Activities for Pre-teaching Vocabulary

Teachers commonly pre-teach vocabulary in order to provide a bridge between words that are unfamiliar to learners and text that includes those unfamiliar words. Pre-teaching vocabulary provides a scaffold for acquiring new vocabulary.

Traditionally teachers point out a word, explain its meaning with student-friendly definitions, and provide examples of how the word is used in context. Students are likely to then parrot the pronunciation of the word and engage in some sort of activity that requires use of the new word. Finally, students read the text that contains the new word and ideally will better understand the overall intent because the vocabulary used is no longer unfamiliar.

If, however, other methods for pre-teaching vocabulary are of interest, they exist. Because, admittedly, words are unfamiliar to students when pre-teaching is being considered, teacher participation is required in the following suggestions:

Read First, Define Later
Read aloud to the class the article students will soon encounter. Have students listen to the text to try to glean its overall intent. Perhaps briefly discuss, as a whole class, the article’s meaning. Then explain and discuss the unfamiliar vocabulary, word by word.

Display Vocabulary
Whenever possible use realia to teach vocabulary. Local museums often maintain lending libraries of realia so that teachers can physically display words and thereby bring them to life. Realia affords students a tactile and multidimensional connection to new vocabulary and to the overall subject matter being addressed.

Picture Support
Where realia isn’t possible, pictures usually are. Use magazine or pictures downloaded from the Internet to “show” the meaning of words to students. Take a look at this unit’s vocabulary flashcards. Students have access to these from their links in Just For Me so you can have them pull these up for use. Also, remind students to preview the reading of each article by looking at the picture dictionary.

Total Physical Response
Action verbs are easily demonstrated through movement—stand up, sit down, pick up the pencil, etc. Adjectives, too, can easily be demonstrated—happy, sad, and angry, for example.
**Associations**
Rather than remembering definitions for new words, suggest an illustrative example or an image of the new word. In this way the learner will connect a visual image to the new word, fostering an ability to remember meaning. For example, to help remember the definition of *nucleus*, encourage students to think of a bull’s eye target.

**Word Maps**
Have students create graphic organizers for new words. Place the vocabulary word at the top or center of a piece of paper. Have three categories branch off of the vocabulary word: classification (what class or group does the word belong to), qualities (what is the word like) and examples.

**Word Parts**
Many of the words in the English language are derived from Latin or Greek roots. They either contain “root” or use prefixes or suffixes that hold meaning. Students can learn the most commonly occurring roots, prefixes and suffixes and their meanings. (Start with words like *bicycle* and *tricycle*—objects that are familiar to children.) When a reader is able to break down unfamiliar words into their prefixes, suffixes and roots they can begin to determine their meanings.