

OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

**FINAL REPORT ON THE OTLA PHASE 7 (ENGLISH) PROJECT –
DEVELOPING HIGH LEVEL VOCABULARY**
Reaseheath College

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For further information regarding the OTLA Phase 7 (English) programme and this project go to <https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/>.

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Final report - Developing High Level Vocabulary

Reaseheath College

This project aimed to enrich learners' vocabularies by adopting a deliberate, explicit approach to vocabulary instruction through introducing a short, finite list of high value words which learners were exposed to recurrently and encouraged to use in their own writing.

Summary

Reaseheath College is a specialist land-based Further Education college offering programmes including Agriculture, Animal Management, Motor Vehicle and Equine studies. The English team developed a strategy for enriching learners' vocabularies and worked predominantly with GCSE resit learners whose main programme of study was Motor Vehicle Technology. We wanted to design a strategy focused on enriching learners' active vocabularies, thus promoting and facilitating the use of rich vocabulary in their writing. The strategy involved the English team researching a range of high-value words that could be used in different contexts. This was then refined by staff and subsequently, collaboratively with learners, to produce an initial list of ten high value words. Learners were exposed to the words through a miscellany of bite-size activities during each lesson and encouraged to use the vocabulary. We wanted to discover whether this approach would help to establish the vocabulary to be there implicitly as part of their active lexicon.

Rationale

In a largely vocationally orientated learning environment, motivation is low for many GCSE resit learners. In-house data and figures from the Department for Education show that 77.3% of students in England do not attain a grade 4 in English when they re-sit the exam post-16 (Belgutay, 2019) and remain stuck in a cycle of non-attainment and ever diminishing self-confidence. Our learners are word poor and as such, struggle to cope with the demands of GCSE English Language. It is an accepted premise that extensive reading helps develop a wide vocabulary (Quigley, 2018), however, our learners are predominantly reluctant readers; often the only reading they encounter is in the English classroom. Given the characteristics of a typical cohort and the inevitable time constraints, it is challenging to convert reluctant into avid readers, so, in our department, we have previously sought to redress the issue of limited vocabularies by exposing learners to as many unseen texts as possible. Words we perceived to be difficult were highlighted, and everyone encouraged to record the new vocabulary in a glossary. Once recorded, however, the words are seldom revisited and consequently forgotten. At best, some learners acquired a wider passive vocabulary; at worst, they were overwhelmed by the myriad vocabulary which only served to hinder their learning. Subsequently, their limited lexicons remained virtually unchanged, which may have an adverse effect on performance in main subject areas.

Approach

Stage 1: Finalising the project outline and selecting the test groups

Three groups took part in the research, a total of 50 learners, whose main programme of study was Level 2 Diploma in Light Vehicle Maintenance and Repair. Two of these groups had achieved GCSE English Language Grade 3 and the other Grade 2. We decided to focus on a single curriculum area for ease of communication with vocational teachers and also to facilitate direct comparisons between the different classes. Once the groups were established, we proceeded to create an actionable timeline and design materials.

Stage 2: Formulating the word list

Our priority was to compile a list of multi-functional sophisticated vocabulary. We did this by trawling GCSE past papers, marks schemes and exemplar responses. This initial list comprised 50 words (see Appendix 2) which were presented to the wider English team for discussion and refinement. The resultant reduced list was presented to our learners for further screening; familiar words were removed leaving us with the final '*Word Up*' list to use with our learners (See Bookmark, Appendix 6).

We also interviewed a number of learners about their understanding of sophisticated vocabulary, encouraging them to express their views in relation to GCSE English. Some of these are included in a video designed to publicise the project (Appendix 3). We also conducted a vocabulary survey (Appendix 4) to ascertain learners' starting points.

Stage 3: Planning & implementing the assessment & learning activities

We developed an initial set of activities suitable for remote and face-to-face delivery using student engagement platforms such as Nearpod and Wordwall - the thinking behind the rapid introduction activities being regular exposure to the words and their meanings. We also implemented consolidation tasks focused on embedding the vocabulary which required more complex understanding (Appendix 5).

Throughout the project, learners were presented with printed bookmarks - a portable, discreet, visual aid without an overtly educational feel (see Appendix 6). A *Word Up* slide was presented at the start of each lesson and copied into the chat feature (in remote lessons) serving as a prompt to encourage learners to use the vocabulary in their writing.

Stage 4: Parental engagement

We recognised that parental/carer involvement was likely to play a crucial role in supporting our learners and we sought to encourage their participation by inviting them to become involved by taking part in weekly fun activities and receiving regular progress reports (see Appendix 7).

Stage 5: Reflection & Evaluation

Throughout the project, the leads have held regular meetings to evaluate and reflect on the success of the project and its implementation. Learner feedback has been a priority and focus groups have been conducted to give learners the opportunity to respond and reflect on their progress (see Appendix 8).

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

Activities we initially planned for the classroom had to be adapted for online delivery. As a result, our expertise in digital pedagogy has improved significantly, so much so that we continue to use the new technology in our face-to-face teaching, recognising the considerable value it brings to learning and engagement.

The project has highlighted the texts chosen by AQA (our current Awarding Body) are mostly inaccessible to Further Education learners and we intend to trial a new, alternative specification in the autumn term. This new specification reflects the diversity of the learners and texts have been chosen with an awareness of gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic background.

We did not anticipate such overwhelming and consistent evidence of poor vocabulary within our trial groups. We usually focus on teaching exam technique but have recognised limited vocabulary is key barrier to success in GCSE. This project sought to redress this by incorporating an initial vocabulary survey (Appendix 4) and using vocabulary building activities to improve learning.

Fundamentally, the project has led us to recognise the power of courage and collaboration, both internally and externally. We have created an FE chat room to foster a collegial way of working and have been speaking to practitioners from other colleges about their scheme of work and action research with a view to continuing with our project next year with an external partner. We would like to extend the project to other curriculum areas in college making it possible for as many learners as possible to be empowered by developing a richer vocabulary.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

Unfortunately, effective collaboration between Motor Vehicle and English teachers was restricted by the second lockdown. Conversely, with the transition to digital teaching in January, collaboration between Inclusive Learning Practitioners (ILPs) (who provide learning support in our classes) and teachers was strengthened. Digital teaching and learning provided opportunities to communicate discreetly with one another during lessons which benefited many learners. ILPs reported they have felt more valued during online lessons, and as teachers we are more aware of their potential contributions. We intend to embrace the opportunities for internal networking more fully in 2021/22.

"I have been able to chat to students that are falling behind and use the bookmark to help them discreetly with their writing" (ILP comment)

Historically, communication between learners' parents/carers and English teachers has been ad hoc and reactive, as it generally falls within the remit of learners' Curriculum Course Managers. However, the project presented us with an opportunity to proactively engage with parents/carers, and we did so by inviting them to participate by signing up to receive weekly fun language teasers. The response rate was low (7%), so there are lessons to be learned. However, those who responded and engaged did so unreservedly and we were able to build positive two-way relationships. The learners, whose parents/carers engaged in the project, have benefited the most and demonstrated greater depth of knowledge of the new vocabulary.

