



# the tutor

Fall 2005

## I Couldn't Put It Down: Captivating the hearts and minds of adolescent readers

By Rāndi Douglas, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Off in the corner Derek slumps, books nowhere in sight. A little nervous as a new tutor, you pull up your chair to chat—about last night's storm, his band, your meeting schedule ... whatever. You share a funny editorial about junk food you read on the bus, then ask, *What do you like to read?* Derek looks up: *Don't read. Only if I have to—in school. I hate reading.*

Now your worries begin: How's he doing in school? Will he graduate? Can he get a job? As you begin your service as a tutor or mentor, it is likely you will ask yourself: *What can I do to motivate my student to read and build his confidence and literacy skills?*

Your concern is real. Derek represents the large population of teens (one in four nationwide) who are reluctant readers with low literacy skills. In response to this critical need, the Corporation for National and Community Service targets literacy support, particularly for disadvantaged youth, as a focus for education volunteers. This issue of *the Tutor* provides tutors and mentors with:

- Suggestions for successfully engaging adolescents in literacy
- Guidance for coaching youth in reading comprehension
- A planning model and examples of literacy support across the curriculum
- Strategies for building vocabulary across the content areas
- Ideas and resources for mentoring teens in the benefits and joys of literacy

### What Students Say...

In interviews with researchers (McCray, 2001), low-level readers challenged the common myth that middle school readers are apathetic, choosing easier activities over reading. These students were doubtful about their future success as adults, but still hoped their reading skills would improve, saying to their teachers:

- *I would learn more if I read more for myself.*
- *Understand that I am afraid to read and the fear makes me crazy.*

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- Locate resources
- Connect with peers
- Brainstorm solutions
- Design and deliver training

- *Sit down and read with me during or after school, because I don't want the other kids to think that something is wrong with me.*
- *Don't put me in reading groups. I would rather you work with me by myself.*
- *Bring me more books, and let me read things that I want to read.*

### The Big Picture: Adolescent Literacy as a National Concern

According to the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 32 percent of the nation's adolescents have the literacy abilities necessary to succeed in school and become lifelong learners, and 42 percent have "basic" skills. The lowest performing 26 percent are cause for great concern: These teenagers may not be able to add up the total cost of purchases on an order form, locate information in a newspaper article, fill out a Social Security card application, or find an intersection on a street map (Reder, 1998).<sup>1</sup>

More than one-third of the nation's juvenile justice population reads below the fourth-grade level. The National Associations of Elementary and Secondary School Principals have issued a joint policy statement about the importance of a comprehensive literacy agenda to future prospects of the nation's youth (Ferrandino & Tirozzi, 2004); many secondary schools are now launching schoolwide literacy initiatives, and incorporating literacy support in dropout prevention programs. Tutors and mentors can play an important role in this national effort.

<sup>1</sup> Data from 2004 show little change from 1999 in average reading scores for 13- and 17-year-olds; data from 2005 not available at this printing.

### What Can Tutors and Mentors Do?

You can provide many positive supports that directly address these student concerns, including:

- More time for reading one-on-one
- Broader reading selections keyed to student interests
- Demonstrations of strategies and coaching
- Consistent, positive encouragement to read

### Engaging Adolescents: Wild and Shy Times

What words would you use to describe yourself as an adolescent? When asked this question, adults often use words like moody, lively, slothful, idealistic, self-centered, unpredictable, rebellious, nervous, sleepy, risk-taking, passionate, bored, needy, chatty, vulnerable, mischievous, independent, demanding, shy, and aloof. These sharp contrasts describe a volatile period, with abrupt swings between the desire to be independent and bold, and insecurity and avoidance about doing so. These contradictions suggest five areas of need for tutors and mentors to consider as they work with adolescent learners (Davidson and Koppenhaver, 1993; Scales, 1991):

#### 1. Self-determination and creative expression.

Offer youth voice and choice in selecting reading materials from their personal interests. While reading, engage youth in setting goals, selecting activities, and ordering tasks for tutoring sessions. Reward completed assignments with self-selected reading, creative writing, art projects, or cartooning.

**2. Self-confidence and achievement.** Struggling adolescent readers are often sensitive about their lack of skill. Tutors can foster feelings of competence by coupling praise with specific information about progress: *Good progress today, Abe. You remembered to check out the charts and headings as you previewed the text, and your predictions were solid.* As students' confidence increases, try to engage them in self-assessment, asking them to reflect on their own improvements.

**3. Diversity.** Adolescents thrive on variety, so changing activities and materials pays off. Ask youth to identify several topics of interest and look for a variety of resources (books, magazines, Web sites, newspapers, CDs, videos, and pictures). Alternate among verbal, written, collaborative, and silent activities, incorporating games, art, music, and technology to liven things up.

