

Wise Words

Making Meaning, Building Vocabulary

Tools		
<i>Kit software:</i> Get A Clue; mPOWER	<i>Other:</i> Computers; the Internet; AppleWorks; EdView	<i>Optional:</i> A digital camcorder; iMovie; Inspiration

Project Duration

Open

Introduction

The English language is rich with words, each offering a specific shade of meaning. The more of these words students know, the better and more precisely they can express themselves, and the more readily they can understand others' speech and writing. How can students help each other build their vocabularies? How can we instill in students a lifelong love of words?

Project Overview

In this ongoing, low-intensity project, students learn new words with Get A Clue during otherwise unscheduled class time and collect unfamiliar words from their reading outside of class. All these words are added to a class database that includes the words and their definitions, derivations, synonyms, antonyms, and related forms. The database continues to grow throughout the quarter, semester, or year; students then work in groups to create multimedia presentations about the words in specific segments of the class database.

Phase 1: Learning words with Get A Clue

During appropriate times (study time, after class, in between other tasks), individuals or pairs complete lessons in Get A Clue, software which helps students build their vocabulary through inductive reasoning. After each session, students print the review sheets for the words they have investigated. Then they open the class' "Wise Words Database" (see the "Wise Words Database Template" on the kit Web site) and check to see if those words are in the database. They enter each new word, along with its part of speech, derivation, definition, antonyms, synonyms, and related forms. They also use the word in a sentence from which the word's meaning can be inferred.

Phase 2: Building the database

Throughout the quarter, semester, or year, students collect unfamiliar words from their school or personal reading. Using available library resources or the Internet (see the Resources section), students discover the definition and derivation of each word, find synonyms, antonyms, and related forms, and write a sentence using the word. Then, they open the “Wise Words Database” and add each new word and its information.

Phase 3: Creating presentations

When the “Wise Words Database” has grown to a sufficient size, divide the class into groups of three or four, and assign each group an equal portion of the words in the database. Then charge each group with the following task: Create an mPOWER presentation for the class that will permanently integrate at least 20 words from the group’s word list into the vocabularies of each student in the class. The mPOWER slides can include images (retrieved from the Internet or created with AppleWorks drawing or painting tools), sounds (recorded in mPOWER), and desktop movies (created with a digital camcorder and iMovie); the presentations overall may employ humor, drama, music, audience interactivity, creative writing, and multimedia, and should include narration by the group.

When the presentations are complete, invite groups to take turns delivering them to the class.

Technical and Facilitation Tips

Facilitation Tips: Phase 1

- The ongoing nature of this project makes it possible to carry it out with only a single computer. This computer can host both the Get A Clue application and the “Wise Words Database.” If more computers are available, they can host additional Get A Clue applications (but the database should remain on a single computer).
- Get A Clue includes 15 separate “Series,” each encompassing 20 words. The Series are divided into five categories: Roots and Prefixes, Strange and Unusual Words, Words Commonly Confused, Mythical and Historical Allusions, and Foreign Words. In each category, the series are at three levels. Students will profit from any approach to choosing series and categories, even if it is haphazard, but you may want to establish more formal guidelines.
- Get A Clue keeps track of each student’s progress. A student can complete any number of lessons (words) in a level, and then return to complete the others later.
- Each printed Get A Clue review sheet provides students with the derivation of the word, as well as multiple hints that together can be used to construct a definition. The hints may also suggest synonyms. Otherwise, students must do their own thinking, brainstorming, and additional research to fill in all the fields of the database record. For formal definitions, students can consult a dictionary, which will also provide some related forms. A thesaurus can be used to find synonyms and antonyms.

- Communicate to students that the “Wise Words Database” is a cooperative class project, and that all students are expected to contribute to making it grow and refining its contents. All students are also responsible for maintaining the accuracy of all the records, no matter who they are created by.
- When students discover that a word is already in the database, they can use this opportunity to become even more familiar with the word. They can review the synonyms and antonyms listed, evaluating how close the meanings are to the main word, and they can review the related forms of the word, perhaps even adding some the previous student or students did not think of.
- Students’ time is best spent entering entirely new words, rather than other forms of existing words. For example, if “allocate” is in the database, the noun form, “allocation” need not be entered separately. If students need to decide which form of a word to use, a good general rule is to give priority to the verb form.
- Suggestions for how to add potentially problematic words to the database:
 - *Words that are simultaneously verbs and nouns.* For such words, students can create two separate database records, one for the noun form, and one for the verb form.
 - *Words with two or more very different meanings.* Each meaning should have its own record in the database. This will make it easier to supply meaningful synonyms and antonyms, and to write sentences using the different meanings of the word.
 - *Words with two or more similar meanings.* Students should use their best judgment: Are the meanings different enough to justify separate database records?
- In the AppleWorks database, the Find function (choose Find from the Layout menu) can be used for a variety of purposes. For example, students can enter a Latin root into the Derivation field to find all the words derived from that root.
- If a student or students find a database record that includes information they believe is inaccurate, they can consult with the creator of the record and decide together—with the assistance of the teacher or an authoritative source—whether the record should be changed, and if so, how.