Parents have reported positively,

"As a parent, the bookmark was a fantastic tool that my child and I used in day-to-day conversations. I was able to focus on using these words more in my vocabulary which I believe has encouraged my child to use them more openly, frequently and understand them and the context in which they can be used."

"I found the bookmark to be a great way for the teacher to let me know what kind of vocabulary would be helpful. It was a very easy way of keeping the words close by, but not an intrusive form of revision like a bulky textbook which can be off putting to the child and parent."

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Learners have been extremely positive about *Word Up* and reported that using the words in their writing has improved and boosted their overall confidence in English. Learners who fully engaged with *Word Up* understood that including the words in their writing helped to boost their levels in both 'Content and Organisation' and 'Technical Accuracy' specifications. There was a clear correlation between learners using the vocabulary in their written responses and their rate of progress.

A focus group and individual interviews were held in May where learners were invited to discuss the impact of *Word Up*. Learners spoke positively about being presented with a lexical set of words which they all found helpful rather than limitative. Feedback and written responses from our learners validated our thinking that 'less is more' when it comes to enriching our active vocabulary. It takes a lot of practice and a long time to fully know a word, so by focusing on a few, rather than many new words, consolidation took place. The new words are retained and committed to long-term memory which builds confidence quickly. Learners reported having the bookmarks to hand encouraged them to experiment with the words which they found empowering. Conversely, there were some negative comments about turning off and shutting down when faced with unfamiliar and overwhelming word lists. They

want clear, simple and effective tools to help them pass the exam which we will take forward into our whole teaching practice.

Learners' comments:

"They boost your grade up because they are more nicer words than standard words."

"The more you get, the more you fret and you won't remember it."

"It builds up time and makes you memorize it more."

"It makes you feel more confident like you're using words right."

Learning from this project

It was a challenge to convey the underlying principle and our aims however the success of the project justified our approach that 'less could be more' and that we were stretching and challenging learners. We have actively and successfully created a culture which is about creating an ethos of ambition and aspiration, and all learners have been encouraged to move beyond their comfort zones which is completely in keeping with 'stretch and challenge'.

We were surprised by the results of initial activities to test learners' prior knowledge of the ten words we selected: We had seriously underestimated how word poor our learners were, whereas in all three participating groups, learners overestimated their knowledge of the words. When they were presented with activities requiring them to use the words in context, they were unable to do so with any degree of accuracy. We have learned that we must never make assumptions about our learners.

Our results indicate continually inundating learners with new, challenging vocabulary has no positive impact and in fact only serves to maintain the deficit. Although exposure to the *Word Up* vocabulary has been less than we would have liked, we have seen clear evidence that reducing the number of words, whilst simultaneously increasing their exposure to learners, has a positive impact on vocabulary retention, usage and confidence. This is further supported by comments made during focus groups with learners: They enjoyed the fact the words were fit for purpose and manageable, and found active repetition and usage increased their confidence. Many verbalised the buzz they felt when they mastered the words.

When motivation is low, 'quick wins' are valuable. Learners have been able to experience success and see the clear link between using the *Word Up* vocabulary and higher scores. Small gains have resulted in larger gains in confidence.

We have learned that, whilst we clearly recognise the needs of the learners in our setting and try to adapt, we find it hard to move away from textbook principles around reading for meaning and improving writing, and have become increasingly aware the hurdle to both these issues and therefore the GCSE, is poor vocabulary. Primacy must be given to vocabulary and it should not simply be an add-on.

Historically, contact with parents has been limited within the English department, but we have learned parental engagement has a positive effect on learners, regardless of age. We have learned that parents want to know exactly how they can support their children and welcome input from practitioners. We will continue building connections with parents/carers and exploring how to do so more effectively.

References

Belgutay, J. (2019) *GCSE resits: 2 in 3 students 'make no progress'*, available on: www.tes.com/news/gcse-Resits-2-3-students-make-no-progress, [date accessed 05.04.2021]

Quigley, A. (2018), *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Appendix 1 – The project team

Project Role	Name	Job Role
Project Lead	Anne Chester	Advanced Practitioner
Deputy Lead	Sophie Smithdale	Programme Lead - English
Project team	Jenny Drain	Advanced Practitioner
Project team	Louise Newman	Inclusive Learning Practitioner
Project team	Louisa Holden-Morris	Inclusive Learning Practitioner
Project team	Samantha Shirley	Inclusive Learning Practitioner
Project Mentor	Catherine McPartland (ccConsultancy)	
Research Group Lead	Sue Lownsborough (ccConsultancy)	