**4. Physical activity.** Recall this familiar scene—the drooping bodies of teens at their desks and the explosion into the hall when the bell rings. Adolescent growth spurts create a restless energy that demands physical activity. Organize stand-up activities using white/black boards, flip charts, butcher paper, and sticky notes. Break up the session with a walk to find resources, incorporating computer work, outdoor observations, and media center visits. Some adolescents respond well to standing up, even pacing, as they read.

**5. Positive social interaction with peers and adults.** Young adults desperately want to identify with and be accepted by their peers (Scales, 1991), so group collaboration can inspire literacy work.<sup>2</sup> Although adolescents may not show it, they also need feedback from adults who like them, respect their efforts, and serve as role models (Scales, 1991). In your one-on-one role as a tutor or mentor, you can fulfill young adults' need for ongoing, consistent, and caring relationships with adults.

The need to read more complex content takes a big jump in middle school and there's no hiding place for poor readers. Over many years, we've noticed that the kids who clown around, cause disruptions, pick fights, and skip school are the same ones who have trouble reading—they want to be noticed for something. So we're working directly on building reading skills and confidence, so they can start to get attention for the right things.

—Jim Schlachter, Director of Education K–8,  
Gresham-Barlow School District, OR

## Job One in Adolescent Literacy: Coaching for Reading Comprehension

If you ask a really good swimmer to describe his thinking process as he swims, you'll get answers like, *I don't think, I just do.* Good readers are also on automatic pilot as they move through text; they have internalized important thinking strategies and use them automatically. But poor readers are like this seventh-grader: *Look, I just don't get it, so let's drop it. Like what should I do, anyway? I don't have a clue...*

**What do successful readers do?** Like swimming, reading is an active process that requires participation to make meaning. Proficient readers use fundamental thinking strategies to understand text. They:

- Activate prior knowledge
- Analyze formats
- Visualize
- Form predictions
- Make inferences
- Generate questions

<sup>2</sup> For additional ideas about group literacy work with teens, contact us at: [learns@nwrel.org](mailto:learns@nwrel.org) or [learns@bnkst.edu](mailto:learns@bnkst.edu). For general information on tutoring small groups, visit: <http://www.nwrel.org/learns/tutor/sum2002/sum2002.htm>

- Monitor understanding
- Fix confusion
- Synthesize content

**What are think-alouds?** When conducting a think-aloud the tutor models her thinking process as she reads, shifting the tone/style of delivery between the actual text and her thoughts, so the youth senses the difference. For example, the tutor reads: *Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance found in the bloodstream.* (The tutor lowers voice, turning toward youth.) *Waxy, that makes me think of candle wax, how it puddles and sticks to things. What image comes to your mind? Struggling readers gain skills from observing what effective readers think about as they read.*

Researchers agree that the most powerful help for struggling readers includes explicit instruction in these thinking strategies, such as:

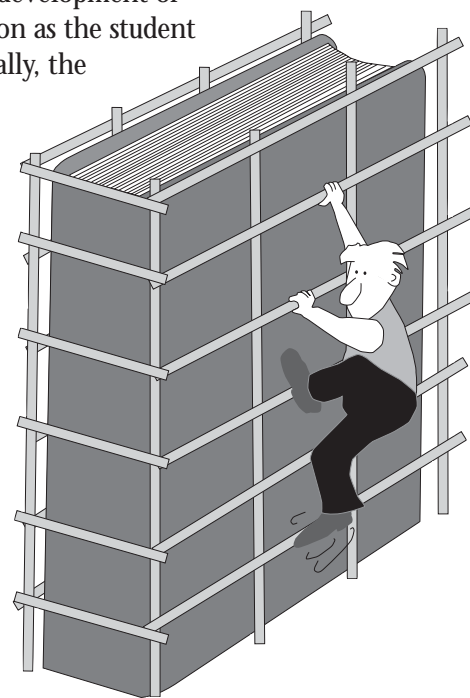
- Naming and describing each strategy
- Modeling each type of thinking (see “What are think-alouds?”)
- Practicing with youth until they can use each strategy independently (Beers, 2003, p. 27).

## How Can Tutors Help? Planning Scaffolded Reading Experiences

Poor readers often lack the automatic thinking strategies that lead to text comprehension (see chart, p. 5). Guided conversations about reading, with opportunities to identify, practice, and internalize key mental habits, will improve their skills. A scaffolded reading experience refers to a

plan of activities (before, during, and after reading) to engage readers in specific thinking strategies as they encounter texts.

Picture a scaffold on a building—a framework that anchors the structure and gives workers access; it’s temporary and when workers no longer need it, the scaffold comes down. A reading scaffold is built by the tutor as he explains, demonstrates, and coaches specific thinking strategies; the structure supports the development of comprehension as the student reads. Gradually, the coaching (scaffold) is withdrawn as the reader achieves independent use of the strategies.



