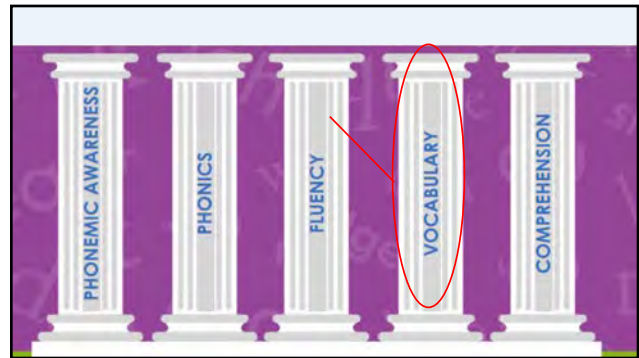


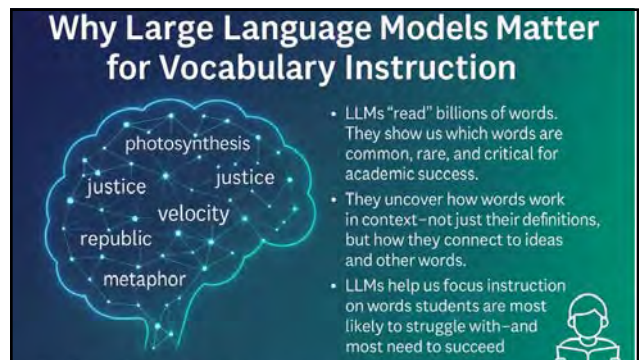
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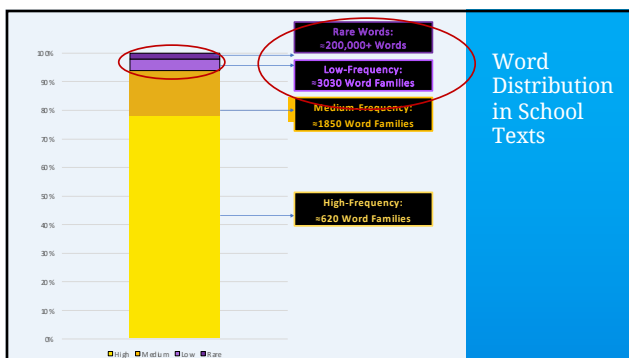
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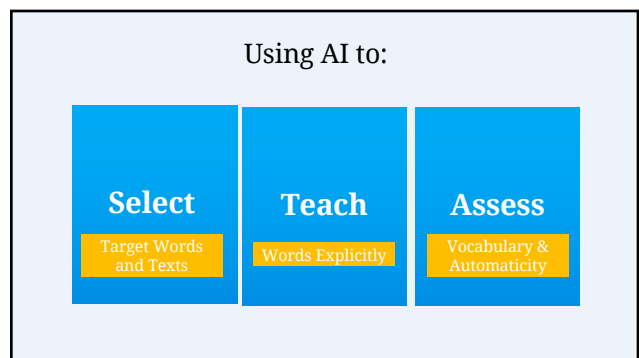
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4



5



6

Cherry-Picking Words: Narrative Texts

chimed	2
concluded	1
flickered	1
gallant	1
preparations	1
slender	1



7

Cherry-Picking Words: Informational Texts

dwarfed	0
presence	1
outfitted	1
procedure	2
transferred	1
snug	1
calculate	1
perch	2
enthusiastic	1
beaming	1



8

Research on the efficacy of “cherry- picking” vocabulary

- on comprehension
(Wright & Cervetti, 2017)
- on vocabulary (beyond
taught words)
(Cervetti et al. (2023))

9

Select:
Target Words and
Texts

10

An Alternative to Cherry Picking Vocabulary



chimed	2
concluded	1
flickered	1
gallant	1
preparations	1
slender	1

11

As a third-grade teacher, many of my students are not at the level of vocabulary required for strong comprehension. I'm working with a story entitled *The Storyteller's Candle*. Here are the words that the publisher has chosen for this text: slender, gallant, chimed, preparations, flickered, concluded. Can you review these words in relation to their centrality to the story as well as to their usefulness in reading across the curriculum and also in subsequent grades. The story is attached.

High Priority Words (Essential to story AND broadly useful):

Preparations - "This word is central to a major plot element (the community coming together to prepare for Three Kings' Day). It's also highly valuable across the curriculum, appearing frequently in science experiments, social studies projects, math problem-solving, and writing processes. Students will encounter this word regularly in subsequent grades."

