



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Supporting Talk Time

Classroom Strategies

Teacher Resource
for Primary Schools

Compiled by Demonstration Project Speech and Language Therapists

Tionscadal Léirithe um Thacaíocht Teiripe sa Scoil agus sna Luathbhlianta
Demonstration Project on In-school and Early Years Therapy Support

Table of Contents

Section 1: Introduction	2
1.1 Why is Vocabulary Knowledge Important?	2
1.2 Explicit Teaching of Vocabulary	2
Section 2: Effective Vocabulary Teaching	4
2.1 The STAR Approach	4
2.2 Vocabulary Selection – What Words should be Taught?	6
2.3 Teaching Vocabulary	11
2.4 Activate Word Knowledge	11
2.5 Review Words that have been Taught	15
Section 3: Ideas to Promote Talk Time across the Whole School	16
Creating a Literacy Rich Environment	16
References	17
Appendices	18
A (i) Semantic Map Visual Organiser	18
A (ii) 4 Square Visual Organiser	19
A (iii) Venn Diagram Visual Organiser	20
A (iv) Word Lines Visual Organiser	20
B (i) Dice for Younger Classes	21
B (ii) Dice for Older Classes	22
C Password of the Day Poster	23
D Sample Parent Letter	24
E (i) Sample Homework Sheet	25
E (ii) Blank Homework Sheet	26
F Talk Time Link to Primary Language Curriculum Online Support Materials	26

Aim of this Resource

This resource was compiled by Demonstration Project Speech and Language Therapists to support the implementation of the Talk Time approach to vocabulary teaching in line with the Primary Language Curriculum. The content is based on Speech and Language Therapy research, Primary Language Curriculum resources and therapists' clinical experience of working with teachers and pupils in primary schools.

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Why is Vocabulary Knowledge Important?

Vocabulary knowledge is central to cognitive development (Cunningham et al, 1997) and is closely linked to reading comprehension and word-level reading skills (Nation & Snowling, 2004). Classrooms have the potential to support and develop vocabulary use in a supportive and inclusive environment through regular and rich oral and written practices (including class discussions and conversations, written language activities, and both independent and shared book reading etc.).

Vocabulary and Speech, Language and Communication Needs

Vocabulary learning is one of the most significant problems experienced by students with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), (Bishop, 1997; Gathercole, 1993; Sim, 1998). Pupils with SLCN may not be as skilled as their typically developing peers at incidentally learning new word meanings. A number of factors may contribute to this including:

- Difficulty with word-learning affecting the rate and quality of vocabulary acquisition.
- Difficulties with reading comprehension and/or decoding which may additionally restrict opportunities for word learning in written texts (Wilson, Nash and Earl 2010).
- Reduced opportunities to hear, use or read a variety and range of vocabulary.

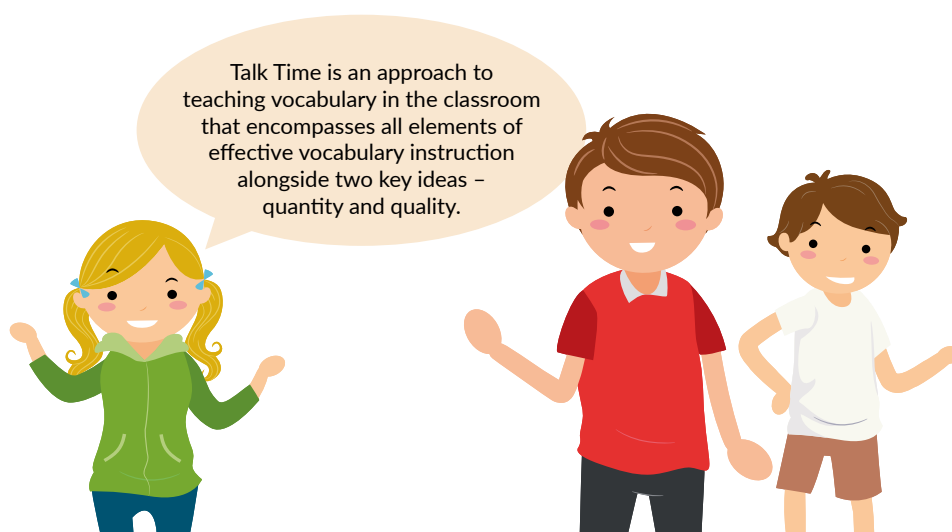
1.2 Explicit Teaching of Vocabulary

Reliance on incidental word learning is not enough for many pupils. Direct explicit teaching of words that are not text/subject specific can support and develop contextual understanding of words, word learning skills and text comprehension skills (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2013).

Effective vocabulary instruction includes:

1. Contextual and definitional information
2. Teaching the in-depth meaning of words
3. Providing multiple repetitions or exposures to new words

Talk Time is an approach to teaching vocabulary in the classroom that encompasses all elements of effective vocabulary instruction alongside two key ideas – quantity and quality.





Quantity

- Teach fewer words robustly instead of several words in an ad-hoc way. Select one word per teaching session (aim for 4 words per week).
- Provide many opportunities to hear and use new vocabulary across curricular subjects.
- Create as many opportunities as possible to use the words and emphasise target words in different contexts throughout the week.
- Repeat and review the new words taught regularly using different methodologies at the end of the week.

Quality

- Select Tier 2 words to teach from curricular topics or shared books. Tier 2 words are high-frequency words that appear across contexts.
- Generate examples and non-examples to illustrate the word.
- Brainstorm synonyms and antonyms for the new word.
- Support pupils to generate their own definitions of the word, instead of using dictionary definitions.
- Discuss differences between the new word and related words.
- Use visual organisers to support rich instruction.
- Support pupils to make sentences using the word(s).
- Play games that target repetition and review of the words.
- Expand use of the word to new contexts.

