



4. STAR Topic

STAR stands for select, teach, activate and review and is based on Blachowicz and Fisher's (2010) work. In this chapter the approach is applied to words that are encountered through topic work.

Using STAR topic

- Use STAR topic if your aim is to develop children's knowledge of the vocabulary encountered in topic work.
- STAR topic is most applicable to content subjects such as maths, science, history and geography, although it can also be applied in other subjects such as religious education, design and technology, and music. STAR literacy, which is outlined in chapter 6, is applicable for teaching the vocabulary encountered in literacy or English lessons.
- The authors strongly advocate that STAR topic is used in conjunction with the other elements of *Word Aware* to provide children with a rich and varied range of word-learning opportunities.

Topic vocabulary

Understanding of a curriculum area and vocabulary are intertwined. If, for instance, a child is learning about what happens when a gas changes to a liquid but does not know the word **condensation**, his ability to fully understand this process and to express his knowledge is severely limited. Language, including vocabulary, enables children to learn concepts (Robson, 2006) and so successfully teaching a topic requires key vocabulary to be specifically taught.

For many children general exposure to new words as part of a vocabulary-rich curriculum will be enough for them to learn. Selecting and then talking about the words that are encountered will provide greater opportunities for word learning. However, specific teaching of vocabulary such as the STAR topic sequence will offer many more children opportunities for word learning as well as deepening the word-learning experience for all.

Getting started

STAR topic is designed to initiate word learning as part of a lesson introduction. Once you are familiar with the approach it is quick and easy to deliver with minimal planning and preparation.

STAR stands for



- Select
- Teach
- Activate
- Review

- **Select** the really useful vocabulary that is core to the topic.
- **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.

Select

To get started it is suggested that one curriculum area is selected, such as maths, science, geography or history. To start with, choose the one in which you feel vocabulary improvement would make the most difference to your students.

Identify the range of vocabulary needed for this topic. This can be from curriculum guidelines or from a list that is devised within your school.




Divide the words on your list into three categories. These categories are 'anchor' (everyday) words, 'Goldilocks' words (words that are not too easy and not too hard, but just right) and 'step on' words (words that are less likely to be encountered again). The table below describes the three types of words in full. Look at your list of topic words and divide them into the three categories using the table below.

<p>Anchor words</p> 	<p>Goldilocks words</p> <p>Not too easy and not too hard, but just right</p> 	<p>Step on words</p> 
<p>Children have a thorough understanding of these words.</p> <p>Everyday spoken and written language for a child of this age.</p> <p>Used at home and in daily interactions.</p> <p>Children may have become familiar with this vocabulary through prior teaching.</p>	<p>Really useful words</p> <p>Likely to be encountered again in reading or oral language.</p> <p>Average adult has a good level of knowledge of the word.</p> <p>Words that are very topic specific but are core to the topic.</p> <p>Age 7+: Desirable for children to use in their writing.</p>	<p>Less likely to be encountered again in reading or oral language.</p> <p>Average adult does not have much knowledge of the word.</p> <p>Words that are particularly topic specific and are not core to the topic.</p> <p>Age 7+: Not a word that children usually need to use in their own writing.</p>
<p>If a child needs work on 'anchor' words then provide small group teaching or differentiated activities.</p>	<p>'Goldilocks' words will be the words that are taught to the whole class.</p> <p>Select one per lesson.</p>	<p>'Step on' words that are needed for comprehension can be briefly explained but can otherwise be ignored.</p>

(Adapted from Stahl & Nagy, 2005 and Beck *et al*, 2002)



