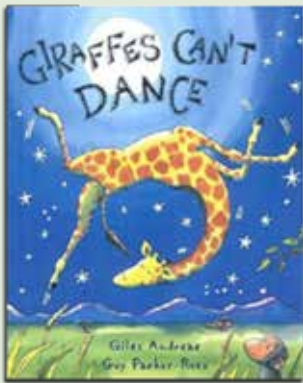


Book Nook

This month's Book Nook topic is...



Building Vocabulary with *Giraffes Can't Dance*

Studies show that the larger a child's vocabulary when she starts school, the better her reading comprehension will be later on. In this Book Nook topic, I'll share some helpful tips for how to introduce new words and build children's understanding of them.

Let's get started!

My chosen book:

Giraffes Can't Dance by Giles Andreae, illustrated by Guy Parker-Rees

Why I picked it:

This book was introduced to me by a preschool teacher who said that it captivated even her most reluctant readers. It's a touching story that most children can relate to. Gerald the giraffe's lack of coordination gets him teased, but once he learns to literally dance to his own beat, he becomes an elegant dancer.

The illustrations are detailed and whimsical, and the text is told in rhyme. It's easy on the eyes and ears of any listener! What's more, there are rare or uncommon words on almost every page, which makes it an ideal book for introducing higher level vocabulary.

Why introduce new vocabulary?

Vocabulary is an essential element of emergent literacy. The more words a preschooler understands, the better his or her reading comprehension. But just exposing children to new words is not enough. We have to take the time explain those words to deepen children's understanding of them.

Picking appropriate words

Once a child understands basic, everyday words (such as “wet”, “small”, “laugh”, etc.), we want to start “stepping up” his vocabulary by introducing more rare words (think of “damp”, “tiny”, “giggle”). Ideal words are those that:

- can be used frequently in many different situations
- can be related to your child’s life

Books are a great source for new vocabulary, because they often contain words we don’t use every day. Also, we can usually use the context of the story to help explain new words.

A word that appears in *Giraffes Can’t Dance* is **entranced**. This is definitely a rare word, but it applies to most preschoolers. How many of you have seen a child whose attention is completely held by what he is watching?

Shoot for the SSTaRS

At The Hanen Centre, we talk about making new words “sparkle”, or stand out, by using a strategy called “**Shoot for the SSTaRS**”. It’s an acronym that stands for: **S**tress, **S**how, **T**ell and **R**elate, and **S**ay it again. Let’s shoot for the SSTaRS with “**entranced**”.

Stress

Make **entranced** stick out from the other words by saying it louder and slower than the rest of the text. You can also pause before and after saying the word.

Show

You can show what a word means in a variety of ways – the easiest of which is using the illustrations in the book. You can point to the picture of all of the animals watching Gerald.

Tell

Give the child a short definition of the word **entranced**. You could say, “**Entranced** means that they’re paying so much attention to Gerald, they don’t see or hear anything else.” Or, tell the child what is not being **entranced**: “The animals are not getting distracted by anything else, they are completely focused on Gerald’s dancing.”

and **R**elate

Relating the new word to other concepts or experiences is extremely important. This will help the child associate the word with other situations, and will make the word much more relevant to him. Relate this word to other experiences by saying “Remember when you were watching *Octonauts* and Ravi couldn’t get your attention because you were **entranced** by the TV show?” Or “Have you ever been **entranced** by anything?” You might also want to share your own experiences of being **entranced**.

Say it again...!

This is another essential step to consolidate the child’s learning: repeat the word both by re-reading the book, and by saying the word again in other situations. For example, if you notice the child sitting with a book, or completing a puzzle you could say, “Wow, you look very focused on that puzzle, you seem **entranced**.”

Giraffe’s Can’t Dance is a book that lends itself very well to being re-read because there are so many rare words, and the story is very heart-warming. Use this to your advantage, and shoot for the SSTaRS with **entranced** and other rare words every time you read.

The first time you read the book:

Introduce new vocabulary words by **Stressing**, **Showing**, and **Telling** the words. Try to keep your explanations short so that you don't interrupt the flow of the book, or take away from the overall storyline.

The second time you read the book:

Now that the child has heard the whole story, you can go deeper into your conversation about **entranced**. This is a great opportunity to **Relate** the word to the child's experiences.

The third time you read the book:

Perhaps you can relate the word to other experiences, or situations, or you could act out a scenario where one of you is **entranced**. Also, make sure to start introducing other rare or new words to the child.

And make a point of using the new word during everyday conversations – that's going to help your child use the word himself during everyday conversations. You'll know it's working when, one day, your child says, "Look! He's entranced with that video game!"

I hope you enjoyed this Book Nook topic. I'd love to hear which books you use to build vocabulary. Please send me your feedback.



A little more about me

I'm a Speech-Language Pathologist working at The Hanen Centre as a Program Specialist. I combine my background in language and literacy development with my knowledge of adult learning to offer evidence-based face to face and online trainings to early childhood educators, SLPs and parents.

The Book Nook combines my passion for children's literature with my knowledge of language and literacy development. I hope you enjoy it!

Tamara