



Vocabulary at St Mary's

How We Teach Guide



Teaching vocabulary is a key priority here at St Mary's. It is embedded in everything we do from teaching and learning, to the classroom environment and in the conversations we have during lessons. We believe that a rich and varied vocabulary empowers our children to express themselves confidently, think critically and access the full curriculum.

Across all subjects, we explicitly teach new words, explore their meanings in context and encourage pupils to use them in speech and writing. Vocabulary is displayed and celebrated around our classrooms, reinforcing understanding and promoting a love of language.

Why is explicitly teaching vocabulary important?

Effective vocabulary teaching helps to:

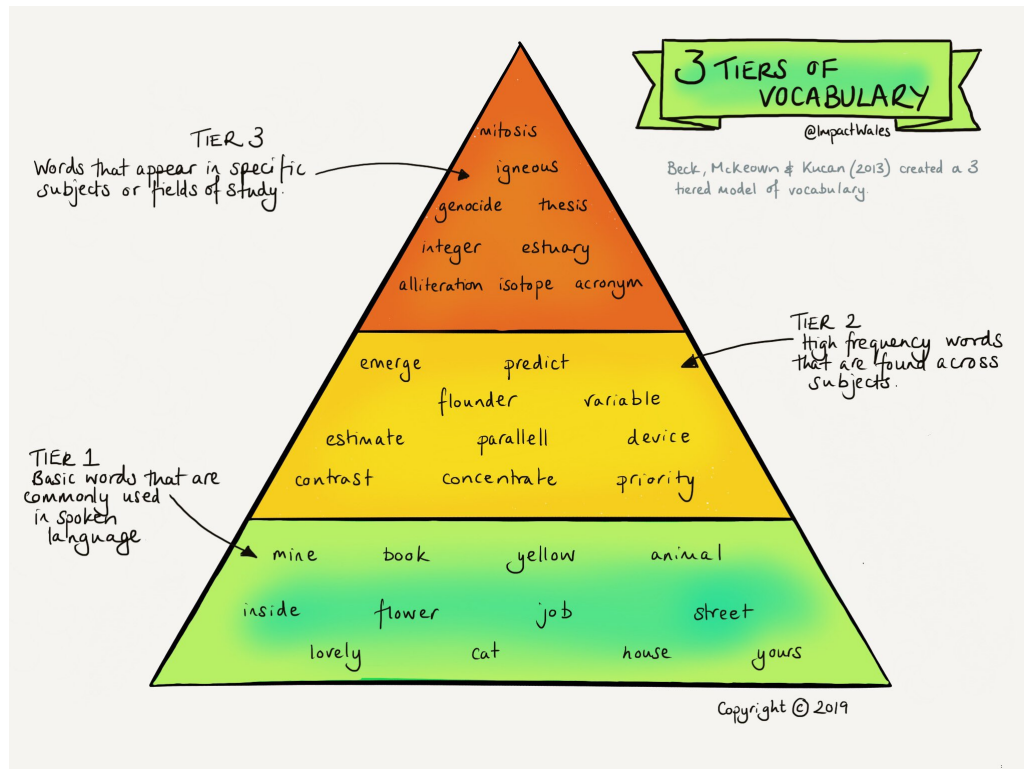
- Address misconceptions by ensuring that children fully understand the meaning and use of key words.
- Prevent misunderstandings and support accurate comprehension across all areas of learning.
- Enable all children to access and engage with lessons, follow instructions and participate confidently in discussions.
- Narrow the word gap, providing every child with the language they need to succeed, regardless of background or starting point.
- Support new learning by removing vocabulary barriers and allowing children to make connections between new and prior knowledge.
- Promote independence, as pupils gain the confidence to use and apply new words accurately in their speech and writing.

How We Teach Vocabulary at St Mary's

Our approach is based on the explicit teaching of **Tier 2** and **Tier 3 vocabulary**:

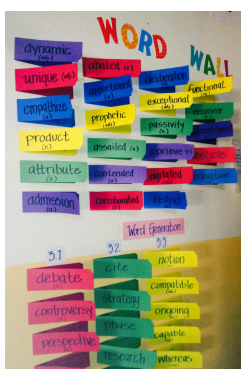
- **Tier 1 vocabulary** refers to basic, everyday words that children typically acquire through conversation and early experiences (*book, run, happy*). While these words are usually learned naturally, we ensure that children use them accurately and confidently in both spoken and written language.

