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SCHOLASTIC

W.O.R.D.®

The Knowledge-Building Vocabulary & Word Study Program for Grades K–5

REVISED FEBRUARY 2026

VERIFIED BY:

LXDRESEARCH AT CHARLES RIVER MEDIA

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Introduction

Words open new worlds to children, empowering them to be literate, expressive, and successful in their endeavors in school and beyond. A robust vocabulary is inarguably a critical factor in becoming a confident reader (Ricketts et al., 2007; Sénéchal et al., 2006). Word knowledge is one of five "pillars" of reading identified by the National Reading Panel, a group of expert educators and scientists who reviewed research on reading instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000). Indeed, research suggests that a person's vocabulary is one of the strongest predictors of how well they understand what they read (Quinn et al., 2015).

Many children enter school with insufficient vocabularies for the tasks required of them. These early disparities place students at an immediate disadvantage in decoding, comprehension, and academic language development, underscoring the need for systematic and intentional vocabulary instruction beginning in the early grades (Goldstein et al., 2017). Studies show that students living in low-income communities are likely to have substantially smaller vocabularies than their peers from middle- to high-income communities (Fernald et al., 2013; Larson et al., 2015). Without targeted instructional support, early vocabulary gaps often persist and compound over time. Students with below-grade vocabulary levels in lower elementary grades are often challenged as readers throughout their school careers and beyond (Lesaux & Kieffer, 2010; Raudenbush & Eschmann, 2015; von Hippel & Hamrock, 2019).

Teaching vocabulary has been shown to improve reading comprehension for students, yet with tens of thousands of root words in the English language, educators can understandably feel daunted by the task (Rimbey et al., 2016). While learning rare or unique words can be novel for students, exposure to and practice with the words that occur most frequently in the text they encounter is most beneficial. This body of research informed the creation of W.O.R.D. (Words Open Reading Doors).

Scholastic W.O.R.D. is a K–5 digital vocabulary and word-study program that builds students' knowledge of high-utility vocabulary through 2,500 morphological word families, using thematic texts and structured practice to strengthen morphological analysis, semantic relationships, and contextual word learning. Scholastic W.O.R.D. teaches the high-utility words that make up 90% of all texts students will encounter in school, ensuring that students have a solid foundation to understand what they read and the ability to effectively communicate their ideas (Hiebertet al., 2018). While developing their vocabulary knowledge, students actively learn how words function and how they can be modified or combined to convey more precise and complex ideas. These skills extend well beyond the W.O.R.D. program and support students' comprehension and expression across all future texts.

OVERVIEW OF SCHOLASTIC W.O.R.D.

Scholastic W.O.R.D. is a personalized research-based digital learning program designed to help students in Grades K–5 master the 2,500 high-utility morphological word families that appear frequently across academic texts. Grounded in research, the interactive program uses thematic reading passages and related digital activities to expose students to high-utility words and their meanings in multiple contexts, encouraging deep comprehension rather than rote recall (Hiebert et al., 2018). Students progress independently, practicing new vocabulary through fun, engaging activities that help them experience the power of words through context, antonyms, synonyms, affixes, and inflected endings. Freddy the Squirrel, a character from the activities, encourages students by cheering them on throughout their word adventure.

W.O.R.D. features a user-friendly design that enables even the youngest learners to navigate the program independently. As a supplemental resource, it is recommended for use three times a week in 20-minute sessions, giving teachers flexibility to integrate it in ways that best support their instructional goals (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The program is also accessible at home, offering additional opportunities for students who need or want extra practice.

Scholastic W.O.R.D. Learning Cycle

The world of W.O.R.D. consists of 10 cross-curriculum themes that are repeated in each grade, enabling students to build rich content knowledge and word-learning skills and strategies over time as they learn new vocabulary within the context of the themes.

The **W.O.R.D.** themes include

1) Amazing Animals
2) Science & Technology
3) Blast From the Past
4) It's My Job
5) People & Places
6) On the Move
7) What Is a Hero?
8) Habitats Close Up
9) The Arts
10) All About Me

By default, the themes are listed in the order shown here, and students must finish one theme before starting another. However, teachers can use the *Theme Order Tool* to customize the order in which students progress through the themes. (See page 55.)