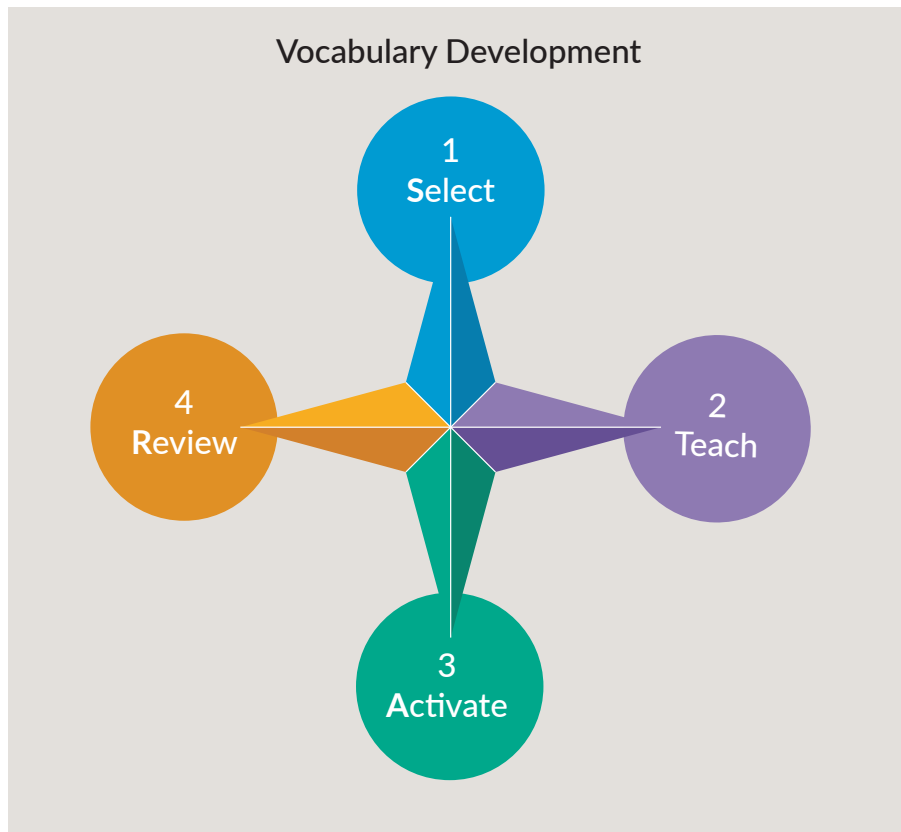
Support material www.curriculumonline.ie

Section 2: Effective Vocabulary Teaching

2.1 The STAR Approach

Follow the STAR approach to teach vocabulary.

Figure 1: Vocabulary Development STAR



STAR stands for Select, Teach, Activate and Review.

- **Select** the most useful vocabulary (i.e. Tier 2).
- **Teach** the selected vocabulary in a structured manner.
- **Activate** the meaning by using the words in context.
- **Review** the taught words to ensure they are retained.

The STAR approach to teaching vocabulary is quick and easy to deliver with minimal planning. It can be applied to both topic-related vocabulary and vocabulary that is encountered in shared texts.

Source: Blachowicz & Fisher, 2010.

2.2 Vocabulary Selection – What Words should be Taught?

Tiered vocabulary is an organisational framework for categorising words (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013). This can be helpful when selecting which words are important to teach.

Table 1: The Most Effective Words to Teach are 'Tier 2' Words

 <p>Tier 3</p>	<p>Tier 3 words are domain specific vocabulary. We anticipate that students will be unfamiliar with Tier 3 words. They are low-frequency, specialised words that appear in specific subjects or content areas. Teach these words as the need arises for comprehension in specific content areas.</p>
 <p>Tier 2</p>	<p>Tier2/Goldilocks words are 'just right' for in-depth vocabulary instruction. They are high-frequency words that appear across contexts. They are more common in writing than in everyday speech. These words are useful beyond the immediate topic being taught. Tier 2 words are learned primarily through reading and explicit instruction and are key to building a strong academic vocabulary.</p>
 <p>Tier 1</p>	<p>Tier 1 words are 'too easy' for in-depth vocabulary instruction. They are basic everyday words. These words are typically found in conversation and do not require direct instruction at a whole class level. They are part of most pupils' vocabulary. However, some pupils with speech language and communication needs may need these words to be explicitly taught.</p>

Stahl & Nagy, 2005.

Table 2: Examples of Words at Different Tiers

Tier	Junior Classes	Senior Classes
Tier 3	<i>stethoscope, sycamore tree, nativity, oval, subtract</i>	<i>perimeter, continent, genes, deity, prime number, aorta, tectonic plates, isotope</i>
Tier 2	<i>exaggerate, ravenous, hilarious, cone, dull, order, repeat, category, gather, curious, necessary, cooperate, generous, nutritious, priority, elegant, resemble</i>	<i>compare, contrast, reality, comment, despise, fortunate, require, obsessed, chaos, emerge, masterpiece, consistent, expand, estimate, cause, significant, solution, benevolent, deliberately</i>
Tier 1	<i>come, see, happy, table, paper, up, four, turn</i>	<i>think, because, need, our, number, hear</i>

Teaching Tier 2 words can help pupils understand Tier 3 words that they come across in specific subjects.

For example, when discussing a story as part of a Religion or English lesson we might come across the word 'apparition' (Tier 3) and to support understanding of this word we could teach the word 'vision' (Tier 2) to build on the concept of 'to see' (Tier 1).

Consider the questions in Table 3 to support you to accurately select Tier 2 words.

Table 3: Considerations for Selecting Tier 2 Words

How important is the word? How useful is the word?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the word appear often in written text? Does the word come up frequently throughout the school day? Does the word come up in more than one subject? <p><i>Examples: 'categorise' and 'technique' range broadly in their use.</i></p>
Is the word in more than one concept or context? Does the word have lots of uses?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the word used in at least more than one concept? Does the word have a number of uses? <p><i>Examples: 'dull' can mean 'blunt', 'not very bright' or 'boring'; 'set' can be a noun (a movie set) or a verb (please set the table).</i></p>
Does the word build on conceptual understanding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the word describe a concept that pupils already know in a more precise, specific or sophisticated way? <p><i>Examples: 'ravenous' builds on concept of 'hungry'; 'cooperate' for 'working together'; 'hindrance' for 'something that is getting in the way'</i></p>