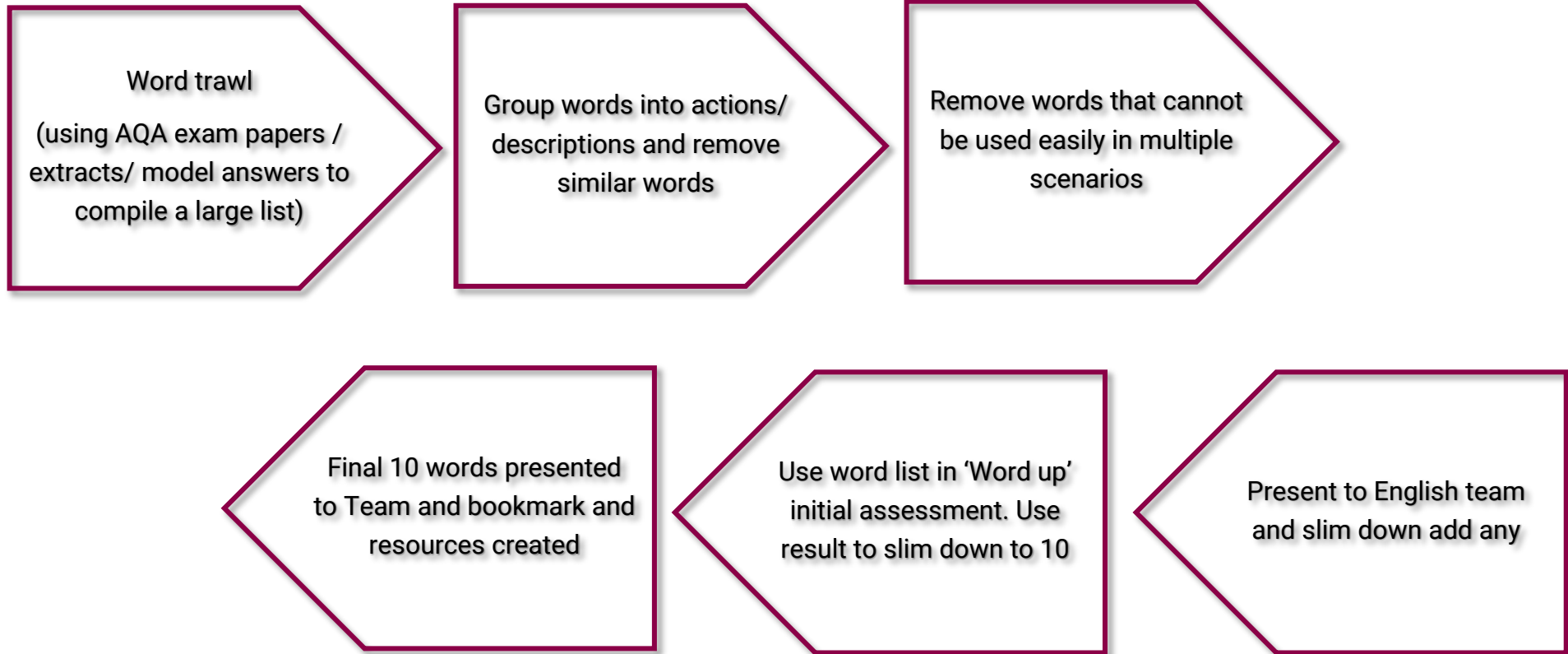
Appendix 2 – The word list

Initial word list

The initial Word Up list was compiled from past exam papers, mark schemes and exemplar answers.

Dispirited	Anarchy	Torrent	Extraordinary
Obscure	Flourishing	Brutal	Environment
Suffering	Conflict	Dominate	Adventurous
Torrential	Whispered	Curious	Mockery
Magnitude	Deception	Ancient	Humiliating
Thrilling	Resilient	Navigate	Stifled
Daunted	Tyrannical	Perilous	Insignificant
Irritate	Towering	Disappear	Chilling
Timid	Discriminate	Plunge	Determined
Enormous	Portrayed	Arduous	Terrifying
Immense	Stereotype	Resplendent	Strive
Majestic	Ultimate	Extravagant	Frenzy
Engulf	Futile	Banal	Vulnerable
Smothered	Extensive	Blazing	Intimidating
	Prevailing	Piercing	Vast
	Expose	Horrific	Voluminous
	fondle	Mischievous	

The process of word selection



Appendix 3 – Promotional Video

Project Overview

We produced a video as a way of promoting the project to our colleagues working in other curriculum areas, parents, learners and other stakeholders.

<https://youtu.be/3XGZ6NQfqeM>



Appendix 4 – Vocabulary Surveys

Initial Word Up survey

Questions Responses 110

OTLA Word Wave 1 Student Survey

Reaseheath English team are involved in some exciting research. Part of this research involves the use and understanding of vocabulary. We would like you to look at the following vocab and tell us how familiar it is to you by following the instructions on each question. THIS IS NOT A TEST but by completing this properly, you will be part of some really great research which will be used to help you 'strive for your 5' in your exam and use more sophisticated vocab in your curriculum area. Thank you ! :)

1. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

- brutal
- humiliating
- intimidating
- none of these
- Option 5

2. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

- vast
- immense
- voluminous
- none of these

3. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

- adventurous
- determind
- curious
- prevailed
- none of these

4. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

- extravagant
- extraordinary
- thrilling
- none of these

5. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

- innocent
- vulnerable
- timid
- None of these

6. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

- expose
- obscure
- smother
- engulf
- plague
- none of these

7. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

- insignificant
- banal
- futile
- arduous
- none of these

8. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

- overbearing
- stifling
- daunting
- dispiriting
- dominating
- none of these

9. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

- blazing
- scorching
- piercing
- none of these

10. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

- majestic
- ancient
- stunning
- none of these

11. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

- perilous
- chilling
- terrifying
- none of these

12. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

- anarchy
- frenzy
- chaotic
- disarray
- pandemonium
- none of these

13. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

- timid
- ambivalent
- fearful
- none of these

14. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

- sullen
- hostile
- petulant
- none of these

15. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

- torrent
- deluge
- cascade
- none of these

16. Using at least one of the words you have selected from any of the questions above, briefly describe someone you don't like. (You can scroll back up the form to have a look)

Enter your answer

17. Using at least one of the words you have selected from any of the questions above, briefly describe a storm. (You can scroll back up the form to have a look)

Enter your answer

18. Using at least one of the words you have selected from any of the questions above, briefly describe your happy place. (You can scroll back up the form to have a look)

Enter your answer

19. Do you understand what the teacher means when they talk about sophisticated vocab in lessons? *

No idea ☆☆☆☆ Yes definitely

20. How often do you think you use sophisticated vocab in your work? *

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

21. Thank you for completing the form. Would you like to be involved in further research? This does not involve any more work, just the odd bit of feedback. *

No - I really don't want to ☆☆☆☆ Yes it sounds really interesting and will help me achieve my English target.

Initial through results

OTLA Word Wave 1 Student Survey

110 Responses 57:06 Average time to complete Active Status

[View results](#) [Open in Excel](#)

1. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

[More Details](#)

brutal	86
humiliating	75
intimidating	83
none of these	8
Option 5	4



2. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

[More Details](#)

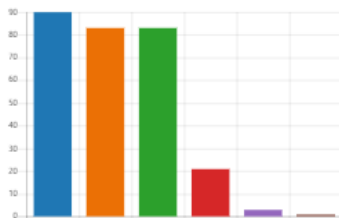
vast	61
immense	49
voluminous	13
none of these	35
Other	1



3. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

[More Details](#)

adventurous	90
determined	83
curious	83
prevailed	21
none of these	3
Other	1



4. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

[More Details](#)

extravagant	45
extraordinary	72
thrilling	88
none of these	9
Other	2



5. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

[More Details](#)

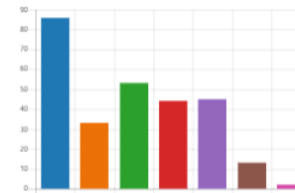
innocent	95
vulnerable	82
timid	55
None of these	2
Other	3



6. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

[More Details](#)

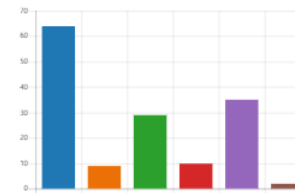
expose	86
obscure	33
smother	53
engulf	44
plague	45
none of these	13
Other	2



7. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

[More Details](#)

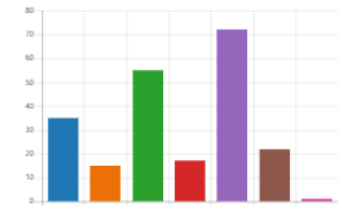
insignificant	64
banal	9
tuttle	29
arduous	10
none of these	35
Other	2



8. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

[More Details](#)

overbearing	35
stifling	15
daunting	55
dispiriting	17
dominating	72
none of these	22
Other	1



9. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

[More Details](#)

blazing	71
scorching	81
piercing	64
none of these	8
Other	3



10. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

[More Details](#)

majestic	73
ancient	80
stunning	90
none of these	5
Other	1



11. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

[More Details](#)

