On Your Way with Dr. Christina Williams

INTRO

Whether you're a teacher who's on your way to school to work with kids and you're leaning into the science of reading movement, or you're on your way to tutor some great kids who are struggling with learning to read and spell well, or you're a parent who'd like to learn to better equip and inspire your children from home, the On Your Way podcast is for you.

I'm Dr. Christina Williams, and I'm your host.

During the previous episode about vocabulary instruction, I said there'd be mini episodes, following, so I could share how students received vocabulary instruction in my classroom and at the Book Bums—tutoring centers I operate in the greater Cincinnati area. My aim is to equip and inspire you—whether you're a teacher, tutor, or parent (or all three!) to expand your students' vocabularies.

The mini episodes are as follows:

1 how to highlight words featured in the authentic materials you share during your read aloud time, so words are introduced in context, and you provide student-friendly definitions

2 how to encourage the use of more sophisticated vocabulary while your students are writing

3 how to promote comparisons of words (make connections between words to aid in recall)

4 how to address roots and affixes with your students (that won't put them to sleep) and address words' grammar structures

5 how to provide multiple exposures to the words you've featured so they're intentionally noticed

This is the first mini episode, and I'm going to share how I deliberately incorporated vocabulary instruction, as a classroom teacher, into the read aloud time I shared, daily, with my second-grade students. But these suggestions can be used at home or in classrooms serving students in most every grade. You will use words you select from the authentic materials you're using in your classroom, so words are introduced to your students in a meaningful context, with student-friendly definitions that you provide.

I'll share how to choose and highlight words that are featured in the texts you're reading aloud to your students, anyway. This work is not separate from or added to your already packed schedule. You're simply capitalizing on the opportunities presenting themselves right there in your read aloud selection. Using your carefully selected read aloud means that the words of focus are introduced within the context of characters your students actually care about. These touchstone moments are stickier than just teaching words from random lists because your students will recall the situations where words were well used. These moments also invite a nod to authors who make books more enjoyable with their crafting techniques and vocabulary decisions so expertly employed—right there, within the stories we're enjoying together.

Let’s be clear.

Kids simply must hear excellent oral reading by adults who deliberately 1) explore a great variety of genres, 2) notice (aloud) lots of captivating writers’ crafting tools (repetition, metaphor, alliteration, etc.), and 3) punctuate big, bad bodacious words and even expertly used small words that pack a big punch.

Though I certainly highlighted vocabulary words in the picture books I read aloud to my students, in this mini-series episode, I’m focusing only on the chapter books I read aloud, every single day—with no exceptions.

For effective vocabulary instruction, it’s practically a must for you to read the books you’re planning to read aloud ahead of your students. Admittedly, I have read books where I was only one chapter ahead of my students, but I don’t recommend that. Reading books before you read them with your scholars takes extra time on your part, but the results make the investment a really good one. Besides, if you’ve chosen outstanding books to share with your class, as a classroom teacher, you’re likely to share them again with other students—so doing the work one year pays off the next and the next. If you’re a parent, well, your kids are worth it.

To begin, you must deliberately choose the books you will read, and you must schedule them across the school year. Because you’ll share lots of genres across the year (as I shared in the previous podcast about read alouds), you’ll want to plan your read alouds to coincide, at least a bit, with what you’re teaching in the content areas. You’ll likely want to save the more rigorous books for the end of the year, but not always.

Nearly every year, I began creating the culture I wanted to promote within our classroom, by reading aloud the short, simple chapter book Stone Fox written by John Reynolds Gardener. In this book, we met Little Willy, a determined little boy who was willing to work really hard

for someone (and something) he cared about. Even though Little Willy endured what was certainly unfair treatment from Stone Fox, Little Willy's genuine kindness and sincere caring in spite of that unfair treatment, caused the callused Native American to see genuine goodness in a boy from whom he'd expected something very different.

I love cultivating teachable moments that inspire children to be better, even with adults who often miss the mark. I love reinforcing the idea that hard work and compassion for othersare worthy of our best efforts. Though this book doesn't offer many great vocabulary words—there are some—it offers something else that's important. And I finish the book quickly, so vocabulary instruction isn't the primary focus the first week. (Shoot. We're just trying to ensure kids get on the right bus at the end of the day. Am I right?)

Anyway, I have a whole podcast about read alouds, and I shared lots of book titles there. Every year I add new books, so my list keeps growing. You'll want to choose books that are sure to inspire your students to be the kinds of people you believe our world needs.

Here are a couple of guidelines to help you choose books that worthy of your time.

First, if you're a teacher, your read aloud selections must always be more sophisticated than those books most of your students are equipped to read independently. If you cannot find two to three words to highlight per reading session with your students, those book selections are likely not worthy investments of your read aloud time.