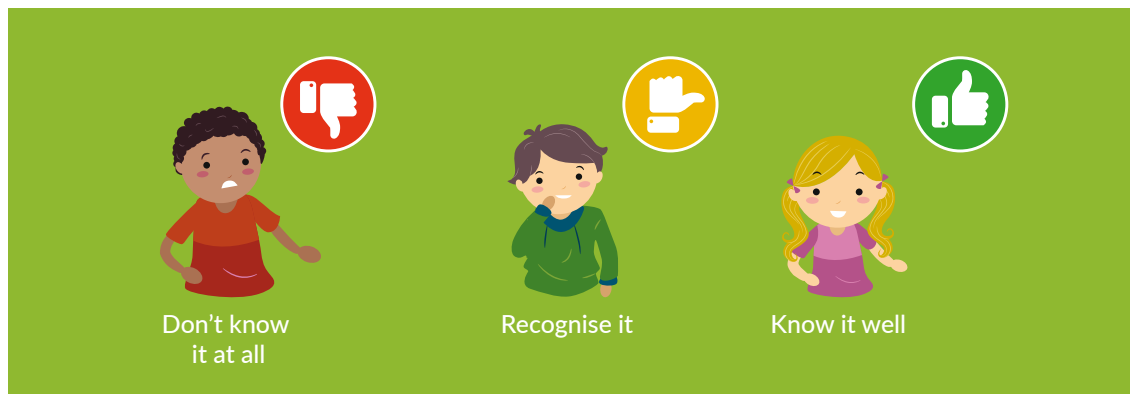
2.3 Teaching Vocabulary

There are a number of steps to rich vocabulary teaching.

- Assess the pupils' understanding of the target word, including using self-assessment.
- Discuss the meaning of the target word and create a pupil friendly definition. Support this process with:
 - Visual supports
 - Multisensory approaches
- Expand the word to new contexts.

a) Assess Understanding of the Target Word

Assess the pupils understanding of the target word and encourage self-reflection. For example, you could use a 'traffic light' visual to determine the pupil's current understanding of the word:



For pupils who indicate that they 'know the word well', give them the opportunity to tell the class what the word means. Provide support and encouragement if pupils' self-generated definitions are not quite accurate.

b) Discuss the Meaning of the Word and Create a Pupil Friendly Definition

Begin by providing a pupil-friendly definition for the word. A pupil-friendly definition is written by an adult and is not constrained by space limitations, as a dictionary definition is.

There are two guidelines for writing a definition:

- Give an example of the word's typical use.
- Explain its meaning in everyday language.

For example:

Word	Benevolent.
Dictionary definition	Marked by or disposed to doing good.
Typical use	Describe a person who helps others.
Everyday language	Describes a person who is happy and kind, and does nice things to help other people feel happy too.

Additional activities that may be used to support word definitions include:

- Teaching synonyms and antonyms.
- Generating examples and non-examples.
- Discussing the similarities and differences between the new words and known words.

These help pupils understand word meanings more deeply.

Use visual supports to support teaching the word meanings:

Create visual organisers in pairs, in small groups or with the whole class. Visual organisers are intended for use during discussion of word meanings (rather than as an independent activity). See Appendix A (i-iv) for blank examples of visual organisers.

Visual Organisers

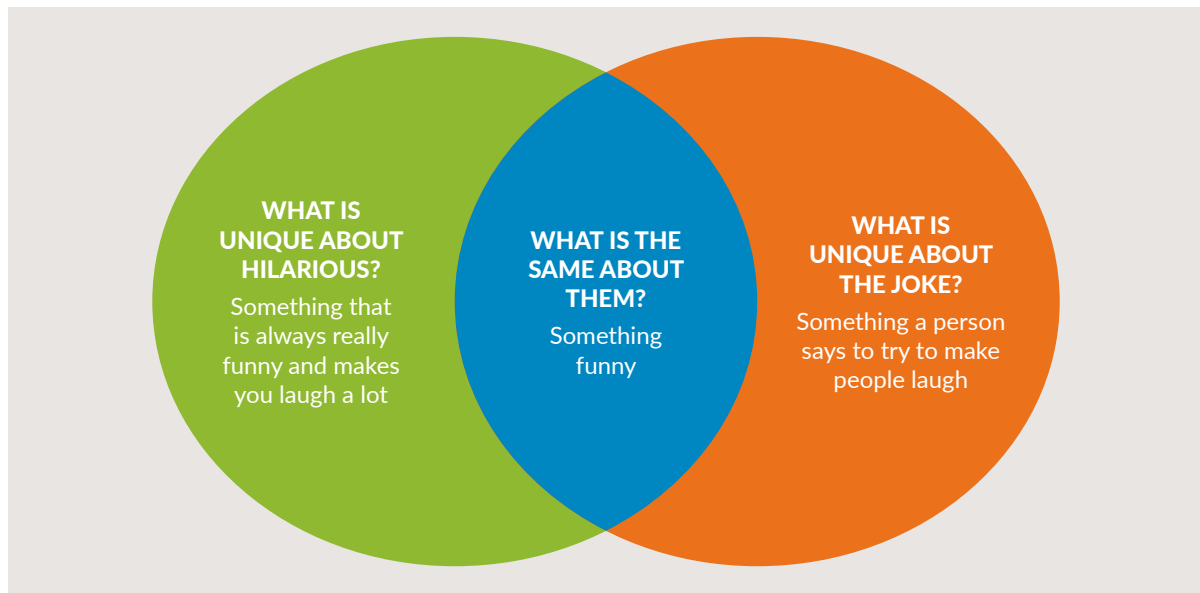
Four examples:

(1) Semantic Map




(2) 4 Square



(3) Venn Diagram**(4) Word Lines****Example 1**

Arrange the words in terms of least funny story to most funny story.