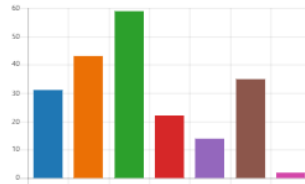
perilous	18
chilling	92
terrifying	98
none of these	5



12. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

[More Details](#)

● anarchy	31
● frenzy	43
● chaotic	59
● disarray	22
● pandemonium	14
● none of these	35
● Other	2



13. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

[More Details](#)

● timid	57
● ambivalent	9
● fearful	97
● none of these	8
● Other	1



14. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

[More Details](#)

● sullen	6
● hostile	64
● petulant	8
● none of these	42
● Other	5



15. Select all the words that you are confident you could use properly in a sentence.

[More Details](#)

● torrent	16
● deluge	10
● cascade	25
● none of these	62
● Other	10



16. Using at least one of the words you have selected from any of the questions above, briefly describe someone you don't like. (You can scroll back up the form to have a look)

[More Details](#)

91 Responses

Latest Responses
"ldk"
"The insignificant person walked into the lesson."

17. Using at least one of the words you have selected from any of the questions above, briefly describe a storm. (You can scroll back up the form to have a look)

[More Details](#)

92 Responses

Latest Responses
"ldk"
"The piercing sound of the wind, engulfed the small seaside town, usu..."
"The fearful storm rolled in terrifying everyone."

18. Using at least one of the words you have selected from any of the questions above, briefly describe your happy place. (You can scroll back up the form to have a look)

[More Details](#)

90 Responses

Latest Responses
"ldk"
"To get away from all the anarchy of the modern world, I like to wand..."
"The stunning and majestically place appeared from behind the trees."

19. Do you understand what the teacher means when they talk about sophisticated vocab in lessons?

[More Details](#)

110 Responses



3.17 Average Rating

20. How often do you think you use sophisticated vocab in your work?

[More Details](#)

● Daily	19
● Weekly	34
● Monthly	18
● Never	39



21. Thank you for completing the form. Would you like to be involved in further research? This does not involve any more work just the odd bit of feedback.

[More Details](#)

110 Responses



2.92 Average Rating

Appendix 5 – Lesson Activities

Examples of in lesson 'Word Up' activities


Curious

Eager to know something
Strange and unusual

Pick one of the following tasks:

Task 1
Write about a time you were 'curious' about something. What was it and why were you so curious?

Task 2
Watch the following clip. Use the word 'curious' to describe the pandas.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-ovzUNno7g>



Extraordinary


Extra - more / better
Ordinary – normal / boring

Very unusual or remarkable

Pick one of the following tasks:

Task 1
The impact of Covid has been extraordinary. To what extent do you agree?

Task 2
Describe the photograph using the word extraordinary



Example in lesson 'Word Up' activity using Microsoft Form to accommodate online delivery

Questions Responses

 **Word Up 'Defy'**

1
How familiar are you with the verb 'defy'? 1 = never heard of the word. 5 = I know what it means and can confidently use it. *

defy.

1 2 3 4 5

2
What is a synonym?

Other Ways To Say Said
 whispered asked whined
 grinned thought bragged
 scolded yelled exclaimed
 complained cried moaned
 giggled replied shrieked
 laughed lied warned
 demanded begged argued

Closely occurring words that have to same sound or letter at the beginning.
 Different words with similar meanings ✓

3
Which of these answers best describes the sentence 'the boys defied their teacher' *

The boys did not do as the teacher asked them too. ✓

Example 'Word Up' lesson using Nearpod to accommodate online delivery.

Match the sophisticated vocab to either its definition of the picture it most represents.

Matching Pairs

Lesson: OTLA Week 3 22/02 1/5 nearpod

Open Ended Question

Lesson: OTLA Week 3 22/02 2/5 nearpod

Use 1 of the following words to describe something you enjoy about your vocational course. (curious / immense / majestic / extraordinary). Try to be emotive and empowering in your description. For example: I love teaching English at Reaseheath College because of the extraordinary characters I meet and the immense pride I feel when students make progress.

Please enter your answer here.

Lesson: OTLA Week 3 22/02 3/5 nearpod

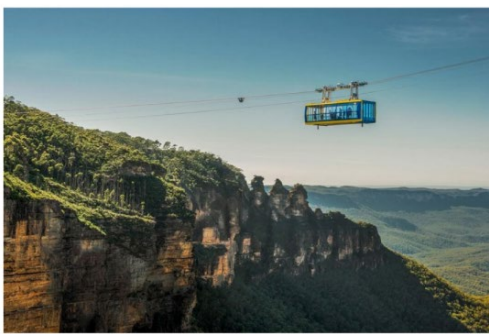
Draw It

Lesson: OTLA Week 3 22/02 4/5 nearpod

Using the following sophisticated vocabulary to label at least 4 elements of the photo with an emotive description. (daunting / extraordinary / majestic / immense / perilous / curious / defiant)

For example; the couple quivered in the cable car, vulnerable to the elements and fearing for their lives.

curious daunting immense
 extraordinary defiantly



Despite being _____ of his first day at Reaseheath, it was still an incredibly _____ experience. The campus was _____ with its _____ network of paths and corridors and new faces _____ strolling around, determined to appear cool and collected.

Lesson: OTLA Week 3 22/02 5/5 nearpod

Lesson: OTLA first 5 SSD 3/3 nearpod

'Insert a word' activity and responses using Microsoft Forms (mid project):

Insert a word in the missing space (5 Points)



1. I was _____ to know what was inside.
(1 Point)

Enter your answer

2. A _____ figure came looming out of the night. *
(1 Point)

Enter your answer

3. The prisoner was _____ and refused to go back into his cell. *
(1 Point)

Enter your answer

4. The picture does not capture her _____ beauty. *
(1 Point)

Enter your answer

5. The pain was _____ and I could barely stand. *
(1 Point)

Enter your answer

34 Responses	0 Average Score	Active Status
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Review answers Post scores Open in Excel

- I was _____ to know what was inside. (1 point)

More Details

34 Responses

Latest Responses
"Fearsly"
"Interested"
"desperately wanting"
- A _____ figure came looming out of the night. (1 point)

More Details

34 Responses

Latest Responses
"Dark gloomy"
"Haunting"
"tall"
- The prisoner was _____ and refused to go back into his cell. (1 point)

More Details

34 Responses

Latest Responses
"Stubborn as a manager"
"Filled with rage"
"bloody, beaten"
- The picture does not capture her _____ beauty. (1 point)

More Details

34 Responses

Latest Responses
"Amazing"
"Inner"
"true"
- The pain was _____ and I could barely stand. (1 point)

