

***The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter—
'tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning. Mark Twain***

It seems that as soon as the last firework explodes in the sky, elementary school teachers' thoughts begin to turn towards the upcoming school year. Who will make up our *school family*? What successful practices from the previous year will I keep? Upon reflection, what do I need to change?

As classroom teachers, we know the impact a well-chosen word has upon our writing. We constantly encourage our students to add vivid vocabulary to their writing, helping to paint a picture for the reader. Although we frequently remind students to choose vocabulary carefully and post word-walls in our rooms, our instruction often seems for naught. What can we implement from the start of the school year that encourages students to be thoughtful and accountable for making interesting word choices? We have found giving students word lists to be an ineffective practice. Mini-lessons like the ones below help students have ownership and gain strategies when making vocabulary choices.

Primary Students

Verbs are an effective way to introduce vivid vocabulary to primary students. Divide a piece of chart paper into two columns. Label the first column **Animal** and the second column **Moves**. As a class, brainstorm a list of different animals. List the animals on the chart paper and discuss that each animal travels in a particular way. The verb *moves* could be used for each animal. For example: *The snake moves over the grass*. However, the word *moves* really doesn't help our reader understand the animal's movement. What better words might we use? Think of *slither*, *slinks*, *slides*, *glides*, etc. Students may act out the animal's movements. Add a vivid, appropriate verb next to each animal on the list. For example: *monkey swings*, *turtle swims*, *snake slithers*, etc. Students can later take these phrases and use them to create a complete sentence.

Intermediate Students

Each student will need an easily accessible place to house their collection of vivid vocabulary words. As the most impactful word in any sentence is the verb, begin by collecting interesting verbs using the following activity. On chart paper, write the words **walk slowly**. Give students two minutes to write as many words as they can that mean to *walk slowly*. On a sticky note, students should write their most interesting synonym for *walk slowly* and post it on the class chart. Examples might include: *amble*, *mosey*, *trudge*, *stroll*, etc. As students share these words with the class, students can add any words they would like to use to their personal lists. After you have collected the words, students should choose one synonym for *walk slowly* to use in a complete and interesting sentence. Repeat this process anytime students fall into a dull word trap or you have a few extra writing moments in class.

Other ideas can be found in the *Write Now—Right Now Writing Program*.

Visit: www.writenow-rightnow.com for more information.