- **Tier 2 vocabulary** refers to words that appear frequently across a range of subjects and texts (*emerge, variable, priority*). These words are crucial for reading comprehension and writing development.
- **Tier 3 vocabulary** consists of subject-specific words (*evaporation, democracy, photosynthesis, propaganda*) that are essential for accessing new concepts within topics and disciplines.



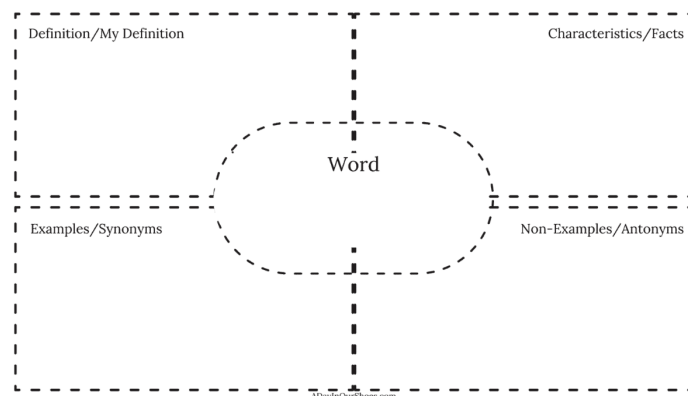
Word Walls

Every classroom features a *Word Wall* to display key Tier 2 vocabulary introduced through weekly early morning activities and guided reading lessons. These words are explored using **Frayer Models** and revisited regularly through classroom discussion and writing tasks. Teachers model the use of these words in conversation and children are encouraged to use them in context across the curriculum. At the start of each term, the Word Wall is refreshed (and added to as the term progresses) while previous words are kept as flashcards for ongoing revision and retrieval practice.



Frayer Models

As part of our structured vocabulary teaching, Frayer Models are used to introduce and explore one new word each week in Years 2–6. Pupils examine each word in detail. For example: finding its meaning, etymology, synonyms, antonyms and use in sentences. This supports a deeper understanding and encourages pupils to apply the word accurately in their own speech and writing. Each new word is added to the class Word Wall and revisited throughout the term.



Vocabulary Baskets

Every class, from Reception to Year 6, is equipped with a **Vocabulary Basket**. These are visible and actively used by teachers each day to support the recall and consolidation of new vocabulary.

- In **Reception to Year 2**, vocabulary baskets contain words from the vocabulary wall and Tier 3 words from topic learning.
- In **Key Stage 2**, baskets include both Tier 2 words from Guided Reading lessons and Tier 3 words from topic learning. Teachers and pupils use these baskets to play retrieval games, review key vocabulary and revisit words from previous topics.

Word of the Day

Every classroom has a **Word of the Day**, which is used to broaden children's exposure to new and ambitious vocabulary. This daily focus helps pupils develop curiosity about language and encourages the use of precise and varied vocabulary in both discussion and writing. In addition, it promotes a love of words and builds confidence in exploring their meanings and how to use them.

Tier 3 Vocabulary

Tier 3 vocabulary (subject-specific language) is explicitly introduced and taught at the start of each topic lesson. These words are displayed in classrooms and revisited regularly to ensure understanding and retention.

In Reception to Year 2, dual coding is used to support comprehension and memory by linking new vocabulary to clear, recognisable images. These words are displayed around the room large enough for children to see and access.

From October 2025, Tier 3 vocabulary will be introduced, revised and recalled at the start of every topic lesson as part of a consistent whole-school routine. Teachers will have their own set of Tier 3 flashcards and each group of pupils will also have access to a set to use in vocabulary games and collaborative activities. These games help children embed and apply new words in meaningful contexts.

Vocabulary games to use:

1. Vocabulary Snap- match the word to the picture
2. Vocabulary charades- act out the word
3. Vocabulary chain- a bit like I went to the super market and I bought...
4. Vocabulary bingo- teacher reads definition, children see if they have the word
5. Vocabulary detective- teacher reads a sentence and misses a word, can children find what the missing piece vocabulary is?
6. Pictionary- draw the word
7. Synonym/ antonym swap- children draw a card and have to say a synonym/ antonym for the word- other children in the group guess what the original word is.