Second, the books should feature engaging plots, relatable and inspiring characters, beautiful language, vivid illustrations, and themes that resonate with and complement students' lived experiences.

Also, it makes no difference whether your students love a series, you will only ever read book one. There are simply too many books to share to waste time on a second book from a series. Your job, if your students do love a series, is to promise to equip them to read the remaining books in that series on their own and to deliver on that promise just as quickly as possible.

When you select the right books, you will absolutely maximize your impact by creating memorable vocabulary moments.

As I'm selecting words from each chapter or two (or three)—depending on how much of the book I can get into my 20-30 minute (give or take) read aloud time, I am looking for words I believe might be handy for my students to know.

Which words should you choose to lean into from each of the chapters you read each day? Remember that you want no more than three words per day. One is good. Two will work. Three is pushing it, but it can work—if each of those words is too good to pass up. Be certain that the words you choose are sophisticated enough to stretch your students, AND they can be useful additions to your students in their speech and in their writing.

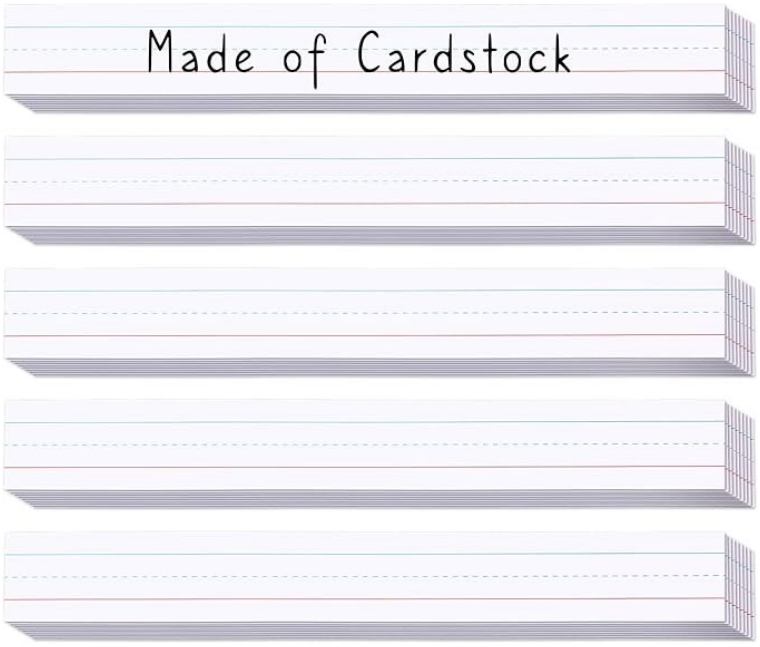
I purchased Sharon Hale's book called Princess Academy. I loved her beginner chapter book series, Princess in Black, so I thought I'd check it out. As I made my way through chapter one, I jotted the following words: seeping, hovering, rumble, wincing, wafted, chattered, cringed, frantic, tawny, perplexed, tethers, roused, gawk, ignorant, and blared.

Now it was time to decide which words my students might be inclined to add to their own stories. From my list, I chose wince (shrinking back of the body as if to avoid pain)—like Miri did when her mattress made too much noise, cringe (bending body in fear or feeling embarrassed or awkward inside)—like Miri did when she saw a man smash a fly on his own cheek, and gawk (rude staring)—like Miri did when she'd heard that someone from the king had been sent to her mountain.

Note that I removed affixes used in the text when I recorded the words onto the word cards.

1) You must provide a word card for each word so your students can observe the words you select along with a very short, student-friendly definition.

My suggestion is to cut lots of 24” sentence strips into thirds. That makes three 8” word cards from each sentence strip, so one packet should get you nearly 300 words. (I added a link on our website (www.bookbums.com) to show the ones I always purchase.)



Zaner-Bloser Sentence Strips, 3 x 24 Inches, White, 100 Sheets - 085288

You’ll also want plenty of fine-tipped Sharpies to write the words and definitions on the cards. Again, you can find a link for the ones I use on our website. When you use our links, you’re supporting the work we do at Book Bums. Thank you.

Have a stack of these word cards handy while you're planning which vocabulary words you'd like to feature within each read aloud session. Before you meet with your students, you'll have written the words you selected and the definitions just below the words--writing the definition in smaller text. (This makes it easier to review these words with a whole class, for kids will be able to see the word but not the definition.).

Note that you will use the handwriting guidelines on the sentence strips for correct letter formations, proper sizing, and proper case usage, because these word cards will be on display for students' use—and we want to display how the words should look when our students write them. Do not use all caps. Model what you'd like to see from your students.

The words I selected can be acted out (they're verbs), and acting them out helps students to remember the words better, so, as you're finishing up your read aloud time, you can point to the words you've hung a board near you and say, "Show me what it looks like to . . .

