



Systematic Instruction to Support Reading Comprehension

April 25, 2025

1:20 – 2:45

Presenter:

Jen Kelly





Today's learning objectives

- We are learning to...
 - Understand the role of oral language in comprehension
 - Make our vocabulary instruction intentional
 - Recognize the importance of knowledge and its impact on comprehension



Not either/or...



Decodable texts	vs.	Authentic literature
Research	vs.	Classroom practice
The art of teaching	vs.	The science of teaching
Individual student needs	vs.	Whole class efficiency
Direct instruction	vs.	Discovery Learning
Practice-in-isolation	vs.	Practice-in-context
Mastery of skills	vs.	Joy of Reading
Structure	vs.	Choice
Urgency	vs.	Joy

@TheSixShifts



De-mystifying the Science of Reading

The Science of Reading Is **NOT**:

- An ideology or philosophy
- A fad, trend new idea or pendulum swing
- A political agenda
- A one-size-fits-all approach
- A program of instruction
- A single, specific component of instruction such as phonics





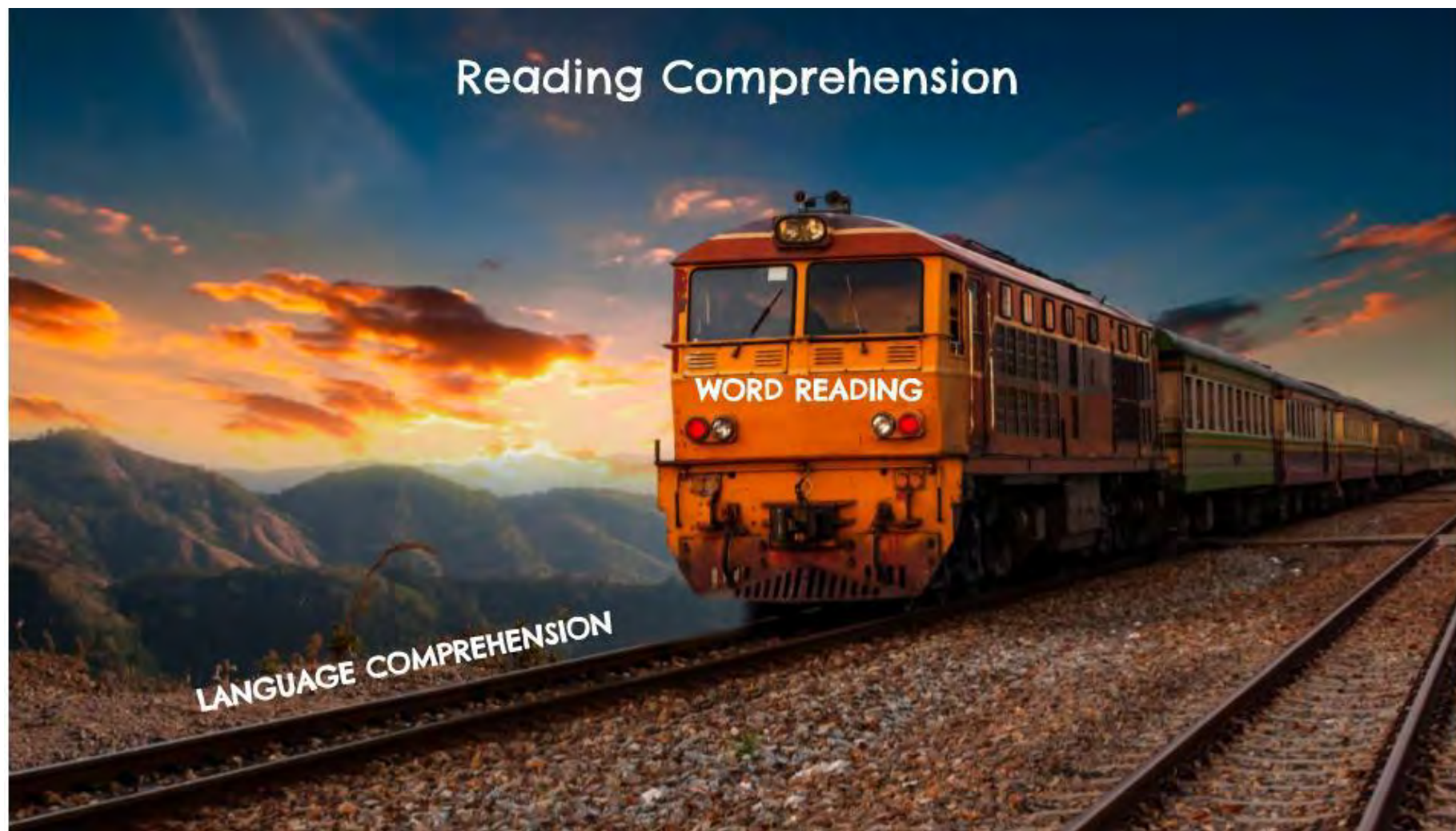
De-mystifying the Science of Reading

The Science of Reading **Is:**

