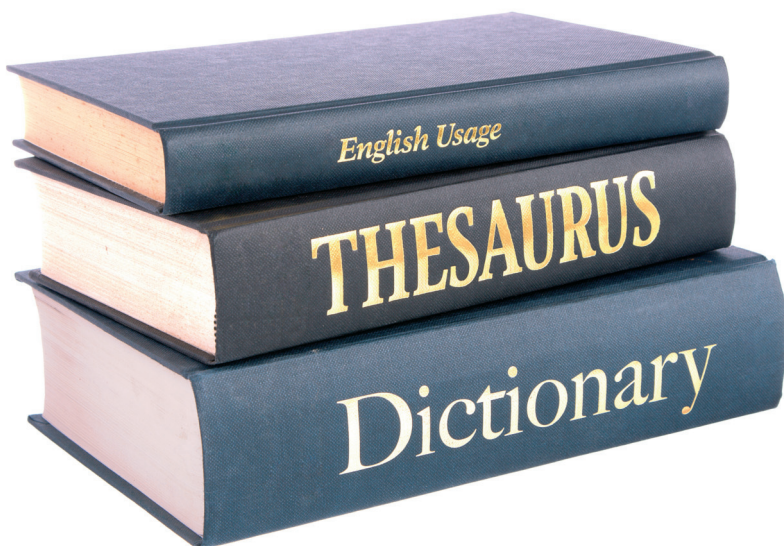


TODAY YOU WILL...

- > ACTIVELY APPRECIATE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SIMPLE AND MORE COMPLEX VOCABULARY
- > DEVELOP YOUR OWN RANGE OF VOCABULARY

ANYTHING BUT NICE

ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO USE MORE ADVENTUROUS VOCABULARY IN THEIR WRITTEN WORK, WITH THESE LEXICON-STRETCHING ACTIVITIES SUGGESTED BY **CHARLOTTE HAWKER...**

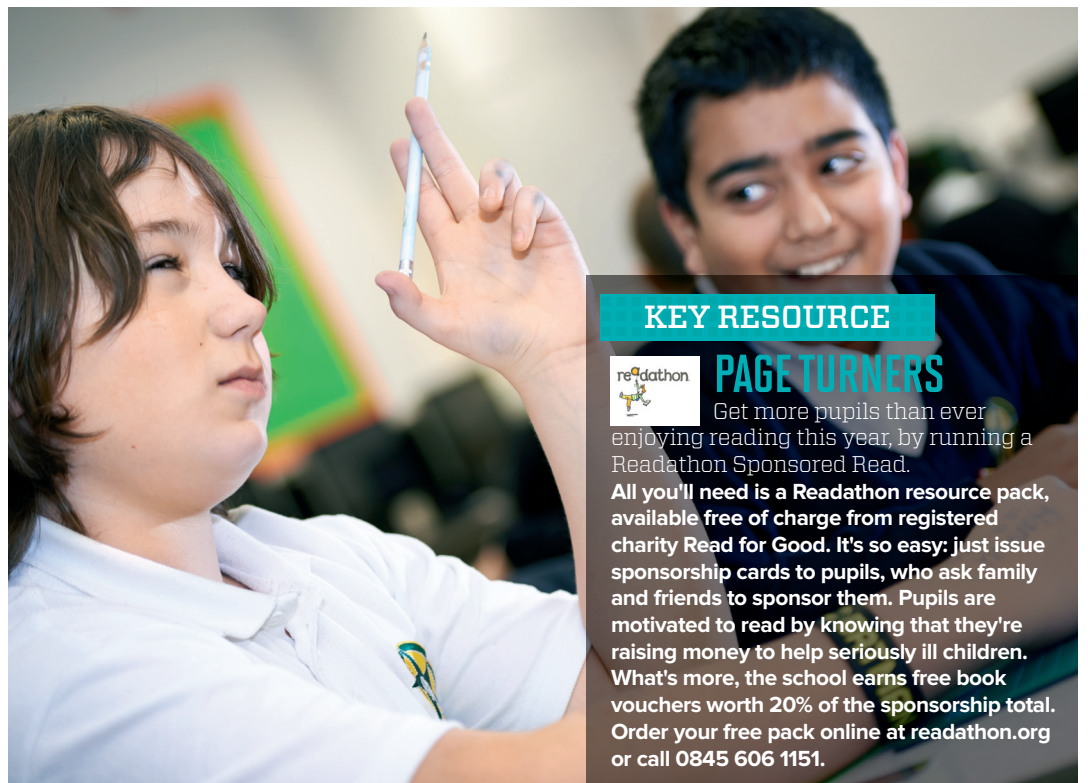


We've all experienced that moment when we sit down to mark a set of GCSE creative writing pieces of coursework, fresh cup of coffee in our hand and high expectations of the Orwellian level of vocabulary that we are about to encounter... swiftly followed by the frustrating realisation that, despite showing our students countless examples of wonderfully crafted pieces of writing, we are facing descriptions such as: "The sky was nice and blue with nice fluffy clouds." Suddenly, the coffee is nowhere near strong enough.

Having experienced this many times myself, I began to ask the question: how do I improve the breadth of vocabulary that my students have at their disposal, in order to enhance their writing? How can I ensure that learners are fully engaged in the process of self-consciously crafting their own language? Clearly, these are skills that need to be cultivated over time, however, it is the hope that the ideas for just one lesson featured in this article will provide a starting point for activities that will extend the breadth of language for our students across time, right from the start.