**Explicit reading instruction means that we show learners how we think when we read ... eventually, the goal is for readers to use these strategies automatically and seamlessly (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000, p. 12).**

### Comprehension Strategies

<u>Thinking strategy</u> <i>Mental process that good readers use</i>	<u>Description</u> <i>What the mental process entails</i>	<u>Questions</u> <i>Questions that promote this thinking strategy</i>
<b>Activate prior knowledge</b>	Recall previous experience and knowledge, making connections with text content, meaning, and style	What has happened in your life that is like this story? What have you read about or seen that relates to this topic?
<b>Analyze formats</b>	Predict characteristics and content of a book based on a review of formats — organization, graphics, and presentation of the text	Based on the title, cover, table of contents, headings, charts, tables, and pictures, what do you think this book is about? Can you predict what will be in each section?
<b>Visualize</b>	Identify and describe mental pictures and images that occur to the reader as text is read	What pictures or images pop into your head about a desert? Can you imagine what the scene/person/item looks like?
<b>Form predictions</b>	Apply growing knowledge of author and content to predict story developments or upcoming content	What clues are in the story about what will happen next? Based on the information we've read, what else will the author(s) discuss?
<b>Make inferences</b>	Combine analysis of the text with what you know of the world to form educated guesses about meaning	What is the characters' relationship, based on how they're acting? How will information in this graph influence public choices?
<b>Generate questions</b>	Wonder about text — what's the purpose, why this detail, what's missing, and what remains to be learned?	What questions do you have about what's coming up in the story? Does the chart on this page make you wonder about anything else?
<b>Monitor understanding</b>	Identify points of confusion about the text and analyze why they occur	Where did you lose track of what's happening in the story? Are there terms/ideas you don't understand on this page?
<b>Fix confusion</b>	Apply fix-up strategies for areas of confusion so that reading can continue	Can you reread that paragraph and look for clues about what's confusing you? What words do you need to know more about to be able to move on?
<b>Synthesize content</b>	Identify main ideas, summarize content, identify contrasts, and make comparisons	Can you summarize the main points of this article in a few sentences? How are the main characters in each story the same? How are they different?



## Kevin Tutors Pilar: An Illustration

Below are key tutor/student interactions (ones that worked) drawn from a series of sessions in which Kevin and Pilar worked with a single book of fiction over an ongoing period. To learn more about the tutor's thinking and planning, his skillful questioning, and other useful tutoring strategies for reading comprehension, read on.

**Choosing a book.** Kevin, the tutor, asks the school librarian for help selecting a book for Pilar, a very shy 13-year-old who likes plants and keeps them in her room. Pilar emigrated with her family from Central America four years ago; she speaks English fluently and can decode English well, but needs help with assignments that require comprehension. Kevin wants a book with short chapters, so they can read and discuss a chapter in a forty-minute session. The librarian suggests award-winning author Paul Fleischman's *Seedfolks*, about a community garden and the diverse people who come to work in it.

In preparation, Kevin reads the entire book, noting passages that will work well to illustrate specific thinking strategies, and listing possible activities and questions to ask.

**Beginning to read: *Seedfolks*, Chapter 1.** Kevin plans to describe and practice two comprehension strategies: analyzing formats and engaging prior knowledge. He encourages Pilar to notice more details.

**The tutor's questions are critical. Unlike questions with right or wrong answers, good comprehension coaching asks students to think aloud, verbalizing key thinking strategies as they use them.**

KEVIN: Good readers learn a lot about a book by just looking it over—how the text is broken up and what the pictures are like. This is called analyzing formats. So let's try—just describe *Seedfolks*, starting with the cover. What do you see?

PILAR: Pictures of people and things.

KEVIN: Tell me more about the people.

PILAR: All different kinds and ages—maybe not from the same family.

KEVIN: That may be important. What about the things?

PILAR: They're all different, too. Simple things I could even draw.

KEVIN: Do they go together?

PILAR: No, they're all different... (Kevin shows her the back cover) Oh, lots of plants on the back, and a pack of seeds.

They flip through the book and Kevin asks Pilar what she notices.

PILAR: Well, every chapter begins with a person's name and picture and one of the things from the cover at the bottom of the page.

KEVIN: Does that tell you anything about the story?

PILAR: Maybe every chapter is about one person and the object belongs to them.