- scientifically-based research
- last five decades across the world
- thousands of studies conducted in multiple languages
- informs how proficient reading and writing develop
- helps us understand why some have difficulty
- informs how to most effectively assess and teach
- improve student outcomes through prevention of and intervention for reading difficulties



Laying the Language Track for the Word Reading Train



Comprehension begins with oral language and the capacity to understand spoken language (listening comprehension)

- through conversation
- through hearing and sharing personal stories
- through interactions with rich text



then children can access these for themselves by reading increasingly complex texts



expose children to:

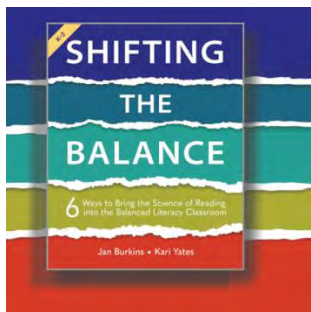
- new ideas
- new vocabulary
- new concepts

The Role of Oral Language and Comprehension

Keep in Mind

Listening comprehension develops through:

- Conversation, sharing stories, and interactions with rich texts



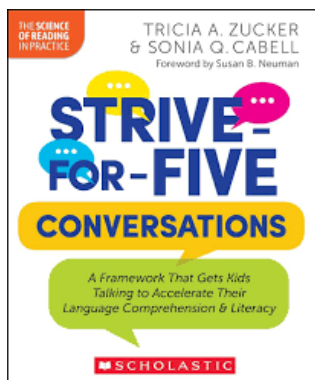
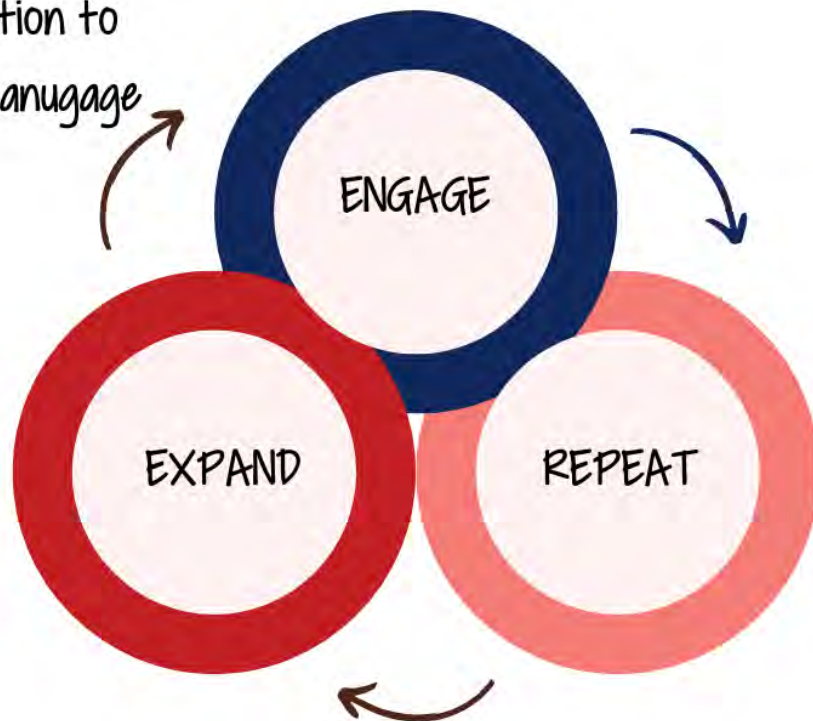
Ideas for Instruction

