As she handed out the master list of content vocabulary words to each team, Margo explained that teams would earn 3 points for an actual object, 2 points for a model or facsimile, and 1 point for a picture. A few students asked if they were allowed to draw or trace, and Margo said that such art would be admissible; however, the drawing should reflect genuine effort and should not be something put together minutes before the conclusion of the hunt. She went on to explain that an object or a picture cannot count for more than one word. Teams were then given the opportunity to assign specific roles to each of their members and to discuss strategies for finding words. Teams were allowed 1 week to complete the hunt.

During the week, teams met a couple of times to update their progress in finding words and to revise their strategy, if necessary. Periodically, they were reminded to maintain secrecy about the status of the hunt, which heightened the suspense of the competition. By midweek, some students were complaining that they could not find an object or a picture for certain words. Margo told them that it might be impossible to collect objects or pictures for every word. Statements of this kind inevitably push teams to search out difficult words with renewed vigor just to prove the teacher wrong.

At week’s end, the teams were allowed to go over their findings and tally the points. Margo double-checked the teams’ figures and looked over the drawings to make sure they clearly represented the words and were not thrown together haphazardly. Finally, the team with the most points was declared the winner. They were allowed to gloat over their victory only briefly, however, because Margo rewarded each team for its efforts with an opportunity to display and publish its work.

Giving them the following options, Margo asked the groups to select what they wished to do with their findings and provided the necessary materials to get them started:

* Collages with the words on cards appropriately arranged
* Slide shows developed by photographing the objects and pictures and writing a brief explanation
* Picture books with photographs and illustrations accompanied by a brief explanation
* Newspapers or comic books with pictures and illustrations accompanied by stories
* An exhibit table with objects labeled and briefly described

Not only are word scavenger hunts fun, but they also go a long way toward building relevant prior knowledge for the chapter or unit. Hunts allow students to explore the topic by collecting and reading about key vocabulary words taken from the content. Students gather a great deal of information about the topic and develop an interest in it. The benefits of the hunt last throughout and beyond the unit. For instance, in the classroom just described, students were surrounded during the unit with reminders of the topic’s key terms in the form of collages on the wall, a display corner in the back of the room, and books featured on the classroom library shelves. The hands-on approach to gathering pictures and objects for words makes scavenger hunting a sound instructional strategy for developing vocabulary and improving comprehension (Cunningham, 1992).