



Literacy at Hartford Public High School

November 29, 2004
Volume 2 Number 13

Using a Word Map

From Pre-reading Activities for Content Area Reading and Learning

A word map is a graphic representation of the definition of a word. Using the word map to help students understand a new vocabulary word involves three categories or contexts for each word.

1. the general class to which the word belongs (What is it?)
2. the important properties of the word including those that distinguish it from members of its class (What is it like?)
3. examples of the concept (What are some examples?)

Word maps work better with nouns than they do with action verbs and other parts of speech, although it is possible to accommodate other parts of speech as well. In the center of the map, in the largest square, the concept being studied is written. Then, a general word or short phrase describing the word is written in the square at the top. This word is often the name of a generic class to which the word belongs. Next, the student answers the question, "What is it like?" with words that fit the same category as the center word. Finally, examples of the concept are written in the bottom square.

Begin teaching word mapping to the students by direct instruction through modeling. By using familiar examples, students gain valuable practice in understanding the categories of questions used.

After students are familiar with the general concept of word maps, you can construct independent exercises in which concepts are

introduced in a rich context and all the information needed to fill in the map is in the text being read.

By using the mapping technique, students gain more exposure to the word than simply looking up the meaning in a dictionary. In addition, this approach promotes independent learning.

Caution: Make sure that when responding to the question, "What is it like?", the students give examples that are in the same category as the center word. For example, with the center word *bear*, words such as *lion*, *elephant*, and *dog* would be appropriate. *Animal* would not be, for it is too broad. Similarly, *Dalmation* would not be, for it is too specific. It is a specific breed of dog and not a generic mammal.

Word Map for *Bear*