KEVIN: That's a good prediction; we'll talk more about making predictions later. Let's read the inside cover and see how the book is described: *Thirteen voices tell one story about the flowering of a Cleveland vacant lot into a neighborhood garden, cultivated by a group of strangers. What's new here?*

PILAR: *It's about a garden ... oh, maybe the plants and things have to do with that.*

KEVIN: *And the people?*

PILAR: *The people who make it don't even know each other.*

KEVIN: *You know a lot, based on your analysis of formats. Let's sum it all up ...*

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Next, Kevin discusses gardening with Pilar:

KEVIN: *Here's another thing good readers do—as soon as they know what the book's about—they think about what they already know about the topic. It's called activating prior knowledge. I don't garden much, but I have a little knowledge—I know seed packets have directions, like how deep to plant the seeds and when. What do you know?*

PILAR: *You can water plants too much. I did that and my violets died.*

Kevin works with Pilar to record her prior knowledge and make some predictions on a Directed Reading/Thinking Activity form ([www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/middleupper/drta.pdf](http://www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/middleupper/drta.pdf)), before they begin the book (Stauffer, 1969). When they have read the entire book, they will fill out the last part of the form, adding information about what they have learned from the story. For the rest of this session, Kevin asks Pilar to read the first chapter, *Kim*, stopping often to ask about her prior knowledge of major topics—Vietnam, urban neighborhoods, and farming. At the end of the chapter, they talk about how their ideas have changed, now that they know the first gardener who comes to the vacant lot.

**Adding strategies: Seedfolks, Chapter 4.** For Gonzalo's story, Kevin plans to work on making inferences and questioning the text; he knows that making inferences will require Pilar to compare what she's reading to her own life experiences and come up with educated guesses. Like Gonzalo, Pilar had to learn English as an immigrant, so Kevin thinks making inferences may work with this content. They read the first paragraph: *The older you are, the younger you get when you move to the United States. They don't teach you that equation in school.*

KEVIN: *The older you are, the younger you get. What does that mean to you, Pilar?*

PILAR: *I don't get it...*

KEVIN: *Well the second part is: when you move to the United States.*

PILAR: *Well I think you feel like a baby.*

KEVIN: *Why do you say that?*

PILAR: *Well you can't say the words, you have to point.*

KEVIN: *And the older you are—why do you think that's here?*

PILAR: *Well, the old people never learn English. I have to talk for my grandmother all the time.*

KEVIN: *So how would you say Gonzalo's equation in your own words?*

PILAR: *When you move here, the old people can be like big babies—and I have to baby-sit!*

KEVIN: *Very interesting idea—what you just did is called making inferences. That's when you put what you know together with the story to decide what something means. Good readers do this when they read.*

Kevin moves on, helping Pilar make inferences throughout the chapter. Like Gonzalo, Pilar also learns English from watching TV, takes care of grandparents, and lives with an extended family. Her experience provides some lively insights. At the end of the chapter, the tutor helps Pilar with another strategy: questioning the text.

KEVIN: *So Pilar, now that we've finished four chapters, we can question the text—that's thinking about what we wonder, like where is the author going with this, or why did something happen?*

PILAR: *I don't know really. So far everybody's really different.*

KEVIN: *Can you think of a question about that?*

PILAR: *Well, so far they all care about the garden, but I wonder, will somebody wreck it?*

KEVIN: *That sometimes happens, doesn't it? What else do you wonder?*

PILAR: *If lots more people come, will there be enough water?*

KEVIN: *Yes, and how about space, I wonder? Here's a question I have: Why does the writer tell this story? What does he want us to think about? How would you answer that?*

PILAR: *Maybe why a garden matters to everybody? Or how the garden fixes their life?*

KEVIN: *I really like those ideas. We just questioned the text. Let's write your thoughts down and keep track as we read about each character. (Download a character theme chart at: [www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/middleupper/ctc.pdf](http://www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/middleupper/ctc.pdf))*

**Erecting the scaffold:** Looking back at the sessions. Kevin followed these steps to create a scaffolded reading experience for Pilar:

- Explain and model—Kevin explains what engaging prior knowledge means and models it by sharing what he knows about gardening

- Guide student practice, decreasing coaching as the student shows understanding—Kevin and Pilar list what they know about gardening; later he asks about her prior knowledge on other topics to reinforce this strategy
- Provide practice with more examples from both fiction and nonfiction texts over time—As they continue reading *Seedfolks*, Kevin names these strategies repeatedly, sometimes modeling them and sometimes asking Pilar to practice
- Notice and name the strategy until the student can use it independently—By the end of *Seedfolks*, Kevin can simply note or ask Pilar to name the thinking strategies she uses during discussion

**Removing the scaffold:** Looking forward. Here is an example of a later conversation, after much describing, modeling, and practicing of comprehension strategies. Often, readers will use a combination of strategies to interpret text.

