



Literacy at Hartford Public High School

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Word Walls

It's no longer enough for classroom walls to be attractive," says Dr. Darla Shaw, coordinator of the graduate reading program at Western Connecticut State University in Danbury, Connecticut, and a frequent workshop presenter on such topics as word walls. "A working word wall may be only an inanimate object, but if properly developed, it can bring real life to a [classroom]."

For teachers who have not used a word wall before, Shaw has some "words" of advice:

- Word walls should be student generated, not commercially prepared.
- New information should be added on a regular -- even daily -- basis.
- Content-area material from the curriculum rather than randomly selected words should be utilized.
- Word walls should be referred to often so students come to understand and see their relevance.
- Word walls are a group effort; allow students to make suggestions for content.

"Children who learn in a classroom with a working word wall have a distinct advantage over students who don't have such a resource in their room," said Shaw.

How could I use the word wall?

Choose 4-5 new words to introduce each week. DO NOT post all the words at the beginning of the year. This will become a "sea of words" and will not be as useful to the students.

Post the words on the chalkboard the week they are introduced. This will help keep the new words highlighted for daily activities. (Variation: Some teachers add the words to the wall on Monday and let the students discover which are new for the week.)

Introduce the words to the class. Point out the new words to the class, review the spelling, the pronunciation, the meaning, and their possible use. You might ask the students to copy the words into their notebooks.

Provide students with many opportunities to read and write the words. Look for the word in texts the students read. You might also require that the students use the words in their bell work. Refer students to word wall when they are writing.

Informally assess students often to see if they are able to read and write the words on the word wall. You might privately ask a student to read 5 words you randomly select. You can check writer's notebooks to see if students are spelling the words correctly. A word wall is a valuable tool only if students are able to read and write the words.

Create word puzzles using the words from your word wall. These two web sites offer teachers the opportunity to create all types of word puzzles based on words that the teacher is using in class:

www.wordplays.com

www.puzzlemaker.school.discovery.com

Create a concept square for the words on your word wall. Require students to complete one of these concept squares for any work that you discover is a problem for a student. Completing the square forces the students to focus on the words that they do not know well, not on those words that they already know.

In this sector... Write a word from the word wall that you would like to understand better.	In this sector... Brainstorm a list of words or ideas that you think of when you hear the word in the first box.
In this sector... Write a definition of the word in your own words.	In this sector Write the formal definition of this word. (Look it up in the dictionary or an Encyclopedia or in the glossary of your text book.)