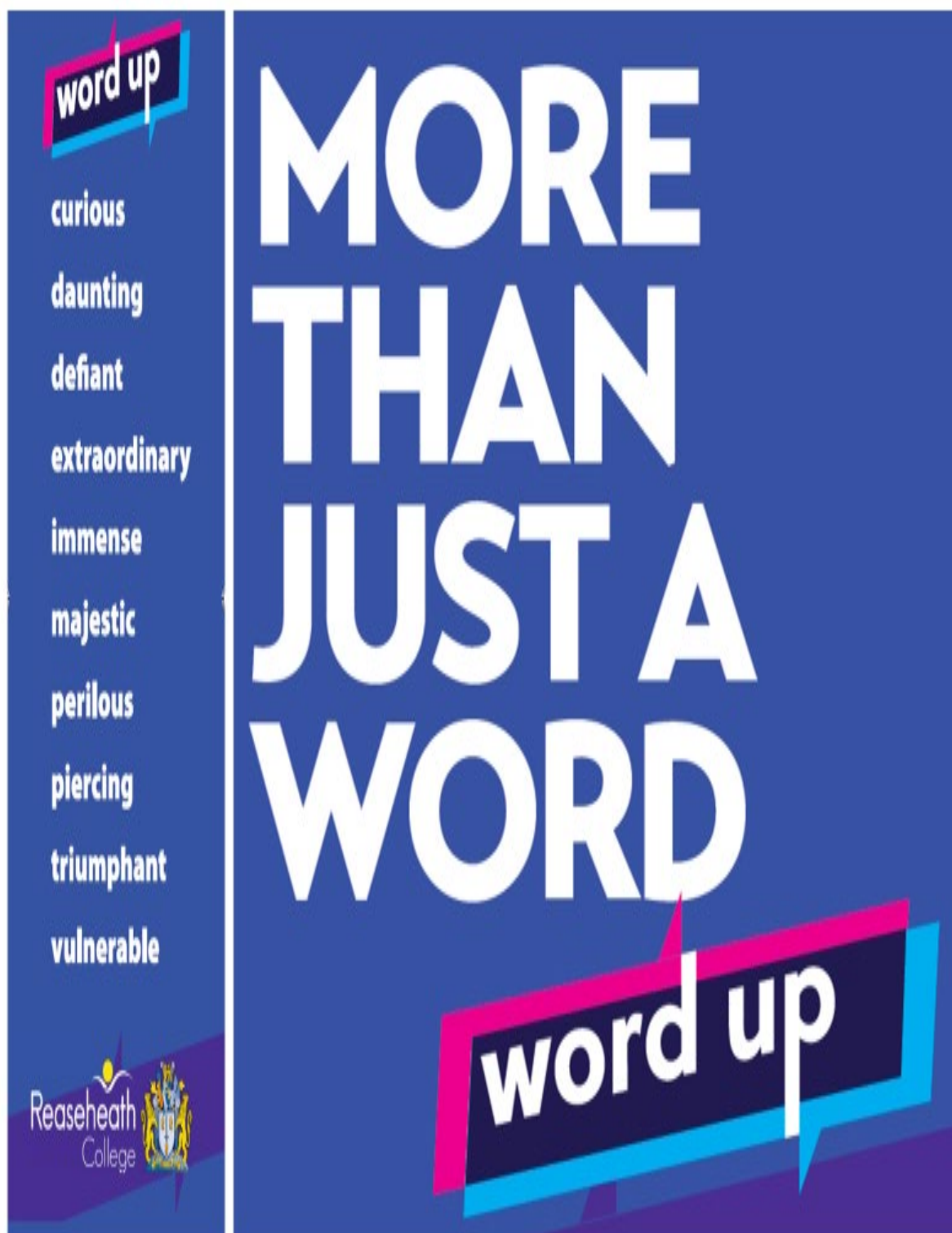
More Details

34 Responses

Latest Responses
"As dangerous as a rugby game"
"Unbareable"
"excruciating"

Appendix 6 - Bookmark

The Word Up bookmark



Appendix 7 - Letter to parents

Dear Parent/Carer,

We hope this letter finds you well.

The Maths and English team at Reaseheath is passionate about the education and experience we provide for our students. As a result, we are engaged in a number of exciting projects this year looking at ways to support and enable our learners, helping them to achieve their potential, grow in confidence and gain new skills. One of these projects, run by our specialist English team in association with The Education and Training Foundation, focuses on improving learners' vocabulary and how this impacts on GCSE grades. More information about the project can be found in a short video accessed from the following link / QR code.



<https://youtu.be/seriu5Y3dLQ>

As part of the project, your learner will be introduced to a specific selection of key vocabulary throughout the next term, which is listed on the enclosed bookmarks. We would love you to use these bookmarks to help challenge and expand your learner's vocabulary at home, supporting the work we are doing in the classroom. We would also like to keep you informed, via weekly texts, of progress on the project, with regular hints and tips or small optional activities to support the classroom learning.

If you are interested in participating and supporting your learner to improve their vocabulary (or your own), then may we kindly ask that **you respond to this letter by email** and include a mobile telephone number, so that we can send you the short weekly updates.

If you have any queries, or would like to know more about the project, please contact Anne Chester (Anne.Chester@reaseheath.ac.uk)

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

The English Team



Appendix 8 – Focus Group

Transcript from focus group

Anne: So, the first thing I want to ask you is, have the Word Up words been helpful?

Seb: Yes, I think they really have been helpful.

Dom: I do.

Alexis: I think they have been extraordinarily good.

Anne: I like that, Alexis! I'm really interested in what you said Seb. What is it about the words that has been helpful?

Seb: Using them in exams. They boost your grade up because they are more nicer words. Better than standard words.

Lunch arrives

Anne: So, Seb you were saying and it was really interesting, that you think it's been really useful because you feel it's boosted your performance in exams. If you hadn't been given the list of words, what would you have done instead?

Seb: I wouldn't have used words like it.

Ernie: Yeah, same.

Anne: Right, so you wouldn't have used words like them. Why's that?

Ernie: I can't think of 'em.

Seb: I went through 'em and revised and I remember them so it's easier for me to like you know put them into my work.

Anne: Ernie, I'm really interested in exploring what you said. You said that you wouldn't use the words. Why is that?

Ernie: I just can't think of any words like that.

Anne: So, is having the words helpful because you can focus on them?

Ernie: Yeah. Using something a bit more better.

Anne: and Seb, you said that you revised those words. So Seb were you able to use them, know the meanings and use them. That's what we have been trying to do with this. We thought that by focusing on just ten words, that would be better for you.

Seb: Yeah, because you can get them in your head. It's better to get them in your head instead of changing every week. Ten new words!

Connor: It's definitely easier to remember.

Anne: So, what would happen if you were given ten new words every week?

Ernie: You just forget 'em.

Seb: It's hard to remember them. The meanings for each one.

Anne: What we have done previously, and this might be what you did at school, we would ask you to write new words in the back of your book in a glossary...

Seb: Every week we were given about ten spellings to learn and every Friday they'd be a test on the ten spellings. And they'd change every week.

