


Strategies For Teaching English Language Learners—

Part 3: Teaching Vocabulary In Layers

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Jill Eisenberg, our Resident Literacy Expert, began her career teaching English as a Foreign Language to second through sixth graders in Yilan, Taiwan as a Fulbright Fellow. She went on to become a literacy teacher for third grade in San Jose, CA as a Teach for America corps member. She is certified in Project Glad instruction to promote English language acquisition and academic achievement. In her column she offers teaching and literacy tips for educators.



The U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Science (IES) and What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) released the latest educator's guide to present [best instructional practices for English Language Learners](#).

Although we cannot explicitly teach all academic and content-specific words our students will need to know in their educations and careers, we can be strategic in how we teach 5-8 words a week so they can apply these word strategies to new words they come across on their own.

[Last week](#) I applied the guide's recommendations on how to choose an appropriate text and vocabulary words for English Language Learners and I modeled it with the Lee & Low informational text, [Drumbeat In Our Feet](#).

I will continue to focus on the guide's **first recommendation**: *Teach a set of academic vocabulary words intensively across several days using a variety of instructional activities.*

Using [Drumbeat In Our Feet](#) and the [IES's process](#), my target words are *origins, vital, ethnically, diverse, unique, vibrant* and *varied* from the "Origins of African Dance" excerpt in *Drumbeat In Our Feet*. See how I chose these words [here](#).

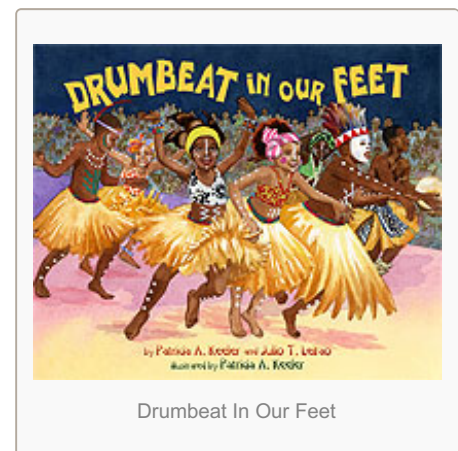
1. Read the text

IES: Introduce the topic of the text by asking about students understanding of the topic and personal experiences. Read the excerpt aloud at the start of the lesson. (P. 24)

Lee & Low: I would read the text aloud so students who cannot comprehend the text independently can access the text whole group. *All* students should be able to follow along with their *own* student copy. Only constant interaction with the print and following along will allow students to connect with what I am saying and how I say it with what they are seeing in the print.

2. Introduce the vocabulary

IES: After reading the text and stopping to ask clarifying questions, introduce the target vocabulary words and have students find the words (in their copies). Display a list of the words in the classroom. (P. 24)

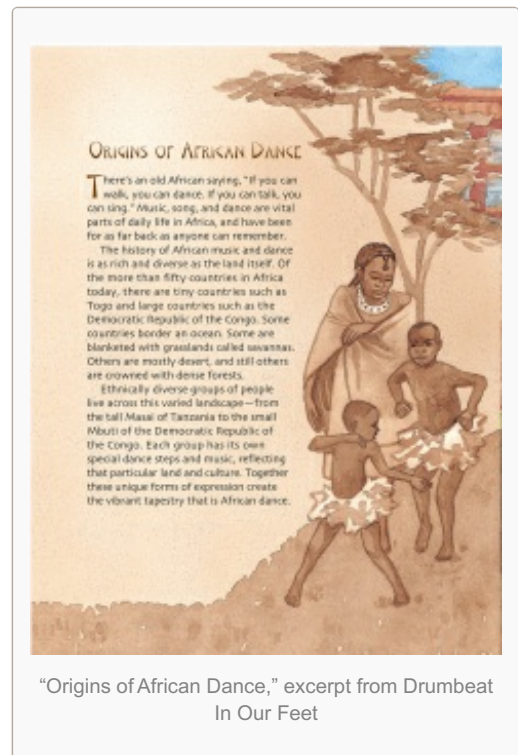


3. Teach the vocabulary words in layers

IES: “Teach academic vocabulary in depth using multiple modalities (writing, speaking, listening)” and “teach word-learning strategies to help students independently figure out the meaning of words.” (P. 18-22)

Lee & Low: Over the course of 5-8 days (lesson periods), I would focus on a couple of aspects of each of the new vocabulary words. On a whole class chart where the target words are listed, I would add a new component to each word each day in order to deepen the meaning and foster familiarity with the words for students.

Together we will create a student-friendly definition; write synonyms, antonyms, examples, non-examples; determine parts of speech; draw a picture or create an action/gesture to represent the words; list related word forms and any cognates; break the word down into word parts; and use the word in a meaningful, student-generated sentence.



For example, Monday I would read the excerpt, introduce the target words, find the target words in the text, and come up with a definition for each target word. Tuesday, I would revisit the chart and add synonyms, antonyms, examples, and non-examples for all the vocabulary words to reinforce meaning. Wednesday I would cover part of speech and concrete representations, and so on.

Below is how I would teach my target word, *origins*, from *Drumbeat In Our Feet* but I would cover all of the target words each day.

Monday

- **student-friendly definition:** the source where something starts

Tuesday

- **synonyms:** beginnings, birthplace, roots, foundation
- **antonyms:** end, destination, result
- **examples:** beginning of the universe and life, family backgrounds/heritage, word roots, superhero/comic book origin stories
- **non-examples:** death of a star, the youngest person in the family tree, the last book in a comic book series

Wednesday

- **part of speech:** noun
- **draw a picture** to represent the word: I might draw a lake with a river leading up to a mountain and arrow pointing to where the river starts.
- **create an action/gesture** to represent the word: with my left hand held out at hip-level as the “lake,” I would point with my right finger to my left shoulder (the mountain) as the *origin* of the river. [Tip: Students are great at brainstorming concrete representations of words!]

Thursday

- **list related word forms:** original, originate
- **list any cognates:** origine (French), origen (Spanish)

Friday

- **affixes:** none
- **use the word in a meaningful, student-generated sentence:** We hiked from the lake up to the mountain looking for the *origins* of the river. The *original* owner of this house built this house all on her own in 1956.

Remember: This is a process I will repeat each week or every 5-8 lessons with a new text and set of target words. While my students may know *only* up to 400 new vocabulary words by the end of the year, this repeated process will allow them to tackle new vocabulary words in other content classes and in independent reading.

Next week, we will take a look at how to incorporate the selected vocabulary into activities that support listening, speaking, and writing practice for English Language Learners.

Further reading on supporting English Language Learners in the classroom:

- [Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners in Elementary and Middle School—Part 1](#)
- [Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners—Part 2: Choosing a Text and Vocabulary Words](#)
- [Strategies For Teaching English Language Learners—Part 4: Writing, Speaking, & Listening Practice](#)
- Similar text to use with grades K-2 is [African Dance: Drumbeat In Our Feet](#)
- ¡Colorín Colorado! resources on [Academic Language for English Language Learners](#)
- *Drumbeat In Our Feet* also has a [BookTalk with creators Patricia Keeler and Julio Leitão](#)