Word	
A hilarious	Story
A funny	Story
An amusing	Story
A good	Story

Blank visual organisers can be found in Appendix A (i-iv).

c) Use Multisensory Elements when Teaching Words

Including multisensory elements in both oral discussion and when creating visual organisers supports the rich understanding of words. See detailed description below:

	<p>Symbol</p> <p>Use a picture, photograph, drawing or symbol to represent the word. The class can use 'Google images' to pick the image that best represents the word.</p>
	<p>Sound</p> <p>Clap the syllables or say the word to a peer.</p>
	<p>Meaning</p> <p>Use a combination of sensory experiences and simple vocabulary to define the word. Relate the word to what they know and/or tell a story.</p>
	<p>Action</p> <p>Use gestures or signs to help the pupils understand the word.</p>

d) Expand the Word to New Contexts

After the meaning of the word is presented and discussed, a rich and informative context for the word (which may be one sentence or an entire paragraph) can be given. This can include other contexts in which the word could be found.

The purpose of these activities is to build depth of vocabulary knowledge:

- Pupils could generate sentences using the target word.
- Pupils could be given a sentence stem which includes the target word, and pupils complete the stem in a meaningful way. For example, 'the *benevolent* father saw the injured cat and...'
- Pupils could generate an entire narrative based around target word.
- Pupils could complete personal experience activities based on the target word. During a personal experience activity, pupils are asked questions which include the target word, such as 'Have you ever known someone who was *benevolent*?' 'Describe a time when you were *benevolent*.' These questions may be extended beyond personal experience by asking questions such as, 'describe a time that you might act *benevolently*?'
- Reinforce words in a variety of contexts, e.g. use P.E. lessons to consolidate target verbs.
- Encourage pupils to find things out for themselves by encouraging them to look things up, for example, using their word book, dictionary, computer etc.
- Teach pupils about making links around words and encourage the use of strategies to access words.
- Encourage pupils to guess what the word means from context and praise their attempts to do so.

2.4 Activate Word Knowledge

Activate pupil's understanding and use of new words by bringing the word to life in the classroom.

a) Use Word Walls with Visual Representations of the Words

Example of a Tier 2 word wall in a 4th class classroom



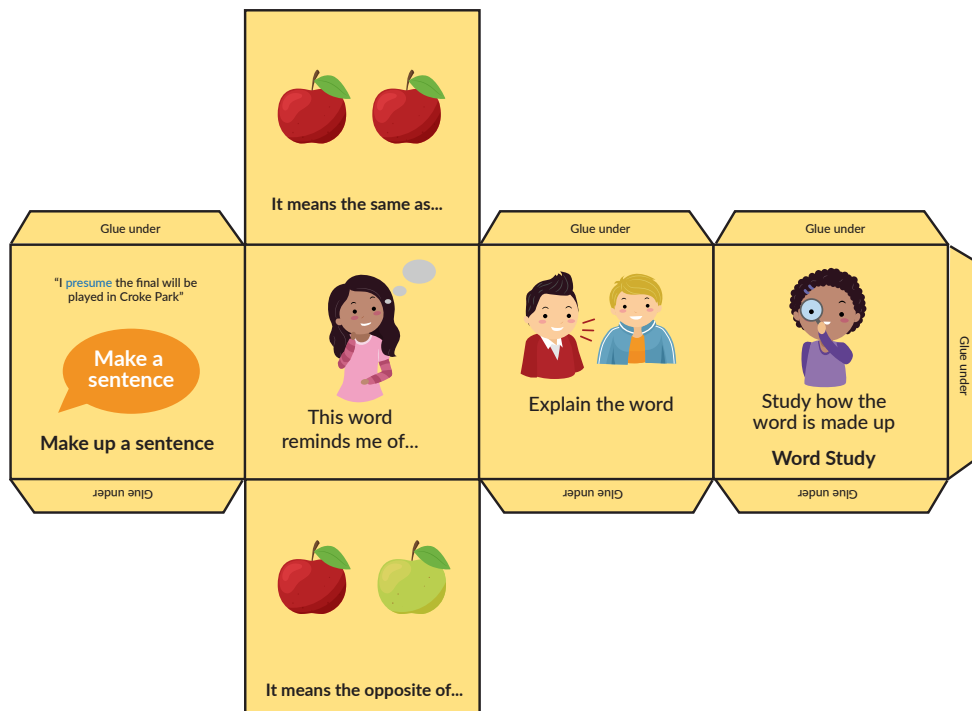
Example of a Tier 2 word wall in a 2nd class classroom



b) Play Games to Reinforce Words in a Fun Way

- Pupils may like dice game – see **Appendix B (i) and (ii)**

Example of a Tier 2 word wall in a 4th class classroom



- Younger pupils may enjoy saying new vocabulary in different voices. Pupils say the word of the day using different voices, e.g. using a quiet voice, loud voice, robot voice, alien voice, monster voice. The whole class can begin by following the teacher's instructions e.g. 'say *ravenous* in a quiet voice'. Try this group by group in the classroom. Pupils wait for teacher's signal before they say the word of the day in the specific voice e.g. 'Blue group – robot voice', pupils: '*rav-en-ous*'.

