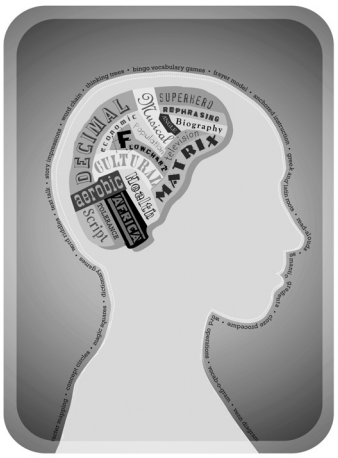

TEACHING VOCABULARY

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Teacher Topic 1

Why Be Concerned About Vocabulary?

Did you know that . . .

- Knowledge of vocabulary is one of the best predictors of success in *all* school subjects?
- Some three-year-olds enter preschool knowing three times as many words as their less-advantaged peers?
- Some six-year-olds have heard many thousands of words more than their peers by the time they enter 1st grade?
- The more words you know, the easier it is to learn new words because you have more "pegs" to hang the new words on?
- The percentage of English language learners has grown 105 percent since 1991 while the overall school population has grown 12 percent?

All these factors have been pointed to as possible reasons for the "vocabulary gap" many teachers and administrators see in their schools. The good news is that teachers can do something about this gap. A study of students from low-literacy homes found that as many as 80 percent of those students could become grade-level readers if they are placed in literacy-rich classrooms. In these literacy-rich classrooms, students

- Talk and listen, share ideas, argue, discuss, and generally are heavily engaged in language.

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- Listen to an adult reading things to them that they could not read themselves. Listening to book language is an important learning experience.
- Read—and read widely. Book language is more complicated than speech and lets students "in" on the secrets of academic language. Even a 1st grade-level book has more difficult vocabulary in it than college-educated parents use in general conversation. Wide reading, seeing those words over and over in many different contexts, "cements" those new words and makes those words their own.
- Play and have fun with language. Word games, contests, riddles, and teacher teasers all can engage students with vocabulary. Motivated students learn more.

In the Teacher Topics to follow, we will try to share ideas for making your classrooms and schools literacy rich and word rich so you can support your students in learning new words.

For Reading and Discussion

- Blachowicz, C., & Fisher, P. (2004). Keep the "fun" in fundamental: Encouraging word awareness and incidental word learning in the classroom through word play. In J. F. Baumann & E. J. Kame'enui (Eds.), *Vocabulary instruction: Research to practice* (pp. 210–238). New York: Guilford.
  Explains the research base and strategies for including word play in the curriculum.

- Thaler, M. (1983). Reading, writing and riddling. *Learning, 11*(9), 58–59.
  A "classic" from the author of many riddle and joke books for students.

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Concept Ladder

WHAT? A hierarchical categorization activity

- ☐ Primary school
- ☑ Elementary school
- ☑ Middle school
- ☑ High school
- ☑ Reading and language arts
- ☑ Social studies
- ☑ Science
- ☐ Math

Strategies for Independent Word Learners Supported by This Tool . . .

- ☑ 1. Recognizing the need to know
- ☑ 2. Connecting to background knowledge
- ☐ 3. Using context
- ☐ 4. Using word structure
- ☐ 5. Using references
- ☑ 6. Using word relationships
- ☐ 7. Using word origins
- ☑ 8. Using visualization and personalization
- ☑ 9. Expanding word knowledge
- ☐ 10. Using word play

WHY? To elaborate on a key term or concept from a unit of study that has been previously taught and discussed

WHEN? Use a Concept Ladder as an after-reading vocabulary tool.

HOW?

- Begin with the word in the center of the ladder.
- Have students work on the upper and lower parts of the graphic.
- Encourage students to use their textbooks, background knowledge, or any combination of other resource materials.
- Use the concept ladders to ask the questions
  1. What is it a kind of? What are the kinds of it?
  2. What is it a part of? What are the parts of it?
  3. What is it a product or result of? What are the products or results of it?
- Engage students in discussion when certain stages of the ladder cannot be completed.

TIPS AND MODIFICATIONS

- Model concept ladders in a whole group setting with concepts familiar to the students.
- Use concept ladders for small group cooperative work, partner work, or independent work.
- Differentiate instruction by providing a list of possible answers for students that need extra support.
- Consider using concept ladders as a form of authentic assessment once students are comfortable with the structure.