Concluded - "While not critical to story comprehension (students could understand the ending without knowing this exact word), it's extremely valuable academically. This is a key transitionary summary word used across all subjects and in standardized testing. It's essential for students' academic vocabulary development."

Moderate Priority Words:

Flickered - "Moderately important for the story's atmosphere and the symbolic importance of the storyteller's candle. It's a useful descriptive verb that appears in literature and science contexts (light, fire, movement), making it worthwhile for expanding students' descriptive vocabulary."

Chimed - "Low centrality to the story (could be replaced with 'said' without losing meaning), but it's a useful dialogue tag that helps students understand different ways characters can speak. Appears occasionally in literature and has some cross-curricular value."

Lower Priority Words:

Slender - "Purely descriptive of Mr. Belphe's appearance, not essential to plot or character understanding. While it's a good descriptive adjective, it has limited cross-curricular application compared to the others."

Gallant - "Appears only in the embedded folktale about Ratoncito Perez. While it's a charming old word that could be useful in literature discussions, it's somewhat archaic and has limited modern usage across subjects."

12

WIDA 10 words would you recommend as the most critical words in this story that are worth instructional time if the aim is to support students' use of vocabulary across texts in other content areas and skills in subsequent grades?

Top 10 High-Impact Vocabulary Words:

- preparation** - Central to the story's plot, extends high utility across all subjects (science experiments, research projects, writing process).
- announcement/announcement** - Appears twice in the story, essential academic vocabulary for all subjects and grade levels.
- discovered** - Key to the story's theme ("happy to discover how") role of the most valuable academic words across science, social studies, and literature.
- learned** - Appears multiple times, high-frequency word in academic and social contexts.
- gathered** - Important to the community theme, frequently used in social studies, science, and literature.
- rehearsed** - Central to the play preparation, valuable for understanding process and positive across subjects.
- concluded** - Story structure word, critical for academic writing and reading comprehension across all subjects.
- special** - Appears multiple times in the story, high-utility adjective that students need for both comprehension and expression.
- journey** - Appears in the story ("The journey took five days"), powerful word used broadly in social studies/science and metaphorically in literature and personal writing.
- characters** - Appears in the story ("cast of characters"), essential literature vocabulary that also means "people," making it highly versatile across subjects.

Why These 10?

These words offer reciprocal cross-curricular payoff:

- Science:** discovered, preparation, learned, gathered.
- Social Studies:** announced, journey, gathered, characters, special.
- Literature:** characters, concluded, special, discovered, rehearsed.
- Writing:** announced, concluded, preparation, learned, special.
- Mathematics:** preparation, gathered, special (used positionally often use these).

13

Performance & Theater

- rehearsed
- cast
- characters
- costumes
- applause

Communication & Sound

- announced
- climed

Community & Celebration

- belong
- vetrino
- celebration
- finds

Spreads work and community traditions

Actions & States

- preparation
- concluded
- gathered

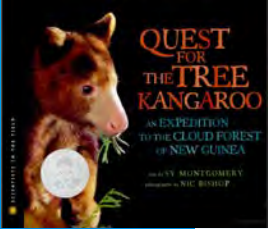
Atmosphere & Mood

- flickered
- sparkled
- twinkled

Creates visual imagery and enhances with light effects

14

An Alternative to Cherry Picking Vocabulary



dwarfed	0
presence	1
outfitted	1
procedure	2
transferred	1
snug	1
calculate	1
perch	2
enthusiastic	1
beaming	1

15

Can you revisit the words procedure, calculate, transferred, outfitted, enthusiastic, presence, snug, perch, beaming, dwarfed in relation to the specific text—Quest for the Tree Kangaroo—how many of these words are essential for the meaning of this text?

ESSENTIAL 10 words:

- Procedure** - Central to understanding the organized scientific process of examining the animal safely.
- Calculate** - Critical for the specific mathematical task ("These are 10 centimeters within the do the work").
- Transferred** - Key to understanding how the tracking technology works ("data can be transferred as a computer").

HELPFUL BUT NOT ESSENTIAL 10 words:

- Snug** - Important for color fitting, but "comfortable but snug" provides enough context.
- Perch** - Useful for visualizing the animal's position, but "climbs to the highest perch" is clear from context.
- Outfitted** - Describes the collar equipment, but the collar's function is explained without needing the word.
- Presence** - Used to "see presence" or "dive down close," but the meaning comes through contextually.

NOT ESSENTIAL 10 words:

- Enthusiastic** - Describes emotion this doesn't affect plot comprehension ("He wants to go out and have fun for once" conveys the meaning).
- Beaming** - Contextual description alongside "huge and wide" which already conveys happiness.
- Dwarfed** - I don't find this word in the text.

