Narrow Activity
Semantic Mapping

The following activity is adapted from the semantic mapping activity described by William Nagy in his book *Teaching Vocabulary to Improve Reading Comprehension*. It is intended for use with words related by topic or theme.

- If you have not already, select a set of eight to ten words related by topic or theme that are important to an upcoming or already-in-progress shared reading text or unit of study.

- Place in a "hub" a word or phrase that represents the theme or topic of the words targeted for study. (Typically, this word should *not* be one of the words targeted for study.)

- Ask students to take a minute to jot down in their notebooks words that are related to the word or phrase on the board.

- Ask students to share the words they have listed in their notebooks. Create a "web," grouping the words when possible and helping students agree on labels for each "leg." During this discussion be sure to encourage students to consider new categories or directions to think in. Also, and most importantly, *teachers should place the target words for study in appropriate categories.* This will begin to help students become better oriented to appropriate contexts and associations for each word.

- Afterwards, lead a discussion of how the new words relate to other words and concepts on the board that might be more familiar. Nagy points out that this activity serves at least three purposes:

  1. It activates prior knowledge and gets students to link their own experiences to the theme or topic. It allows a teacher to assess students' background knowledge, thereby sup- porting the delivery of more student-focused instruction.

  2. It provides a basis for further writing and reading.

Nagy also points out that because the exercise is designed for words related in some way, "one cannot cover all of the words that might need some clarification in the selections to be read."