Example of a Tier 2 word wall in a 4th class classroom

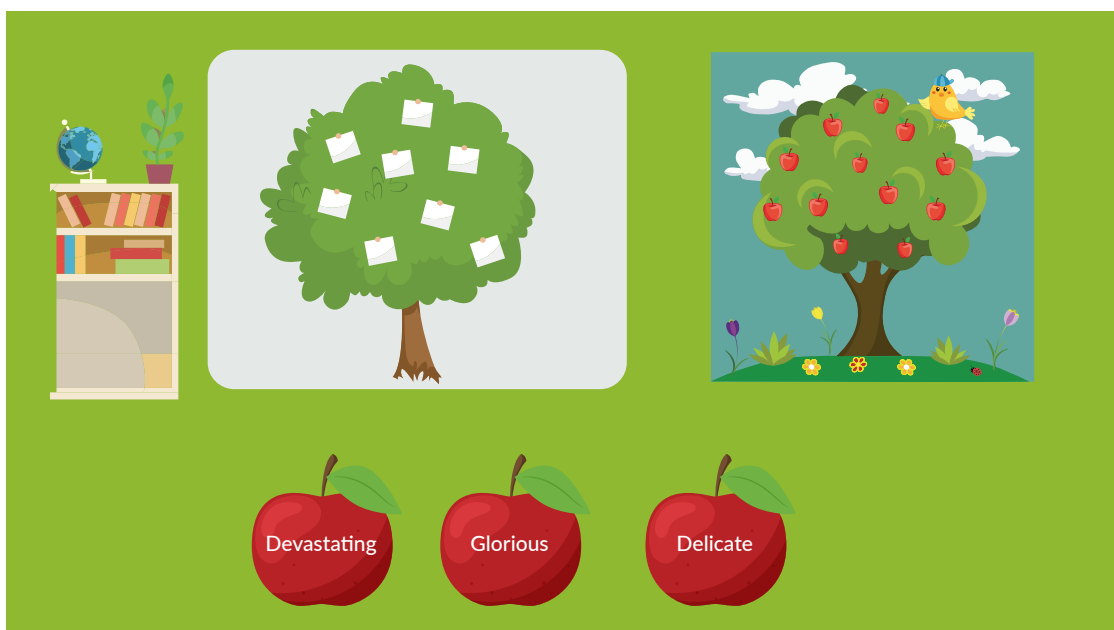


- Clap out the beats in the word e.g. 'How many beats?'. This activity helps to develop phonological awareness skills. Pupils clap the beats (i.e. syllables) of the target word. The teacher models and uses visual supports if possible.



- Build a 'tree of words'. The pupils and teacher add leaves and/or apples to the tree. Write the words on the leaves/apples and add pictures. The leaves/apples can be added to a large display of a tree trunk and branches that can be displayed in a prominent location in the classroom.

Example of a Tier 2 word wall in a 4th class classroom



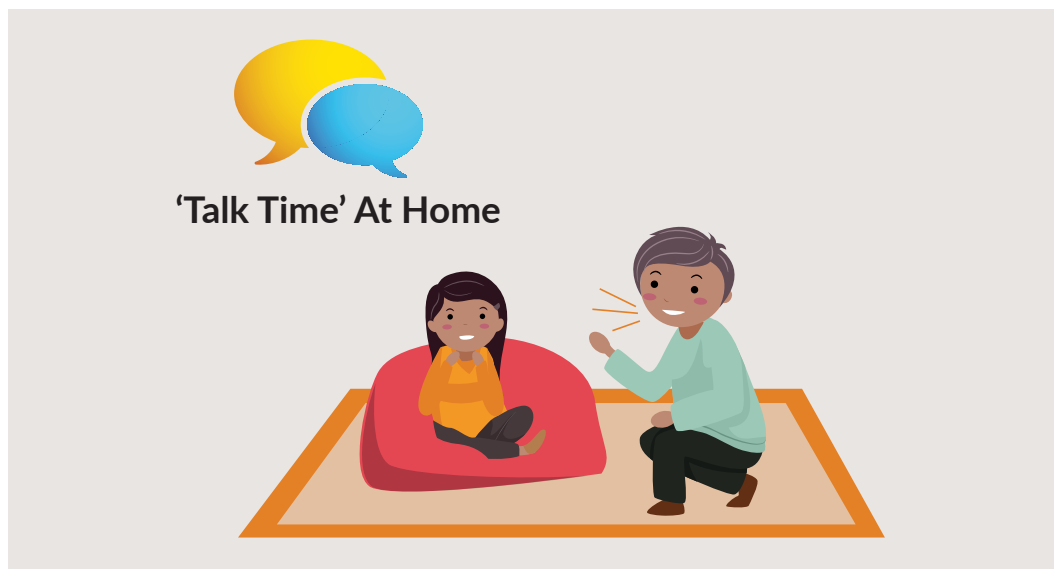
- Play games such as Hedbanz and include pictures which represent the target words. The game 'Articulate for Kids' can be adapted by making cards which list the target words.
- Word of the day password poster. Younger classrooms may enjoy using their Talk Time word as a classroom 'password' when entering and exiting the room. See Appendix C.




c) Parent Involvement

Include parents to support consolidation of vocabulary learning.

Send home a *parent letter* with information on Talk Time, why it is important and what parents can do to support their children at home. See sample letter in Appendix D.



Send home the word of the day as part of the *homework* and encourage the pupils to discuss the new word with a family member at home. See sample homework sheets in Appendix E (i) and (ii).

Day	Target Word	Topic to talk about for 10 minutes	Signed
Monday	Gather	 : Squirrels gathering acorns; Gathering money for charity; Gathering leaves. Qs: I wonder... what does 'gather' mean? How would you gather? What types of things can you gather?	



Send home *vocabulary books* with indicators of key topics and target vocabulary to be discussed at home in different contexts to reinforce their meaning.

2.5 Review Words that have been Taught

Repetition and regular review of vocabulary teaching is important and a fundamental feature of programmes like Talk Time.

Use a Word Bag

Put in objects that represent words which have been taught (e.g. the word 'ocean' could be represented by a shell or a fish; the word 'gobble' could be represented by a spoon or a toy ice cream). Pupils pick out an object and match it to a word that they have learned. Pupils are encouraged to use the target word and name the object in a sentence, e.g. "I found a shell in the ocean".



Use a Word Pot

Add the target words which have been taught into the Word Pot. The pupil or teacher can pull out a word that has been taught and give a definition. Teachers can give a definition and ask if it's true or false, ask questions about the words, or encourage the pupil to tell a partner what they know about the word.



Teach a New Word to Teddy

Introduce a teddy or a puppet to younger pupils and tell them that the teddy needs help to learn the word. Ask them to tell teddy what they know about the word. Once the pupils have made their contributions, teddy then summarises it back to them, providing a definition.



I Heard a Good Word

Teachers should listen out for pupils using the target words which have been taught. Highlight this when a pupil says it. 'I heard Cian saying that he was *ravenous* for his lunch. Well done for using the new word *ravenous* Cian'.

True or False?

Make up obvious true or false questions. For example, if the target word is *precious*, ask the pupils – 'True or False, do you put *precious* things in the bin?'

Flyswatter Game

Write a few target words on the board/add them to the whiteboard. Divide the class into two teams. Have one pupil from each team come to the board with the flyswatter. Read a definition of a target word. Pupils should race to locate the word on the board and hit it with their flyswatter.



Play Pictionary – using the target words.

Play Charades – using the target words.