- Leverage conversations throughout the day
- Ask quality questions
- Provide wait time
- Repeat and expand
- Use interesting words
- Read aloud
- Use text sets to build content knowledge



Dialogic Conversation

Dialogic
Conversation to
Build Oral Language



1. Engage

- Verbal interaction around a text or general conversation
- May involve asking child's opinion, to name or recall something from a text, or to make a connection

2. Repeat

- Repeat, embedding the child's response in a natural way
- Repeat only the correct part of a student's response or integrate a correction into this step

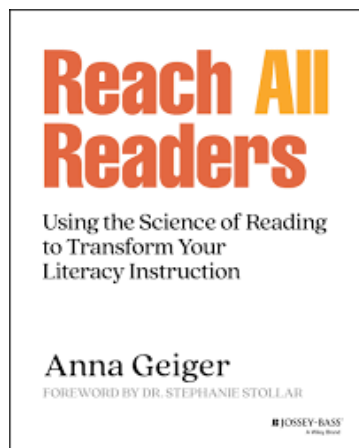
3. Expand

- As you repeat, say a little more
- Expand the language to include a new word, phrase or idea



Re-thinking Reading Comprehension

- Reading comprehension is complex and is **not a single “skill” or set of strategies**
- Instead, we can think of it as an **outcome**



Reading Comprehension is a combination of:

➤ The Reader

- Each reader brings their own knowledge and interests

➤ The Text

- Texts vary in genre, topic and difficulty

➤ The Activity

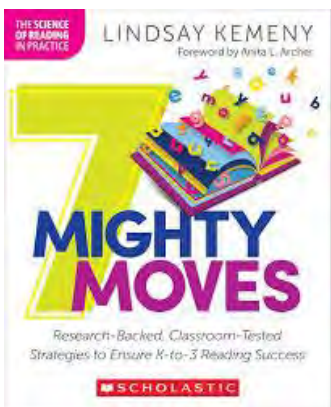
- The activity varies depending on the purpose for reading





Re-thinking Reading Comprehension

“There is no comprehension strategy powerful enough to compensate for the fact that you can’t read the words” (Archer, 2001)



Reading comprehension differs from language comprehension in that it **relies on print**

- *A reader needs to be able to read a text accurately and fluently to comprehend the text*



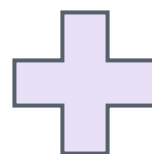


Re-thinking Reading Comprehension

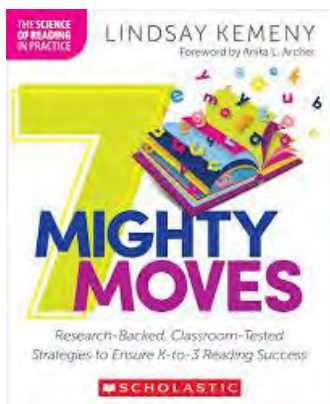
Word recognition + language comprehension



monitoring + questioning + summarizing
(focus on text content)



inferring + knowledge of text structure
(construct a representation of meaning)



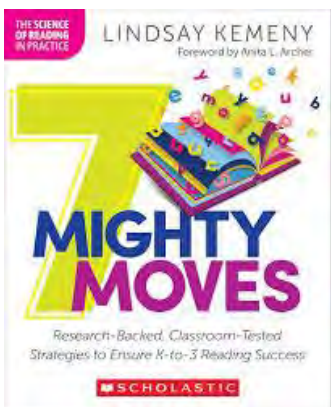


Re-thinking Reading Comprehension

We know that reading comprehension is a complex process and many factors contribute to it, but...

Vocabulary & Background Knowledge

ESPECIALLY CRITICAL





Why Teach Vocabulary?

