

characterized by longer, more complex sentences that contain vocabulary less frequently heard than the vocabulary in everyday spoken English.” That makes academic language quite different from the more common everyday words that students use, making it important to teach this language directly. Lessons and activities on any topic provide an opportunity to build students’ academic language skills. One part of this is directly teaching the words needed for understanding a particular lesson or activity. These may include two types of **academic vocabulary**.

Key terms—also called domain-specific vocabulary—are unique to a content area. These are the technical or specialized terms used in academic disciplines, such as math, science, and history. These terms usually have no exact substitute, and the definition is one that is generally agreed upon by experts in the content area. Key terms are the words likely to be highlighted in textbooks and digital materials and to be defined in the glossary. Some examples are *linear measurement*, *quotient*, *fossil*, *topography*, *syllable*, *constitutional*, *chronological order*, *foreshadowing*, *photosynthesis*, *condensation*, and *landform*.

Academic vocabulary also includes **general academic vocabulary** words. These are words that students are unlikely to hear or use in everyday, social situations although they sometimes have a common meaning as well as an academic meaning. This vocabulary is used across content areas rather than being specific to one discipline. These are words and phrases used in teacher presentations, textbooks, questions, assignments, and tests, and that students will need to use when discussing and writing. Some examples are *compare and contrast*, *community*, *estimate*, *infer*, *provide evidence for*, *assess*, *role*, *task*, and *conclude*. A source of academic vocabulary words is *The Academic Word List* (Coxhead 2000) available online.

The labels *bricks* and *mortar* may help to differentiate between these two components of academic language (Dutro and Moran 2003). *Mortar* (general academic vocabulary) sticks *bricks* (specific academic terms) together to build understanding. Sometimes, teachers collaborate to prioritize academic terms and vocabulary to teach across grade levels and content areas. This helps provide the repeated exposure to terms and vocabulary needed for deep understanding.

Nonacademic vocabulary may also be taught as part of lessons and activities. *Basic* vocabulary words are words familiar to most kids and used in ordinary, daily communication. They are usually learned indirectly, but high-utility basic vocabulary words may need to be directly taught to language learners with low English proficiency, to students less exposed to language at home, or to students with learning or cognitive disabilities. When stories/literature are part of the lesson/activity, students may encounter more *sophisticated*, nonacademic vocabulary that will need to be taught to support reading or listening comprehension (see Photo 5.2). Additionally, in some lessons/activities, students may benefit from being directly taught words to help make their writing more precise and vivid. Examples of nonacademic vocabulary words are *meandering*, *amiable*, *squat*, *outraged*, *vast*, *smudge*, *shrewd*, *fantasy*, *footloose*, and *startled*.

The labels *tier 1* for basic vocabulary, *tier 2* for general academic vocabulary (sophisticated), and *tier 3* for content-specific vocabulary (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan 2002) are also used to describe the various types or levels of vocabulary needed in school. As you plan for teaching these key terms and vocabulary, you’ll need to make various decisions.

5-4b Decision Steps for Planning to Teach Key Terms and Vocabulary

There are four decision points or steps through which a teacher works as he plans for teaching key terms and vocabulary. These decisions are much



Photo 5.2 This teacher pre-teaches vocabulary words that will be used in the story he is about to read. He uses a visual support as well.