16

This text is intended for fourth graders to read as part of reading instructions in life sciences. Can you identify the words that are most critical for students to know, if they are to comprehend this passage. Please identify the top 10.

- Tracker** - A person who follows and finds animals; essential since trackers are the main characters who locate the tree kangaroos.
- Elusive** - Hard to find or catch; key to understanding why finding tree kangaroos is so exciting and difficult.
- Anesthesia/Anesthetic** - Medicine that makes animals sleep during medical procedures; central to the safe examination process.
- Radio collar** - A special collar with a transmitter to track animals; the main scientific tool and goal of the research.
- Transmitter** - A device that sends out signals; necessary to understand how the radio collar works.
- Respiration** - Breathing rate; critical for understanding the medical monitoring during the procedure.
- Procedure** - A series of steps to accomplish something; helps students understand the organized scientific process.
- Examination/Exam** - A detailed check of the animal's health; central to understanding what the scientists are doing.
- Temperature** - How hot or cold something is; important for the medical monitoring context.
- Frequency** - A specific radio channel or number; necessary to understand how each animal's collar works differently.

17

Tree Kangaroo Semantic Map

TREE KANGAROO CHARACTERISTICS

- elusive
- agile
- equilibrium
- strong

TRACKING TECHNOLOGY

- radio collar
- transmitter
- frequency
- location
- monitoring

MEDICAL MONITORING AND EXAMINATION

- examination
- procedure
- anesthesia
- collar
- respiration

18

Teach: Words Explicitly

19

Additional Opportunities with Critical Vocabulary



	#Times in Text
announcement	2
applause	1
celebrated	1
costumes	2
decorations	1
fiesta	2
preparations	3
rehearsed	1

20

Activity 1: Generating Text Sets with Critical Vocabulary

Can you write a 240 word text that is informational and that includes these words: rehearsal, costumes, applause, preparations. Please repeat the key words--or morphological members of these words (e.g., rehearsal, rehearsed). The text is for third graders who are not the most automatic or motivated readers.

21

What's a Fiesta?

The word "fiesta" means "party" in Spanish. It can be big or small, loud or quiet, but it is always a time to celebrate. A fiesta can happen for many reasons. People might have a fiesta for a birthday, a holiday, or to honor someone special. Fiestas are a way to celebrate friendship, family, or a special event in the community.

At a fiesta, there is often music. People might play drums, guitars, or sing songs. Sometimes there is dancing. People clap, move to the beat, and enjoy the celebration. Music and dancing help bring people together.

There is almost always food! Some fiestas have tacos, rice, fruit, or sweet breads. Eating together is a big part of the celebration.

Many people like to decorate for a fiesta. Colorful paper flags, balloons, streamers, and lights help make a place feel bright. These decorations show that something special is happening.

Some fiestas have games or piñatas filled with candy. Others might have parades, costumes, or face painting.

A fiesta is more than a party. It is a time to celebrate, to share with others, and to make joyful memories that last.

22

Preparing for the School Play

Putting on a play takes hard work and careful preparation. First, actors learn their lines and practice moving around on stage. The cast rehearses their lines over and over until they know them perfectly. Some kids feel nervous during their first rehearsal, but they get better each time they practice.

While actors rehearse, others work on costumes. Costumes help tell the story. The costume team measures everyone and picks out special clothes. Kids try on their costumes during dress rehearsal to make sure everything fits.

Behind the scenes, more preparations happen. Students paint colorful backdrops and build props like trees and castles. The lighting crew learns when to make the stage bright or dim.

Finally, opening night arrives. The actors put on their costumes and rehearse their lines backstage. When the curtain opens, families and friends fill the auditorium. At the end of the play, loud applause fills the room. The audience claps and cheers for all the hard work everyone has done.

23

The Best Fiesta Ever

Luz could not wait for her school's big fiesta. For weeks, her class had rehearsed their special dance. Now they knew every step by heart.

On Thursday, Mrs. Soto made her final announcement to the class: "Remember, tomorrow is our spring fiesta!" Everyone cheered at the end of the announcement.

Early on Friday morning, preparations began. Luz and her friends helped with the preparations by hanging ribbons and balloons. Then it was time to put on their costumes.


The gym soon filled with family and friends who had come to celebrate. Luz's heart was racing, but she remembered how much they had rehearsed. She knew they were prepared.

The music started. Luz's class danced just like they had rehearsed. When the dance ended, the applause was so loud it made Luz's heart swell with pride.

After the performance, the fiesta continued. Families had donated food to make the party even more of a celebration. Tables were filled with donations: tacos, rice, beans, cookies, and cakes.

