

# Big Words for Little Learners

## Building Vocabulary While Reading Together

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Children enjoy sharing in the joy of reading with their families. Research shows that reading books together holds many benefits, including helping children build vocabulary knowledge—an important part of literacy learning. *Vocabulary* refers to the words we understand when reading or listening and to the words we use when writing and speaking. Learning vocabulary in the context of a book can encourage your child’s interest in understanding and using new words.

Here are some ways to foster vocabulary knowledge as you read together. The examples are from the book *Giraffes Can’t Dance*, by Giles Andreae, in English, but you can use the following strategies as you read to your child from a variety of books in any language.

**Preview the book to choose new words to share with your child.** Before reading with your child, look through the book and find words they may not know. Plan to pause to explain these new words.

**Give a brief explanation of the new word.** Use words your child already knows as you define new words. For example, in *Giraffes Can’t Dance*, your child may not know the word *rooted* in “Gerald simply froze up. He was *rooted* to the spot.” You can define *rooted* as “frozen in place, stuck.”

**Provide a synonym.** Offering a different word that shares a similar meaning is helpful. You could share, for example, that another word for *rooted* is *unmoving*.

**Ask your child to repeat the word with you.** Say the target word (*rooted*) together.

**Connect the new word to something your child already knows.** Think about what your child already has experience with. For example, you may say, “Remember when I dropped my plate, and I was so surprised I didn’t move? I was *rooted* in place for a moment.” You can help your child notice how words and concepts fit into different categories or experiences they know.

**Use objects, pictures, and movements to demonstrate the meaning of the new word.** Point to illustrations in the book that help explain the new word. Make use of objects and/or movements to demonstrate a new word’s meaning (make a game of dancing and then suddenly being rooted to the spot).

**Read the book with the new word multiple times.** Children often enjoy rereading their favorite books. Explaining words during repeated readings can help your child remember new words.

**Use the word at other times.** Use the new word when you are not reading the book. For example, if you see a character in another book or in a movie who’s rooted to the spot, point out the expression and remind your child of the word *rooted*.

Reading together is a great way to introduce new vocabulary to your child and support literacy learning.

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