

# Academic Vocabulary Activity

LEVELS 15, 18, 21

## What is Academic Vocabulary?

Vocabulary knowledge is a key part of literacy development, and building up a deep knowledge of vocabulary—in particular, academic vocabulary—is critical to quality literacy instruction. Academic vocabulary, in particular, includes the constellation of sophisticated words and phrases most often used in school, civic, and professional settings and texts (Nagy & Townsend, 2012). This vocabulary is abstract, morphologically complex, multifaceted, and highly useful in academic contexts (Nagy & Hiebert, 2011). These conceptually rich terms include general academic vocabulary words that are used across many content areas (e.g., *represent*, *however*, *contribution*), as well as content-specific academic vocabulary words that are unique to a particular subject (e.g., *estimate* in math and *habitat* in science; Baker et al., 2014).

## Why focus on Academic Vocabulary?

When it comes to deeply comprehending school texts—and participating in academically focused conversations—deep knowledge of the academic words that fill these texts and dialogues is crucial (Kieffer and Lesaux, 2012; LaRusso et al., 2016; Proctor et al., 2012). Why? Academic concepts cannot be separated from the vocabulary words used to describe them. “Reading to learn” means having a deep enough understanding of the vocabulary on the page or screen to glean the author’s intended message; it means having such a thorough understanding of the concepts represented by these words that integrating these concepts with prior knowledge is possible. But for many of today’s students, particularly students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, academic vocabulary acts as a gatekeeper to deep comprehension and is often a persistent source of difficulty (Lesaux & Kieffer, 2010; Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011; Townsend et al., 2012).

## How does Lexia® Core5® Reading address Academic Vocabulary?

Levels 15, 18, and 21 of Lexia Core5 Reading each contain an Academic Vocabulary activity. In the activities, students move through a cycle that is designed to deepen vocabulary knowledge and is based upon a suite of instructional principles outlined in recent research (Dalton et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2016; Lesaux et al., 2014; Proctor et al., 2011; Silverman et al., 2014). Units are organized into sets of five, and the tasks within each set are presented in a standard order. Each set supports students in building up knowledge of a group of five academic words in the context of a thought-provoking topic or question. The specific tasks include engaging with a short text that features the five words to be studied; building definition cards with student-friendly definitions and images; applying knowledge of the words in sentences; digging into word relationships with a focus on synonyms; and revisiting the big question from the first text by reading two new texts that present different positions or examples. Students also answer a poll question, asserting their own point of view on the topic at hand. This poll question is linked to offline writing and discussion.

*continued on next page*

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