

Using a Word Wall in the Secondary Classroom Best Practice Idea

Definition: A word wall is a display area in the classroom devoted strictly to high-frequency vocabulary that will be used or is being used during the course of a particular unit of study.

Background Information:

A word wall is most likely unfamiliar to most high school teachers or is something that may have been encountered in an elementary classroom. As part of a balanced literacy approach, word walls are being used in elementary classrooms as a means of promoting vocabulary growth leading ultimately to improvement in literacy. There are many reasons, based in research, for the study of vocabulary as an explicit daily activity. From building prior knowledge to providing contextualized information to simply providing students with high-frequency words that will be encountered in particular units of study, no matter what the justification or rationale, no matter what the grade level and no matter what the subject area, word walls are and extremely effective learning and teaching tools.

Pertinent Points About Word Walls:

1. Words selected must be useful to students, usable by students and frequently used in the subject area.
2. Select high-frequency words that are used in the context in which you expect the students to know them.
3. Use the same display area throughout the semester for your word wall. Students, once used to the concept, will look for the wall. Consistency is important when presenting organizational ideas to a class. Refer to the display area as the 'word wall' as some students will remember this from their elementary experience.
4. Do not overcrowd the word wall. You may want to remove words as the unit progresses or you may want to display words by unit and then remove the entire word wall when a new unit begins. Some high-frequency words may stay up during the entire course.
5. Creatively display and organize words. It seems that in secondary schools the creative displays are left to the art department. High school students like visual stimuli as much as their elementary counterparts. Creative displays that incorporate the message behind the words can be fun (time consuming, but fun).
6. Add words in manageable amounts (usually between 5 to 7 new words at a time...per week).
7. Make word wall activities a regular and predictable part of the classroom routine. Word wall activities make for natural class openers or closers. The word wall activity should be only about 5 minutes in length unless incorporated with a larger activity.
8. Use a variety of instructional activities to review words.

** I have a large bank of activities that I draw upon for the word wall. I will provide you with an example of a(n):

- Beginning of the unit activity;
- Mid unit word wall activity;
- End of unit word wall activity

Beginning of Unit Word Wall Activity

Description of Activity:

Students are organized in groups of three. 5-7 new words will have been placed on the word wall. Students will be provided with the K-W-L handout as they walk into class. They are to immediately, with their groups, complete the handout using each word for the handout. I use this time to complete my administrative

business (attendance, having students sign their absence forms, collecting assignments and ticking off the complete list or having students who have not completed the work sign the incomplete register, and etc.). After approximately 5 minutes I call the class back together to discuss the words, specifically what they know already, what they want to know and what they have learned that relates to each of the words given. This serves as a great springboard into discussion around the topic that will be the focus of the daily lesson.

Example K-W-L handout:

Word	What I Know	What I Want to Know	What I've Learned

Students are generally familiar with the K-W-L format as it is practiced at the elementary level as part of the active reading program.

Mid-unit Word Wall Activity:

Description of Activity:

Students will work with a partner to complete a word cluster activity. This is designed to have students reflect on what they have learned thus far in the unit. Students place one of the words from the word wall in the center of the cluster hand out and place connecting ideas or words that they have learned in the unit in the surrounding boxes. After the students have completed their handouts, I will select five partner pairs to present briefly the ideas that they have connected with the word from the word wall.

