

WORKING WITH A TEXT APPROPRIATE FOR STUDENTS IN KINDERGARTEN–GRADE 3

For developing vocabulary instruction for primary grades students, we use a short folktale, *The Tailor*, which can be used as a read-aloud for kindergarten and first-grade students or as a story that late second- and third-grade students read on their own.

Selecting Tier Two Words

Engage

Read the story and mark any Tier Two words that you think are candidates for after-reading robust instruction. We begin by mentioning that this short story has few Tier Two words from which to choose. But we managed to identify four candidates.

The Tailor

A folk tale retold by Ronette Killcrece Blake

Once upon a time, many, many years ago, there lived a poor, clever tailor. The tailor made beautiful clothing for all the townspeople. He worked hard every day, and lived quite simply. He was very frugal and never bought cloth to make something for himself.

One morning as he was unlocking his tailor shop door he saw a brown paper sack sitting at his stoop, with a small card attached. “This is for you,” the note said. “Sincerely, A dear friend”

“Who could have left this?” the old man whispered to himself. He took the sack in between his wrinkled hands, and carefully untied the white string keeping the paper together. The tailor could not believe what he saw. A fine piece of red and gold cloth fell out. “What a fine piece of cloth!” he shouted. “I can’t believe that someone would give me this beautiful cloth. I will make a fine coat out of this.”

He measured, he figured, he cut, and he sewed. When he was done, he had a splendid new coat. He loved his coat very much, so he wore it every day. Through wind, and rain, and snow, and sleet, he wore his splendid coat. He wore it so much, that it was soon worn out.

Actually, it was not exactly all worn out. The tailor examined the coat carefully and saw that there were a few pieces that were not worn out. “This is still a fine piece of cloth!” he said. “I will make a fine pair of pants out of this.” He measured, he figured, he cut, and he sewed. When he was done he had a splendid new pair of pants. He loved these pants very much, so he wore them every day. Through wind, and rain, and snow, and sleet, he wore these splendid pants. He wore them so much, that they were soon worn out.

Actually, they were not exactly all worn out. The tailor examined the pants care-

fully, and saw that there were a few pieces that were not worn out. “This is still a fine piece of cloth! I will make a fine hat out of this.” He measured, he figured, he cut, and he sewed. When he was done he had a splendid new hat. He loved this hat very much, so he wore it every day. Through wind, and rain, and snow, and sleet, he wore this splendid hat. He wore it so much, that it was soon worn out.

Actually, it was not exactly all worn out. The tailor examined the hat carefully, and saw that there were a few pieces that were not worn out. “This is still a fine piece of cloth!” he said. “I will make a fine button out of this.” He measured, he figured, he cut, and he sewed. When he was done he had a splendid new button. He loved this button very much, so he wore it every day. Through wind, and rain, and snow, and sleet, he wore his splendid button. He wore it so much, that it was soon worn out.

The tailor looked at the button, and he saw that the fine button was completely worn out. What was he to do?

He was a very clever tailor. So he made the button into . . . a story! It was a splendid story. He told it every day. And the story never, ever, wore out.

Compare

What words did you select? We identified *clever*, *frugal*, *splendid*, and *examined*.

Consider and Reflect

Another word we imagine you might have selected is *exclaimed*. We thought about selecting it too, but decided that it is heard so often in literature that it probably is implicitly understood. On the other hand, precisely because it is found in literature and we can imagine children using it in their writing, if it were directly dealt with, it might be a good word to use. The options then are to include *exclaimed*, exclude *exclaimed*, or exchange it for one of the other four words. Thinking about these options is quite useful because it raises issues about what is important in relation to what can get done.

Perhaps you considered the words *fine* and *measured*. We think that most primary-grade students have heard *fine* rather often and at least associate it with something positive. They well may not know that a characteristic of a “fine piece of cloth” may be delicacy. But that kind of enlargement of the basic idea that something that is *fine* is positive will occur over time without attention being brought to it. In the case of *measured*, again young children know that *measure* has something to do with size. The details of measurement will be a focus in mathematics.

So that we can all go ahead on the same page, so to speak, let’s assume that we will work with the words *clever*, *frugal*, *splendid*, and *examined* from the text. Although four words is a reasonable number of words to target for robust instruction for young children, it is also the case that we have evidence that four words is not an upper limit for young children (Beck & McKeown, 2007). Just for the sake of illustra-

tion, let's say that we want six words—so that makes us two words short. In this case, we move to identifying “words about the story,” our notion about labeling events and ideas in a text with Tier Two words that are not in the story (see Chapter 4, p. 41).

Selecting Words about the Story

Engage

Try to come up with two other words that are not in the story but that describe some aspect of the story. *The Tailor* is a sparse story, but there's still enough content for which to develop some labels. For this story you might want to think of interesting words to describe the major event, the nature of the tailor, or the tailor's reaction to something. We find that sometimes when teachers try this at first they tend to simply look for a single word in the story and come up with a synonym for it rather than thinking more broadly about some story idea. Toward spurring thinking for identifying good words about a story, we offer the following hints:

- Think in terms of looking for a concept or something that happened in the story that could be labeled rather than looking for a synonym for a word in the story. For instance, the word *material*, which is a synonym for *cloth*, would not be the best choice as far as a good Tier Two word with mileage.
- To prompt thinking about something within the story that can be labeled with a Tier Two word, we've found it useful to think about categories such as:
 - traits of a character
 - reactions to events
 - mood or setting
 - characterization of an event
 - interaction of characters
 - consequences of an event

Compare

What words did you come up with? Two ideas that came to us were that the tailor works very hard all the time and that the cloth could be used for many purposes. Thus, the two words about the story that we chose were *industrious* and *versatile*.

Consider and Reflect

You might have considered using the word *mystery* to describe the part where the tailor finds the cloth, or *creative* to describe the tailor's ability to use the cloth. *Mystery* has potential, but we would hesitate to use it because it could take the children down a garden path thinking about who left the cloth, when the core of the story is the idea

that a story lasts forever. We would not use *creative* as it is close to *clever*. The distinctions between the two might be brought in after students knew one of the words well.

By the way, we particularly like *industrious* as it reminded us of when we were observing a first-grade teacher who told her class that “Jerome,” who was hard at work at his desk, “was being industrious.” The word took hold, and the teacher reported that over the next few days children would ask her whether she thought they were industrious and would describe someone as being industrious. The teacher then asked them to find someone in their neighborhood who was being industrious. Many reported having seen industrious people paving a street.

As for *versatile*, the multiple uses of the cloth allows its use. *Versatile* is a word with breadth of utility: there can be versatile things and versatile people.

So that all of us can stay together, we will use *clever*, *frugal*, *splendid*, *examined*, *industrious*, and *versatile* as our target words, acknowledging that someone else might have a somewhat different set.