Section 3: Ideas to Promote Talk Time across the Whole School

Creating a Literacy Rich Environment

- Stick the daily Talk Time word on the front of the classroom door so everyone in the school knows what your Talk Time word is that day.
- Younger classrooms may enjoy using their Talk Time word as a classroom 'password' when entering and exiting the room. Use the 'password of the day' poster (see Appendix C).
- Word Pots can travel with each class from year to year so by 6th class the pupils will have words in their pot from infant classes/2nd, 3rd, etc. This will make word pot games interesting as pupils will be encouraged to recall and use words they learned a few years ago.
- Teachers could select a 'word wizard' or 'word whizz' of the week in each class for the pupil who used their Talk Time words the most when speaking and in their writing. These pupils could be congratulated in class on a Friday or by the Principal at a weekly whole school assembly.
- Schools could hold 'word assemblies'. Each class nominates their favourite word and prizes are given to the most interesting word.
- Ensure that classroom libraries include a variety of genres and text types.
- Use bulletin boards to showcase words being learned in your classroom. This may work well if you have several words related to the same topic/story/curriculum subject.
- Use labels in the classroom which include both picture and written words.

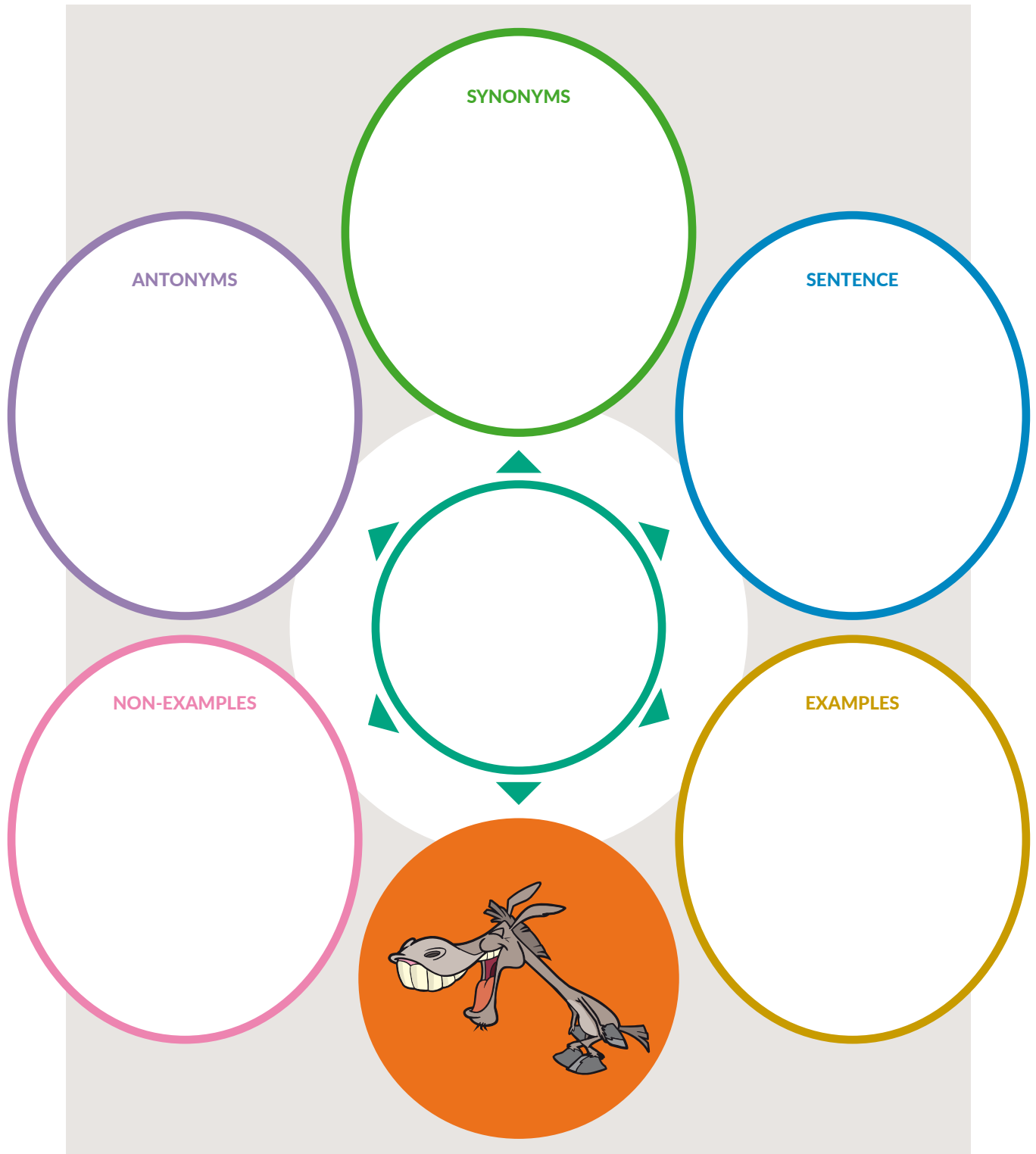


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Appendices

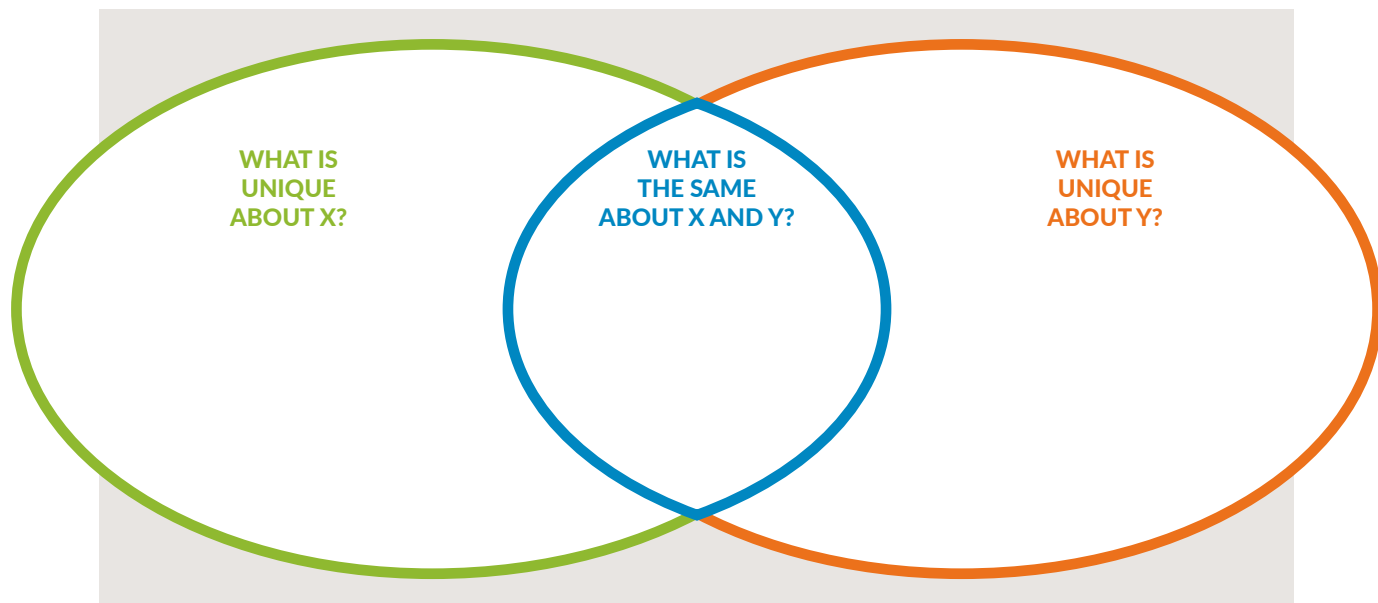
Appendix A (i) – Semantic Map Visual Organiser



