, apparently so **discrepant**, are far from conflicting; they advance together, and mutually support each other. Religion perceives that civil liberty affords a noble exercise to the **faculties** of man, and that the political world is a field prepared by the Creator for the efforts of the intelligence. Contented with the freedom and the power which it enjoys in its own sphere, and with the place which it occupies, the empire of religion is never more surely established than when it reigns in the hearts of men unsupported by **ought** beside its native strength.

Religion is no less the companion of liberty in all its battles and its triumphs; the cradle of its infancy, and the **divine** source of its claims. The safeguard of morality is religion, and morality is the best security of law and the surest pledge of freedom.

### Commentary:

This text contains 523 words with 12 tier two words that might cause some problems for students in this grade band, as well as two tier three words. Writing nearly 200 years ago, Tocqueville uses some words rarely used today, like *dear* and *ought*. Other words are used in unusual ways, such as *classed* and *agitated*. The text supports *dear* well and though many students are unlikely to have seen it used this way, its meaning will be determined by most. That being said, the word's etymology and connection to its current use merit discussion. *Ought* would

need mention as it is not as clear from context, but is quite concrete and would not need intensive instruction. Students would notice the unusual use of class and likely be able to determine its meaning. Other than a discussion of the ease with which words sometimes become verbs, more would not be needed. *Agitated*, a word with a variety of related meanings, is likely to appear in literary as well as informational texts and thus would merit more focused instruction. *Researches* is also uncommon but clear from context.

The phrase *true light* in the beginning and *divine* at the end are both important to the passage and not well supported by context. *True light* is, of course, not part of a word family, but *divine* is part of a word family (divine, divinity, divination). Both words, however, would benefit just as well from discussion in the context of the passage as from more intensive vocabulary work afterward; *true light* because it is fairly concrete and *divine* due to the central role religion plays in the passage. *Sanctuary*, though not strictly used as a religious term, would also be better served through discussion of the passage. *Faculties*, also not well supported by context, can be taught briefly (though a discussion of its etymology in reference to the faculty of a school would be informative). Finally, *ardent* is a concrete term well supported by the context, thus a brief discussion would suffice.

The five remaining words would benefit from intensive instruction for a number of reasons. *Suffice* is part of a large word family (suffice, sufficient, sufficiency, suffused), abstract, and likely to appear in texts in college. The same is true of *incorporated* (corpus, corporation, corporal, corpse), as well as *discern* (discern, discerning, discernable). *Discrepant* is given some support by the context, and though from a small family (discrepant, discrepancy), this too is a word likely to appear in academic as well as literary texts.

*Anglo-American* and *sectarian* would be considered tier three words in a text concerning early American life and philosophy. Both words are fairly concrete and, unlike the passages analyzed earlier, neither of these tier three words is repeated. *Anglo-American* and all that it implies is central to understanding the passage

and any thorough discussion of the text should include it. It would not require anything further. *Sect*, though part of a word family and more likely to appear in far future texts than *Anglo-American*, would not require more work for students at this band level as the concept behind any of its meanings would be readily accessible for these students.

## Passage 2 – Literary:

Lahiri, J. (2004). *The Namesake*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

### *Excerpt from Chapter 5*

One day he attends a panel discussion about Indian novels written in English. He feels obligated to attend; one of the presenters on the panel, Amit, is a distant cousin who lives in Bombay, whom Gogol has never met. His mother has asked him to greet Amit on her behalf. Gogol is bored by the panelists, who keep referring to something called “marginality,” as if it were some sort of medical condition. For most of the hour, he sketches portraits of the panelists, who sit hunched over their papers along a rectangular table. “Teleologically speaking, ABCDs are unable to answer the question ‘Where are you from?’” the sociologist on the panel declares. Gogol has never heard the term ABCD. He eventually gathers that it stands for “American-born confused deshi.” In other words, him. He learns that the *C* could also stand for “conflicted.” He knows that *deshi*, a generic word for “countryman,” means “Indian,” knows that his parents and all their friends always refer to India simply as *desh*. But Gogol never thinks of India as *desh*. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India.

Gogol slouches in his seat and ponders certain awkward truths. For instance, although he can understand his mother tongue, and speak it fluently, he cannot read or write it with even modest proficiency. On trips to India his American-accented English is a source of endless amusement to his relatives, and when he and Sonia speak to each other, aunts and uncles and cousins always shake their heads in disbelief and say, “I didn’t understand a word!” Living with a pet name and a good name, in a place where such distinctions do not exist—surely that was emblematic of the greatest confusion of all. He searches the audience for someone he knows, but it isn’t his crowd—lots of lit majors with leather satchels and gold-rimmed glasses and fountain pens, lots of people Ruth would have waved to. There are also lots of ABCDs. He has no idea there are this many on campus. He has no ABCD friends at college. He avoids them, for they remind him

too much of the way his parents choose to live, befriending people not so much because they like them, but because of a past they happen to share. “Gogol, why aren’t you a member of the Indian association here?” Amit asks later when they go for a drink at the Anchor. “I just don’t have the time,” Gogol says, not telling his well-meaning cousin that he can think of no greater **hypocrisy** than joining an organization that willingly celebrates occasions his parents forced him, throughout his childhood and adolescence, to attend. “I’m Nikhil now,” Gogol says, suddenly depressed by how many more times he will have to say this, asking people to remember, reminding them to forget, feeling as if an **errata** slip were perpetually pinned to his chest.

### Commentary:

This text contains 445 words, including seven tier two words and one tier three word, **telologically**, which might cause some students in this band difficulty. Students at this level will at times have some sense of the meaning of these words, but not necessarily the fully developed notion the author intended. For example, nearly all students at this level would know that **errata** have something to do with errors. They may not, however, realize that **errata** refers more specifically to errors noticed after a work is first published or printed, as in this case where the **errata** refers to correcting the “error” of Gogol and replacing it with Nikhil. Similarly with **marginality**, students may have some sense that it means *not central* or *not important*, which matches to some extent how it is used here, but not the full sociological sense of the word. A similar pattern is possible with **ponder**, where students would likely conceptualize it as *thinking about something* but not necessarily with the more pronounced thoroughness and care that ponder implies and is evident in the text.

Once again, and similar to the discussion of background knowledge above, a careful reader who did not have a good sense of all that **ponder** implies could develop this from the text. In the same vein, a careful reader with some sense of what an academic panel is might infer the sociological concept of **marginality**.

Comprehension requires as well as generates background knowledge, just as it requires as well as generates vocabulary knowledge.

Given the importance of these words to the text they would all merit intensive instruction.

*Hypocrisy* and *modest* are likely known by most students in this band, supported by the context, and *moderately* concrete. Thus, all three can be taught briefly.

*Generic* and *emblematic*, though not essential to understanding the story, are abstract words that could appear in complex literary as well as academic texts, and on this basis would merit more intensive instruction.

Finally, *teleologically*, a tier three word from the domain of philosophy, is best addressed in the discussion of the text that focuses on the panel discussion. This discussion could be quite brief, as the term is not essential to understanding the passage nor likely to appear in many future texts the students would read.

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