Tech Tips: Phase 1

- To print a review sheet for each word studied during a session with Get A Clue:
 - 1** From the Score Card screen, click Review Words.
 - 2** Select a word from the list on the left.
 - 3** Click Print.
- To print words from a level or series different from the one just completed, click the Series name (to the left of the red triangle). This opens a menu that lists all of the series and levels a student has worked on. Selecting one of these provides access to the words in that series and level.
- Get A Clue is designed for students to work with individually. Each student logs in to begin a session, and the software keeps track of each student’s progress. It is possible, however, for a pair of students to log in (they can type both their names) and complete lessons together.

- To check the AppleWorks database to see if a word is entered or not, follow these steps:
 - 1 With Browse or List chosen from the Layout menu, choose Show All Records from the Organize menu.
 - 2 Choose Sort Records from the Organize menu and click OK.
 - 3 Scroll through the records, which are listed alphabetically.
- An alternative method of checking the database to see if a word exists (or to find a word), is to use the Find function:
 - 1 Choose Find from the Layout menu.
 - 2 Type the word in the Word field.
 - 3 Click the Find button (or press the Return key). All the records containing the word that was typed are displayed (for this reason, it is best to type all or most of the letters of the word to be located).
- To create a new record in the database (that is, to add a new word):
 - 1 Choose New Record from the Edit menu.
 - 2 Enter the appropriate information in the fields of the record, using the Tab key or the mouse to move between fields.

Facilitation Tips: Phase 2

- You can establish a certain expectation for the number of new words each student should bring in per week or per quarter.

Tech Tips: Phase 2

- See the Tech Tips for Phase 1 for tips related to managing the “Wise Words Database.”

Facilitation Tips: Phase 3

- Before groups begin creating mPOWER slides, they may want to create storyboards for their slideshows. The “Storyboard Card Template” and the “Storyboard Example” (located on the kit Web site) may be helpful for this purpose.
- The content of each mPOWER slide can be left open to allow room for student creativity. At minimum, however, slides should include examples of how the word is used, as well as a definition and/or synonyms.
- Encourage groups to include in their presentations some kind of audience interaction. A group, for example, might ask for examples of how the word could be used in a sentence.
- A digital camcorder and iMovie can be combined to create compelling desktop movies to place on the mPOWER slides. For example, students can record a person acting out the action of a verb. In addition, a group could create a desktop movie of a skit that features dialogue made up mostly of words from the group’s list, and then they could place this movie on a slide that concludes the presentation.
- The presentations can be completed in one to three class sessions, depending on how elaborate groups want to make their presentations. For all the groups to deliver their presentations, you will probably need two class sessions.

Tech Tips: Phase 3

- In mPOWER, students can write speaker notes to go with each slide. When these notes are printed, they include a thumbnail view of the slide, and can therefore serve as a helpful script for narrating a slideshow. To create speaker notes in mPOWER:
 - 1** Click the Notes button in the second row of buttons below the view window (in the Presentation menu, you will need to select the slide first).
 - 2** Type the speaker notes. The limit is 32,000 characters.
 - 3** To print the notes for the current slide, click Print Notes (the notes for a slide cannot be viewed during a presentation, so printing them is advised).
- mPOWER can be used to record sounds, which can be placed on slides to help illustrate a word's meaning. To record sounds with mPOWER:
 - 1** From the mPOWER menu, choose Preferences, and then choose Components.
 - 2** Select one of the No Port items in the Port box, select Generic Audio in the Supported Components box, and click the Add button under this box.
 - 3** Select Generic Audio in the Attached Components box. Below this box, in Component Settings, click the Sound button, and then choose Source from the pop-up menu and choose the external or built-in microphone.
 - 4** Click OK and then Configure. Return to the mPOWER menu.
 - 5** Open a presentation (a one-slide presentation can be created just for this purpose). From the Slide menu, choose Audio.
 - 6** Choose Add New Audio, select the microphone source, and click OK.
 - 7** Click the Start Recording button to start recording, then press the Escape key or click the mouse button to stop recording.
 - 8** Choose a method of saving the audio file and click OK. If you save the sound on a disk, a file is created that can then be used in any presentation.
- For help using iMovie, students can visit the “Desktop Movies in Education” Web site.