The W.O.R.D. thematic map

W.O.R.D. User Guide, pg. 18

For every theme, students follow a similar learning path of instruction, reading, and activity through five distinct components:

1. What Do You Know?

Each theme in W.O.R.D. begins with a placement activity designed to determine a student's existing knowledge of the vocabulary they will encounter in that theme. During this activity, students are asked to match the correct image or images to a word from the theme. Instructional feedback is provided throughout the activity. Based on a student's performance, they are placed into one of two reading levels for the W.O.R.D. fiction and nonfiction passages: grade level or simplified.

2. Book Nook

Following the placement activity, students visit the Book Nook, where they read two passages (one fiction and one nonfiction) related to the theme. Each passage exposes students to high-utility vocabulary words in context, along with grade-appropriate idioms and expressions. Students select which passage to read first. Full audio support and text highlighting are automatic for Grades K–1 and can be enabled by students for Grades 2–5. Additionally, closed captioning is also available and student enabled.

Based on a student's performance in the What Do You Know? activity, a student will read grade-level or simplified passages in the Book Nook. Vocabulary is identical at both levels of text, while reading passages have the same layout and differ only in presentation—for example, length of sentences or number of modifiers. The passages will always include the same high-utility vocabulary words and tell the same story. This approach ensures equitable access to grade-level vocabulary while allowing students to engage with text complexity that matches their current reading proficiency.

Simplified texts use shorter, clearer sentences and focus on reinforcing high-frequency vocabulary through repetition and emphasis. There are no contractions, fewer pronouns, and fewer modifiers. There is more repetition and reiteration of ideas from one sentence to the next, and there are no extra non-vocabulary words that may be perceived as challenging. Where applicable, especially in the lower grades, the passages have less text per page and generally utilize a simpler layout (e.g., more line breaks). Grade-level passages include both the high-utility vocabulary words and some additional challenging words, using compound and complex sentences. For example, a text about animal shelters would use only the word *shelter* in the simplified version but, in grade level, would use shelter along with words such as *kennel* and *lair*. Grade-level passages also use subordinate clauses and antecedent pronouns, as well as more nouns and modifiers. Where applicable, the grade-level passages will have more text per page with fewer visual breaks. Regardless of reading ability, all students are exposed to the same core word lists for that grade and theme— making W.O.R.D. appropriate for all learners.

3. Mega Sort

Once students finish reading a passage, they then sort the new vocabulary words they have just encountered into megaclusters. Megaclusters are groups of words with strong semantic ties—words that are related in meaning or function based on the meaning within the context of the passage. As an example; swim, hunt, help, and protect can all be grouped into a single megacluster because they share related meanings and functions. These words can fit into a "nature" megacluster as well as a megacluster focused on actions. All megacluster work is done within the context of the fiction or nonfiction passages, reinforcing the connections between words and highlighting that a word can have different meanings depending on the context.

4. Club House

In the Club House, students practice each theme's vocabulary through fun and engaging activities that are imaginative, short, varied, and self-paced, and that help them master key learning objectives. Students in Grades K–1 have three vocabulary activities per theme while students in Grades 2–5 have an additional two activities per theme, for a total of five activities. The activities may be completed in any order, and students earn stars for completing each, as well as "stickers" to customize their virtual Club House.

Upon finishing all the Club House activities associated with their selected reading passage, students are directed back to the Book Nook to read the second passage for the theme and complete the learning cycle again with all-new content for the new passage, still utilizing the same high-utility vocabulary as a spiraled review.

5. Free Choice

After students have spent 15 minutes in the W.O.R.D. program engaging in the full sequence of activities, encountering vocabulary enough times for meaningful learning and building relevant connections for long term learning, they are rewarded with five minutes of Free Choice. During this time, they can choose to reread the current theme's passages, replay any of the activities to earn more stars, customize their Club House, or revisit themes they have previously completed. If a student is in the middle of an activity at the 15-minute mark, W.O.R.D. will wait until the activity has been completed before offering Free Choice. Similarly, if a student has not finished an activity after five minutes of Free Choice, the program will wait until completion before transitioning the student back to the learning cycle.