"This is the best fiesta ever!" Luz thought as she looked at all the happy faces, the beautiful decorations, and her friends in their costumes. Luz knew she would always remember how it felt to dance in her costume, see all the pretty decorations, and hear that wonderful applause. This had been the best celebration ever!

24



The third graders wore animal costumes for their big show.

The Dancing Zoo Animals


Today our third-grade class put on the play "The Dancing Zoo Animals." For weeks, we had daily rehearsals to learn our parts for the play. Mrs. Cooper, our teacher, made an announcement before the play began: "Remember, we've rehearsed this many times. You are well prepared for the performance!"

But all of us were too busy looking at one another's costumes to be worried. Jake wore an elephant costume with big floppy ears. My penguin costume was black with a big white bowtie. Sofia's costume was the tallest of all. That's because she was a giraffe.

Finally, the gym was full of our families and friends. The music started. We danced out onto the stage just like we had practiced in rehearsals. Jake's elephant trunk made everyone laugh as he pretended to spray water at the audience. When Sofia the giraffe pretended to eat leaves from the paper trees, the audience laughed again. My favorite part was when I and the other penguins waddled in a line and then did the slide move that we had rehearsed.

At the end of the show, everyone in the audience applauded. Some people in the audience even stood up to give us more applause! Mrs. Cooper made one last announcement: "You were great in rehearsals but your performance this afternoon was even greater."

25




The Storyteller's Candle
La velita de los cuentos
by Luis Ochoa
illustrated by Luis Ochoa

Additional Opportunities with Critical Vocabulary

	#Times in Text	+Times in Set of 4 Texts
announcement	2	4
applause	1	5
celebrated	1	7
costumes	2	14
decorations	1	4
fiesta	2	17
preparations	3	7
rehearsed	1	14

26

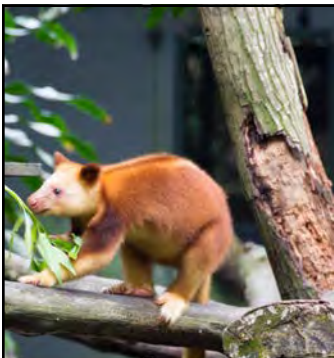


QUEST FOR THE TREE KANGAROO
AN EXPEDITION TO THE CLOUD FOREST OF NEW GUINEA
by LUCY MONTGOMERY
photographs by NICK BISHOP

Additional Opportunities with Critical Vocabulary

Word	#Times in Text
agile	0
elusive	1
transmit	1
frequency	1
anesthesia	5
sedated	0

27



Tree Kangaroos: Amazing Animals of the Forest

Tree kangaroos are animals that live high up in the trees. They spend most of their time climbing and jumping from branch to branch. Unlike other kangaroos that live on the ground, tree kangaroos are built for life in the trees.

Tree kangaroos are very elusive. That means they are hard to find. They hide so well in the forest that scientists have trouble spotting them.


These animals also show great agility. They are excellent jumpers and climbers. Tree kangaroos can leap from one branch to another. Their agility helps them move quickly and safely through the trees.

Tree kangaroos are also very cautious. When they hear or see something coming, they quietly climb higher to stay safe. This careful behavior protects them from danger.

Don't be fooled by their soft fur and sweet faces—tree kangaroos are strong! They have powerful arms and legs. Their strength helps them hold onto branches and climb tall trees. They can even grab things with their strong paws.

These five traits—being elusive, agile, cautious, strong, and great at tree living—make tree kangaroos just right for life in the forest.

28



This is a koala (NOT a tree kangaroo) but it shows a radio collar that transmits information to scientists.

How Scientists Track Tree Kangaroos

Scientists use technology to study tree kangaroos. They want to learn where these animals go and what they do. First, scientists put a radio collar around a tree kangaroo's neck. This collar looks like a dog collar, but it has special parts inside. The radio collar is comfortable and doesn't hurt the animal.

Inside the collar is a transmitter. A transmitter is like a tiny radio that sends out signals. Scientists can study these signals to track where the animal goes.

Each transmitter sends signals on its own frequency. A frequency is like a radio station number. Just like your car radio has different stations, each tree kangaroo has its own frequency number. This way, scientists know which animal they are tracking.

The collar also has a microchip inside. A microchip is a tiny computer smaller than your fingernail. The microchip stores information about the animal, just like a name tag.

High above Earth, satellites fly around in space. These satellites pick up the signals from the transmitters. The satellites help scientists know exactly where each tree kangaroo is, even when the animals are hiding in thick forests.