- A rich vocabulary supports learning about the world, new ideas, and enjoying the beauty of language
- A rich vocabulary enhances what an individual wants to say and write
- Vocabulary knowledge is strongly related to reading proficiency
 - tightly related to reading comprehension: primary, intermediate, high school and adults

READ WRITE SPEAK LISTEN LEARN





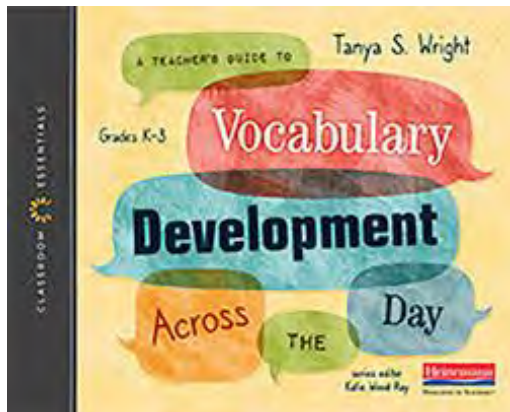
Why Teach Vocabulary?





Why Teach Vocabulary?

“Even if we spend lots of instructional time teaching decoding and strategic reading, students will continue to struggle to comprehend text unless we also support their vocabulary development.”





What it means to really know a word...

- I can share an informal explanation
- I can use a synonym or antonym
- I can give categorical information
- I can recognize nuances between similar words
- I can recognize word parts (morphological understanding)
- I can connect to personal experience
- I can recognize multiple meanings - bark/bark





How do we learn new words?

When we engage in conversation

- What can this look like in the classroom?
 - Regularly and intentionally using sophisticated language throughout the day for students of all ages
 - The more interesting words we use around students the more words they will pick up and use themselves





How do we learn new words?

When we are read to and we read a lot ourselves

- What can this look like in the classroom?
 - Read aloud in a fantastic way to explicitly teach new vocabulary
 - select texts with intention - relate to content area
 - read first for enjoyment, then re-read across days
 - Plan ahead for student friendly definitions
 - Independent reading time, small groups, partner reads



Active Processing looks and sounds like...

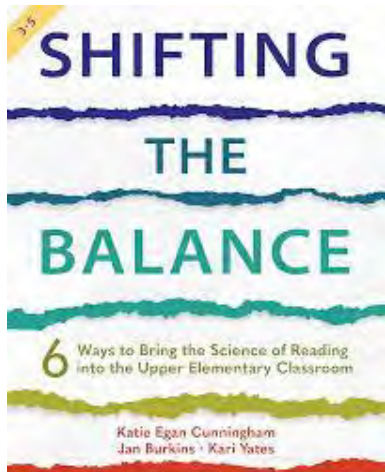
Children are more likely to learn when they can actively engage with a word and its meaning, rather than passively receiving information from the teacher

- Discussing images related to a new word
- Discussing and exploring objects ie. a thermometer
- Using movement - demonstrating migration by walking from one side of the room to the other
- Thinking of real life examples - a time when you felt exuberant
- Discussing multiple meanings of a word - season (your food), season (winter, spring)
- Thinking about/noticing meaningful parts of words (morphology) - tricycle, triangle, tripod
- Using new vocabulary in writing



Why Teach Vocabulary?

“The goal of vocabulary instruction is not to learn words for their own sake. The goal is for students to apply knowledge about words and their meanings to better understand what they’re reading and to expand the possibilities for expressing their own ideas.”





How do we learn new words?

When we learn new things!

What can this look like in the classroom?

We can plan to support vocabulary development during content area learning:

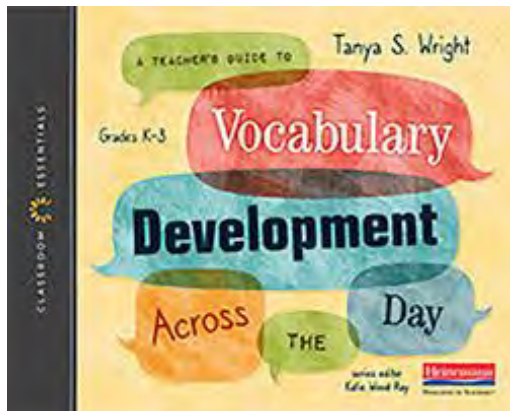
- First, we want to identify the content we want to learn
- Next, curate informational text sets
- Then, make an ambitious list of words to teach
- Consider how and when you will teach the words
- Finally, plan for ways students will be actively engaged in word learning





Vocabulary and Knowledge

“In order to create opportunities for young children to learn new words, we need to build their knowledge of the world and make sure that they are learning new things.”





Into the classroom...