Logic Model

The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) urges districts and schools to invest in evidence-based interventions supported by research and guided by a clear, well-defined logic model explaining how the approach is expected to improve student outcomes. Figure 1 provides a conceptual model of W.O.R.D.'s design to facilitate engagement with literature and improve short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. Specifically, this logic model outlines the targeted activities associated with Scholastic W.O.R.D. and demonstrates how these activities produce measurable outputs, including increased vocabulary knowledge, enhanced word awareness, and greater engagement with reading. These outputs, in turn, contribute to key literacy outcomes, such as a deeper understanding of word meanings, improved ability to recognize relationships among words, and strengthened reading comprehension. Collectively, the logic model illustrates a clear and coherent pathway from program implementation to meaningful literacy gains, aligning Scholastic W.O.R.D. with ESSA's emphasis on evidence-based practices.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes (Short-Term)	Outcomes (Long-Term)
• Scholastic W.O.R.D. is a research-based vocabulary program focused on 2,500 high-utility morphological word families • Standards-aligned fiction and nonfiction texts organized by topic • Instructional design emphasizing morphology, multiple meanings, and word relationships • Personalized and adaptive learning features	**Teachers:** • Implement W.O.R.D. consistently (three 20-minute sessions per week) • Incorporate independent student practice into instructional routines • Review real-time student reports to monitor usage and vocabulary development • Use data to supplement, differentiate, and inform classroom instruction	**Teachers:** • Increase knowledge of students' vocabulary development, including morphological awareness and word knowledge • Identify and verbalize which vocabulary and word-analysis skills students have mastered and which require additional instruction • Use real-time data to differentiate vocabulary instruction and group students effectively • Adjust instruction based on evidence of student progress in vocabulary, comprehension, and word relationships • Integrate high-utility vocabulary instruction consistently across ELA and content areas • Provide more targeted and efficient vocabulary instruction through access to actionable reports • Save instructional planning time by using structured, standards-aligned W.O.R.D. resources	**Teachers:** • Use evidence of student skill development to group students and target vocabulary and comprehension instruction **Students:** • Develop deeper understanding of word meanings, including multiple meanings, through exposure to fiction and nonfiction texts • Increase ability to identify semantic and morphological relationships among words	**Teachers:** • Improve instructional efficiency by focusing planning and support on identified student needs. • Strengthen capacity to support long-term student growth in vocabulary, comprehension, and ELA achievement. • Demonstrate increased confidence and effectiveness in delivering high-quality, standards-aligned literacy instruction.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes (Short-Term)	Outcomes (Long-Term)
• Structured routines for explicit instruction, repetition, and reinforcement • Embedded opportunities for student practice and application • Teacher instructional materials and professional supports • Data and reporting tools to monitor progress and inform instruction	**Students:** • Engage in personalized vocabulary instruction three times per week • Learn high-utility words through fiction and nonfiction texts across content areas • Participate in a purposeful learning cycle (reading in context, word clustering, vocabulary activities, and free choice) • Interact with audio narration and text highlighting to support diverse learners	• Increase confidence in delivering evidence-based vocabulary and knowledge-building instruction • Leverage program-generated data in real time to differentiate vocabulary instruction and adjust classroom practices **Students:** • Apply morphological analysis skills at the word and sentence level using high-utility vocabulary • Demonstrate word knowledge through identification of multiple meanings and semantic relationships in context • Complete vocabulary activities involving word clustering, morphology, and usage in fiction and nonfiction texts • Engage in repeated practice to reinforce vocabulary, content knowledge, and text structures • Interact with audio-supported text and highlighting to support accurate word recognition and comprehension • Program-generated usage and proficiency reports document engagement, vocabulary growth, and learning progress	• Improve comprehension of grade-level texts across content areas	**Students:** • Demonstrate sustained growth in academic vocabulary and morphological knowledge across grade levels. • Comprehend increasingly complex fiction and nonfiction texts across content areas. • Transfer vocabulary and word-analysis skills to reading, writing, and discussion tasks. • Maintain increased engagement, confidence, and enjoyment in reading and literacy learning.

Figure 1

VOCABULARY: WORDS AND MEANING

According to the National Reading Panel, vocabulary is one of the five foundational skills that students need to master in order to be fluent, confident readers (NRP, 2000). Advances in technology now allow researchers to identify the words that appear most frequently in school texts, highlighting which vocabulary is most essential for students' reading success.

