

TEACHING ROBUST VOCABULARY

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Transcript

I am Linda Kucan from the University of Pittsburgh and with my colleagues Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown, we've co-authored two books about vocabulary—one, *Bringing Words to Life*, and the other, *Creating Robust Vocabulary*.

The words that are chosen for children in kindergarten and grade one are often words that are not important because of their meaning. They are important because they teach children something about how words work. So, some of the words that are chosen for a first-grade story might include words like “time” or “fine.” They are important because they have a spelling pattern. Other kinds of words that might be suggested for teaching children are words like “said” or “about” or “there.” These words don't have a regular phonics pattern or spelling pattern but they are high-frequency site words that children need to learn.

The words that we chose to teach in MARTHA SPEAKS are words that are important because of their meanings. Words that children are not familiar with or do not encounter usually in conversation. In one episode of Martha, children learn the words, antique, and valuable, profit. Words like that, we call tier two words.

Research has shown that kindergartners and first graders are quite capable of learning tier two words. It's important to note that they are learning these words as part of their oral vocabulary development.

MARTHA SPEAKS does a great job of introducing children to tier two words. First of all, a good explanation of the word's meaning is always provided.

In one story, Martha talks about herself as being exceptional. Martha pauses and says, “Exceptional. That means different from the ordinary.” Later in that episode, Skits is described as meeting exceptional people. They are exceptionally nice because they give him pats and treats. Even later in that episode, a cat is described as exceptionally bad and nasty. So, children know that exceptional means different from the ordinary, that it can be used to describe positive and negative situations, and they've been able to hear and listen to that word being used multiple times in one little episode. Later, that word will appear in subsequent episodes so children across the programming for a particular season will hear that word many times.

This show is really intended for children in pre-school, kindergarten, and grade one. And the words that we have selected for these children to learn are quite sophisticated. And some people have asked us, “Is it really possible for children to learn these words? Are these words important for them to learn?” And our resounding answer is, these are exactly the kinds of words that children need to learn.

We're word people and we believe strongly that young children can learn sophisticated words and that this will help them develop not only their oral language, but when it comes time to read, they will recognize these words in print.



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