This tracking technology helps scientists learn about tree kangaroos without bothering them too much.

29



Keeping Tree Kangaroos Safe During Examinations

Scientists give tree kangaroos health examinations, just like when you visit the doctor. But scientists follow special procedures to keep the animals safe during examinations because tree kangaroos get scared around people.

The most important part of this procedure is using anesthesia. Anesthesia is special medicine that makes animals fall asleep. When an anesthesia works, the animal becomes sedated. Sedated means the animal is in a deep, peaceful sleep and cannot feel anything.

During the examination, scientists watch the sedated animal carefully. They check three things to make sure the anesthesia is working safely and the animal stays properly sedated. First, scientists check the tree kangaroo's pulse to make sure its heart is beating at a good speed during the procedure. A pulse tells how fast a heart is beating.

Second, they watch the animal's respiration. Respiration means breathing. Scientists count how many times the tree kangaroo breathes in and out each minute. Good respiration shows that the anesthesia is working properly.

Third, they take the animal's temperature. A normal temperature means the animal is healthy during the examination.

Scientists must work quickly during this procedure. They don't want to keep the animal under anesthesia too long. By watching the pulse, respiration, and temperature, they can finish the examination safely and quickly.

30

Kangaroos and Tree Kangaroos



Kangaroos and tree kangaroos belong to the same animal family. They have some things in common, but they also live in very different places and move in different ways.

Both animals have long tails and strong back legs. They are mammals, so they have fur and feed their babies milk. A baby kangaroo is called a joey. It stays in its mother's pouch until it is big enough to live on its own.

Kangaroos live on the open land of Australia. They can hop fast and can jump very far in one hop. Their tails help them balance as they move. Kangaroos live in groups called mobs.


Tree kangaroos live in the rainforests. They are good at climbing. Their legs are short but their front paws are strong for grabbing tree branches. Their tails help keep them balanced as they climb high in the trees.

Unlike land kangaroos, tree kangaroos are quiet and hard to spot. They live alone or in small groups and move slowly through the trees.

Both kinds of kangaroo carry their joeys in pouches. Both use their tails for balance. But one is built for speed and hopping. The other is built for climbing in the trees of the rainforests.

31

Additional Opportunities with Critical Vocabulary



Word	#Times in Text	+Times in Set of 4 Texts
agile	0	3
elusive	1	3
transmit	1	6
frequency	1	3
anesthesia	5	8
sedated	0	5


32

Activity 2a: Generating Semantic Grids

FH Can you make a semantic grid with the words flickering, sparkled, twinkle and 5 other words that have varied degrees of intensity in the same semantic category. Can you ensure that 2 of the new words are ones that students who are not great third-grade readers can read?

33

Semantic Grids: *Storyteller's Candle*




blaze
flash
sparkled
gleam
flickering
shine
twinkle
glow

spark
proclaim
broadcast
announce
notify
warn
pray

34

Semantic Grids: *Tree Kangaroo*



Intensity of "Hard to Catch/Find"

Secretive
Mysterious
Elusive
Slippery
Evasive
Fugitive

Intensity of "Moving Skillfully"

Steady
Steadily
Steadily
Agile
Agile
Athletic
Nimble
Acrobatic

35

Activity 2b: Adding Morphological Families: *Storyteller's Candle*

FH Can you make a mind map of all of the morphological relatives for the word announcements.



announce

Verb Forms
announce
announced
announcing
announced

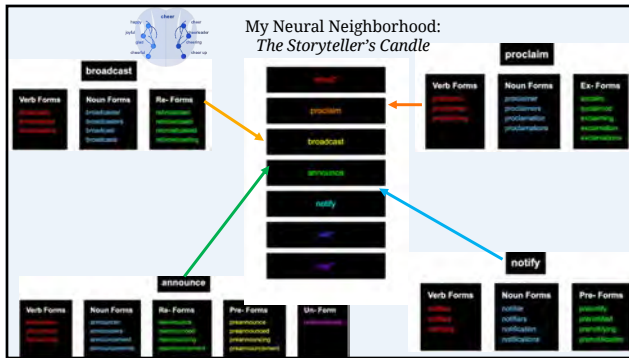
Noun Forms
announcer
announcers
announcement
announcements