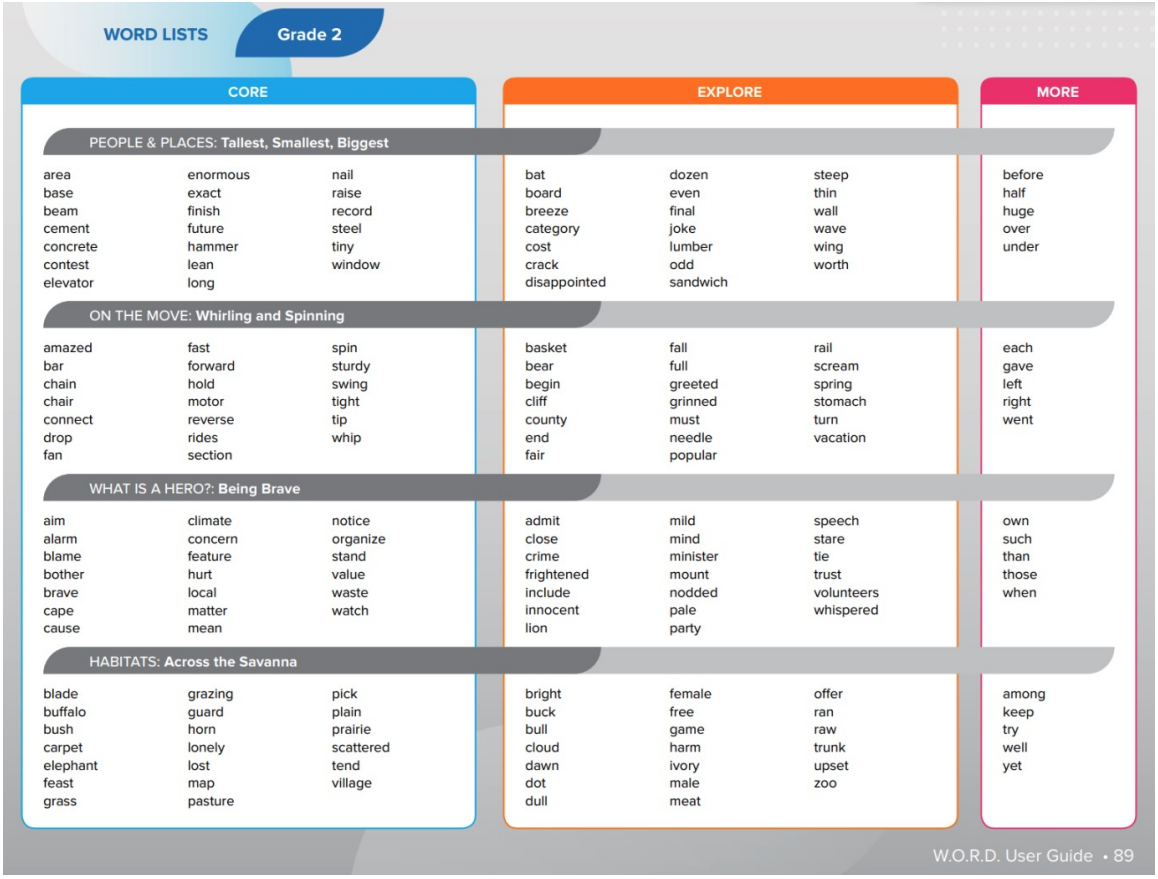
CORE VOCABULARY

Research shows that a relatively small number of words make up the bulk of written English. Leading literacy experts Elfrieda Hiebert, Amanda Goodwin, and Gina Cervetti examined more than 10,000 digitized texts written for students across grade levels and content areas (2018). Their analysis identified a "core vocabulary" that accounts for more than 90% of the words in school materials (Hiebert et al., 2018). These words "represent ideas that are central to the themes and content of texts, usually share root words with additional words, and are often versatile in their meaning and function" (Hadley & Menendez, 2021). Knowing 90% of the words in a given text is considered the threshold for meaningful reading (Stahl et al., 2005). Such proficiency allows a reader to get the main idea of a passage and correctly decipher the meaning of unknown words, which in turn further expands their vocabulary.

The research by Hiebert and colleagues (2018) examining morphological families in school texts shows that the identified core vocabulary includes over 11,000 individual words, a quantity far too large to be feasible for direct, systematic instruction in classroom settings. However, research on morphological awareness suggests these words do not have to be individually taught (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). In linguistics, a morpheme is the smallest unit of language that carries information about meaning or function. Words may consist of one morpheme, such as *play*, or multiple morphemes, such as *playful*. Morphologically related words are grouped together in our internal lexicon, leading some experts to suggest teaching vocabulary as members of morphological word families (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). Their argument is that if students know one member of a word family, such as the root word, they will likely be able to figure out the meanings of its related family members. Research shows that proficient readers use root words to decipher unknown words (Carlisle, 2010), and that students lacking this word-sleuthing skill can learn it (Goodwin & Ahn, 2010). Consequently, Hiebert and her colleagues (2018) grouped the core vocabulary into 2,500 morphological word families, each including a root word, its inflected endings, and any derivational family members, with each family consisting of about five words on average.

