

Active Learning Strategies to Support the Use of Vocabulary Cartoons

The Quality of Learning Rarely Exceeds the Quality of Teaching
By Pat Magestro

Introduction:

This is an exciting time to be teaching and to be learning. Teachers have at their fingertips a wide array of interesting and motivational materials which address the needs and developmental stages of their learners. And there has been no time in our evolution as educators that we have had so much scientific support for learning. While the scientists only suggest that their research supports certain approaches, good teachers can take comfort in that much of what they intuitively believed about providing stimulating and enjoyable learning experiences for their students has a great deal of support from various academic and scientific sources. *We do not teach the brain to think. We, can however, help learners to organize content to facilitate more complex process.* (Sousa, 1995)

Using Mnemonics to Help Retention:

(Sousa, 1995) (From the Greek “to remember”) are very useful devices for remembering unrelated information, patterns, or rules. They were developed by the ancient Greeks to help them remember dialogue in plays and for passing information to others when writing was impractical. There are many types of mnemonic schemes. One of them is rhyming mnemonics which are used in Vocabulary Cartoons to assist students in remembering the meaning of more challenging words.

Rhyming Mnemonics:

Rhymes are simple and effective ways to remember rules and patterns. They work because if you forget part of the rhyme or get part of it wrong, the words lose their rhyme or rhythm and signal the error. To retrieve the missing or incorrect part you start the rhyme over again, and this helps you to relearn it. Have you ever tried to remember the fifth line of a song or poem without starting at the beginning? It is very difficult to do since each line serves as the auditory clue for the next line.

Common examples of rhymes we learned are “I before e, except after c...”. “Thirty days hath September.....,” and “Columbus sailed the ocean blue....”

Visual Mnemonics:

Most students are visual learners. Connecting a visual image to something you are trying to remember is a very powerful mnemonic tool. For example, in geography it is very easy to remember how to locate “Italy” on a map or globe. Why? Because we were taught that Italy is shaped like a boot. Vocabulary Cartoons uses humorous and/or bizarre cartoons. The more bizarre a visual image the easier it is to remember.

Teaching to Both Hemispheres: Vocabulary Cartoons teaches vocabulary words by involving students verbally and visually. The text uses words and provides a visual stimulus. When the teacher introduces the word an auditory stimulus is also given.

Purpose:

We have reviewed many sources and have identified a rich array of active learning strategies that we believe support the use of the vocabulary cartoons as a means to increasing, extending, and enriching the vocabulary in order to assist students in communicating more effectively and reading with more understanding. While these strategies can be used with content in any subject matter, we give examples here will provide student with a wide array of differing ways to use the Vocabulary Cartoons as part of their language arts programs. This approach will be particularly helpful for students who have had limited opportunities to develop a rich and useful vocabulary due to lack of experiences in their lives. Because students are increasingly being held to high standards in the forms of high stakes tests at almost all grade levels and most certainly at the point of graduation from high school and because these tests rely heavily on an understanding of vocabulary in many disciplines, it is essential that students be supported in identifying, understanding and remembering as many words as possible in as efficient manner as possible.

The brain works better / learning is enhance when students are asked to do the follow: (John Holt, 1967)

- * State the information in their own words
- * Give examples of it
- * Recognize it in various guises and circumstances
- * See connections between it and other facts and ideas.
- * Make use of it in various ways.
- * State its opposite or converse.

“In brain-based learning, educators see learners as active participants in the learning process. The teacher is not the deliverer of knowledge, but the facilitator and intelligent guide who engages student interest in learning” (Caine & Caine, 1997, p.87).

When the brain is passive, learning is greatly reduced. We can turn the brain on by involving students actively as they learn and practice new material. Without practice, the brain doesn't store or save what it has been presented. Learning doesn't happen in one-shot doses. It takes several exposures and several opportunities to practice in order for learning to move into long-term storage.

