

Model Response

Which Words Do I Teach?

Practice Identifying Tier 2 and 3 Vocabulary for Instruction
Grades 6-8

Passage 1 – Informational:

Freedman, R. (2006). *Freedom Walkers: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott*. New York: Holiday Press.

Excerpt from the Introduction: "Why They Walked"

Not so long ago in Montgomery, Alabama, the color of your skin **determined** where you could sit on a public bus. If you happened to be an African American, you had to sit in the back of the bus, even if there were empty seats up front.

Back then, **racial segregation** was the rule throughout the American South. Strict laws—called "**Jim Crow**" laws—enforced a system of **white supremacy** that **discriminated** against blacks and kept them in their place as **second-class** citizens.

People were separated by race from the moment they were born in **segregated** hospitals until the day they were buried in **segregated** cemeteries. Blacks and whites did not attend the same schools, **worship** in the same churches, eat in the same restaurants, sleep in the same hotels, drink from the same water fountains, or sit together in the same movie theaters.

In Montgomery, it was against the law for a white person and a Negro to play checkers on public property or ride together in a taxi.

Most southern blacks were denied their right to vote. The biggest **obstacle** was the **poll tax**, a special tax that was required of all voters but was too costly for many blacks and for poor whites as well. Voters also had to pass a **literacy** test to prove that they could read, write, and understand the U.S. Constitution. These tests were often **rigged** to **disqualify** even highly educated blacks. Those who overcame the **obstacles** and insisted on **registering** as voters faced threats, **harassment** and even physical violence. As a result, African Americans in the South could not express their **grievances** in the voting booth, which for the most part, was closed to them. But there were other ways to protest, and one day a half century ago, the black citizens in Montgomery rose up in protest and united to demand their rights—by walking peacefully.

It all started on a bus.

Commentary:

This excerpt contains 321 words: nine tier three words and phrases and ten tier two words. Understanding of all nine tier three words is necessary to fully comprehend this passage. As noted in the introduction, these words are often repeated and defined in context. **Segregated** is introduced in the second paragraph, though determining its meaning from this paragraph might be difficult without a clear grasp of **discrimination**. The next paragraph, however, provides more context as well as repetition.

The second paragraph contains a high proportion of tier three words not repeated later in the text, as well as one tier two compound word. When this many words students might struggle with are packed together, determining meaning from context becomes more difficult. It is possible that these terms were described earlier in the book, but not likely given that this excerpt was taken from the introduction. In these situations, if students are to have the opportunity to read independently and learn from their reading, some words (especially tier three) might need to be introduced before reading. The remaining tier three words, **poll tax** and **registered**, are well supported by the context of the last paragraph, and would not likely need any pre-teaching.

Introductions in general are more likely to need support before reading, but even here, a third of the tier three words could be determined from context.

The first tier two word, **determined**, indicating that much of what follows in the passage is based on skin color, is essential to understanding the passage. The power of **determined** here lies in the notion that skin color in Montgomery, Alabama at that time was the causal agent for all that follows. The power of the word and its connection to the topic merits intensive instruction. It is also a word with multiple meanings, likely to appear in future texts, and part of a word family (determine, determination, determined, terminate, terminal).

Second-class, **worship**, and **obstacle** are more concrete and supported by the text. Though **literacy** is less concrete, as well as part of a word family (literate, literature), it is not central enough to the meaning of the passage to warrant intensive instruction.

Rigged, **disqualify**, **harassment**, and **grievances** are more central to the text and the topic in general, and are likely to appear in future social science texts. On this basis, they would merit more intensive discussion.

Passage 2 – Literary:

Paterson, K. (1990). *The Tale of the Mandarin Ducks*. New York: Lodestar Books.

Excerpt

Long ago and far away in the Land of the Rising Sun, there lived together a pair of mandarin ducks. Now, the drake was a magnificent bird with plumage of colors so rich that the emperor himself would have envied it. But his mate, the duck, wore the quiet tones of the wood, blending exactly with the hole in the tree where the two had made their nest.

One day while the duck was sitting on her eggs, the drake flew down to a nearby pond to search for food. While he was there, a hunting party entered the woods. The hunters were led by the lord of the district, a proud and cruel man who believed that everything in the district belonged to him to do with as he chose. The lord was always looking for beautiful things to adorn his manor house and garden. And when he saw the drake swimming gracefully on the surface of the pond, he determined to capture him.

The lord's chief steward, a man named Shozo, tried to discourage his master. "The drake is a wild spirit, my lord," he said. "Surely he will die in captivity." But the lord pretended not to hear Shozo. Secretly he despised Shozo, because although Shozo had once been his mightiest samurai, the warrior had lost an eye in battle and was no longer handsome to look upon. The lord ordered his servants to clear a narrow way through the undergrowth and place acorns along the path. When the drake came out of the water he saw the acorns. How pleased he was! He forgot to be cautious, thinking only of what a feast they would be to take home to his mate. Just as he was bending to pick up an acorn in his scarlet beak, a net fell over him, and the frightened bird was carried back to the lord's manor and placed in a small bamboo cage.

Commentary:

This text contains 341 words with fourteen tier two words that might cause some problems for students in this band, though not all are equally likely to do so. Because the setting of this text is feudal Japan, it also contains eight tier three words connected to the topic with four of them repeated. It is worth noting that even in a literary text, half of the tier three words and phrases are repeated.

The passage focuses on the Lord's desire to surround himself with beauty. **Adorn**, used to help show this, is thus necessary to understanding the text. This can be briefly taught with reference to the more common synonym *decorate*, which students in this band are likely to know. Its meaning is also well supplied by the context. Words to describe the beauty of the **drake**, such as **magnificent** and **gracefully**, would need to be taught for the same reason. Both are words likely to appear in literary texts students read in middle and high school and both are fairly abstract. Thus, both merit more intensive instruction. **Envied** is important both in understanding the emperor's motivation and in shedding light on his character. It could easily be taught with use of the more common synonym *jealousy*. **Surface** is not essential to understanding the passage and its meaning in this context is clear. This is a word, however, that can appear in so many contexts that if time allows, it would merit intensive instruction. The final word connected to the drake's appearance, **scarlet**, is easy to describe as a darker red.

The only other tier two word that merits intensive instruction is **spirit**. Part of the drake's beauty is its spirit, and much of the pathos of the story involves the capturing of this wild spirit. **Spirit** is

a highly abstract word likely to appear in literary texts; it is also part of a word family (spirited, spiritual, inspiring, inspiration). On every count this word merits intensive teaching.

None of the remaining tier two words are good candidates for more intensive instruction. **Captivity** is important to the story, but fairly concrete and easily taught. The same is true for **undergrowth** and **bamboo**, though these are not as important to the story. **Despised** and **cautious**, though not as concrete, can be accessed through their more common synonyms *hated* and *careful*, though a discussion of the difference between despise and dislike, perhaps placing it on a continuum with *dislike*, *hate*, *despise*, and *detest*, would be a useful exercise.

All of the tier three words highlighted are needed to understand the passage. Since this is an excerpt from a full length novel, it is likely these words are explained in context in earlier chapters.