

Vocabulary: sponge tasks

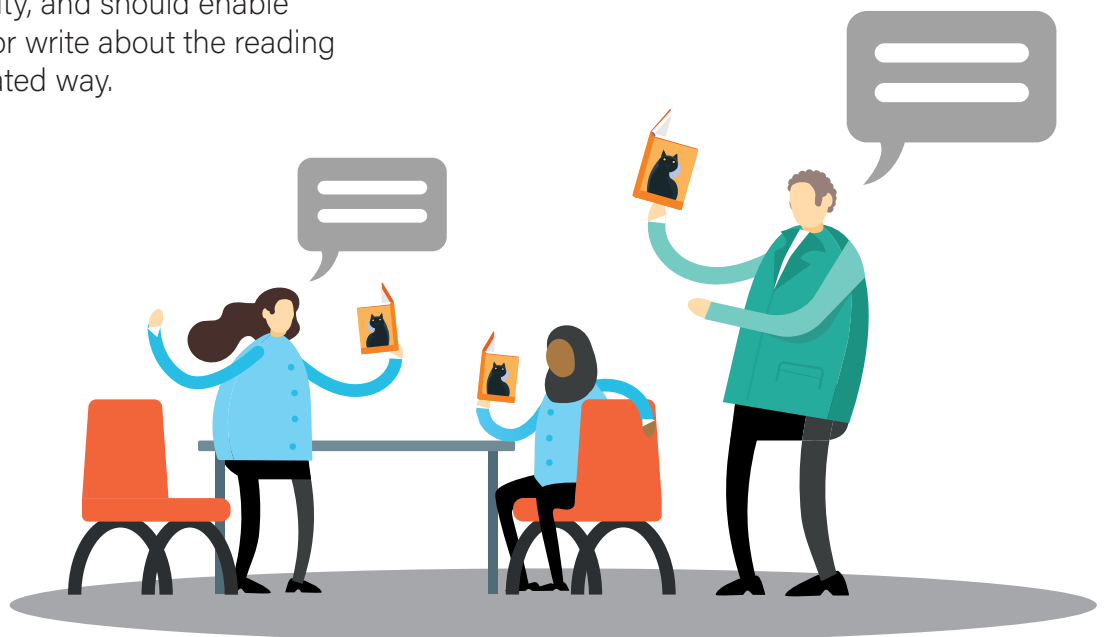
8C – Set sponge tasks to develop depth of new vocabulary knowledge

What is a sponge task?

A 'sponge task', as the name suggests, allows pupils to better absorb new vocabulary after reading. These tasks are also designed to develop the depth of pupils' vocabulary knowledge, giving them opportunities to practise using new vocabulary in different ways, and connect new words to their existing schema.

Sponge tasks can also help to consolidate pupils' understanding of the passage or article they have just read; therefore, the word selected should be of high utility, and should enable pupils to talk or write about the reading in a sophisticated way.

Sponge tasks can be written or spoken, and can involve responding to carefully designed questions, categorising and comparing words, or writing sentences with strict parameters that ensure the word is used in specific ways.



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Example 1

Pupils are reading a passage from Chapter 10 of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde*, which describes Jekyll's temporary rejection of Hyde, and subsequent explosion of violence.

Before reading, the teacher has introduced the word 'repression,' giving a pupil-friendly description, allowing pupils to sound the word out, and using morphology to explore the word in relation to similar words like 'suppression' and 'oppression.'



After reading, the teacher sets a writing task with sentences for pupils to practise:

- 1 Jekyll **represses** his desires for two months by...
- 2 Jekyll **represses** his darker side because...
- 3 Ultimately Jekyll's **repression** leads to...

These sentences are designed to allow pupils to use the word in different ways, but they also rely on successful comprehension of the specific passage, and therefore act as an opportunity for pupils to consolidate their understanding of the word and the text.

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Example 2

A word like 'ambition' could be introduced in a number of subjects: English, History, PSHE.

After introducing and defining the word during reading, a sponge task could involve the following questions:

- 1 How is an **ambition** different to a **desire**?
- 2 What does an **ambitious** person do?
- 3 Is **ambition** always a good thing?

These questions are designed to give pupils the opportunity to think about the word, and connect it to their existing knowledge. The first question aims to ensure pupils' understanding of the word is specific and precise; the second and third encourage them to think around the word and approach it from different angles.

For any word, it's important that the teacher gives pupils a variety of further opportunities to encounter it in future lessons, spacing these out over time. These can be through simple retrieval cues (eg Which 'a' word means...?) as well as more complex questions relating to the text (eg Explain how Stevenson shows the consequences of repression in Chapter 10).