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Academic Vocabulary for Middle School Students

Research-Based Lists and Strategies for Key Content Areas

by

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LANGUAGE-FOCUSED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The activities in this section will assist students in learning the spelling, grammatical, and morphological features of academic words in addition to their meanings.

THE FRAYER MODEL

Meaning-focused input	☐	Language-focused learning	☑
Meaning-focused output	☐	Developing fluency	☐

WHAT IS IT?

The Frayer Model (Frayer, Frederick, & Klausmeier, 1969) uses a graphic organizer to help students explore deeper meanings of select words.

WHY DO IT?

The Frayer Model provides students opportunities to clarify their understanding of target academic vocabulary by performing the following tasks:

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- Comparing and contrasting between a target word's essential and nonessential characteristics
- Identifying examples and nonexamples of the target word's meaning

HOW TO IMPLEMENT

1. Identify target words from your current instruction. For example, in a middle school American history chapter about Andrew Jackson's presidency, popular democracy, and conflicts over states' rights, students need a rich understanding of key terms in order to understand the content of the text (e.g., *compromise*, *democracy*, *issue*, *policy*).
2. Provide students with a Frayer Model graphic organizer (Figure 4.2). Frayer Model graphic organizers consist of four squares labeled *essential characteristics, nonessential characteristics, examples,* and *nonexamples*. The target word is placed in the center.
3. Display a copy of the graphic organizer on a SMART Board or on a PowerPoint using an overhead projector.

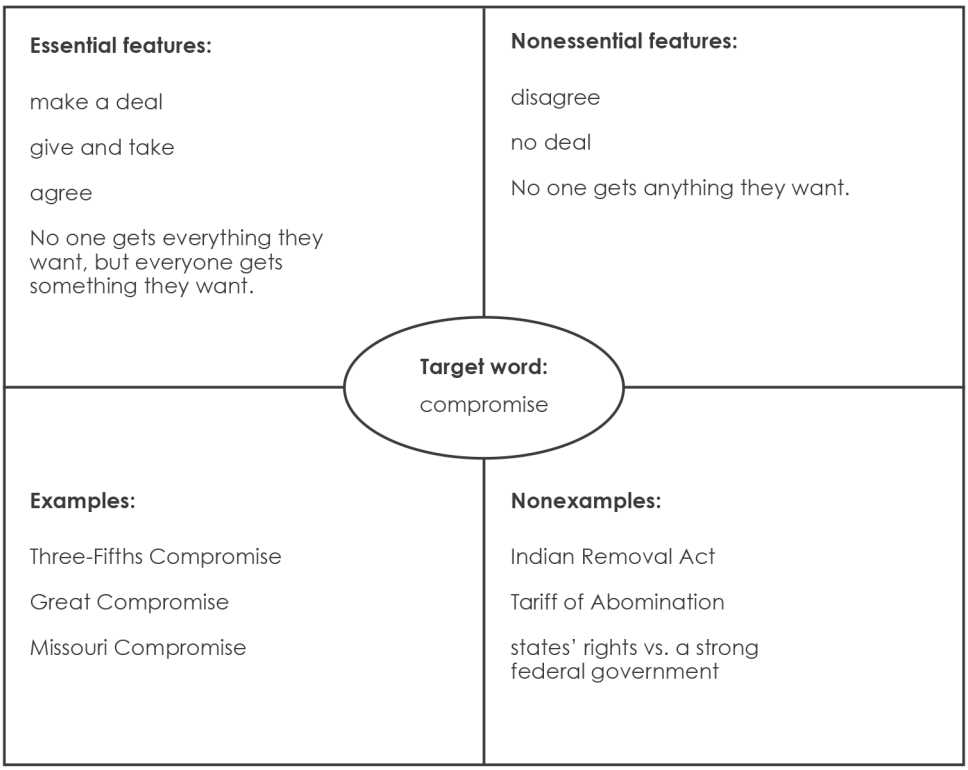

Figure 4.2. Graphic organizer for the Frayer Model. (*Source:* Frayer, Frederick, & Klausmeier, 1969.)

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4. Have students write the key term in the center of the graphic organizer.
5. Have students brainstorm ideas to complete each of the areas of the graphic organizer. Discuss students' ideas and record ideas on a SMART Board or on a PowerPoint using an overhead projector. Students should be able to make connections between essential features and examples and between nonessential features and nonexamples.
6. Have students complete their individual organizers while you are completing the displayed organizer.
7. Have students work with a partner and take turns describing the target word to each other using their graphic organizers as a guide.

FIX-UPS

- This strategy focuses on a single word's meaning, and it can take some time to complete. For this reason, we suggest that you limit this strategy to key concepts related to your current chapter.
- You can modify the category titles in each square to help your students focus on more specific ideas related to your content area.
- Depending upon individual student's developmental needs, you may need to provide explanations for some of the ideas presented in the class.

EXTENSIONS

Quick Writing Have students summarize their understanding of the target word in a quick write.

Triple-Entry Journals Before using the Frayer Model, have students describe their understanding of the target word in their triple-entry journals. After using the Frayer Model, have students add their new understandings to their entry.