W.O.R.D. teaches the core vocabulary that appears most frequently in school texts and is grounded in research identifying the 2,500 high-utility morphological word families that make up the majority of words students encounter (Hiebert et al., 2018). These word families informed the development of W.O.R.D.'s 10 thematic modules, which span concepts across social studies, science, and language arts. Because each theme recurs at every grade level with new content, students revisit familiar concepts while steadily expanding their background knowledge as they progress through the program. Themes can also be reordered to fit a classroom's instructional sequence. Within each theme, students read two passages—a fiction and a nonfiction text—that highlight a focused set of vocabulary. These words fall into three categories: Core Words, Explore Words, and More Words.

Core Words and Explore Words connect closely to each theme, incorporating both concrete and abstract vocabulary, such as *hatch* (Core) and *separate* (Explore). More Words are high-utility terms, like *when* and *any*, that appear frequently across a wide range of texts. After completing both passages for a theme, students will have encountered all of that theme's Core, Explore, and More Words. As they advance through the program, the number of new words introduced increases to match developmental readiness—from 20 words per theme in kindergarten to 65 in Grade 5—ensuring steady, age-appropriate growth in vocabulary knowledge.



WORD LISTS Grade 2

CORE			EXPLORE			MORE
PEOPLE & PLACES: Tallest, Smallest, Biggest						
area	enormous	nail	bat	dozen	steep	before
base	exact	raise	board	even	thin	half
beam	finish	record	breeze	final	wall	huge
cement	future	steel	category	joke	wave	over
concrete	hammer	tiny	cost	lumber	wing	under
contest	lean	window	crack	odd	worth	
elevator	long		disappointed	sandwich		
ON THE MOVE: Whirling and Spinning						
amazed	fast	spin	basket	fall	rail	each
bar	forward	sturdy	bear	full	scream	gave
chain	hold	swing	begin	greeted	spring	left
chair	motor	tight	cliff	grinned	stomach	right
connect	reverse	tip	county	must	turn	went
drop	rides	whip	end	needle	vacation	
fan	section		fair	popular		
WHAT IS A HERO?: Being Brave						
aim	climate	notice	admit	mild	speech	own
alarm	concern	organize	close	mind	stare	such
blame	feature	stand	crime	minister	tie	than
bother	hurt	value	frightened	mount	trust	those
brave	local	waste	include	nodded	volunteers	when
cape	matter	watch	innocent	pale	whispered	
cause	mean		lion	party		
HABITATS: Across the Savanna						
blade	grazing	pick	bright	female	offer	among
buffalo	guard	plain	buck	free	ran	keep
bush	horn	prairie	bull	game	raw	try
carpet	lonely	scattered	cloud	harm	trunk	well
elephant	lost	tend	dawn	ivory	upset	yet
feast	map	village	dot	male	zoo	
grass	pasture		dull	meat		

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COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

In the early 1960's, educational psychologist Jerome Bruner coined the term "spiral curriculum" to suggest an iterative approach to learning (Bruner, 1977). He argued that a topic should be revisited multiple times during a course of study, with each encounter building on previous learning and progressively deepening a student's understanding of the topic. What is learned in an early loop of the spiral is linked to new information learned in a later loop (Kim et al., 2024). This approach is especially relevant to vocabulary development, where repeated exposure and increasing nuance are essential for deep word knowledge.

Spiraling supports word learning by giving students repeated meaningful opportunities to interact with vocabulary over time, allowing them to steadily expand their personal warehouse of words and develop deep knowledge along with strategies for independent word learning (Butler et al., 2010). Research has identified key features of effective vocabulary instruction that create these opportunities and help learners broaden their word knowledge. Core vocabulary words are intentionally selected for their versatility and multiple meanings, which make them common in texts; instead of overwhelming students by teaching all meanings at once, W.O.R.D. introduces these meanings gradually and in context. Following Bruner's spiral curriculum, the program continually builds on students' understanding so that learning remains incremental, connected to relevant content, and aimed at fostering deep comprehension rather than rote memorization (Moody et al., 2018).