Connor: We did that.

Anne: Did you look at the vocabulary and the meanings of words, or just spellings.

Seb: Just spellings.

Anne: Charlie, I heard you say that you didn't do any vocabulary. This is really interesting.

Anne: When you come into our GCSE classes and we say to you, don't forget to use sophisticated vocabulary, what goes through your mind? How do you feel?

Charlie: Daunting.

Anne: Daunting. Wonderful. That's brilliant.

Seb: When you first gave us the words. I thought they'd be good for assessments and tests, but I actually got quite scared because I've never used any of these words before. Or I hadn't heard of them which was another thing. But I just said to myself, I've got to revise them, try and learn the meanings and do well in these exams we're taking.

Anne: Thank you for sharing this Seb. So, what you are saying is that initially you were scared of the words, but because we kept things small, this meant you could focus on them and learn to use them. What I've noticed is that in all of your work, you've used them.

Seb: Seriously, when we got them and they came through, my mum said, have you seen these? I thought, oh no I'm gonna struggle right.

Anne: This is so helpful. Does anybody else have any thoughts?

Connor: I've got some.

Anne: Go on Connor.

Connor: I think English here, I've learned more here in the past two years than I ever have in high school.

Seb: In my school there was two halves: the smart half and the dumb half. And what would happen is that with the smart half the teacher would help 'em and the dumb half they didn't give two fs and would always be where they'd tell us things last minute.

Connor: That was similar in mine cos I was in this class called Oasis this class everyone knew you needed extra time and stuff like that. And they always treated us differently to all the other students. Always. Always. I've definitely learned more here in the past two years than I ever did in high school.

Alexis: They don't teach you how to actually do it.

Connor: They gave you so much pressure in high school.

Anne: I have a question. Some of my colleagues thought that by giving you only ten words, this was limiting your vocabulary. There was no stretch and challenge...

Connor: I don't agree. It's better to do things slower.

Seb: I think that.

Charlie: Me too.

Connor: because it builds up time and makes you memorize it more.

Seb: And the more you get, the more you fret and you won't remember it.

Anne: Thank you.

Seb: That's what happens with me. When someone puts loads of stuff on me. I'm there stressing, trying to get it all in but it actually doesn't go in because of stress.

Dom: That happens to me that. I switch off.

Seb: The brain just can't take it like.

Alexis: That's probably why we all failed.

Seb: Yeah, they're shoving too much information at us to remember and you just can't.

Dom: I just can't read very well and when there are words I've never seen in my life it's never very easy.

Anne: I'd like to ask you a question. How do you feel when you use the words?

Dom: Laughs . Like I'm up in the roof... (puts on a posh voice)

Everyone laughs.

Connor: It also makes you feel more confident like you're using words right.

Connor: And it makes you think of more things.

Alexis: But it's so random. I mean when in your whole life are you going to say, "Oh, that's magnificent" (speaks in a posh voice)

Charlie: Or perilous!

Alexis: Oh it's piercing!

Dom: It's sooooo majestic!

Anne: Okay. So it sounds as though you're saying that these are not words you would use in everyday life, but Connor, you were saying that when you do use them it gives you confidence.

Connor: Yeah.

Alexis: It just feels weird.

Dom: It's like going round a roundabout and you find your road and it tells you where to go. It's sort of like that. You're driving round and round and you see which way to go on the signpost. It's not a bad feeling, but it is weird in a way.

Dom: Curious – I'd use that some of the time but

Connor: It gives me more of a head start. When you start off with nothing, you're like okay where do I start? But when you've got these words you've kind of got a start on where you can go.

Dom: Fill in what you're trying to say in less words.

Connor: Exactly. Yeah yeah.

Anne: Do you think we could have done anything better or differently?

Connor: I think it's just been fine the way it is Anne if I'm honest.

Ernie: It just works dunnit. That's the thing.

Connor: To be fair, without this I wouldn't think there was a chance of me getting a four.

Seb: Yeah. What should have happened from the start is that we should have got this in September.

Anne: Yes, yes.

Seb: There would have been more time to improve in the other milestones.

Anne: And we might have been able to go on to use ten more.

Will you go on to use any of these words?

Seb: Yes, one or two of them. Daunting, extraordinary, majestic.

Anne: A lot of our activities have involved speaking the words.

Alexis: Yeah, but I still wouldn't use daunting.

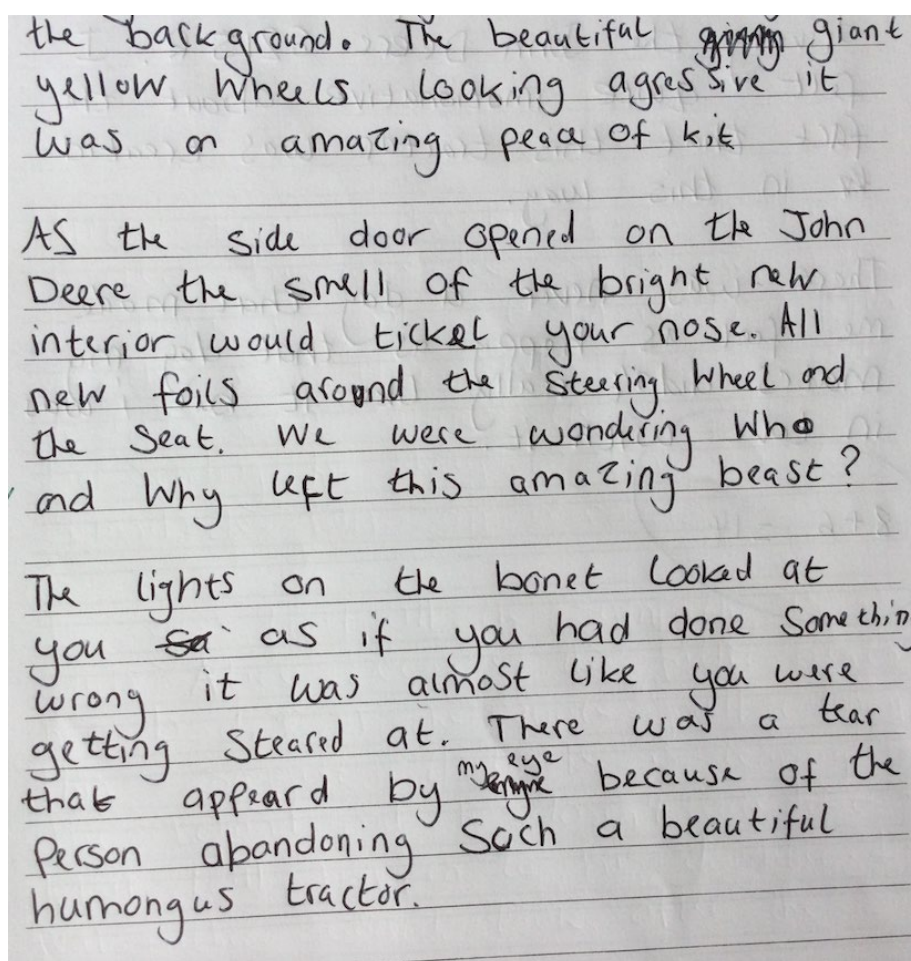
Appendix 9 – Case Studies

Reaseheath College Case Study 1 – SS

SS is from Poland and has lived in the UK for six years. Prior to this, SS had a basic knowledge of English, but is now fluent and speaks without a discernible accent. SS is an extremely conscientious and hardworking student and started his Level 2 Diploma in Motor Vehicle Technology having achieved grade 3 in English Language GCSE. In order to progress onto a Level 3 Diploma in Motor Vehicle Maintenance and Repairs, he is required to have GCSE English grade 4. Consequently, from the outset, SS engaged enthusiastically and wholeheartedly with the initiative.

