Use Shades of Meaning to Improve Reading Comprehension

What Really Works
California State University, Northridge
March 23, 2013
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Drawing A Blank: Improving Comprehension for Readers with ASD

Drawing a Blank:
Improving
Comprehension
for Readers
on the
Autism
Spectrum

Presented by Emily Iland, M.A.

Shades of Meaning Activity

- Expands **vocabulary** by teaching synonyms
- Teaches **connotation**: the emotion and intention attached to specific words
- Reveals the hidden meaning behind words (**inference**)
- Clarifies the **perspective** and **intention** of characters or the author (**social thinking**)

Not all synonyms are created equal!

- Words can be positive, negative or neutral
  stunning +   ugly -   natural=

- Words can be heavily positive or negative
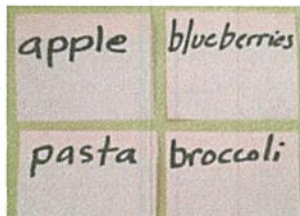 interesting   fascinating
  alluring   repulsive

Advantages of this activity

✓ Visual
✓ Concrete
✓ Systematic
✓ Grows Vocabulary
✓ Author Intention
✓ Inference
✓ Improves writing

Let's try it

A. Take 4 post-it notes
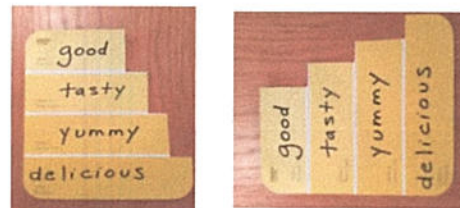B. On each post-it, write the name of a food that you like to eat

apple | blueberries
pasta | broccoli

Match the food to how much you like it

- Use the orange paper to rank your foods

+
++
+++
++++

Shades of Meaning

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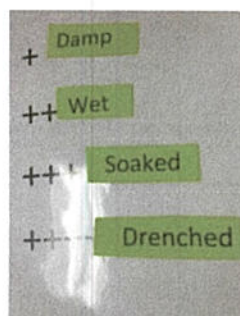California State University, Northridge
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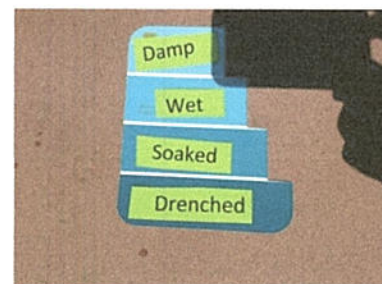
Different amounts of water

Soak the sponges

How Wet?

+ Damp
++ Wet
++ Soaked
+++ Drenched

Ordering the synonyms

Damp
Wet
Soaked
Drenched

**Ranking Synonyms= Emotional Intensity
(personal perspective)**

- Explore meaning, then have students ORDER familiar words from "lightest" to "heaviest"

  Funny Amusing Comical Hilarious

- Have students write the words on a paint chip to show the shades of meaning

Rating Synonyms=
hidden judgments & inferred meaning
(author's perspective, context clues)

- Rank from lightest to heaviest "emotional load"
  - Any neutral words go first
  - then light meaning
  - then heavy meaning

SLENDER ANOREXIC THIN SKINNY

Shades of Meaning
Comprehension Activity
High School-level vocabulary

Group activity, 3-4 people.
1. In a moment you will be given four words.
2. Decide together how to RANK YOUR WORDS on the paint chip in order: from the "lightest" to the "deepest" shade or intensity of meaning
3. If you finish quickly, check out the other lists

RATE & RANK (light to heavy)
Order the words on the Paint Chip

ECONOMICAL	INTELLECTUAL
STINGY	SHREWD
THRIFTY	CLEVER
FRUGAL	ASTUTE

| EVIL |
| BAD |
| SINISTER |
| WICKED |

No wrong answers!

Context + Culture + Experience =
Interaction, interpretation & response to text

Application
How else can you use this activity?

- To Improve word choice in writing
- Writing with a purpose: persuasive writing
- To make a judgment about headlines/media