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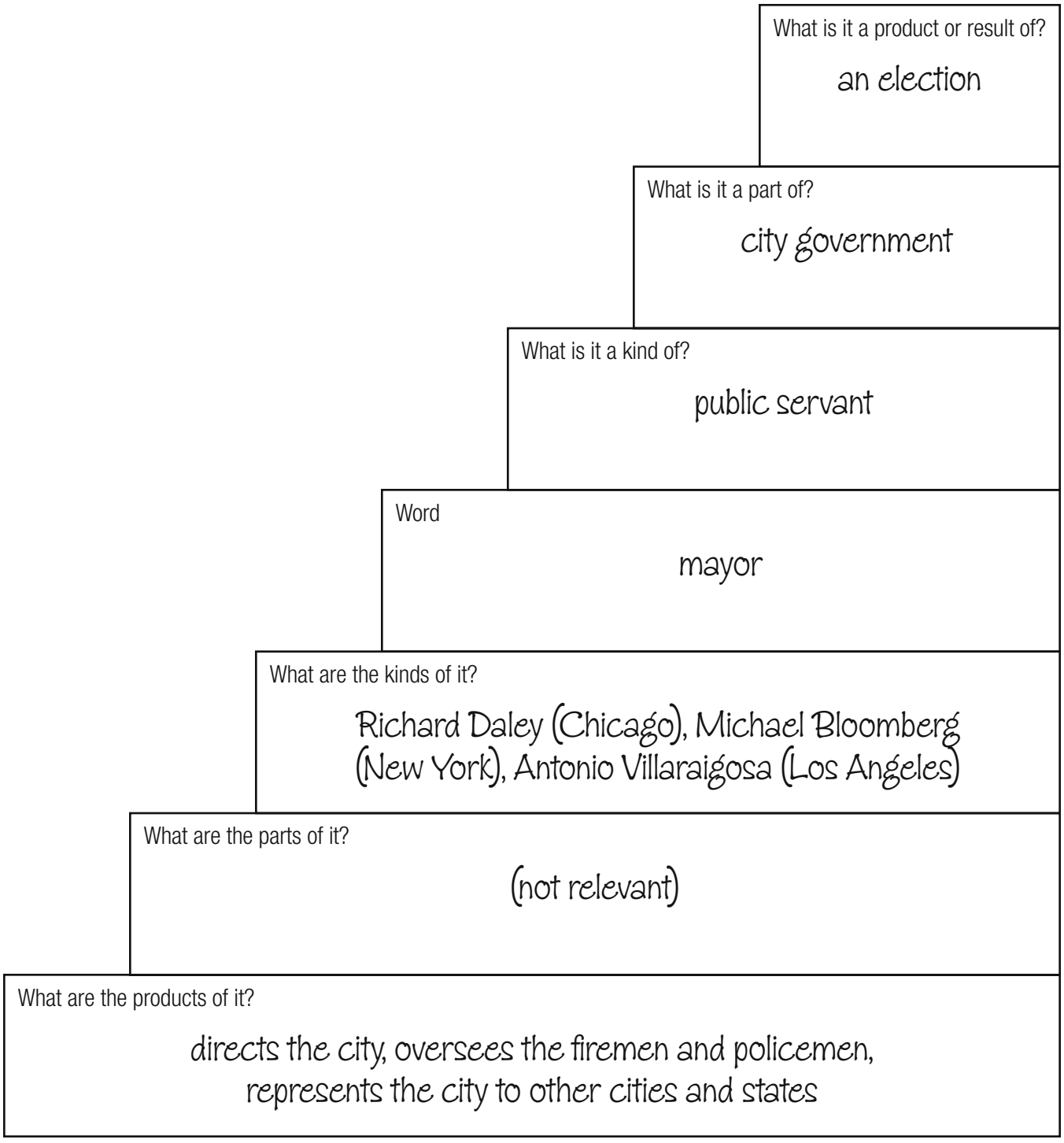
Concept Ladder



