

Rich Activity

The Set Piece

In his book *Breathing In, Breathing Out*, Ralph Fletcher describes the way a writer uses a set piece. He compares a set piece to a girl juggling a soccer ball or a kid spinning a basketball on his finger. Fletcher writes, “It’s hard to imagine how balancing a spinning basketball or juggling a soccer ball would ever come in handy during a game.” In both cases, however, individuals take on impractical tasks to demonstrate or develop certain intangibles that are important to becoming a skilled player.

This following activity accomplishes a similar end.

- After studying a set of words for some time, have students work independently or in small groups to compose passages of text in which they use as many target words as possible in meaningful ways.
- During this work, students are encouraged to make use of any available resources—artifacts from other completed vocabulary exercises, dictionaries, etc. Students should be prepared to explain the use of any given word in a passage.
- A simple scoring guide can be set up (for example, one point per meaningfully used word).
- After students have completed the assignment, have them share their passage aloud.
- The class should then question the writer(s) on the use of the words in the text and then evaluate the passage according to the scoring guide.