Achieving goals: SS's primary motivation for improving his vocabulary was to improve his GCSE grade, but he also stated that he wanted to be able to express himself better and communicate professionally and effectively in the workplace. SS was unusual in that, most of his peers had an inflated sense of their vocabulary knowledge/usage. Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that SS's mother tongue is not English, but he was acutely aware of the need to develop his vocabulary.

In September 2019, SS completed an initial assessment. In Section B (writing), learners had to write a story with the title 'Abandoned' (see below).



the background. The beautiful ~~giant~~ giant yellow wheels looking aggressive it was an amazing piece of kit

As the side door opened on the John Deere the smell of the bright new interior would tickle your nose. All new foils around the steering wheel and the seat. We were wondering who and why left this amazing beast?

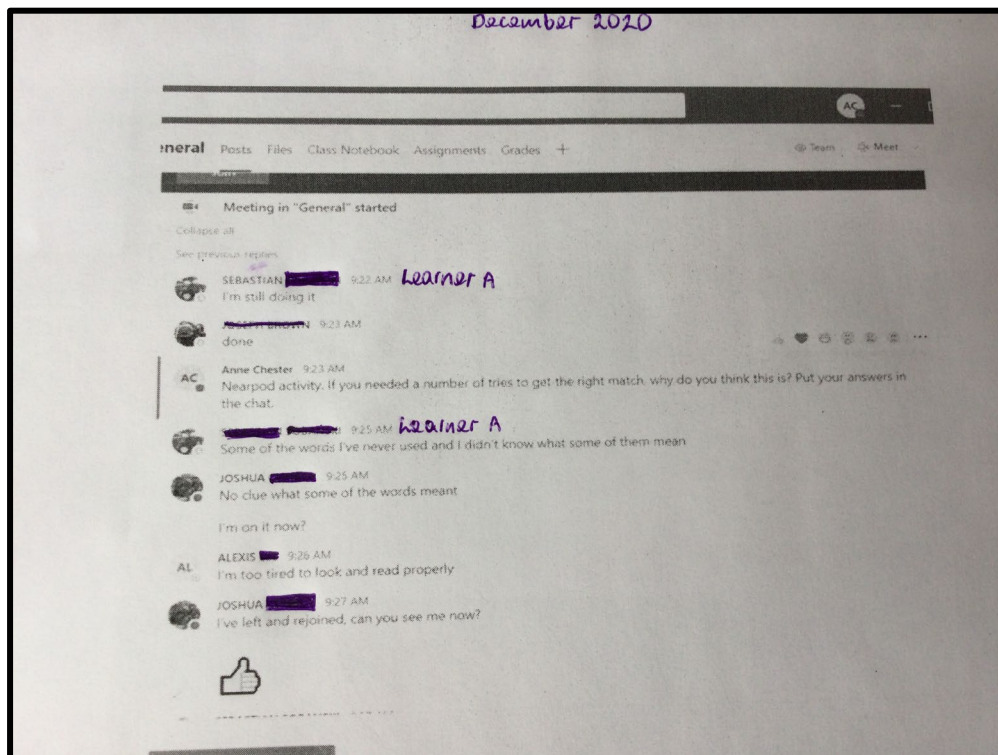
The lights on the bonnet looked at you ~~sa~~ as if you had done something wrong it was almost like you were getting stared at. There was a tear that appeared by ~~my~~ ^{my eye} because of the person abandoning such a beautiful humongus tractor.

SS scored 8 marks (out of a total of 24) for A05 Content & Organisation and 6 marks (out of a total of 16) for A06 Technical Accuracy. The total of 14/40 equates to a grade 2. In September, his writing was characterised by vague and repetitive adjectives such as *amazing* and *beautiful*.

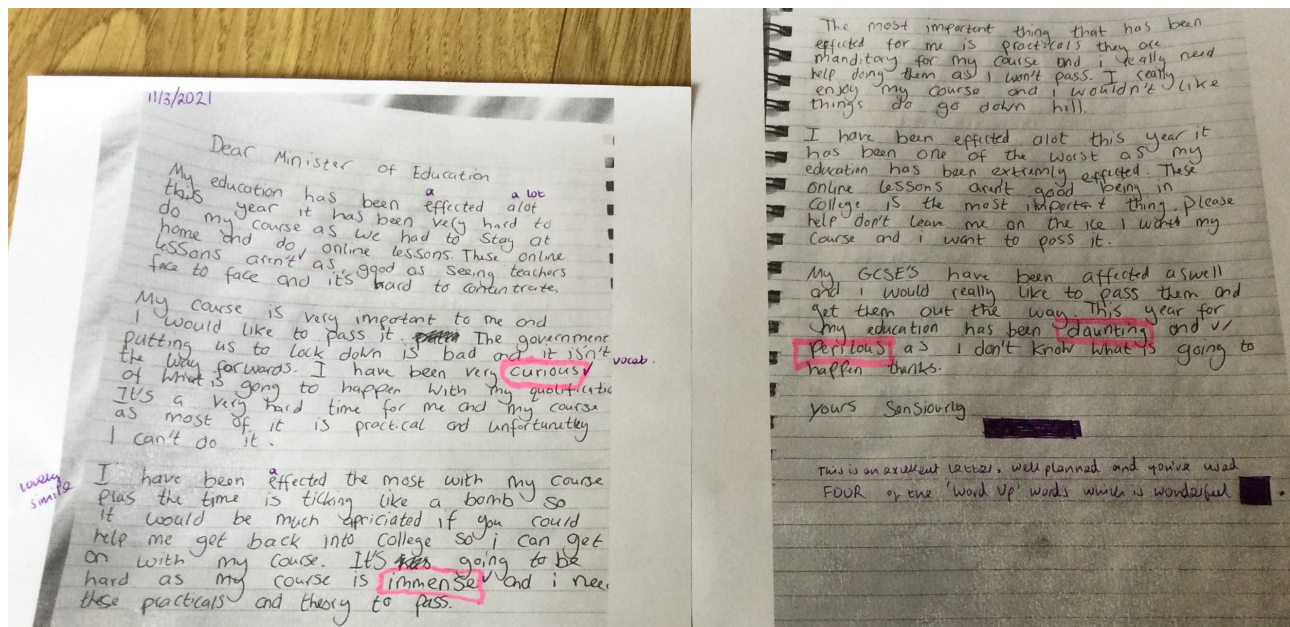
When the bookmark/word list was introduced, learners participated in a Nearpod activity – matching words to their definitions. SS needed 37 tries before all 8 words were matched to correct meanings. SS (Learner A) was very open about the fact that he didn't understand the words at all. They were completely unfamiliar to him.