Kevin and Pilar silently read this passage from *Seedfolks*' final chapter:

*My great grandparents walked all the way from Louisiana to Colorado. That was 1859. They were both freed slaves and they wanted to get good and far from cotton-growing country. They went over the mountains, just to be safe, and homesteaded along the Gunnison River. Which is how my grandfather and my father and my sisters and I all came to be born here, the first black family in the whole county. My father called them our seedfolks, because they were the first of our family there.*

KEVIN: *So Pilar, what do you notice about how Florence starts this last chapter?*

PILAR: *Well, her people had to walk—really far, and they came a long time ago.*



KEVIN: *Can you question the text?*

PILAR: *You mean like: I wonder why the author puts her last?*

KEVIN: *Yes, like that; we can look for answers as we read. But what's your hunch about it? Can you make a prediction?*

PILAR: *She's maybe been there the longest—and she talks about the title...*

KEVIN: *Which is?*

PILAR: *Seedfolks ... that's like us.*

KEVIN: *Why do you say that?*

PILAR: *We're the first people here from our family.*

KEVIN: *So you feel something for this story. When you put your own experience together with the story to get a feeling for the meaning, there's a word for that ...*

PILAR: *I remember—infer.*

KEVIN: *Wow, aren't you something? Making inferences is a hard one. So we're just starting this last chapter—what do you predict will be in it?*

PILAR: *Something about whether the garden lasts ... whether people will keep it up.*

This final exchange shows Kevin has planned well, incorporating good questioning and modeling into reading activities over time, and using the scaffolded reading approach to build Pilar's confidence and comprehension skills.

## Not Just for English Class: Literacy Support Across the Curriculum

Literacy coaching can occur in many contexts. It can be an integral part of tutoring in other content areas and a range of out-of-school time activities. We can see one approach to incorporating literacy coaching into a science unit through the weekly tutoring log below. Keeping a session-by-session record of tutor/tutee interaction is important—documenting your tutee's work and progress, guiding a replacement if you are absent, or providing samples of your work to other tutors and supervisors.

Working with middle and high-school students sometimes requires tutors to learn something new or brush up on forgotten information. When Vadim, a seventh-grader, brought books on the weather to his tutor, Sharon, she didn't remember much about the topic. To prepare, she found some resources, like *Weather for Dummies*, at her public library. Here's her record of a week's work, including tutoring plans and notes about her student's responses.

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**Adolescents deserve homes, communities, and a nation that will support their efforts to achieve advanced levels of literacy and provide the support necessary for them to succeed.**

—Position Statement on  
Adolescent Literacy,  
International Reading Association

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### Scaffolded reading plan for Weather unit: Week one

(Vadim brought textbook on water/weather. He needs help understanding terms and concepts, is working with a team in school, and wants ideas for a report.)

Session # Day/Date	SessionPlan	Student Response
Session 1 Monday	<p><b>Analyze text structure:</b> Review both books with V, look at headings, read the charts, talk about pictures. Ask: What is his team doing in school? What parts of these books are most important?</p> <p><b>Monitor understanding:</b> Where is V most confused? Where is the best place to start?</p> <p><b>Notes:</b> Look on Internet for weather forecast sites, videotape weather forecasts; next session, review cloud types, high/low pressure.</p>	<p>V says team members will be weather forecasters, each member to create a different forecast and weather map.</p> <p>V confused by cloud types &amp; high/low pressure, needs to know how to read weather prediction maps (synoptic charts).</p>
Session 2 Tuesday	<p><b>Visualize:</b> Work with cloud names/pictures helping V to associate cloud image and name; then draw cloud types with chalk on dark paper (save and label). Discuss connection between cloud types and high/low pressure.</p> <p><b>Form predictions:</b> Show tapes of weather forecasts; discuss the high/low pressure parts (rewind if needed). Look at synoptic chart in textbook; work with V to connect satellite pictures (from TV) with textbook weather charts; try to predict weather based on high/low pressure areas. Show him Internet sites that will help.</p> <p><b>Notes:</b> Bring in outside resources on weather conditions/reports. Review chapter vocabulary.</p>	<p>V could remember best when we “drew” cloud types with our hands first, then on paper.</p> <p>V wants topic ideas for his weather report—interested in tornadoes (has been in one). Others he likes: sunny/hot and ice storm.</p>
Session 3 Thursday	<p><b>Word sort:</b> Do a word sort with V, using main vocabulary from chapter as review (See Word Sorts, p. 12 for example)</p> <p><b>Report brainstorm:</b> Ask how team assigned topics (what V got); then go through V’s topic in all books, looking for good ideas.</p> <p><b>Notes:</b> Plan “tornado in a bottle” experiment—may aid understanding or be useful in report.</p>	<p>V still confuses climates with weather conditions—desert is not “weather.” The sort helped out.</p> <p>V’s topic is tornadoes (he’s excited). We made a good list of tornado topics to explore.</p>


