How to empower your students to become

Worder Nerds

(Follow the blue links to see the research behind each step.)

1. First of all, have you told your students **_how important words are_**? Do they know that the more words you know the more choices you have in life…and that this is a fact! Share with them some of the following materials. The more convinced they are that building their word banks will increase their success both in and out of school, the easier it will be for them to be engaged in becoming a _Worder_.
   - https://litemind.com/top-3-reasons-to-improve-your-vocabulary/
   - http://www.city-journal.org/2013/23_1_vocabulary.html
   - http://blog.thelinguist.com/vocabulary-success-word-power

2. Establish a process for setting a **_weekly goal_** for new words learned and provide recognition for meeting those goals. Rather than competing for the number of words learned each week, compete for reaching your goal. Later after confidence has built up and students are challenging themselves with higher goals, recognize those who choose the highest weekly goals and then meet them. Goal setting is well known for motivating learners.

3. Recognizing effort rather than sheer competitive numbers puts everyone on a more level playing field. Encourage your students to **_cheer each other on_**. Positive peer recognition is especially motivating.

4. Set aside a **_weekly 30-40 minute time_**, dedicated to being a _Worder_. Honored time is essential.

5. Have some **_challenging non-fiction texts_** selected ready to use during this dedicated time period. Starting with a grade-level text dedicated to the content you want to teach, select two more texts that teach similar content but are more difficult (rather than having alternative easier texts for your struggling readers). Remind students that this reading activity is not about practicing fluency but about learning new words. Go for a "smart up" challenge not a "dumb down" simplification. Go for college level material! Rigor is invigorating.

6. **_Pair up students at similar reading levels_** and provide copies of all 3 choices. Tell them which is the hardest and which text is at grade level. Students have 5 minutes to skim through the first 3 to 5 paragraphs in each text and count the number of words the two of them do not comfortably know. **_They select the text_** they want to work with based on their goal and their comfort with the challenge. Choice is empowering.

7. Set a timer for 10 minutes. Partner A starts reading aloud, partner B has the phone open to a dictionary app (phone is in airplane mode). Each time neither of them can positively define a word, A spells it aloud for B to look it up and A **_writes their agreed upon definition_** at the bottom of the text or on sticky notes. Writing down words strengthens the imprint of learning.

8. After they look up each word, they **_paraphrase_** the sentence or phrase which uses the word, to the best of their ability. Summarizing or paraphrasing is a high level skill which requires practice.

9. When the timer goes off, the reader (A) becomes the listener and the previous listener (B) ***rereads the selection*** they have deciphered. Repeated readings help reinforce and improve comprehension.

10. If time is left over B reads on and A looks up words, ***repeating steps 6-8***. Respect for each other's contributions can add to the positive ownership of this learning.

11. Partners file (binder, folder) their readings, ***record the number of words*** they learned about and ***once a month return to partner-reread*** a selection of their choice. Reaching goals, having choices, and review, all are empowering.

CELL PHONE TIPS

- By requiring phones be on airplane mode, students are unable to text, access wi-fi and play on the internet. Let students know that you will daily check one phone randomly for the correct setting and be sure to follow through. I confiscate the phone when a student is using for the wrong reason and have the student call parents/guardian to come pick up the phone at end of day (this is a school policy). Students get a clean slate the next day, but 3 times caught means you may no longer have your own phone at school.

- For students who have no phones or have been blocked from bringing their phone, make a school-wide request for old phones that are no longer in use. Most older phones can still manage a download from wi-fi, of a digital dictionary. (My favorite is Merriam Webster.) Get support for loading these from your Tech Dept.

- When phones are not in use they should be visible on top of student desks/tables, face down.

- If students have a home desk, have them make a decorative, personalized manila-paper phone holder that is taped to their desk.

- A sturdy envelope for enclosing phones, taped to each desk, can provide extra security when students do not have assigned desks.

- If you are comfortable letting students have internet connectivity, then students may listen to the pronunciation of words as well.

- Most phones come with a timer. Let students time themselves, at intervals that they prefer. As mentioned earlier, choice is empowering.