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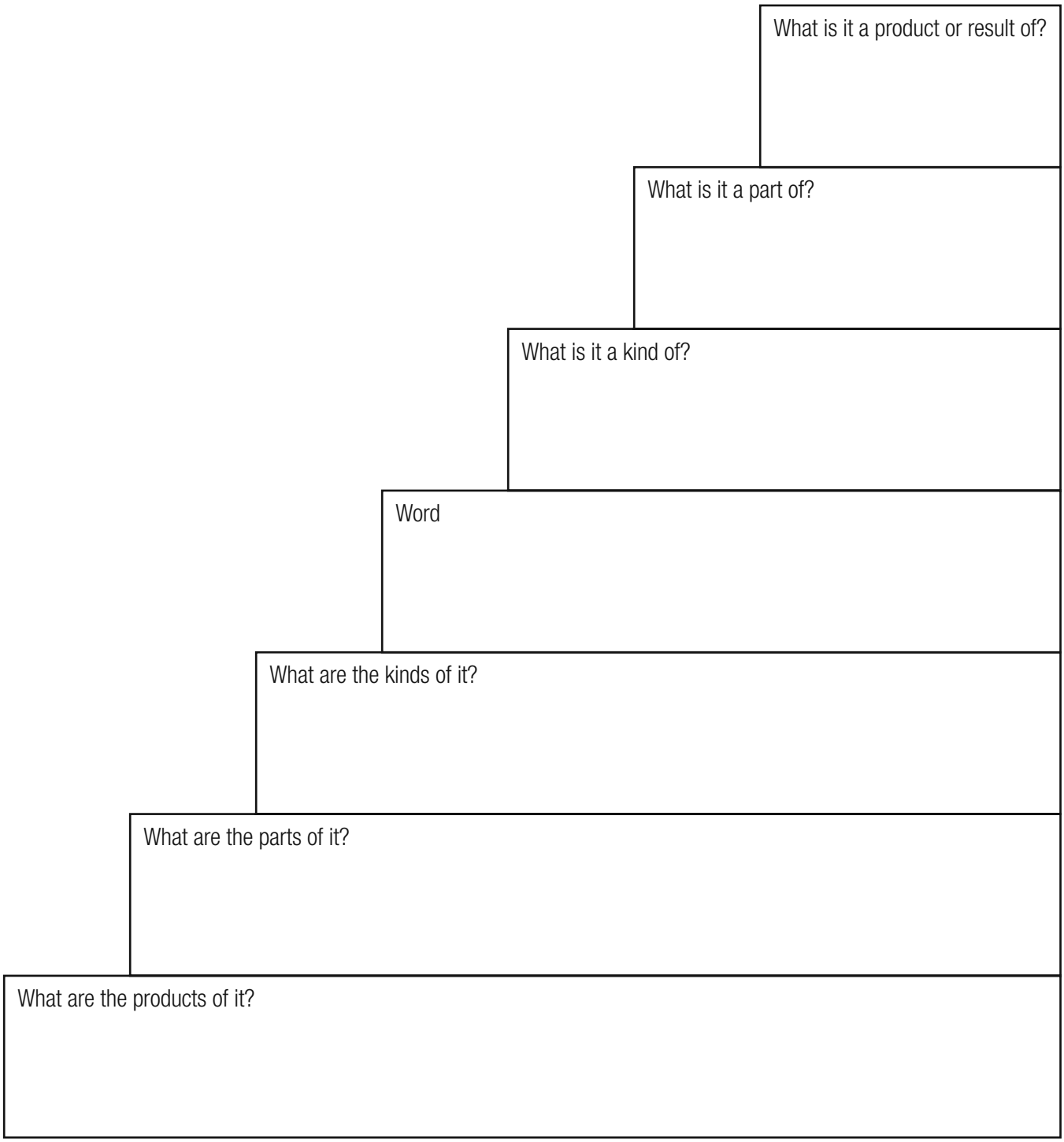
Concept Ladder



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Verbal and Visual Word Association

WHAT? A tool for independently learning vocabulary

- ☐ Primary school
- ☑ Elementary school
- ☑ Middle school
- ☑ High school
- ☑ Reading and language arts
- ☑ Social studies
- ☑ Science
- ☑ Math

Strategies for Independent Word Learners Supported by This Tool . . .

- ☑ 1. Recognizing the need to know
- ☑ 2. Connecting to background knowledge
- ☐ 3. Using context
- ☐ 4. Using word structure
- ☑ 5. Using references
- ☐ 6. Using word relationships
- ☐ 7. Using word origins
- ☑ 8. Using visualization and personalization
- ☑ 9. Expanding word knowledge
- ☐ 10. Using word play

WHY? To enable students to learn and remember language arts and content area vocabulary

WHEN? Use Verbal and Visual Word Association during reading as words are encountered and after reading as a study guide tool.

HOW?

- Provide students with a Verbal and Visual Word Association organizer.
- Have students
  - Place the word to be learned in the top left-hand box.
  - Place the definition, derived from context or from a reference book, in the bottom left-hand box.
  - Place a personal association with the word in the upper right-hand box.
  - Place an antonym or nonexample in the bottom right-hand box.
- Allow students opportunities to work independently, in pairs, or in small groups to practice words.

TIPS AND MODIFICATIONS

- Model how to select personal associations and nonexamples to the whole class to scaffold the process.
- Have second-language learners omit the nonexample and, instead, place a visual association in the top right-hand box and the personal association in the bottom right-hand box.
- This tool works best with nouns and descriptive adjectives.

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Verbal and Visual Word Association

Language Arts Example

Word	**Personal association**
egregious	bullying
Definition	**Nonexample or antonym**
conspicuously bad or offensive	acts of kindness

Social Studies Example

Word	**Personal association**
consumer	shopping
Definition	**Nonexample or antonym**
a person who buys and uses goods or services	babysitting

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Verbal and Visual Word Association

Word	Personal association
Definition	Nonexample or antonym

Word	Personal association
Definition	Nonexample or antonym

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