To inspire
CONTENT AREA READING

Build Background
Knowledge
&
Vocabulary

ReadWorks Article-A-Day™

Build knowledge, vocabulary, and stamina with a routine that students love.



Sets of 6 to 9
articles that are
related by topic



Nonfiction topics
to build
knowledge



For grades
Kindergarten to 8th



Research-based
classroom routine with
writing & oral sharing

All you need is 10 minutes each day for the routine. Students will gain the most by reading **4 or more articles** from an Article-A-Day set each week and doing the routine for **15 or more weeks** in the school year. Article-A-Day can be done digitally, printed, or projected!

Plan an entire year with our K-6 Scope & Sequences: <https://www.readworks.org/scope-and-sequence>

Step 1: Set the purpose for the routine

- "Words are where humans store knowledge. So we will build our knowledge by reading these articles. We will also increase our vocabulary, improve our reading stamina, and enjoy reading every day."

Step 2: Students read or listen to an article

- If students cannot read independently, they can listen to the audio, or you can read the article aloud.

Step 3: The "Book of Knowledge"

- Students write or type two or three things that they learned from the article and would like to remember in their Books of Knowledge.
- If students cannot write yet, they can draw their responses.

Step 4: Share Knowledge!

- Ask a few students to share with the class what they learned from reading.
- Create a "Class Book of Knowledge" where you record this information. You can do this in Assignments & Progress or on chart paper.

Text Sets
to
Build Background
Knowledge
&
Vocabulary



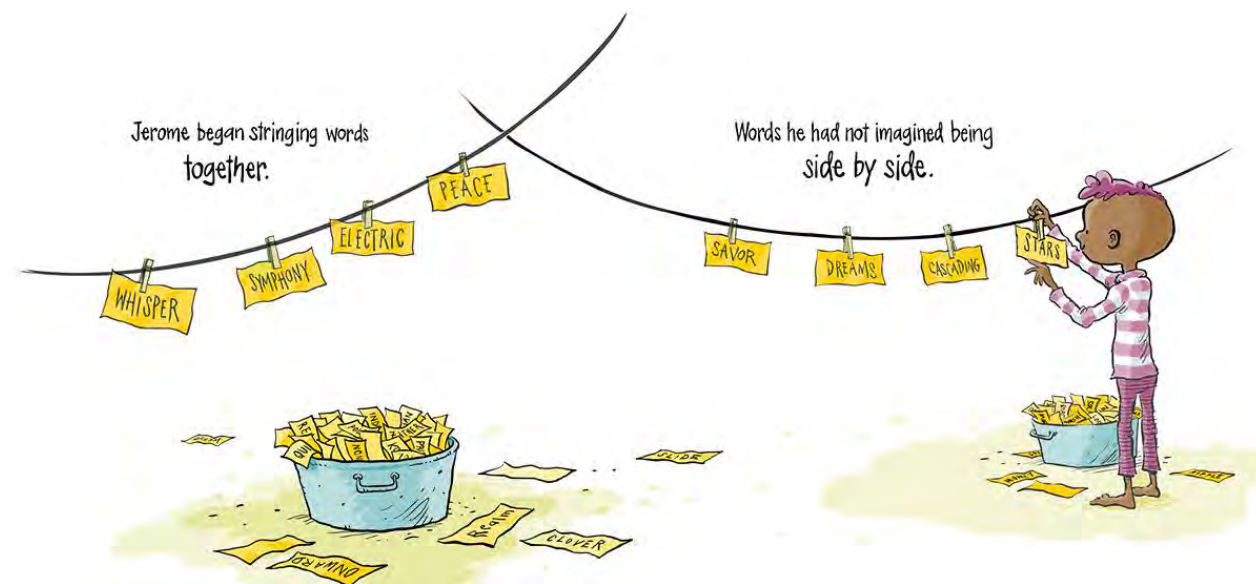
Books that **teach** the life cycle of 
BUTTERFLIES 

