

Explaining fingertip vocabulary

2B – Craft short, crisp explanations of selected ‘fingertip’ words and phrases

Please see 5A for how to integrate explanations of fingertip words with reading.

In most texts that pupils encounter there will probably be a few unfamiliar words and phrases. Some may be words relating to the particular topic being covered or to the wider curriculum in general, while others might only really be relevant to the meaning of the given text.

These are essentially **‘fingertip’ words** – words or phrases that pupils need to have to hand in the moment. They have relatively short-term utility because they are mainly intended to help pupils understand the bigger idea contained in a sentence or paragraph.

The fleeting or transitional importance of these words necessitates an approach to defining them that both ensures pupils

know enough about the meaning of a word (the smaller unit) to understand the meaning of a passage (the larger unit), ideally while preserving overall reading fluency.

The following extract comes from the opening of *The Gilded Ones* by Namina Forna, a fantasy story about a 16-year-old girl called Dekka, who struggles for survival in a hostile environment. If you were a form tutor reading this text to your tutor group, you might decide that you need to teach your pupils the term ‘Ritual of Purity’ as it is quite complex and an important part of the story.

The words ‘ominous’ and ‘rheumy’ are likely to be unfamiliar for most pupils, but while they support an understanding of Dekka’s feelings, they are not crucial to a wider understanding of the story, so a short ‘fingertip’ definition would be useful. The words ‘ward-off’, ‘frail’, ‘hearty’ and ‘stooped’ might be tricky for some pupils but they are the kinds of words that are more likely to be contextualised by the surrounding details. You cannot teach every word!

- 1 Today is the **Ritual of Purity**.
- 2 The thought nervously circles in my head as I hurry toward the barn, gathering my cloak to
- 3 **ward off** the cold. It’s early morning, and the sun hasn’t yet begun its climb above the snow-
- 4 dusted trees encircling our small farmhouse. Shadows gather in the darkness, crowding the
- 5 weak pool of light cast by my lamp. An **ominous** tingling builds under my skin. It’s almost as if
- 6 there’s something there, at the edge of my vision... .
- 7 It’s just nerves, I tell myself. I’ve felt the tingling many times before.
- 8 The barn door is open when I arrive, a lantern hung at the post. Father is already inside,
- 9 spreading hay. He’s a **frail** figure in the darkness, his tall body sunken into itself. Just three
- 10 months ago, he was **hearty** and robust, his blond hair untouched by gray. Then the red pox
- 11 came, sickening him and Mother. Now he’s **stooped** and faded, with the **rheumy** eyes and
- 12 wispy hair of someone decades older.

Academic words

Finger tip words

Leave alone