Looking over this schedule, we see that Sharon's tutoring plan incorporated several effective practices. She:

- Took initiative to learn about the topic herself
- Located additional resources
- Planned sessions around Vadim's concerns and classroom expectations
- Incorporated literacy support—both comprehension strategies and vocabulary work
- Integrated “daily use” resources (the taped TV forecasts)
- Added hands-on activities (drawing clouds, tornado in a bottle)

## Building Vocabulary Across the Content Areas

Many adolescents, especially English language learners, benefit from focus on specific vocabulary. Vocabulary development and reading comprehension are interdependent: The best readers have the largest vocabularies and poor readers typically have limited vocabularies. Simply identifying an unknown word and looking it up in the dictionary is an ineffective way to increase vocabulary. But when students use vocabulary words repeatedly to construct meaning in new text, they learn and retain word meanings longer (several studies cited in Allen, 1999, Stahl, 1999, and Beers, 2003).

**Choosing vocabulary words.** Vocabulary work in tutoring sessions will be most successful using the texts your student is reading. Remembering adolescents' sensitivity and need to feel confident, which question would you ask: *What words don't you know? What words do you need help with? What words would you like to know more about?* The final choice is best—this question puts the learner in charge and challenges her to learn more.

SYNONYMS: <i>ancient, outmoded</i>	DEFINITION: <i>out-of-date, no longer useful</i>
ANTONYMS: <i>popular, in use, up-to-date</i>	
ILLUSTRATION: 	WORD: <i>obsolete</i>
	SENTENCE: <i>Grandp's old record player is obsolete, because they don't make records any more.</i>

## Beyond the Dictionary: Strategies for Finding Word Meanings

As you read together, ask your tutee to identify words she wants to learn more about. Before using the dictionary, introduce basic strategies for figuring out word meanings from the surrounding text. Prompt your student to:

- Substitute some other word that would make sense
- Reread the sentence(s) before and after the word for clues
- Identify parts of the word she recognizes
- Look for other words in the passage that might be related, refer to something similar, or are synonyms or antonyms

Once struggling readers understand how to approximate word meanings from context clues, they will begin to pick up vocabulary as they read (Stahl, 1999). At this point, more reading time and broader selections will be the main ways readers learn new words. However, English language learners and other students with low language exposure will also benefit from direct vocabulary instruction.

## Word Cards: Collecting and Reusing Vocabulary Throughout Your Year

When students create word cards they go deeper into the significance and uses of a word, and accumulate a tangible “deck” of vocabulary words—satisfying evidence of progress as the pile grows throughout the year. Word cards take time, so selections should be

limited to words critical to current reading. *Troposphere* might be an important word to a study unit on weather, *accomplice* for a crime novel, and *obsolete* for a unit on industry. To create word cards, ask your student to write the word at the center of an index card, filling out each corner of the card as illustrated.

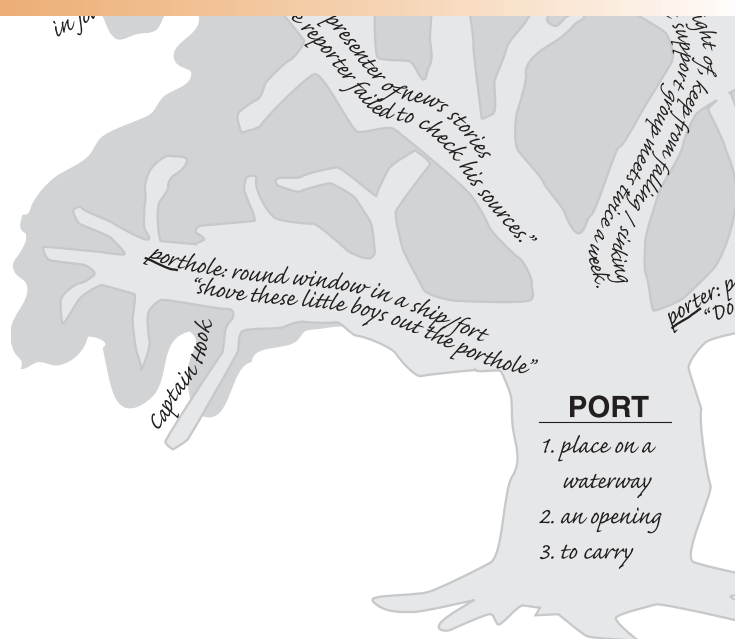
Return to these cards (shuffle the deck each session) and use the words regularly and in different contexts to make efforts pay off. For our example, *obsolete*, here's a follow-up conversation you might provide: Okay Jason, if I go through my desk drawers, I'll find some obsolete stuff—like old checkbooks from banks in other cities. What obsolete stuff do you hang onto?