Lesson Planning: The Old Model: From Teacher's Perspective
Plan Content to Be Taught
Today's Model: From Learner's Point of View
Plan How It Can Best Be Learned
(Eric Jensen, Super Teaching, 1995 p.81)

STRATEGIES

The following strategies have been selected from a variety of sources to support the teacher in providing active, hands-on situations for students to further understanding of the vocabulary words presented in *Vocabulary Cartoons*.

These are strategies that are useful in introducing the Vocabulary Cartoon approach to students by involving them in interesting and personally relevant tasks related to the use of the cartoons as content. These strategies have been drawn from the references listed below. Each strategy has been modified to use Vocabulary Cartoons as the content basis.

Strategy #1: Pair-Share

- Divide class into pairs.
- Select five words from the book and list them on the board.
- Ask each pair to discuss their present understanding of the meaning of the word to their partner. Assure them it is all right to guess or to indicate that the word has no meaning for them at this time.
- Direct the students to the selected words in Vocabulary Cartoons.
- Each pair writes one additional sentence for each of the five words.
- Each pair joins another pair and shares additional sentences generated.

Strategy #2: Cooperative Groups: (3 or 4 students)

- Select 5 sets of 5 words from Vocabulary Cartoon.
- Assign small cooperative groups to each set of words.
- Ask each group to write a story using all five words appropriately.
- Each group can illustrate their story and present it to the class.

Strategy #3: Poster Session: (Individual or pair activity)

- Ask student(s) to select or assign to student(s) three vocabulary words.
- Ask each student(s) to review the words in the book.
- Ask each student(s) to complete a poster illustrating the three words. The poster display should be self explanatory depicting the use of the words in an illustration of the appropriate use of the word.

Strategy #4: Role Plays: (Small Cooperative Groups)

- Assign students a set of words.
 - Ask students to locate the words assigned in the book and review them.
 - Form small groups
 - Ask each group to prepare a small role play which uses the words assigned.
- Ex: Burden, Scurry, Culprit ,Detain can be combined into a fun role play.

Strategy #5: Rotating Pairs

- Assign several words to pairs of students.
- Ask the pairs to locate the words and review them in the book.
- Then ask them to write one or more sentences using the words correctly.
- Then ask pairs to rotate to share their original sentences and give each other feedback on the correctness of their usage.

Strategy #6: Whip Around, Pass Option

- Ask students to complete the tasks in the text.
- Ask a group of students to take a turn defining one of the vocabulary words.
- Whip around the circle or around the group giving each student a word.
- It should be shared with the students that a pass is a respected option.

Strategy #7: Vocabulary Review: Guided Practice

- After students have been exposed to and studied several sets of the vocabulary definitions, review the material by having students write definitions as teacher calls out words.
- Give the correct definition after students have a minute or two to write.
- This provides them with immediate feedback and guided practice before further testing.

Strategy #8: The Firing Line: A Drill and Practice

- After students have studied the vocabulary words assigned, divide the group into two.
- Arrange chairs in two facing rows.
- Give each student the assigned words on a card.
- Each student is to ask the student in the opposite row to give a definition for each word as quickly as possible.

Strategy #9: Index Card Match

- On separate index cards list the words that have been assigned or studied.
- On separate cards, write the definitions.
- Mix and cards and shuffle them several times.
- Hand out one card to each student and explain that this is a matching exercise. Some students have the vocabulary words and some students have the definitions.
- Ask students to find their matching card.
- When a match is formed, ask the matching students to find seats together.

Strategy #10: Numbered Heads Together

- Students number off 1 through 4.
- Teacher distributes 10 words to each group.
- Students put their heads together to agree upon and write a definition for each word.
- Teacher calls a number and asks that group to define one of the words assigned.
- Teacher rotates around the group until all words have been defined.

Strategy #11: Think, Pair, Share

- Students listen while teacher calls out a word and gives a definition for a word.
- Students are given time to think of the answer or to write down the answer.
- Students turn to a partner and discuss their responses.

Strategy #12: Making Predictions: Comprehension is affected by anticipation.