Learning in Context

Learning words in context leads to greater vocabulary gains over time than rote memorization of words and their definitions (Nagy et al., 1985; 1987). In one study, two groups of 7- and 8-year-olds with limited vocabularies were taught a selection of new words. One group learned the words from definitions, while the other was taught how to derive their meanings from context using strategies such as context clues and inferences. Three months later, the context group showed significantly better comprehension of text containing many of the taught words. The students also effectively used the strategies they had learned to determine the meaning of unknown words (Nash & Snowling, 2006). As students encounter a word in different contexts, their knowledge of it grows incrementally. Each time, they learn a bit more about how words work and how they can take on new meanings and functions (Durán & Henderson, 2018).

To be successful, students need to be linguistically flexible and able to discern which meaning of a word is appropriate in a given context (Durán & Henderson, 2018). To support this flexibility, W.O.R.D. repeats many of the high-utility words in the core vocabulary in different contexts so that students develop a multifaceted understanding of them. As an example of the progression of spiraled development across grade levels, consider the word *shape*. Students in kindergarten learn from W.O.R.D.'s reading passages and activities that *shape* refers to a geometric figure. By third grade, when students are able to use concrete words in idioms, W.O.R.D. presents *shape* to describe a physical condition. Fifth graders, meanwhile, encounter even more idiomatic uses of the word, such as when it refers to the formulation of an idea.

Build Word Knowledge Through Related Texts

Background knowledge is the single best predictor of how well a person understands what they read (Gasparinatou & Grigoriadou, 2013; Ahmed et al., 2016). Without some knowledge of a topic, the words on the page are meaningless. Research shows that reading sets of related texts not only builds subject expertise but is also associated with growth in vocabulary acquisition (Cervetti et al., 2016). As students delve deeper into a topic, they can access the knowledge they have acquired earlier to figure out the meanings of new words they encounter.

The 10 themes of W.O.R.D. were intentionally chosen to help students develop background knowledge in key topics related to the natural and social world. Themes reflect real-world ideas familiar to or essential for students—such as movement, animals, jobs, people, and places—because contextual learning supports stronger comprehension and retention. In the Book Nook, students read fiction and nonfiction passages that reinforce core vocabulary words in context. The reading passages differ for each grade but all connect back to the particular theme to deepen knowledge, as demonstrated by the nonfiction and fiction passage pairs for the theme Amazing Animals: Kindergarteners read about cat behavior and a story told by a house cat; second graders learn about bugs and read "The Grasshopper and the Ant;" and fourth graders read an article about wildebeest migration, as well as the story of the Pied Piper.

W.O.R.D. Theme 1: Amazing Animals

	Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Fiction	Cat and Mouse	King of the Birds	The Grasshopper and the Ant	The Tale of Urashima Taro	The Pied Piper	The Tiger, the Wise Man, and the Jackal
Nonfiction	Let's Learn About Cats!	Fantastic Birds	Bugs, Bugs, Bugs	Save the Whale!	The Great Migration	The Octopus and the Shark Tank

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By reading thematically related texts, students develop areas of expertise and rich vocabularies that aid comprehension (Gelzheiser et al., 2014). After students finish a passage, a word progress meter celebrates the accomplishment by showing the total number of words they have read and the number of new words encountered.

Make Connections Between Words

Words do not live in silos but share connections in meaning and function. Effective vocabulary instruction "involves not only teaching single-word entities, but also teaching words in conceptually linked groups, with particular benefits shown for teaching words in taxonomies" (Hadley et al., 2018, p. 55). Having students cluster words into categories facilitates comprehension, accelerates word learning, and enhances word retention (Neuman et al., 2007; 2011). When students have mastered frequently used words in a particular category, they can draw on that knowledge to unlock the meanings of related words that are rarer.

Activities that ask students to cluster words based on meaning or function reinforce an understanding of new vocabulary and the idea that a word can have multiple meanings. After reading a passage, students explore the connections between words and the concept that words can take on different meanings depending on the context through W.O.R.D.'s Mega Sort activity. Using sentences pulled directly from the most recently read passage, students sort the theme's Core Words into megaclusters—groups of words connected by the type of content they describe, such as weather or feelings and attitudes. These megaclusters function similarly to semantic categories, word families, or word sets. For each grade, W.O.R.D. utilizes approximately a dozen megaclusters. The same word may belong in different megaclusters, according to the context of a sentence or passage.