Re-Forms
reannounce
reannounced
reannouncing
reannounced

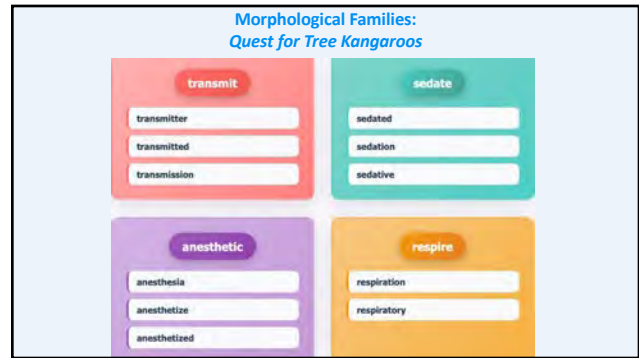
Pre-Forms
preannounce
preannounced
preannouncing
preannounced

Un-Form
unannounced

36



37



38



39

Maze Assessment

2. I would like you to make a maze assessment of the attached text. In a maze assessment, the first sentence is kept intact. After that, every 7 word is represented by a blank, followed by parenthesis with three choices. The correct word and two words with the same number of letters and same part of speech (but not silly words).

The School Play

The school play was coming soon! Every day after lunch, the ____ (crew, kids, staff) in Mrs. Smith's class rehearsed their ____ (books, songs, lines). Tom's dad donated snacks for ____ (everyone, nowhere, outside), and Zoe's mom helped make ____ (frost, the, fat) decorations for the stage. When ____ (new, old, the) big night came, all the ____ (students, writers, farmers) wore their costumes.

The principal ____ (book, made, kept) an announcement before the show ____ (walked, jumped, started): "Welcome to our winter ____ (best, play, game)!" The children acted out ____ (your, some, their) parts perfectly. At the end, ____ (one, the, few) crowd gave them loud applause.

____ (Since, After, Until) the show, the whole class ____ (searched, wandered, celebrated) with cookies and juice. Everyone agreed it ____ (felt, was, ran) the best play ever!

40

Target Vocabulary

Turn, applaud, donated, rehearsed, celebrated, costumes, decorations, announcement

- Tom _____ his old books to kids who needed them at school.
- The class _____ their songs every day until they knew all the words.
- At the _____, there were fun games and lots of good food to eat.
- The crowd gave loud _____ when the little dog did its trick.
- We put up birthday _____ like balloons and streamers all over the house.
- The teacher made an _____ about the field trip next week.
- The kids put on their Halloween _____ and went to get candy.
- We _____ with cake and ice cream when my team won the game.

41

Semantic Family Members

Fill in the blank with the best word.

Words to choose from:

broadcast, notify, announce, shout, proclaim, say, tell

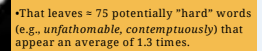
- The TV station will _____ the football game live across the country.
- The school will _____ parents by email if there is a snow day.
- The principal will _____ important news over the speakers about the fire drill.
- The coach had to _____ instructions to the players during the noisy game.
- The king will _____ his daughter as the new ruler of the kingdom.
- Can you _____ your name clearly when it's your turn?
- I need to _____ you something important about the class party.

42

43

1. The baseball _____ spoke clearly into the microphone.
2. The principal made an _____ about the pizza party.
3. My cousin made an _____ visit with her new puppy.
4. The teacher _____ the winner of the art contest every Friday.
5. Mom _____ that we could get ice cream after dinner.
6. The student is _____ the weekly lunch menu over the speakers.

44



45



- **Stereotype** - oversimplified, fixed ideas about a group
- **Prejudice** - pre-considered negative judgments
- **Social stigma** - mark of disgrace associated with a group
- **Labeling** - categorizing people based on appearance/look/sexual
- **Self-fulfilling prophecy** - when expectations cause predicted behavior

47


48



49



50



In *The Outsiders*, Ponyboy feels like he is an outsider and struggles with society's rules.

What You Need to Know: S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*

Fourteen-year-old Ponyboy Curtis is way too smart for his own good. Ponyboy is a "Greaser," which means he wears leather jackets and slicked-back hair. Greasers have little money and live on the "wrong side" of town. On the "right side" of town, there are the "Socs," or "Socials." Socs are rich teens who drive fancy cars and jump Greasers for fun.

Ponyboy and his best friend Johnny meet two Soc girls, Cherry and Marcia, at a drive-in movie. Another greaser, Dallas, starts bothering the girls. After Johnny tells Dallas to leave them alone, the girls sit with Ponyboy and Johnny. They talk and connect despite being from opposite sides of town. When Cherry figures out that Ponyboy reads a lot, she says, "I'll bet you watch sunsets, too."

Bob is Cherry's boyfriend. When Bob finds out Cherry has been hanging out with greasers, he's furious. Bob and his drunk friends go hunting for Ponyboy and Johnny.