Appendix A (ii) – 4 Square Visual Organiser

TARGET WORLD	EXAMPLES
OWN DEFINITION	NON-EXAMPLES

Appendix A (iii) – Venn Diagram Visual Organiser

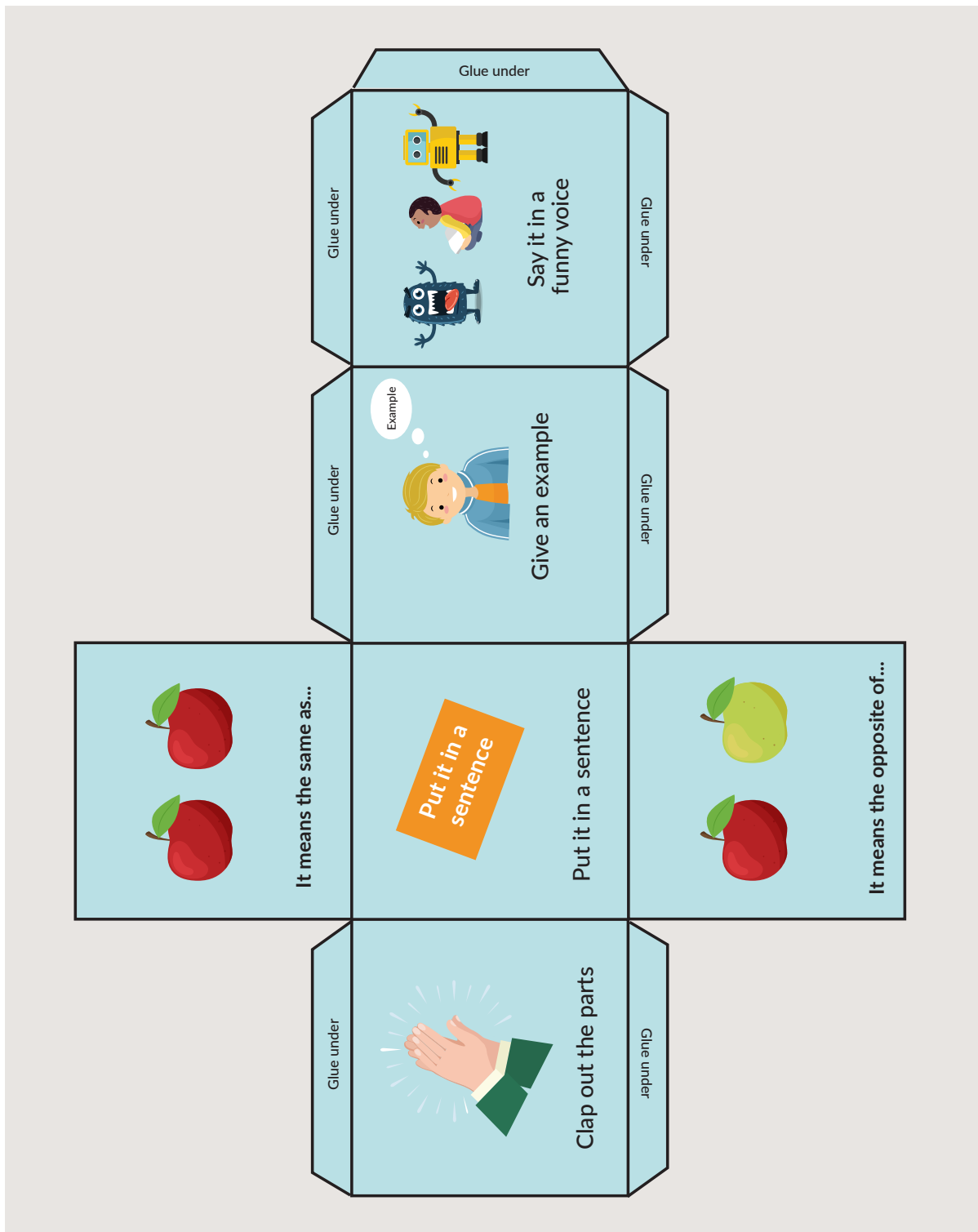


Appendix A (iv) – Word Lines Visual Organiser

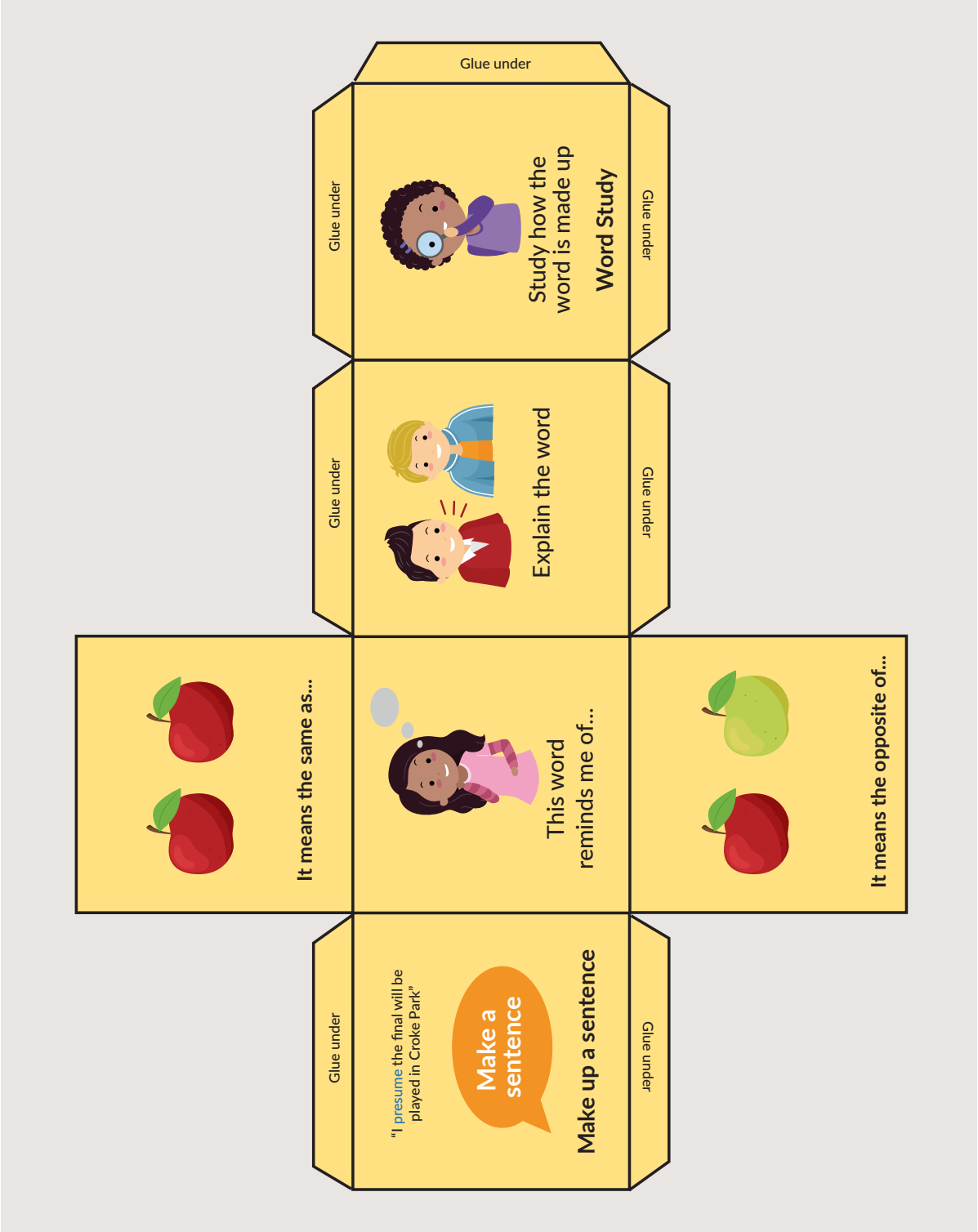
Arrange the words in terms of least _____ to greatest _____ .

Word	

Appendix B (i) – Dice for Younger Classes



Appendix B (ii) – Dice for Older Classes



Appendix C – Password of the Day Poster



Before you enter, take time to say our secret password...

The word of the day!



Appendix D – Sample Parent Letter

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

This year, as part of the Primary Language Curriculum, we are implementing a whole school approach to vocabulary teaching called 'Talk Time'. Your child will be taught four new words each week.

An important part of this initiative is the involvement of parents to support their child to learn and use these new words at home. Every day we will send home Talk Time homework. As part of this homework, we will tell you the word your child learned that day.

Parent support is crucial to help children develop vocabulary. If possible, please spend 10 minutes each day talking to your child about this word. You could talk to your child on the walk home from school, in the car, cooking dinner together, before bed time, etc. When you talk about the new word:

- Stress or emphasise the new word when you are chatting.
- Ask your child to explain what the word means to you.
- Explain the new word to them.
