

Rich Activity

Using and Creating Contexts

Variation #1: Associating Words with Contexts

The following activity is described in McKeown and Beck’s article, “Learning Vocabulary: Different Ways for Different Goals.” The authors write that the point of this exercise is to get students to associate new words with contexts that do *not* contain definitional elements, but that present consequences, examples, or typical actions associated with the target words.

- » Ask students to work with a partner nearby. If your class uses small whiteboards or other methods of quickly displaying a response, consider using them for this activity—otherwise, have students write down their responses.
- » Teachers craft a few sentences related to an individual target word. Students then select the word from the word study set that best describes those sentences or answers the question posed.
- » McKeown and Beck provide the following example of sentences crafted for the word *ridicule*:

“Maria decided she didn’t want to play with Terry anymore. Terry was always being nasty about other people. She’d make a big joke out of the way other people looked or talked. What did Terry do to other people?”

Variation #2: Creating Contexts

Begin using this activity in a whole-group discussion setting. Later it can be modified to become an independent and small-group writing task.

- In this activity, a teacher provides a prompt for the class that uses one or more of the target words. For example, a teacher might say “Discuss how a *timid* person might behave in a room full of people.” If the word under study is *timid*, students would reveal their understanding of it in their responses. Other examples might be prompts like the following:
 - » Describe the details of an ocean *teeming* with life.
 - » Give examples of what might be *imprudent* responses to the fire alarm going off.
 - » Who is the most *malevolent* villain you’ve seen in a movie and why is this so?
 - » If you were stuck in an elevator with someone, what would you say to *assuage* their anxiety?

- Students should be able to explain their responses.

This activity hinges on and promotes lots of discussion and interaction. McKeown and Beck point out that even “off-beat” answers should be accepted if reasons are provided.

Variation #3: Returning to Literary Context

Create questions that lead students back to the story where they first encountered their target words. Below are examples connected to *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

- What makes Maycomb a *quaint* setting for a novel?
- Describe the rumors that make Boo Radley seem like a “*malevolent* phantom” and explain why you think these fascinate the children.
- Scout has an imagination *teeming* with unique thoughts. What does this show about her as a character?