Select

Age: 7-8 years	Subject: <i>History</i>	Topic: <i>ROMANS</i>
<p>Anchor words</p> 	<p>Goldilocks words</p> <p>Not too easy and not too hard, but just right</p> 	<p>Step on words</p> 
<p>Children have a thorough understanding of these words.</p> <p>Everyday spoken and written language for a child of this age.</p> <p>Used at home and in daily interactions.</p> <p>Children may have become familiar with this vocabulary through prior teaching.</p>	<p>Really useful words</p> <p>Likely to be encountered again in reading or oral language.</p> <p>Average adult has a good level of knowledge of the word.</p> <p>Words that are very topic specific but are core to the topic.</p> <p>Age 7+: Desirable for children to use in their writing.</p>	<p>Less likely to be encountered again in reading or oral language.</p> <p>Average adult does not have much knowledge of the word.</p> <p>Words that are particularly topic specific and are not core to the topic.</p> <p>Age 7+: Not a word that children usually need to use in their own writing.</p>
<p>If a child needs work on 'anchor' words then provide small group teaching or differentiated activities.</p>	<p>'Goldilocks' words will be the words that are taught to the whole class.</p> <p>Select one per lesson.</p>	<p>'Step on' words that are needed for comprehension can be briefly explained but can otherwise be ignored.</p>
<p><i>long time ago</i> <i>transport</i></p>	<p>Roman <i>Anglo Saxon</i> <i>Celtic</i> refugee <i>tribe</i> trade <i>mosaic</i> <i>troops</i> invade <i>settle</i> immigration</p>	<p><i>hill fort</i> <i>hypocaust</i> <i>forum</i> <i>basilica</i> <i>legion</i></p>

The words in bold are the six most important words that are selected to be taught.



Word Pot games



How to make a Word Pot

Word Pots are an effective way to review words that have been taught in class using the STAR approach. Once the word has been taught, ask a child to write it on a piece of card and add it to your Word Pot. When you have a moment select the word and discuss it with the class. Prompt questions are provided below.

Find a container with a lid. It can be any shape so long as it is sturdy and can be closed. Cover it in any attractive paper. Cut out the *Word Aware* symbol to go on the top of the pot. Cut out the question prompts and stick them to the sides of the pot. Both the *Word Aware* symbol and the question prompts are in Appendix 3 and on the website: www.routledge.com/cw/speechmark

When there is a spare moment select a word from the pot and review it using the question prompts.

<i>What can it do?</i>	<i>What does it look like?</i>	<i>Describe it to your friend.</i>
<i>Can you think of something that can be described as (target word)?</i>	<i>What verb does it describe or go with?</i>	<i>When might someone do this? When might you do this?</i>
<i>Where might you see this word?</i>	<i>Think of a time when you could use this word.</i>	<i>I like/don't like this word because ...</i>
<i>Which other word is a bit like this word? How is it different from that word?</i>	<i>The author chose this word. What other word could he/she have used?</i>	<i>How will you remember the word?</i>



Playing Word Pot games regularly will ensure that the children hear and use the words again and they are not forgotten. Word Pot games are not limited to words that have been placed in the pot, but can be played with words from any source.



Charades variation

A child selects a verb from the Word Pot and acts it for others to guess. To make it slightly easier write a list of all the verbs on the board.



Act it out

A small group of children is given one word from the Word Pot. They then need to come up with a brief play that uses the word. To make it harder the number of times the word must be used can be specified or you can include more than one word from the pot.



True or false

Each group selects a word from the Word Pot. They then need to generate words or phrases that either are associated with the word or are not associated with the word.

For example, 'Which of these things is most likely to be **tattered**?'

A birthday present

An old football kit

A paper found at the bottom of your school bag

A new pair of shoes.'

(Based on the work of Beck *et al*, 2002)



Word and context

A word is chosen from the Word Pot. The adult then thinks of a context in which the word might be used. The children are asked to provide an example of how they might use the word in that context.

For example, 'Can you think of an example of using the word **huge** when eating at a restaurant?' (Based on the work of Beck *et al*, 2002)



Make up a story

A word is selected from the Word Pot and the children are given some time to generate a brief story or paragraph that exemplifies that particular word.

For example, '**illuminating**. There is so much to see at the British Museum. You can learn so much by looking at the displays and the people who work there know so much. A trip to the British Museum is extremely **illuminating**.'

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