1) wince like you're trying to be sneaky and your mattress makes too much noise."

2) Cringe as if you just saw a man smash a fly on his own cheek."

3) Gawk like you might if you heard that a prince is coming to our school to choose a princess."

You can challenge your students to write one of the words you shared in sentences of their own. It is helpful to have a rubric to remind students of your expectations including conventions.

Writing is an exceptional way for students to consolidate students' learning, and adding their expanded vocabulary knowledge complements that work.

You should know that we can share our selected vocabulary words before reading the text, while reading the text, and/or after reading the text. I suggest mixing it up a bit.

Here's how it might look if you're introducing the vocabulary words before reading your book:

As you're preparing to begin your read aloud, you'll introduce each of the day's featured words, one at a time, sharing the word pronunciations, highlighting relevant phonics rules at play, pointing out the morphological parts you want to notice together, providing a simple definition, and then demonstrating how to use the word in a sentence or two.

As you share each word card, you'll want to post them near you (I used a tape ball to adhere the word cards to the white board right beside me) so kids can see them when you

begin reading aloud from the text. You absolutely want your students to see those words in print. Sure, you could simply write the word on the board, however, you're going to want a word card because we're going to transfer the word cards into a word bank from which students will select stretch words when writing and using words they want to learn. (more on that soon)

Before beginning the reading of the book, you'll also want to share that when your students hear those words you've just shared, as you're reading to them, they are to indicate they recognize a featured words by giving a thumbs up, by saying the word aloud when they hear it, or by demonstrating the meaning of the word somehow. You quietly and quickly acknowledge the words (or offer a pause and a quick re-read if no one catches it at first) and then continue your reading.

Let's pretend I'm featuring the word gape. Then, when I got to the word gape in the text, I stopped and said something like . . . "I just read the word __gape__. Did you notice it? Here's how that word is spelled. (I'd show the students the featured word on the sentence strip. For gape, I'd certainly point out the magic e at work. I'd likely share that without that magic e, the word would be gap.) I'd then say, "__gape__ means __a wide opening, and it often indicates when a mouth hangs open wide, like when someone is shocked or surprised__. Does that word make sense in the sentence I just read?" Then, I read the sentence again, from the story.

Side Note: I used the same procedures when teaching my kids about authors' crafting tools. If I'd taught about similies, my students would whisper "similie" when they recognized one as I read. I'd give an affirming smile and nod, acknowledging their expert noticing, and continue with reading the story with hardly an interruption.

As your students watch out for and acknowledge your reading of the selected words, you're deliberately providing easy access to less-familiar words and you're confirming definitions, pronunciations, and usage within the context of a story the kids are enjoying anyway. Lotsa' birds. One stone.

If I chose to share the featured words while reading the book, I stuck the word cards between the pages on which the words were found, and I'd simply stop my reading to add words to the board after a quick bit of instruction, again, sharing the word pronunciations, highlighting relevant phonics rules at play, pointing out the morphological parts I wanted to notice together, providing a simple definition, and then demonstrating how to use the word in a sentence or two.

If I chose to share the featured words after reading the book, I stuck the word cards at the end of the chapter and asked the students to see if they could recall when those featured words were used during our read aloud time. I don't recommend doing this very often, but it can be a fun challenge because the students are listening and predicting which words you're reading might be worthy of your selection.

However you choose to highlight the one to three words from your read aloud each day, when you've finished reading aloud, you must have a "word bank" to move your featured words into.

For me this was a bulletin board or a section of cabinetry to which I adhered the words I'd shared with my students across the school year. Words were moved, within that word bank, as needed (to teach parts of speech, alphabetizing, roots, etc.)

Throughout each and every day, teachers should continually be highlighting lots and lots of words with their students—sharing word spellings (noting word parts that might be useful when trying to recall their meanings)—along with those easy-to-remember, kid-friendly definitions.

Later in this mini series, we're going to talk about how to review the words you've selected and shared with your students so they are not quickly forgotten but instead become a part of your kids' working vocabularies.

Side note: Please don't "reward" kids for using words. Simply acknowledge when kids stretch themselves into using big, bad, bodacious words. A high five, a genuine smile, a "Well done!" will do the trick. Intrinsic motivation beats extrinsic motivation every time.

In the next mini episode, I'll share how kids can become more highly engaged in their own vocabulary learning by contributing words they want to learn to your daily vocabulary instruction. We want our kids to experience efficacy in vocabulary learning, because it improves learning outcomes and promotes confidence, persistence, and motivation. See you in the next episode!

Hey, everyone. We hope you've enjoyed this episode of On Your Way with, me, Dr. Christina Williams. Please follow the podcast so you don't miss a thing. And we'd love for you to share what we could do to make these podcasts even better.

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