- Teacher distributes a list of vocabulary words not as yet studied by the students.
- Students write down what they believe the word means.
- Students compare their responses with two or three others.
- Teacher directs the students to the words in Vocabulary Cartoons and asks students to check their responses with the ones in the book.

Strategy # 13: Creating Personal Vocabulary Cartoon Books

- Students can be asked to develop their own vocabulary booklets.
- Students can select words from other sources (social studies, language arts, math, science, etc.) and develop their own cartoon and/or illustrations for the words as well as a definition.
- This strategy can respond to the need to differentiation of curriculum and instruction as students can be asked to pick their own demon words or other words of interest to them in their various content areas.

Strategy #14: Individual Goal Setting

- Ask students to generate their own goals for their involvement in Vocabulary Cartoons Activities.
- Goals are best for students when:
 - 1) created by the learner,
 - 2) concrete and specific,
 - 3) due on a specific date,
 - 4) self-assessed often, and
 - 5) re-adjusted periodically. (Jensen, 1995)

Strategy #15: Insuring Greater Memory and Recall

- Vocabulary Cartoons provides a humorous and interesting approach to helping student remember definitions of important words. By using the following, students can be helped to recall learned material:
 - * Attach a strong emotion to the activity
 - * Repeat it within 10 minutes, then 48 hours and then 7 days
 - * Give student or let them make a concrete reminder
 - * Act it out in a fun role play

Strategy # 16: Outcome Sentences

- Thinking is the pathway to meaningful learning. Students need to be encouraged to think about their learning - metacognition.
- Outcome sentences provide a strategy that encourages them to thinking back and search for personal meanings for themselves.
- After the completion of a learning activity, ask the students to complete one of the following stem sentences: I learned... I re-learner... I was surprised....
- Students can be asked to share their ideas using the whip around-pass option.

Strategy #17: Applying Bloom's Taxonomy to Selected Vocabulary Cartoons

- Ask students to indicate their understanding of _____ (selected word) at each level of the taxonomy. Example: **WHIMSICAL**
 - Knowledge Level:** What is the definition of whimsical
 - Comprehension Level:** Explain the meaning of whimsical in your own words.
 - Application Level:** Use whimsical in a sentence.
 - Analysis Level:** How many words can you find in the whimsical?
 - Synthesis Level:** Create a short story about a whimsical character and a character who has none of the characteristics of whimsy. Be sure your characters displays the attributes of someone who is 'whimsical' and one who is not. Review your definition of whimsical.
 - Evaluation Level:** Which of the two characters you developed would you prefer to have as a friend. (NOTE) This may be a reach. Applying Bloom's taxonomy is easier on content with a larger conceptual scope. I have tried to use each level but it may be that providing a few choices for students that reach beyond the knowledge and comprehension level would be helpful.

Strategy #18: Create Your Own Vocabulary Cartoon

- After the class has become familiar with Vocabulary Cartoons and understands how mnemonics work, break the class into groups of 3 to 5 students per group.
- Hand each group a list of ten words they have no yet studied along with their definitions. The words can come from Vocabulary Cartoons or another source.
- Instruct each group to pick one word from their list and construct their own Vocabulary Cartoon with the following parameters:
 - 1) Create a “Link Word” which is a rhyming word or phrase.
 - 2) Draw a picture/cartoon which combine the vocabulary word and link word.
 - 3) Write a caption to the picture/cartoon with the vocabulary word and link word.
- After all groups have completed their Vocabulary Cartoon or after a given period of time, have each group present it to the class.

Strategy #19: Extra Credit: Vocabulary Cartoon Clippings

- Have students cut out clippings from a newspaper, magazine, etc. of any article which contains any of the vocabulary words that were previously assigned.
- Ask the student to attach a copy of the Vocabulary Cartoon to the article.

Strategy #20: Extra Credit: Personalized Vocabulary Cartoon Notebook

- Ask students to create their own Vocabulary Cartoons (see strategy #18) for any word that they do not know the meaning of come across in any of in their assigned readings or casual readings.
- The cartoons can be kept in a notebook.