- Give them examples of words that mean the same thing or include the new word in a sentence.
- Ask your child to give you an example or talk about the word.

Talking about the new word could look like this:



Thank you for your continued support for all the initiatives implemented by your child's school.

Your sincerely





Appendix E (i) – Sample Homework Sheet

Week: _____



= Ideas for talking

= Questions to prompt chat

Day	Target Word	Topic to talk about for 10 minutes	Signed
Monday	Gather	 : Squirrels gathering acorns; Gathering money for charity; Gathering leaves. Qs: I wonder... what does 'gather' mean? How would you gather? What types of things can you gather?	
Tuesday	Obsess	 : Being obsessed with sports, band, other things. Qs: I wonder, what does it mean? What are you obsessed with?	
Wednesday	Repeat	 : Cartoons repeated on TV; Songs repeated; Baby repeating words; Having to repeat instructions/actions/questions. Qs: I wonder who has to repeat themselves often? Why do you think?	
Thursday	Hilarious	 : Something extremely funny – jokes, clowns, cartoons. Qs: What do you find very funny? I wonder what makes them/that person funny?	

Appendix E (ii) – Blank Homework Sheet

Week: _____



= Ideas for talking

= Questions to prompt chat

Day	Target Word	Topic to talk about for 10 minutes	Signed
Monday		 : Qs:	
Tuesday		 : Qs:	
Wednesday		 : Qs:	
Thursday		 : Qs:	

Appendix F – Talk Time Links to the Primary Language Curriculum

<https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/eab4bdf5-d987-4b92-9b51-de094bf060ff/Talk-Time.pdf>

