

## Literacy Development

# Building Background Knowledge



## More You Know - The More You Know

**T**here are many times that we hear someone say a word or describe an event that sounds familiar but we're not exactly sure what it means or refers to. Other times we hear or read something and we haven't a clue as to its meaning.

We only know what we know. Sometimes we can figure out what is meant by paying attention to its context (the words or phrases that come before and after). Sometimes a word we don't know sounds like a word we do know, and we can make an informed guess. But that often doesn't work.

Here's the bottom-line: the more we know, the more we can know, and the easier it is to read. What we know at any one time is called our "background knowledge." Increasing what you know about all sorts of things expands your brain's ability to read quickly without having to pause for a word it doesn't understand.

There's an easy but somewhat time consuming way to increase your background knowledge about something or the definition of a word - Look It Up! Although this takes some time, it will greatly improve your ability to read well and you'll understand more and more things about your world. Remember: The more you know, the more you know!

## Let's Practice



Read the following story and then write a definition or example for the key words in the story. You likely already know the definitions for a number of the words, but there may be some you don't know. If you don't already know the definition of a word, look it up either in a paper dictionary or an online dictionary.

(*Merriam-Webster OnLine* is a good resource. It includes sounds for many words so you can check pronunciation as well.)

<http://www.merriam-webster.com>

### My Grandparents

My grandparents grew up in Poland. They had a good life until the Nazis invaded at the beginning of WWII. The Nazis quickly defeated the outmanned Polish army, but many people continued to fight as part of the resistance. My grandfather joined the underground and continued to fight throughout the occupation. My grandparents were Catholic and did not suffer from the same hardships faced by their Jewish friends. Nearly all of their Jewish friends rounded up and sent to concentration camps, ultimately, to be exterminated as part of the Holocaust - Nazi genocide of the Jewish people. My grandparents were able to help a few of their friends. They hid a number of Jewish children in a secret room in their basement. Later, the Polish underground helped the children escape from Poland to Denmark where they were protected until the end of the war. My grandparents could easily have been killed for their civil disobedience, but they were fortunate. After the war, they joined relatives in Canada and started a family. My grandfather never practiced medicine again, but he and my grandmother continued to care for all of us for many years.

Word or Event	Definition or Example
Nazi	
resistance	
concentration camp	
Jewish	
exterminated	
Polish underground	
civil disobedience	
Holocaust	
genocide	



# Words to Teach

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Preparing to teach others is a good way to really learn new words. Complete the following forms so that you are able to teach three new words to others.

First new word: \_\_\_\_\_

Where I saw or heard the word: \_\_\_\_\_

Examples of the word in a sentence:

Sentence 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Sentence 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Part of speech: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Second new word: \_\_\_\_\_

Where I saw or heard the word: \_\_\_\_\_

Examples of the word in a sentence:

Sentence 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Sentence 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Part of speech: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Third new word: \_\_\_\_\_

Where I saw or heard the word: \_\_\_\_\_

Examples of the word in a sentence:

Sentence 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Sentence 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Part of speech: \_\_\_\_\_