

# Test Taking Vocabulary

Dr. Dimple J. Martin, Reading/Language Arts, K-5

## **Vocabulary Can Make or Break Assessment**

The task of preparing students for standardized tests in the social studies is daunting. The breadth of the content in each discipline allows a vast range of questions. Students (even those who are well-prepared) may feel a high level of anxiety.

A teacher's goal is to help students approach these tests with a degree of confidence, without spending undue class time "teaching to the test."

## **Overcoming Language Hurdles**

One major hurdle for the student is the "evaluative" or "task" word that often appears before or within a test question. If students do not understand the examiner's expectations (often conveyed through these words), their chances of giving wrong answers increase.

Another hurdle for the student is the language peculiar to each social studies discipline. The student unfamiliar with these "discipline-related" words is at a disadvantage. Attention to vocabulary can pay off in improved test scores.

Examine the Evaluative/Task words. Do your students know what each term asks them to do?

### **Evaluative/Task Words Students Should Be Familiar With**

<b>Analyze</b>	Systematically and critically examine each of the facts.
<b>Compare</b>	Show how the facts or ideas are similar.
<b>Contrast</b>	Show how the facts or ideas are different.
<b>Define</b>	Set forth the meaning or make something clear.
<b>Discuss</b>	Present a detailed argument or consideration.
<b>Evaluate</b>	Determine the value, significance, or worth of.
<b>Identify</b>	Establish the essential characteristics of.
<b>Illustrate</b>	Make clear by citing examples.
<b>Interpret</b>	Present the subject at hand in understandable terms.
<b>Infer</b>	Draw a conclusion based on given facts; predict, generalize.
<b>Justify</b>	Show or prove to be right or reasonable.
<b>Sequence</b>	Arrange in meaningful order, beginning to end.
<b>Summarize</b>	Explain the main points.
<b>Synthesize</b>	Combine the parts into a coherent whole.
<b>Trace</b>	Review in detail, step by step.

## **Integrating Evaluative/Task Words in Class Assignments**

Merely studying the table above will be insufficient to prepare most students for

understanding the terms on standardized tests. Have students practice addressing questions that use these terms frequently in various forms of evaluation. Redirect those students who are having difficulty.

### **Discipline-Related Words with Meanings Peculiar to Social Studies**

Social studies textbooks customarily present vocabulary words and exercises as a standard feature in every chapter or section. These are technical vocabulary, such as "grand jury" or "iron curtain," used primarily in the discipline. Other terms may be common to the general vocabulary but have a more specific meaning inside the discipline.

Teachers usually incorporate textbook vocabulary terms in lessons. However, we may assume that words people use frequently are familiar to most students. This view takes too much for granted. The following terms are ones students might be expected to know, but that would be unfamiliar in a social studies context to many:

#### **Discipline-Specific Words Students Should Know**

abdicate	factors of production	pragmatist
adaptation	federal	primary source
alien	free enterprise	quartered
alliance	fundamentalism	quota
amendment	genocide	ratify
amnesty	guerilla	ratio
belligerent	humanism	reactionary
bias	icon	realism
buffer state	imperialism	rebate
bullion	individualism	reform
bureaucracy	indulgence	republic
chivalry	inflation	resolution
classical	inherent	revenue
coalition	innovation	safety valve
collectivism	institution	sanctions
commune	jurisdiction	schism
compensation	landmark case	sector
constituent	latitude	sovereignty
consumption	mandate	standard of living
contemporary	mass culture	subsistence
culture	media	suffrage
data	mortality	supremacy
delegate	native	topographic
demographic	nativism	trust
desertification	nuclear family	unalienable
diffusion	nullify	urbanization
dissident	override	ultimatum
domestic	partisan	venue
emigration	petition	welfare state

economic system  
ensuing

political map  
population density

zoning

### **Learning Vocabulary Words**

Teachers use various methods to teach vocabulary. Regardless of the method, the key to learning the terms is reinforcement.

Here are some suggestions for teaching and reinforcing social studies vocabulary words:

- **Traditional**

- Write the definition or use the word in a sentence.
- Find the word in the text; read it in context; explain its meaning.
- Complete a crossword puzzle using several vocabulary words.
- Match the word to its definition in matching sets.
- Practice with 3" by 5" cards: the word on one side, the definition on the other.

- **Creative**

- Play a word-game version of charades in which students try to guess a word being acted out silently by another.
- Choose a Word (or Words) of the Day and use the word at different times in class: lecture, discussion, question/answer, written assignment, and so on.
- Play a "dictionary game" by having one person read the word to the class; letting each student write what they think is the definition; collecting and reading 5-10 definitions at random, one being correct; having the class vote on each to determine whose definition was correct.

Understanding the vocabulary is not the same as mastering the content of a discipline, but it does give the student a head start on learning. It may also be an effective way to help them leap forward on a standardized/high stakes test.