Outcomes

After completing this project, students will be able to

- define or use correctly many previously unfamiliar words
- identify the meaning of a number of common Latin roots and prefixes
- examine many unfamiliar words and guess their meaning by looking at their roots and prefixes
- add, sort, search, and edit records in a database

In addition, students will have

- gained facility in guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words through a variety of techniques
- built their working vocabularies
- developed their skills in recognizing the related forms (verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs) of given words

- developed skills in written, oral, and visual communication and the organization of information
- gained confidence and skill in their abilities to work in groups and contribute to a common goal
- practiced creating and delivering a slideshow presentation
- learned skills or acquired knowledge relating to each of the state and national standards referred to in the Project Standards section

Project Standards

From the Secondary Language Arts & Social Studies Web site, you can identify select state curriculum standards and national educational technology standards that correlate to this student project. To locate these standards, go to the kit Web site and click the Curriculum button. Locate and open this student project and click the “Project Standards” button.

Assessment Suggestions

- For Phase 1, Get A Clue provides a variety of means for students to track their progress and assess their performance. The Diagnostic Exam can be completed before a student completes any lessons, and helps the student decide which level to begin with. A student can complete the Achievement Exam toward the end of the project to assess his or her overall achievement. In addition, after completing all 20 lessons (words) in a level, a student has an opportunity to take a quiz evaluating the student’s knowledge of the words in the lessons.
- Students’ work in the database can be evaluated by reviewing the records created by each student and assessing each record based on criteria related to accuracy, completeness, and clarity. (The Find function, applied to the “Record Created by” field, can be used to search for all the records created by an individual student.)
- In Phase 4, groups’ presentations can be peer-assessed by means of a rubric including items such as the following:
 - The presentation was engaging and kept my attention.
 - The presentation helped me remember the words and how they are used.
 - The presentation helped me build my vocabulary.
 - I will be able to use most of the words presented in my writing from now on.

Preparation

- Download the “Wise Words Database Template” and put it on the computer that will be used for building the database during the project.
- Review and print any of the Step-by-Step Cards that students may find helpful during this project. These include “Creating a Database With AppleWorks 6,” “Making a Presentation With mPOWER,” and “Finding Clip Art and Photographs on the Web.”
- Secure the use of a projection device for the presentations in Phase 4.

Resources

Internet

AllWords.com

<http://www.allwords.com/>

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language

<http://www.bartleby.com/61/>

Desktop Movies in Education

<http://www.apple.com/education/dv/>

Dictionary.com

<http://www.dictionary.com/>

EdView

<http://edview.apple.com>

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary and Thesaurus

<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary.htm>

Reference Resources for Writers Directory

<http://www.writerswrite.net/refsrch.cfm?search=dictionary>

Vocabulary Builder

<http://www.palosverdes.com/jesse/pvphs/www-freecollege-com-vocab.htm>

A Word A Day

<http://www.wordsmith.org/awad/>

WordOrigins.org

<http://www.wordorigins.org/home.htm>

Wordsmyth

<http://www.wordsmyth.net/>

Yourdictionary.com (with synonym dictionary)

<http://www.yourdictionary.com/>

Step-by-Step Cards

- Creating a Database With AppleWorks 6
- Finding Clip Art and Photographs on the Web
- Making a Presentation With mPOWER

Templates

- Wise Words Database Template

Additional Resources

- Storyboard Card Template
- Storyboard Example
- Multimedia Development Checklist

Prerequisite Skills

To complete this project successfully, students should be able to do the following:

- use a mouse to navigate through a multimedia application by clicking icons and links
- use AppleWorks to create new records, edit existing records, and search for specific records in a database (see the Step-by-Step Card “Creating a Database With AppleWorks 6”)
- make a multimedia slideshow presentation with mPOWER (see the Step-by-Step Card “Making a Presentation With mPOWER”)

Background Information

Here is some information you may find useful as you plan how to implement this project or introduce it to your students.

- Building one’s vocabulary is more than a matter of memorization. When students learn to reason inductively to discover the meaning of words, to recognize the common components (roots and prefixes) of many of the more difficult English language words, and to appreciate how new words help them express themselves more clearly, their vocabularies increase naturally.

Options and Extension Activities

Options

- If a projection device is not available, groups can deliver their presentations to small groups of students.
- Groups can use Inspiration to plan and storyboard their presentations in Phase 3.

Extension Activities

- Students can build a separate database of Latin and Greek roots and prefixes.
- Challenge students to write sentences, essays, letters, poems, or short stories that make use of as many of the words in the database as possible.
- Export the mPOWER presentations as HTML files, post them on the Web, and encourage family members and students from other classes to visit the site.

The Home-School Connection

- Materials that students read at home can be an excellent source of new and unfamiliar words for the “Wise Words Database.” In addition, students can enlist family members for help in coming up with synonyms, antonyms, and related forms for their words.

This Project as a Model

The core of this project—creating a database and adding to it through a school year—can be applied in several other ways. Possible subjects of databases include authors, memorable quotes, and works of literature.