

WORD HEROES™

The following information is extracted from “Empowering Students to Become Word Heroes,” an article by Isabel L. Beck, PhD, and Margaret G. McKeown, PhD, in the *Word Heroes Program Guide*.

Choosing Which Words to Teach

Since there are about 170,000 words in the English language, educators have said, “What’s the point of teaching vocabulary when you can’t possibly teach all the words?” Well, that sounded like a challenge to us. **That’s why we took inventory and sorted vocabulary into groups, or tiers, to determine which were worth teaching to improve literacy.**

TIER 1

Tier 1 comprises words that are common, conversational, and clear from context: *run, ball, mother, good, dog, dinner*. Native speakers rarely require instruction for such words.

TIER 2

Tier 2 are academic words that are general enough to be used across domains, for example: *analyze, restrict, foundation, require, inevitable, ultimate*. These words are not part of students’ social language, so they must be taught. And since these words pepper all kinds of texts—content-area textbooks, articles, biographies, stories, and poems—knowledge of these words does affect literacy.

TIER 3

Tier 3 includes academic words that are more technical words and belong to specific domains, such as *molecule, tundra, or axle*. These words reside in networks of content-area knowledge, and thus, they are best taught within their disciplines. Because these words have limited use outside of their content areas, teaching them doesn’t have a large effect on general literacy.

The reason Tier 2 vocabulary development is so important is because it helps students move across the **lexical bar**. The lexical bar is a hypothetical barrier that learners need to cross to make the transition from social, conversational language to the more formal language they need to succeed academically. Children pick up conversational language easily. But developing proficiency with more formal language requires a lot of practice, which they get through reading and thinking about text or through interactions that promote deep understanding of word meanings.

Drs. Beck and McKeown hand-picked the Tier 2 words in *Word Heroes*.
Contact your sales representative to preview the words in each grade level.