High Leverage Instructional Routines to Support Word Noticing and Curiosity

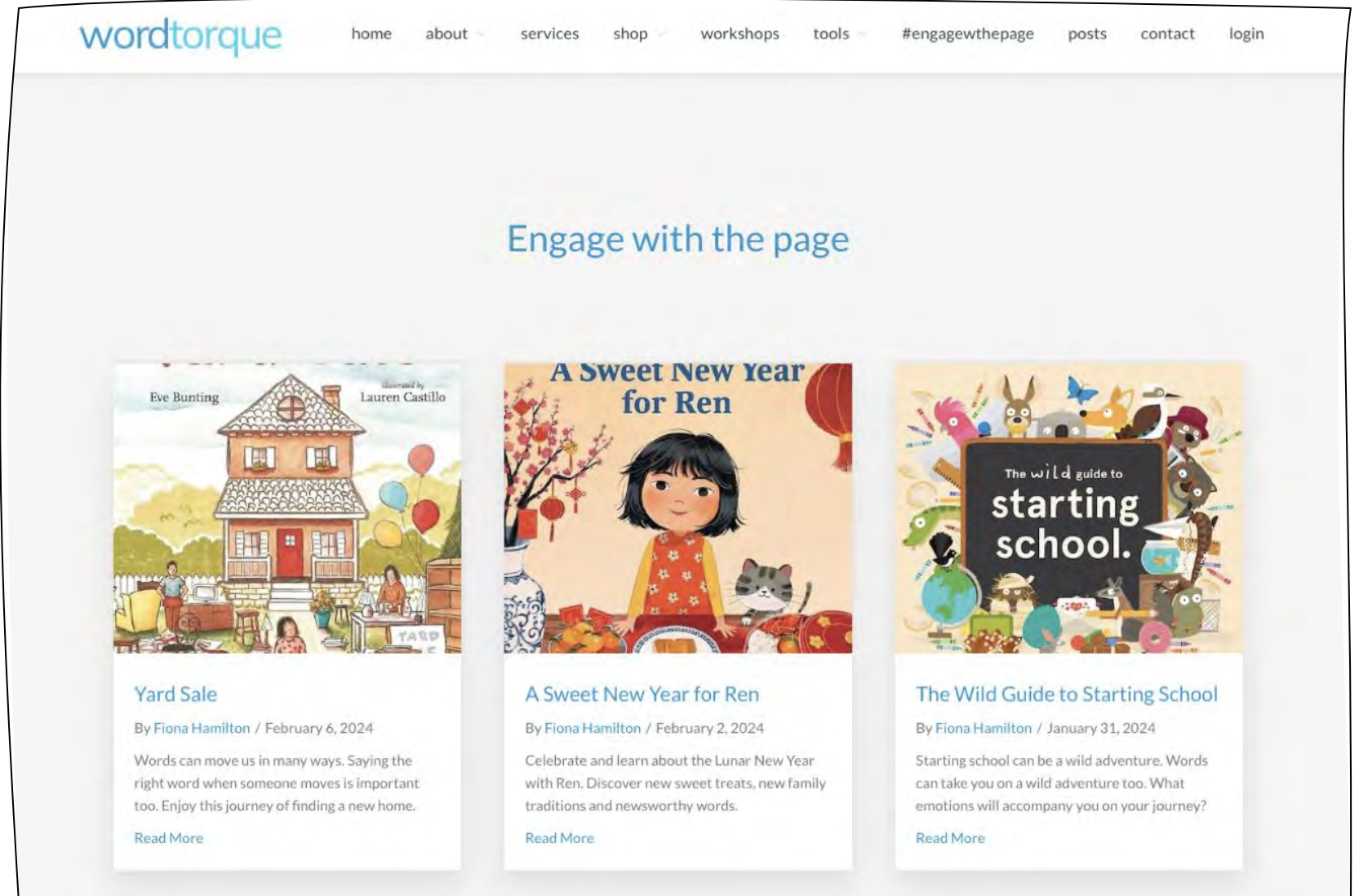
Word Collection Notebooks - individual or class:

For children to learn many words we need to empower them to:

- Become aware of an interested in new words
- Develop word awareness
- Notice when they encounter new words



