Vocabulary Strategy: Most Important Word Field Guide

Task: Explore the most important word in a text and consider what the author communicates through the significance of that single word.

Instructions

1. Read the text once through as a reader. Let the words wash over you.
2. Go back and mark any words that felt: striking, jarring, surprising, arresting, on-purpose.
3. Read the text a second time, marking any additional words that jump out at you.
4. Look for any words you do not know. (These are *always* important words in a poem!) If you can't articulate a definition for a particular word, look it up!
5. Choose **ONE** most important word from this text. It can be any word (one you already know or one you just looked up!) It should be the word on which the whole poem hinges – the word without which the poem would not be the same.
6. Create an exploration of that word. Your goal: to make new discoveries about this word.
7. At the end of your exploration, synthesize and reflect: based on your exploration of this word, why is it the most important? What does knowing more about this word tell you about the text itself?

Ways to Explore a Word

Must	Might
❏ Write down a definition **in your own words using multiple meanings of the word** ❏ Include the part of speech ❏ Include sentences *from professionals* that use your word. (And cite it!) ❏ Include some kind of image.	Pronunciation (what the word sounds like) ❏ Parts of other words (roots, prefixes,suffixes) you see in this word. ❏ How frequently this word is used (Is is rarely used? Is it a frequently-used, every day word?) ❏ Synonyms and antonyms

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❏ Synthesize your new understanding of the word in the context of this text. ("This is the most important word in the text because ...")	❏ How is your word different than a synonym or fuzzynym? (For example: "Smart" and "intelligent" -- how are these words DIFFERENT?) ❏ Emotional connotation (is it a happy word? Sad word? Emotionally-neutral word?) ❏ Related words / other forms of the word ❏ Words that frequently go with this word in a sentence ❏ Situations in which you might use this word ❏ Sentences that use this word from ❏ Writing ❏ Songs ❏ Television/ Films ❏ Friends and Family ❏ Places you encounter this word (or some form of it) -- in what you read, watch, listen to, in other classes, etc. ❏ Translation of this word in another language you speak (Spanish) -- how does that enlarge your understanding of the word? ❏ Search Google News -- in what ways does the news use this word? What patterns do you see? (In other words, "The news often uses this word in articles about _____"). Skim the articles. What additional knowledge do you glean? ❏ Connections between your word and other words in your field guide ❏ Connections between your word and other words/concepts from other classes ❏ Connection to YOUR life -- when has this word been applicable in your life? When do you see an example of this word in your life?

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Go-To Resources for Word Exploration

- **Grown ups!** Ask them what they know about the word. Ask them to use the word in a sentence. Ask them situations they associate this word with.
- **Vocabulary.com** -- give the word with multiple definitions and professional pieces of writing that use the word. This will show you how frequently this word is used.
- **M-w.com** - Definition, examples, frequency
- **Niftyword.com** -- associated words, related words, roots/prefixes/suffixes
- **Lexipedia.com** -- different versions and forms of your word, synonyms, antonyms, "fuzzynyms" (words that mean *kind of* the same thing)
- **Etymonline.com** - my favorite site for understanding where a word comes from and how the meaning has developed over time.
- **WebstersDictionary1828.com** -- This is an online edition of the Webster's Dictionary from the year 1828! Use this to see how the word USED to be used (if it was even a word in 1828!) to compare it to how it is used today!

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