**Group adaptation:** As each student accumulates a personal word deck, allow him to share with peers, drawing cards and creating new contexts for using the word during group meetings. Students will pick up additional words from each others' collections.

## Word Trees: Mapping Relationships From Root Words

Another effective approach to vocabulary development is working with word families—ones that share similar roots, prefixes, or suffixes. Knowledge of root words provides students with powerful tools to predict meaning for many similar words (Beers, 2003). If you are working on a unit about transportation, *port* is an important root word to consider. To create a word tree, draw a tree (or use template: [www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/middleupper/tree.pdf](http://www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/middleupper/tree.pdf)) and write the root word on the trunk, along with definitions. Ask the student to:

- Add a branch for every word he can think of that contains the root word
- Write each of these words on a branch, along with a definition
- Add a sentence using the word
- Add twigs to the branch for people you hear using the word



Here are just a few additional root words that have many derivatives in secondary curriculum: *hydro-*, *hypo-*, *geo-*, *bio-*, *astro-*, *arch-*, *tract-*, *phono-*, *meter-*, and *tox-*.

**Group adaptation:** Students have fun with word trees; they like to see who can create the most complicated ones, and creative use of the words in sentences provides entertainment. Creating word trees on butcher paper and posting them on walls can be a productive after-school activity, especially if students work on different root words and share their progress.

## Word Sorts: Recognizing Relationships Among Key Concepts

Word sorts, done with sticky notes or index cards on the wall, can be a nice break from reading text. Because the activity requires sorting words by their characteristics, content areas that require analytical thinking work well. Word sorts need to be planned in advance. To create a word sort for your youth, start with index cards or sticky notes in two different colors:

- Select a subject area and identify 15–20 words common to the subject, but with different characteristics
- Write one word each on sticky notes or index cards of the same color
- Stick or tape them to the wall in random order
- For a closed sort (tutor determines the categories) write the categories for the sort on a second color of sticky notes/cards and tape them to the wall in a row
- For an open sort (youth determines the categories) ask the student to study the words and create the category cards
- Sort the words by grouping the word cards under the categories

Here are examples for science and math:  
**Meteorology:** stratus, temperate, sunshine, cumulonimbus, wind, tropical, lenticular, polar, fog, cirrus, snow, Mediterranean, hail, stratocumulus, savannah, desert, and thunder. **Closed sort categories:** clouds, climates, weather. **Open sort categories:** weather forecast, places with weather, words I don't know

**Geometry:** Circle, diameter, angle, radius, rectangle, area, pi, trapezoid, square root, oval, ellipse, axis, equation, semi-circle, parallelogram, triangle. **Closed sort categories:** round figures, angular figures, computations. **Open sort categories:** things I can draw, terms I know, what to learn.

Word sorts are particularly effective for content area learning because they encourage students to analyze and create categories for groups of related words. The tutor also gains insight into how the youth thinks about words. Word sorts can be accomplished in many different ways; often, there

is no totally “right” answer to a sort, but the activity encourages focused dialogue about what words mean. Appropriate resources for the subject area (dictionaries, textbooks, manuals) are critical tools to have on hand, so that areas of uncertainty can be investigated and resolved.

**Group adaptation:** In an out-of-school time setting, students can work on word sorts in teams, observe other student versions, and share observations about their choices. Once the group understands how word sorts work, they often develop enthusiasm for creating their own versions.

### Concept Definition Map: Help With Common Academic Words

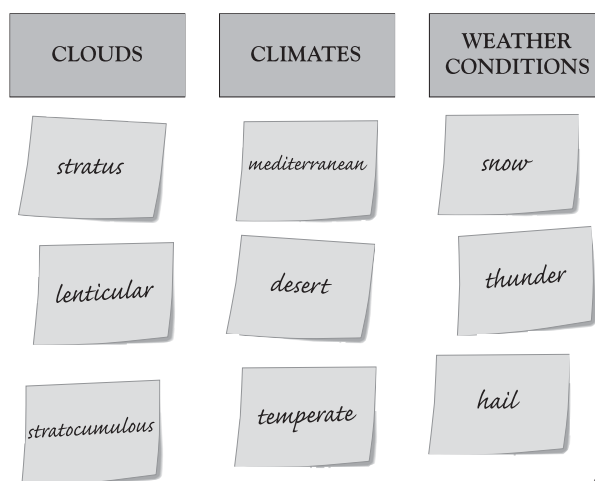
Many words are commonly used in classrooms across the content areas; students who have trouble with them may suffer confusion in many academic areas. Think of how often we use words/phrases like: *compare and contrast, integrate, regulate, summarize, calculate, categorize, compute, and search the Net.*

Providing an opportunity for students to talk about these words and form broader concepts about their meaning can provide needed confidence and boost academic performance.