If students provide an incorrect response again, W.O.R.D. automatically places the word in the correct megacluster. This process allows students to continue working through the activity even when they make errors, while still ensuring they receive the accurate information needed to deepen their understanding. By giving students space to try, adjust, and learn without penalty, the approach supports a growth mindset and reduces frustration, helping them see mistakes as part of the learning process (Dweck, 2006).

At the end of the activity, W.O.R.D. displays the sorted vocabulary in their megaclusters word bubbles to give students a visual aid of how words go together. The "Giving and Getting Information" megaclusters include words such as *article*, *reporter*, and *media*— all words found in the most recently read passage in the Book Nook.

When students complete the Mega Sort activity, the theme's Core and Explore words are displayed by their megaclusters.

Provide Multiple, Meaningful Exposures to a Word

Students need many encounters with a new word before it becomes part of their working vocabulary (Nagy & Scott, 2000; Biemiller & Boote, 2006). The quality of the exposures matters, too. Experts caution against mere repetition or drills, instead recommending a variety of interactive activities that expose students to words in different contexts and engage them in learning (Stahl, 2005). A 2016 review of 36 studies examining different approaches to vocabulary instruction found that activities requiring students to actively engage with a word's meaning, such as comparing and contrasting terms, answering questions about the word, or creating semantic maps, had a significantly stronger impact on reading comprehension than simply copying a definition. (Wright & Cervetti, 2016).

W.O.R.D. provides multiple meaningful opportunities to interact with and deepen understanding of high-utility words. By engaging in each of these opportunities in W.O.R.D., students excel far beyond just the definition of high-utility vocabulary words—the varied and connected practice students experience results in the strengthening of skills and strategies necessary to decipher new words. W.O.R.D. covers many key learning objectives at the appropriate grade level:

	Definition	Example
Homonyms	Homonyms are words that sound and are spelled alike but have different meanings.	*Left* can be the opposite of *right* and the past tense of *leave*.
Polysemy	Polysemy is the association of one word with multiple related meanings.	The word *good* can describe one's abilities as well as one's character; someone can be a *good* singer or a *good* person.
Synonyms & Antonyms	Words can relate to each other by either having similar or opposite meanings.	The word *kind* is similar to *friendly* or *loving*. It is the opposite of *mean*.
Expressions & Phrases	An expression or phrase is used in a specific way to express ideas through words.	The words *quiet* and *time* can be put together to form the very specific phrase *quiet time*.
Heavy-Lifting Words & Megaclusters	In W.O.R.D., words from each theme are grouped into roughly a dozen megaclusters based on their shared meaning and function. The heavy-lifting words in these megaclusters are crucial for literacy because they are commonly used. Megaclusters teach how words are connected by meaning and function.	The words *swim, hunt*, and *protect* can all be grouped into a nature megacluster—as well as a megacluster focused on actions.
Picturable Words	Students can learn basic definitions of words by identifying how pictures are used to represent words.	Students can learn the word *shark* by seeing an image of a shark.
Derivatives	Derivatives are new words formed by adding affixes (prefixes or suffixes) to a base word, resulting in a change in meaning and usually a change in part of speech. This process is called derivational morphology.	The word *creation* is a derivative of the word *create*.
Tenses	Tenses are morphological changes to verbs that express time, such as past, present, or future. Tense is marked through inflection (e.g., adding -ed, -s, or auxiliary verbs).	The base verb *walk* to *walked* indicates past time due to the inflected ending -ed. Tenses rely on inflectional morphemes that modify the verb to reflect grammatical time without changing its core meaning or part of speech.
Inflected Endings	Inflected endings are suffixes added to a word to mark grammatical information, such as tense, number, possession, or comparison. Unlike derivational affixes, inflected endings do not create new words; they adjust the form of the existing one.	Inflected endings show how inflectional morphemes function to encode grammatical features—such as number (-s), tense (-ed, -ing), or degree (-er, -est).

