

Strategy #5: Vocabulary Wall and Vocabulary Box

Grade 6 Social Studies

Purpose

To learn both definitional and contextual knowledge about each term through multiple and varied exposures to the word.

Steps

- The Vocabulary Wall (Word Wall) may be built in various ways.
- At the beginning of the lesson, when new terms are being introduced, the teacher and class discuss new terms. Each term is embedded in the content.
- Cards are made ahead of time for each term. During the exercise, cards are placed on the “word wall,” (a bulletin board or a designated section of the classroom.) Note: Don’t pre-teach terms separately from the content. Try to embed the term in the content.
- At the end of the class, the teacher or students identify other terms that may be added to the wall.

Formative Assessment

As the students discuss terms, the teacher will note which students have some prior knowledge about them and which may not.

Effective Use of a Vocabulary Wall

To be effective, word walls must be used frequently. Through a quick review of the terms and definitions at the beginning and/or end of class, students will begin to become familiar with them.

A Vocabulary Word Box may be used with the Vocabulary Wall or by itself. The terms are put on smaller cards and placed in a box (or a hat). Definitions may be

placed on other cards and placed into the container as well. Students draw from the container. If they draw a term, they define it. If they draw a definition, they provide the term.

So students are not “put on the spot” while they are learning and to have fun, they may be offered options. They could call a friend if they don’t know the answer, draw another word, ask the three or four classmates to act as a panel and provide assistance, etc. The purpose is to provide students with the multiple and varied exposures to the word as they learn it.

As more terms are added, students use the terms in a number of different strategies /activities. They use some or all of the following: Sort and Predict, Word Sorts and/or Sort and Create, Vocabulary Cycle, “I Have, Who Has” and Graphic organizers. Each strategy is discussed in this document.

The word box is an excellent way to spend the last few minutes or first few minutes of class.

Word walls must be active not passive.