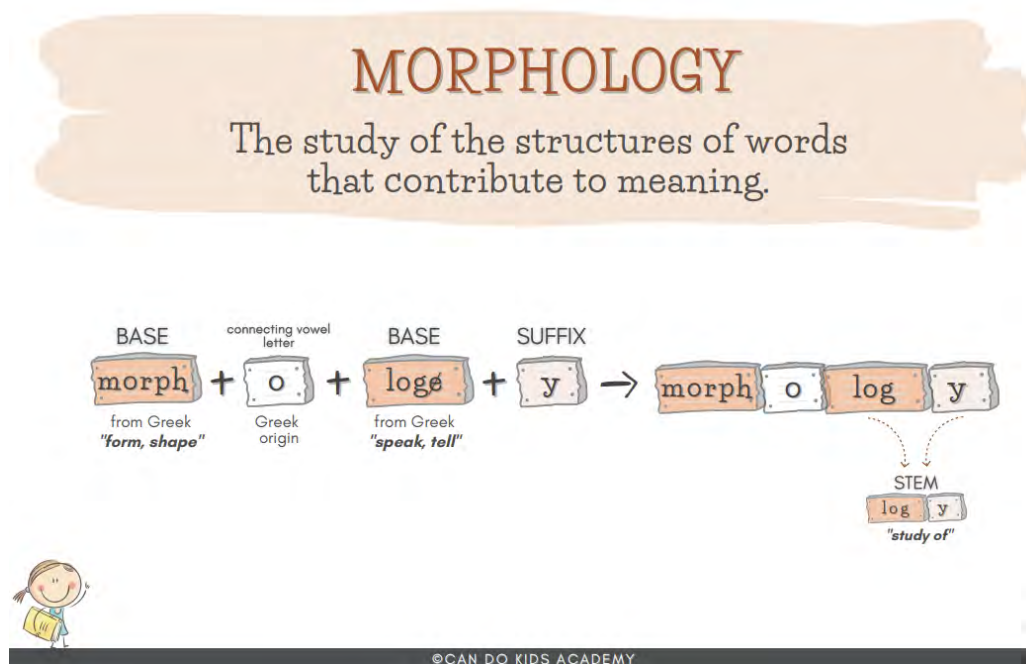
To inspire WORD STUDY



High Leverage Instructional Routines to Support Independent Word Solving (and spelling)

Explicit Morphology Instruction

- Teaching one new affix or root per week adds to their word solving toolkit



“The more information children have about how words and language work, the more powerful they will feel as strategic word-solvers”

Some word solving strategies include:

- Context Clues
- Word Parts

Into the classroom...

High Leverage Instructional Routines to Support Independent Word Solving

LET'S PRACTISE BUILDING WORD SUMS

Build word sums using the <pack> matrix.



DON'T FORGET

A **BASE** is an element which carries the MAIN MEANING of a word.

A **PREFIX** is an element fixed BEFORE a base or stem.

A **SUFFIX** is an element fixed AFTER a base or stem.

SYNTHETIC WORD SUMS

pack + s → packs

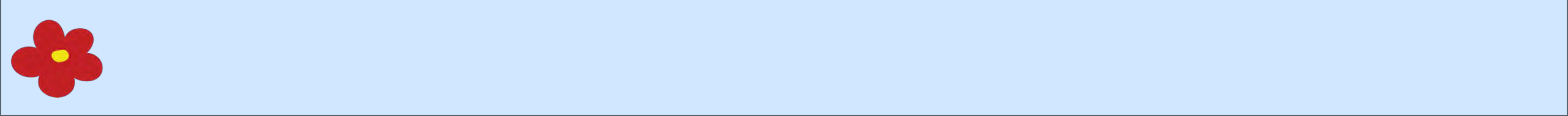
Blank lines for practicing synthetic word sums.



Vocabulary take away...

“The more words he knew the more clearly he could share with the world what he was thinking, feeling and dreaming”





- [The Six Shifts](#)
- [Can Do Kids Academy](#)
- [Engage with the Page](#)
- [Read Works: Article A Day](#)
- [Science of Reading Defining Guide](#)

- [Reading Rockets](#)
- [Word of the Day](#)

- A Teacher's Guide to Vocabulary Development Across the Day: Wright, 2021
- Bringing Words to Life - Beck, McKeown, Kucan
- Reach All Readers – Geiger, 2024
- Strive for Five Conversations – Zucker & Bell, 2024
- Shifting the Balance K-2: Burkins & Yates, 2021
- Shifting the Balance 3-5: Burkins, Cunningham & Yates, 2024
- 7 Mighty Moves – Kemeny, 2023





Thank you from the POPEY team!

