With the fifth and final step of Possible Sentences, students are asked to create new sentences using the targeted words. This activity can be a homework assignment for the next class period, or it can occur during class as students work in pairs or share in the large-group discussion. As students share these sentences, everyone should be involved in checking the text, as well as the agreed-on definitions generated during class discussion.

On the plus side, the Possible Sentences Activity involves students in the elaborative thinking processes that characterize active learning. However, as with any teacher-directed activity, it will not work with all units of study. This is especially true for units containing a lot of technical vocabulary for which students may not have any prior knowledge.

WORD SCAVENGER HUNTS

All of us have participated in a real scavenger hunt at some time in our lives. Remember the thrill and excitement of competing with other teams in trying to be the first to gather assorted items in a limited time? Scavenger hunts for helping students build word meanings by collecting real items and pictures are valuable because they are fun, develop cooperative learning skills, and require active involvement. These elements of the strategy ensure that vocabulary learning will be more memorable (Moore, Moore, Cunningham, & Cunningham, 1986).

An eighth-grade science class developed a genuine “learning frenzy” when given the opportunity to work in cooperative groups and compete with other groups in a word scavenger hunt. The teacher, Margo, had selected vocabulary words from a textbook chapter on astronomy, words for which she thought students could find actual objects, models, or pictures. She included the key terms that the students needed to learn to gain a full understanding of the important content of the astronomy unit. In compiling her master list, which follows, she included technical words she knew would be easy to collect, as well as difficult words:

comet meteor pulsar nova cosmic dust
red giant sextant black hole radiation big bang
telescope asteroid gravity radar crater

Margo divided her class into teams of four students and explained the scavenger hunt to be sure that all of them understood the rules and purpose. She accomplished this by asking students to share their experiences with scavenger hunting. She then specified the conditions of the competition:

* Students must bring in objects and pictures by a certain date.
* No team should reveal to any other team which items they collected and where they found the items until the hunt is over.