When the Socs find them, they start shoving Ponyboy's head underwater in a fountain. Johnny recognizes Bob as the Soc who badly beat him up months earlier. When Johnny sees Bob about to kill his best friend, all that fear and rage explodes. He slaps Bob with the switchblade he's been carrying since the beating. Johnny may have killed Bob in self-defense but Ponyboy and Johnny know Greasers are rarely believed. They run from the law and hide in an abandoned church.

One day, the church catches fire with some neighborhood children trapped inside. Ponyboy and Johnny save the children, but Johnny dies from injuries.

After that, Ponyboy fails classes at school and gets into fights. But when he reads Johnny's final letter, he realizes Johnny's story matters. He thinks telling it might save other kids. So Ponyboy begins writing his story—the story of *Outsiders* like them.

51



The old church is on fire. They overhear someone say, "Some of the kids are missing."

An excerpt from *The Outsiders*

Ponyboy and Johnny have been hiding in an abandoned church for days after Johnny killed a Soc in self-defense. They've cut their hair and bleached Ponyboy's. They are trying to lay low until things cool down. When their friend Dallas finally comes to check on them, they decide it's time to turn themselves in.

But as they drive back toward town, they see something that changes everything: the old church is on fire. There's a crowd gathered, and they overhear someone say, "Some of the kids are missing." A school group had been having a picnic, and several young children are trapped inside the burning church.

I wasn't about to go through that flaming door, so I slammed a big rock through a window and pulled myself in. It was a wonder I didn't cut myself to death, now that I think about it.

"Hey, Ponyboy." I looked around, startled. I hadn't realized Johnny had been right behind me all the way. I took a deep breath, and started coughing. The smoke filled my eyes and they started watering. "Is that guy coming?" Johnny shook his head. "The window stopped him."

"Too scared?"

"Naw..." Johnny gave me a grin. "Too fat."

I couldn't laugh because I was scared I'd drown in the smoke. The roar and crackling was getting louder, and Johnny shouted the next question. "Where's the kids?"

"In the back, I guess," I hollered, and we started stumbling through the church. I should be scared, I thought with an odd detached feeling, but I'm not. The cinders and embers began falling on us, stinging and smarting like ants. Suddenly, in the red glow and the haze, I remembered wondering what it was like in a burning ember, and I thought: Now I know. It's a red hell. Why aren't I scared?

52



Some of S.E. Hinton's novels became popular movies. In this picture, she is on set with actor Matt Dillish who played "Dallas" in *The Outsiders*.

About the Author: S.E. Hinton

S.E. Hinton grew up as Susan Eloise Hinton in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In 1965, when Susan was sixteen, she realized she was tired of reading stories about perfect teenagers living perfect lives. Where were the stories about teens like the ones at her school? The ones who didn't have money, who had to fight, just to get by?

Susan decided to write a book about what teenage life was really like—a book that she would want to read. What came out was real, honest, and totally different from any book for teenagers.

Her story was about Ponyboy Curtis, a fourteen-year-old "Greaser" stuck between being loyal to his gang and being true to himself. She wrote about how fast one fight could ruin everything.

Susan wrote like someone who really knew what it was like. She got the way teens talked, how they felt, and how badly they wanted to belong somewhere.


However, when she finished *The Outsiders*, Susan had a problem. Book companies didn't know what to do with her story. It was too grown-up for children's books, but too young for adult books. It also was written by a teenage girl.

But one editor saw something special. She saw that Susan understood how real teenagers talked and thought. The editor urged Susan to go by her initials "S.E." to hide her gender.

The Outsiders came out in 1967 when Susan was just nineteen. It was a hit right away. Young readers finally found a book that felt like their real lives. The book was turned into a movie in 1983, and the story became legendary.

From her small bedroom in Oklahoma, a teenage girl had changed storytelling forever. Susan had created something brand new—stories written just for teenagers. She proved that great stories can come from

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In *Romeo and Juliet*, two teenagers fall in love despite the rules of their society that want to keep them apart.

Text Connection: *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Outsiders*

You might have read or heard about the play *Romeo and Juliet*, written by William Shakespeare. It is a tragedy about two young lovers, Romeo and Juliet. Their families forbid them from being together, and they take their own lives at the end of the play. S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* shares similar themes.

Romeo and Juliet are from families that hate each other for reasons nobody even remembers anymore. "Socs" and "Greasers" hate each other because one side has money and the other does not. Just like Romeo's and Juliet's families, they're stuck in a cycle of hatred that nobody questions.


Cherry Valance is a lot like Juliet. She is a rich girl who falls for someone from the "wrong" side of town. She can't be with Ponyboy because their worlds are too different, just like Juliet couldn't be with Romeo because of their families. Cherry doesn't die for love like Juliet does. But Cherry has to live with dating someone she doesn't love or respect.