Match the sophisticated vocab to either its definition or the picture it most represents.

Classroom Results		
Student	Matches	Tries
Levi	8/8	9
Seb	8/8	37
Alexis	8/8	15
joe	5/8	15
Connor P	8/8	13
Josh	-	-



In March, while working online, learners were asked to write a letter about the impact of Covid on their education. At this point, SS had been exposed to the Word Up words for nearly three months. His written response had developed significantly (see below.) He used two of the words (*curious* and *immense*) in the right context and attempted to use *daunting* and *perilous*. He demonstrated that he understands the meaning of the two words, but the writing is clumsy. Notwithstanding this, he was rewarded for his *conscious use of vocabulary* (and correct spelling).



SS went on to include more of the Word Up vocabulary in his work and as his confidence grew, so did the fluency and accuracy of his writing.

Improving confidence: SS flourished as a result of participating in Word Up. He started to write more and experimented using the words when answering questions in Section A (Reading). He reported feeling more intelligent when using the words and feeling more confident in English. He also spoke about practising the words at home with his mother.

Reaseheath College Case Study 2. JD

JD is a Motor Vehicle Engineering learner. This was his first year at Reaseheath and he was studying both English and Maths. JD presented as a 'typical' resit learner, lacking self-confidence and motivation, describing his school learning experience as extremely poor, talking about how his teacher didn't care and how little help he received. JD was keen to reach a target grade of 4 (having achieved a grade 3 at school) but did not think it was possible at the start of the year and so fell in with peers, using avoidance tactics to deflect weaknesses and vulnerabilities in English. In his initial assessment JD scored 24/80 which equated to a grade 2 and showed a clear lack of effort with minimal expansion of answers, using simple, limited vocabulary. In the 'Word Up' initial assessment, JD demonstrated an inflated sense of vocabulary knowledge yet an inaccurate use of the 'Word Up' words.

The response below was taken from an online 'Word Up' activity carried out in February and is typical of the writing style of this cohort, frequently using slang in their writing. This was more pronounced during online lessons, and had to be regularly addressed, showing a lack of understanding of the requirements of the exam, the appropriate use of different forms of the English language and that spoken language cannot always be transcribed. It also shows how the learner has picked the same word as the example, potentially showing insecurity with the 'Word Up' words.

23/02/21

Open Ended Question		Participation 100%
Slide	Open Ended Question	Answer
2	Use 1 of the following words to describe something you enjoy about your vocational course. (curious / immense / majestic / extraordinary). Try to be emotive and empowering in your description. For example: I love teaching English at Reaseheath College because of the extraordinary characters I meet and the immense pride I feel when students make progress.	I enjoy learning moter vehicle at reasheath coz I wanna learn how to e ly work on extraordinary tanks in the army

JD embraced online learning, which he believes enabled him to concentrate and stop worrying about what his peers thought. This is his response when asked about the differences between face-to-face teaching versus online.

[11/03 09:31]

"Behind a computer I'm not scared saying anything because I can't see if anyone laughs but face to face, I can lol 😊"

This also coincided with the introduction of the 'Word Up' list and the improvement of JD's written responses and a surge in his confidence. JD embraced the 'Word Up' list and he became accustomed to using the bookmark to improve his writing, however it was also clear that the continued reminder and focus on vocabulary encouraged him to try his own sophisticated words as well, as can be seen in the text below which is a question 5, creative writing plan:

1 main character at work sunny and calm = happy and bubbly and warm

2 main character gets kids from his wife to stay at his house when wind picks up = dramatic sympathy and worried 😞

3 the storm hits = horrific and mysterious

4 something comes out the ground like a dinosaur coming out an egg = suspension and terror and sympathy for wats gonna happen next

5 there is a massive storm and the main character saw something petrifying and runs away scarring the hell out his daughter = sympathy towards the family and main character horrified by the thing curious about what it is

Learner's own 'sophisticated' vocab

'Word Up' vocab

This plan, written in March 2021 after only 3 months of exposure to the focused vocabulary activities, shows a substantial improvement in his vocabulary choices, whilst still showing his poor underlying literacy, typical of a resit learner.

Within the same period learners were asked to describe how they feel about the Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs) system using at least 2 of the 'Word Up' words:

[11/03 09:24]

*I'm **curious** about what there plans are and how there gonna make this work as **dauntingly** there plans so far have lead us absolutely no were."*

Again, we can see the attempt to use 'sophisticated' vocabulary but not always correctly and with basic grammatical errors, demonstrating a clear gap in learning stemming from early years. Despite this, this sustained attempt to use more sophisticated vocabulary is rewarded within the AQA mark scheme and seems to build JD's confidence in writing, allowing him to try less familiar words more frequently within a non-judgemental culture.

The paragraph below is taken from a piece of creative writing (horror) completed in April 2021 and shows clear, unprompted attempts to use the 'Word Up' vocabulary.

*I **perilously** begin shouting like a dog who saw a squirrel. I never felt so **vulnerable** in all my life. My face was like a river of sweat and blood castigated down my face. Once I confessed he reversed the cogs and my hair was as free as a dog in a corn field and happier then a kid with a paper boat on a rainy day.*

Not only can we see the 'Word Up' vocabulary, but there is a marked improvement in attempts to use language features and more descriptive writing as well.

In the milestone, completed not long after this piece of work, JD scored 40/80 (Grade 4), showing a drastic improvement in his work, in particular, Assessment Outcome (AO) 5 score increased from 7 at the beginning of the year to 12 and his AO6 score increased from 5 at the beginning of the year to 8. He also attempted all questions and expanded his responses in section A. Reviewing his Initial Assessment and last milestone, it was clear to see a huge improvement in confidence and attempts to use more sophisticated and unfamiliar words in both section A and B. I also believe, that focusing more intently on vocabulary allowed him to understand and search for implied meanings, having learnt and understood more about interchangeable language and 'word power'. JD has expressed how his confidence has grown and that he really liked the bookmark which enabled him to use 'big posh words'.

One notable observation about JD, and in fact the whole class, was the persistent use of the top 2 and last words on the 'Word Up' bookmark. Curious (at the top of the list) was the most frequent word used by the whole group, suggesting that

students did not fully engage with this resource and perhaps found even the 10 words listed overwhelming. Noting this observation, next year the words will be rotated on all visual resources.

OUR PARTNERS



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