A concept definition map is a way of charting what these core academic words mean, how they are used in different contexts, and also what they are not.

To create a concept definition map, ask students to work from their own knowledge first, and then consult resources to:

- Write the concept word in the center box
- Write the definition in the box above it
- Write synonyms or similar words down the righthand side





- Write antonyms or dissimilar words down the lefthand side
- Write examples of the word (different contexts) in the three bottom boxes

See an example and download a template at:  
[www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/middleupper/cdm.pdf](http://www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/middleupper/cdm.pdf)

### Mentoring Youth in the Benefits, Skills, and Joy of Literacy<sup>3</sup>

*My Daddy can't read, and I can't read that good, and I guess I won't be able to help my kids to read neither if I don't get better at reading.* —Shane, middle school student (McCray, 2001)

Many teens lack adult role models with strong literacy skills. Mentors or tutors can fill the gap by showing enthusiasm for the contributions of reading—practical, entertaining, enriching—to everyday life.

#### Share the value/joy of literacy in your life.

Each time you meet, share something you have read recently that was useful, educational, or just fun (jokes/cartoons, music or movie reviews, instructions, advertisements, news articles, Web searches).

*Example:* On a Friday, show the top picks from the weekend entertainment section of a newspaper, reading aloud what you'd like to do and telling why. Then ask your youth to choose an event and do the same thing.

#### Provide guidance for use of learning resources.

If possible, take your youth to the public library, browse through a nearby book store, and search the Internet, community directories, or phone directories for learning resources that can be fun, interesting, or useful. *Examples:* Help your youth get a library card, search for books, videos, and CDs, and find out where various resources are located. Conduct an Internet search on a topic your youth adores, visiting sites and making notes about the best ones. Identify a

skill your teen would like to learn, and work through the Internet, libraries, or community education programs, to make a plan for learning that skill.

#### Model enthusiasm for learning new words.

Demonstrate ways you expand your own vocabulary with a sense of challenge and enjoyment. Here's a story one tutor told about learning a word that stumped him: *I heard it on a Cajun record—lagniappe. It sounds like "LAN- yap". The song went, Sittin' on the porch, spittin' through my tooth-gap; wavin' at the neighbors, smilin' too for lagniappe. I finally found it in a dictionary of slang. It's Creole—mixed African and French. Lagniappe means a dividend or something extra, from little presents shopkeepers in New Orleans gave to customers. Louis Armstrong sang about it, too.* The tutor shared this word, the slang dictionary, and the zydeco song with his mentee; it led to their looking at song lyrics, developing lists of slang words, and a discussion about Spanglish as another example of a creative language mix.

**Demonstrate ways books are a pathway to learning.** Everyone has books that have influenced their ability to make choices or do something well; find the ones you treasure, share them and the reasons you value them (could include how-to manuals, self-help books, cookbooks, reference books, magazines, joke books). Encourage your youth to build a collection of books significant to her.

You may face unexpected challenges as you interact with your adolescent tutee or mentee; students often bring unique personal needs and challenging backgrounds to their reading tasks. As you consult with them and create your literacy plans, remember that adolescents beginning their adult lives will need to read and write more than ever before; they will need literacy to cope with ballooning information systems and the requirements of jobs, households, and personal lives. Finally, with appropriate support, their improving literacy will feed their imaginations so they can create the lives they envision.

<sup>3</sup> For additional discussion on this topic, see the Winter 2000 *Tutor*, "Motivating Reluctant Adolescent Readers" at: <http://www.nwrel.org/learns/tutor/win2000/index.html>

## Resources for Tutors

**Comprehension coaching:** To enhance your understanding of the key thinking strategies and coaching methods, start with Beers, *When Kids Can't Read, What Teachers Can Do*, and Harvey/Goudvis, *Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding*.

**Vocabulary support:** For additional ideas targeting specific vocabulary strategies, great additional resources are: Allen, *Words, Words, Words: Teaching Vocabulary in Grades 4–12*, and Beck/McKeown/Kucan, *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*.

## Book Selection Aids

Meaningful content for adolescent readers:

Carr, *Inquiring Minds, Learning and Literacy in Early Adolescence* (listed above); you can find a downloadable annotated bibliography, organized by topic, at: [www.nwrel.org/lld/im\\_appendix2.pdf](http://www.nwrel.org/lld/im_appendix2.pdf)

Harvey/Goudvis, *Strategies that Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding* (listed above). Useful annotated bibliographies for 1) comprehension strategies, p.197; teaching content in history, social studies, science, music, art, and literacy, p. 207

Reviews, categories, and ratings of young adult books can be found online at:

Book Links, a searchable index from the American Library Association:

<http://cs.ala.org/BookLinks/search.cfm>

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