Romeo and Juliet die because they can't handle living in a world that keeps them apart. Johnny dies trying to save children from a fire. But he never would have been in that church if the Socs hadn't jumped him and Ponyboy, and they did so because Ponyboy refused to keep apart from Cherry.

Both stories are basically asking: How many people have to die before society realizes their pointless feuds are destroying lives? In *Romeo and Juliet*, it takes the deaths of both teenagers for the families to wake up. In *The Outsiders*, it takes Johnny dying for people to start seeing Greasers as heroes instead of just troublemakers.

Shakespeare set his story in palaces. Hinton set hers in regular places. But the message is the same: When you divide people into "us" and "them," everybody loses.

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Text Reflection: The Real Meaning of Courage

Think about your favorite story hero. They're probably strong and fearless, and they always know exactly what to do. The good guys win, and the world is saved. But real courage and heroism is way messier than that. S.E. Hinton understood this point.

When Johnny and Ponyboy run into the burning church to save the children, they do not have superpowers. They are just two scared teenagers who know they have to do something. They are terrified but make the decision to act anyway. That's real courage: acting when everything in your body is screaming at you to run the other way.

There is also the character of Dallas Winston. He is the guy everyone calls a hoodlum. Dallas has a police record and a bad attitude. But he shows courage too. When Johnny is dying in that hospital, Dallas risks everything to be there for him.

Ponyboy is also brave. He decides to tell Johnny's story. He revisits this difficult time in his life with honesty and openness.

Society loves simple hero stories. The good guy saves the day. Everyone cheers. But think about the real courage you see every day: The person who stands up to bullies. The student who speaks up in class despite their anxiety. The friend who tells you the truth when everyone else just tells you what you want to hear.

Sometimes courage looks like Dallas. It is raw, desperate, and self-destructive. Sometimes it looks like Johnny. It is quiet, unexpected, and life-changing. And sometimes it looks like Ponyboy, surviving trauma and choosing to tell the story anyway.

The point isn't that we should run into burning buildings. Courage is not about being fearless or getting applause. It is about doing the right thing even when you're terrified. It's about showing up when it matters, even when *everyone else* says *no one's watching*.

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Now can you take two of the quotes from the story for each of the 5 vocabulary/concept terms and make an assessment where the words are in the quotes below (numbered but in a random order), followed with a blank in which to write the word?

Vocabulary Words: stereotype • prejudice • social stigma • labeling • self-fulfilling prophecy

Directions: Read each quote from *The Outsiders*. Write the vocabulary word that best describes what the quote represents.

1. "What kind of world is it where all I have to be proud of is a reputation for being a hood, and greasy hair? I don't want to be a hood, but even if I don't steal things and mug people and get booted up, I'm marked anyway."
Answer: _____
2. "The term 'greaser,' which is used to class all us boys on the East Side."
Answer: _____
3. "They looked like they were all cut from the same piece of cloth: clean shaven with semi-soft bangs, wearing striped or checkered shirts with light red or tan colored jackets or madras ski jackets."
Answer: _____
4. "You didn't see a kid grease and a Sory cheerleader together often?"
Answer: _____

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Using AI to:

Select

Target Words and Texts

Teach

Words Explicitly

Assess

Vocabulary & Automaticity

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Potential Problems: AI for Vocabulary Instruction

- Generating text with consideration of vocabulary requires clarity of curriculum and developmental progression.
- "The lowest hanging fruit": An even larger world of worksheets; fewer opportunities to deal with complex texts.
- Knowledge is the commodity of the digital age. Fatuous texts and worksheets can be a barrier to knowledge acquisition as well as a deterrent to motivation and learning.

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More to Read and/or Hear (for free!):

- Hiebert, E. H. (2020). The core vocabulary: The foundation of proficient comprehension. *The Reading Teacher*, 73(6), 757-768.
- Hiebert, E. H. (2024). Unpacking automaticity: Scaffolded texts and comprehension. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*.
- Revolutionizing Vocabulary Learning: AI's Contributions to Word Selection in Education <https://textproject.org/vocabulary-learning-and-ai/>
- The Science of Word Zones: How Big Data is Building Better Readers <https://textproject.org/word-zones-science/>
- Using Story Structure for Comprehension and Enhancing Vocabulary <https://textproject.org/story-structure-and-vocabulary/>
- Terminology, Texts and Teachers in an AI World: Possibilities and Problems <https://textproject.org/terminology-texts-teachers-ai/>

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