Word Builder Once students have an understanding of the target word from the Frayer Model, have them focus on the morphological variations of that word using the Word Builder activity (described later in this section).

WORD SORTS

Meaning-focused input	☐	Language-focused learning	☑
Meaning-focused output	☐	Developing fluency	☐

WHAT IS IT?

Word sorting (Gillett, Temple, & Crawford, 2004) is a hands-on activity allowing students to manipulate words into categories based on their meanings, relationships, forms, and functions.

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WHY DO IT?

- Word sorts provide students with opportunities to compare and contrast, analyze word meanings, or analyze word form.
- You will never run out of ideas for categorizing word sorts—words can be sorted according to their form, meaning, or function.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT

1. Choose a topic for your word sort. Choose up to 20 academic words related to that topic.
2. Decide whether you want students to sort words into their own categories (open sort) or whether you want to pick the categories yourself (closed sort). There are ample possibilities for word sorts. We have listed several in the example later in this activity.
3. Model the sorting process for your students and explain the reasons for your sort.
4. Place students in small groups.
5. Provide groups with small pieces of paper or card stock. Have students do the following:
   - Write target words on paper or card stock.
   - Sort words into categories and record their sorts on a sheet of paper.
   - Volunteer to share their sorts with the class and explain the decisions they made when sorting the words into categories.

Example

Target words from physical science:

atom	hydrogen	C
element	aluminum	H
compound	oxygen	H_2
molecule	carbon dioxide	Al
symbol	water	O
carbon	formula	O_2

Possible sorts:

- Sort words by elements.
- Sort words by symbols.
- Match elements and symbols.
- Sort words into formulas for water and carbon dioxide.

FIX-UPS

- If students are new to word sorts, scaffold the process by choosing sorts for them (closed sorts). Once students become familiar with the process, they can begin to choose their own categories for their sorts (open sorts).

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- Ensure students' success by providing additional modeling and guided practice as needed before allowing them to work independently.
- Consider your students' developmental level when selecting target words for word sorts.

EXTENSIONS

Quick Writing Have students write about their word sorts in a quick write.

Concept Map Once students have sorted words into categories, have them develop a concept map based on those categories.

Vocabulary Cards Have students create vocabulary cards for the words in their word sort.

Semantic Feature Analysis Have students complete a semantic feature analysis (see activity later in this chapter) to analyze the differences between words in each category.

TRIPLE-ENTRY VOCABULARY JOURNAL

Meaning-focused input	☐	Language-focused learning	☑
Meaning-focused output	☐	Developing fluency	☐

WHAT IS IT?

A triple-entry vocabulary journal is a variation of the dual-entry diary described by Berthoff (1981), which helps students focus specifically on word learning.

WHY DO IT?

When students complete triple-entry vocabulary journals, they have opportunities to accomplish the following:

- Make connections between word meanings across content areas and link word meanings to their own lives.
- Read, think about what they have read, and write about their thoughts.
- Build a personal record of word learning.

In addition, triple-entry vocabulary journals provide teachers opportunities to communicate with students individually via feedback on their entries.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT

1. Select a reasonable number of target words that appear in a current chapter. Choose words that occur frequently or are important

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for understanding the text. The number of words you choose depends on the amount of time you have to work with them in class.

2. Provide students with a template for their triple-entry vocabulary journals (see Figure 4.3). The template should have three columns labeled *Target word*, *Sentence in text*, and *My thoughts*.
3. Model a sample entry in a triple-entry vocabulary journal for your students. Example:

   Target word: *function*

   Sentence in text: All of your body systems work together to make your body *function* properly.

   My thoughts: Sometimes parties or school dances are called *functions*, and I know that in math a *function* can be a relationship between sets. But in this sentence, I think *function* means that my body is doing what it is supposed to be doing.

4. Have students complete their triple-entry vocabulary journals using the academic words you have selected.
5. Have students volunteer to share their thoughts with the class.
6. Review students' triple-entry vocabulary journals. Provide feedback and share some of your own thoughts. This final step is important, because it gives you a chance to check students' understanding of word meanings and provides you an opportunity to communicate with them individually. Do not be surprised when your students start responding to your responses!

Target word	Sentence in text	My thoughts

Figure 4.3. Template for triple-entry journals. (*Source:* Berthoff, 1981.)

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FIX-UPS

- Consider your students' developmental level when planning to use this strategy. As an example, ELLs may benefit from using a bilingual dictionary to assist them, or they may require additional information from you. In either case, have students jot down some ideas about what they think the word might mean, then use additional resources to check their thoughts. They can write about that process in the *My thoughts* section in their triple-entry vocabulary journals.
- If your students seem to be struggling with the process, provide additional modeling and guidance as necessary.
- You can assign triple-entry vocabulary journal entries for homework or for independent practice once you feel confident that your students understand the process and can complete it on their own.

EXTENSIONS

Vocabulary Cards Once students have developed ideas about word meanings through triple-entry vocabulary journals, they can create vocabulary cards using more formal definitions.

Word Chain Have students do word chain activities (see activity on word chains later in this chapter) to explore additional morphological forms of the target word along with their meanings and uses.

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