Figure 2

	Definition	Example
Affixes	Affixes are morphemes added to the beginning or end of a base word to modify its meaning or grammatical function. Affixes include prefixes (added to the front) and suffixes (added to the end).	In the word *unhappy*, the affix *un-* changes the meaning of the base word *happy*.
Compound Words	Compound words are words that may be combined to make new words.	The word *rain* plus the word *bow* make *rainbow*.
Simple Comparisons	A word can transform into something new by adding letters or combining with another word to give it a different, but related meaning.	The words *big*, *bigger*, and *biggest* are related, but have differing shades of meaning.
Analogies	Comparing words to each other in parallel relationships clarifies meaning and highlights the characteristics they have in common.	*Duck* is to *pond* as *whale* is to *ocean*.
Idioms	Understanding phrases whose meanings cannot be established by a literal translation of the words in the phrase leads to a more nuanced grasp of word usage.	The expression *break a leg* cannot be understood by translating it literally.

Figure 2

These learning objectives informed the design of all W.O.R.D.'s components. Combined with the spiral curriculum design, W.O.R.D. allows students to continue sharpening their skills over time with new vocabulary. The What Do You Know? placement activity, the Mega Sort activity, and all the Club House activities together actively require students to apply a wide range of vocabulary, language, and comprehension skills to successfully accomplish the objectives. The five Club House activities—Wordy Workshop, Ha Ha Shop, Zap! Pow! Blast!, Monster Munch, and Crabby Crates—cover a range of learning objectives. Once students finish the Club House activities, they are directed back to the Book Nook to read the second passage for the theme and repeat the learning cycle with all-new content. A new theme is unlocked after they complete all of the activities for both passages.

Meeting the Needs of All Learners

Embedded supports are available in W.O.R.D. to address the needs of English learners, striving readers, and students with special needs. W.O.R.D. automatically places students in the level that corresponds to their grade, but educators can change the W.O.R.D. level for individual students at any time. Similar displays and activities make it discreet for students to work at varying levels without peers immediately recognizing a difference. Text highlighting and read-aloud functions can be activated for any grade level, and students can click on any word in a text passage to read or listen to its definition. Such flexibility ensures that English learners and striving readers are working at a level that is appropriate for their learning needs. The placement activity at the start of each theme in W.O.R.D. also differentiates learning by determining whether students work at grade level or at a simplified level (Tomlinson, 2017). Regardless of their learning path, all students working within the same grade learn the same words.

English learners represent a growing share of today's classrooms, and while many experience challenges with reading due to limited exposure to high-utility English vocabulary, they also bring significant linguistic strengths that support vocabulary learning, such as experience navigating multiple language systems, flexible language-processing skills, and rich cultural knowledge (Banik, 2025). Research shows that the same evidence-based vocabulary practices used with native speakers are equally effective for students who speak multiple languages (Graves, 2016). Moreover, multilinguals benefit greatly from computer-assisted instruction, as students using these tools learn substantially more high-utility vocabulary, recognize words more quickly, and demonstrate stronger reading comprehension than students in control groups (Tozcu & Coady, 2004). Digital literacy supports, such as hyperlinked glossaries, also help English learners efficiently access and understand unfamiliar terms (Proctor et al., 2007). By pairing research-based instruction with recognition of the linguistic assets students already possess, educators can help English learners thrive as vocabulary learners and readers.

CONCLUSION

Research shows that a relatively small number of words in the English language make up most words found in a majority of texts (Heibert et al., 2018). These words, known as the core vocabulary, are paramount for academic success, and fluency with them is crucial for students to become confident, proficient readers (Hadley & Menendez, 2021). The most effective instruction teaches the high-utility core vocabulary in context and offers students multiple engaging opportunities to advance their understanding of how words work. Additionally, multiple opportunities to practice with the core vocabulary allow students to develop skills and strategies to decipher new words while deepening their background knowledge on a variety of cross-content topics.

Scholastic W.O.R.D. is grounded in research that identifies the most important words for students to know and the most effective ways to teach them, while providing important background knowledge on cross-content topics and building word-learning strategies and skills. Through thematic passages and interactive digital activities, Scholastic W.O.R.D. builds students' knowledge of the core vocabulary, which opens doors to their knowledge of the world. Students encounter words in different contexts, deepening their comprehension, and have many opportunities to practice using the words, ensuring that they become part of students' working vocabulary. To aid educators, W.O.R.D. provides real-time student reports to monitor progress and inform instruction. Together, these elements ensure that Scholastic W.O.R.D. equips students with the vocabulary knowledge, confidence, and skills they need to thrive as readers and learners across all content areas.

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