STARTER ACTIVITY

An engaging way to begin is to play a game like Mallet's Mallet as a class competition – although I have reworded this alliterative title to make it 'Hawker's Hammer'! I ask for one volunteer from each half of the classroom to come up to the front and stand facing each other, with me standing in the middle, 'hammer' (a rolled up piece of paper) in hand. The challenge for the players is to take a category that I give to them and, as the 'hammer' swings back and forth between them, they need to think of as many descriptive words for it as possible. Repeating a word, or failing to think of one, results in a tap from the 'hammer' and the win being awarded to the other player (you may need to check your school's safeguarding policy about the use of pretend DIY tools in the classroom...) To make this less pressured and/or for less confident classes, it could be played in groups of three around the room.



KEY RESOURCE



PAGE TURNERS

Get more pupils than ever enjoying reading this year, by running a Readathon Sponsored Read.

All you'll need is a Readathon resource pack, available free of charge from registered charity Read for Good. It's so easy: just issue sponsorship cards to pupils, who ask family and friends to sponsor them. Pupils are motivated to read by knowing that they're raising money to help seriously ill children. What's more, the school earns free book vouchers worth 20% of the sponsorship total. Order your free pack online at readathon.org or call 0845 606 1151.

MAIN ACTIVITIES

1. Encountering and evaluation

For the main part of lessons like this, I have found it really valuable to design activities that actively engage students in encountering different types of language and evaluating the successes of each example. One idea is to give students the phrases: 'some interesting words', 'a variety of words', 'powerful words' and 'sophisticated words'. Rather than starting off by simply telling the students the differences through a teacher modelled example, I have found that sticking examples of descriptions onto A3 sheets of paper and asking the students to tour around each 'station' in a carousel to evaluate the level of vocabulary in each example can really support their understanding of what each of the phrases above mean. I ask them to do this in the form of a silent debate, following these pointers:

1. Would you say that there are 'some interesting words', 'a variety of words', 'powerful words' or 'sophisticated words' used in this example?
2. Highlight examples.
3. If there are 'some interesting' words or 'a variety of words', how could you make them more 'powerful' or 'sophisticated'? (Make sure each station has a thesaurus to support students.)
4. If there are 'powerful' or 'sophisticated' words, what is the impact on the reader? Can you use any of these in your own writing? (Here, you could tailor the examples of writing to suit the purpose/audience/format that you will be asking the students to write in for their assessment.)

When the students have written their ideas at the first station, they move around to the next one to encounter a different example. Obviously, when they arrive at the 2nd, 3rd and 4th stations, there will already be other ideas written on the piece of paper from previous



groups. This is a great opportunity for students to focus on points 3 and 4 from the above pointers, whilst extending and commenting on the ideas from their peers. I find that this activity is fantastic for formative assessment as it provides time for the teacher to tour around and read what the students are writing, whilst supporting or extending where required. This is where the silent element is key, because all students are writing and responding, so you can continually intervene and extend where necessary. After completing this, students return to their own work and put some of the new ideas/vocabulary that they've learnt into action in their coursework.

2. Learning and sharing

An alternative activity, which is particularly successful with high ability students, is to give each

SUMMARY

At the end of the lesson, refer back to the original four phrases: 'some interesting words', 'a variety of words', 'powerful words' and 'sophisticated words' to structure peer or self-assessment of what students have produced. They should use different coloured pens to circle and annotate examples of the above phrases in their own or each other's work, perhaps extending or suggesting more powerful/sophisticated words if required.

student a new and challenging word on a card, with its definition. They have a couple of minutes to learn it and put it into a sentence. Then play some music for them to move around the room to – dancing is optional. When you stop the music, learners should find the nearest person to them and the pair then teach each other their new words, including how to use them in a full sentence. Start and stop the music again – when students next pair up, they should teach each other their own original word and then the new one learnt from the previous encounter. You can

INFORMATION CORNER

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Charlotte Hawker has a BA in English Literature from Royal Holloway University; she qualified as an Advanced Skills Teacher four years ago and has been teaching English for nine years. She oversees staff training along with teaching and learning groups and feels very passionate about making learning active by engaging all students through imaginative activities. She currently works at Oakgrove School, Milton Keynes (oakgrove.milton-keynes.sch.uk)

TRY THIS

PLAY 'OUTLAWED': IN GROUPS OF TWO OR MORE, THE FIRST PLAYER PICKS A LETTER FROM THE ALPHABET. THE SELECTED LETTER IS NOW 'OUTLAWED' AND CANNOT BE WITHIN ANY WORD SPOKEN DURING THE REST OF THE GAME. THE FIRST PLAYER ASKS ANY QUESTION, CAUTIOUS NOT TO USE THE OUTLAWED LETTER. THE REST OF THE PLAYERS TRY TO ANSWER THE QUESTION WITHOUT USING THE OUTLAWED LETTER. IF THIS IS DONE SUCCESSFULLY, THE NEXT PLAYER ASKS ANOTHER QUESTION. IF A PLAYER USES THE OUTLAWED LETTER, ANOTHER PLAYER YELLS OUTLAW AND THE GUILTY PLAYER IS OUT OF THE GAME. THE LAST REMAINING PLAYER WINS. RAISE THE DIFFICULTY BY OUTLAWING TWO LETTERS...

choose to do as many rounds of this as you feel relevant – I normally find that three is enough to broaden learners' ideas and introduce them to a new range of vocabulary. When they sit back down, they can share ideas with their desk partner and then start to put the new words into practice in their own coursework.

HOME LEARNING

Students could find, annotate and bring in an extract of writing that uses really impressive vocabulary and prepare to share their evaluation with the class.

You could give students a 'boring' extract of writing to improve with what they've learnt in the lesson, ready to share with their desk partner at the start of the next lesson.