

**FEBRUARY**

**Tip**

**of the Month**

Joycabulary

## *Vocabulary Ladders!*

Last month, we discussed two ways to teach more words: semantic and thematic clusters. This month, we'll take a closer look at **semantic clusters** by using Tim Rasinki's work on *Vocabulary Ladders* ([timrasinski.com](http://timrasinski.com)).

Vocabulary Ladders provide a framework to teach semantically related words within a cluster. Similar to Rasinski's *Word Ladders* and Burkins & Yates *Word Chains* ([thesixshifts.com](http://thesixshifts.com)) where a letter or letters are changed or taken away to go from a beginning word to a word at the other end of the ladder, Vocabulary Ladders are a gradient, or ordered intensity, of words related to a topic. With Vocabulary Ladders, the emphasis is not so much as learning a large number of *new* words as it is to understand the *nuances*, or **shades of meaning**, of words the child may have already encountered.

## *So What? The Why:*

Ordering words according to their essential meaning (*microscopic vs. small*) or nuance (*cute vs. stunning*) produces rich discussion as “*word relationships are complex, and there may be several reasonable interpretations of how words should be arranged along a continuum*” (Zutell in *Vocabulary Ladders: Understanding Word Nuances*, 2014). This talk is important as we nudge students to use more precise language during literature discussions and to consider word choice when writing. **These conversations provide an authentic reason for multiple encounters with a word and creates a deep understanding of its meaning.** Vocabulary Ladders almost act like a thesaurus sorting synonyms. The ladders can be expanded to merge into opposite meanings at the other end of the continuum. Some teachers like to build the ladder with student-friendly definitions alongside each word.\*

## The How:

When building vocabulary ladders, it is best to have children work in **partnerships** or **small groups** to encourage talk and debate. Even when working as a whole class, students should have a talking partner. Work with vocabulary ladders can go across days, needing **only a few minutes a day** for this work. This might go like this:

Day One: match words to the definition

Day Two: order the words based on meaning (LOTS of discussion!)

Day Three: Give sentence clues for each word

Example:

Topic: Weather- Go from a little sun to a lot of sun

Words: murky, foggy, cloudy, fair, clear, sunny

Sentence Clue: The sailboat disappeared into the \_\_\_\_\_ harbor.

**Vocabulary Ladders are fun and bring JOY to word learning!**

\* Student-friendly definitions can be found on [wordsmyth.net](http://wordsmyth.net)

*(You may want to check out [Rasinski's Love-to-Cupid](#) word **ladder** for Valentine's Day on his website)*

Welcome February! We wish you a month filled with peace, love, & JOY!

Spread the Word. Spread the Joy.

