



Oxford
Reading
Tree

Word
Sparks

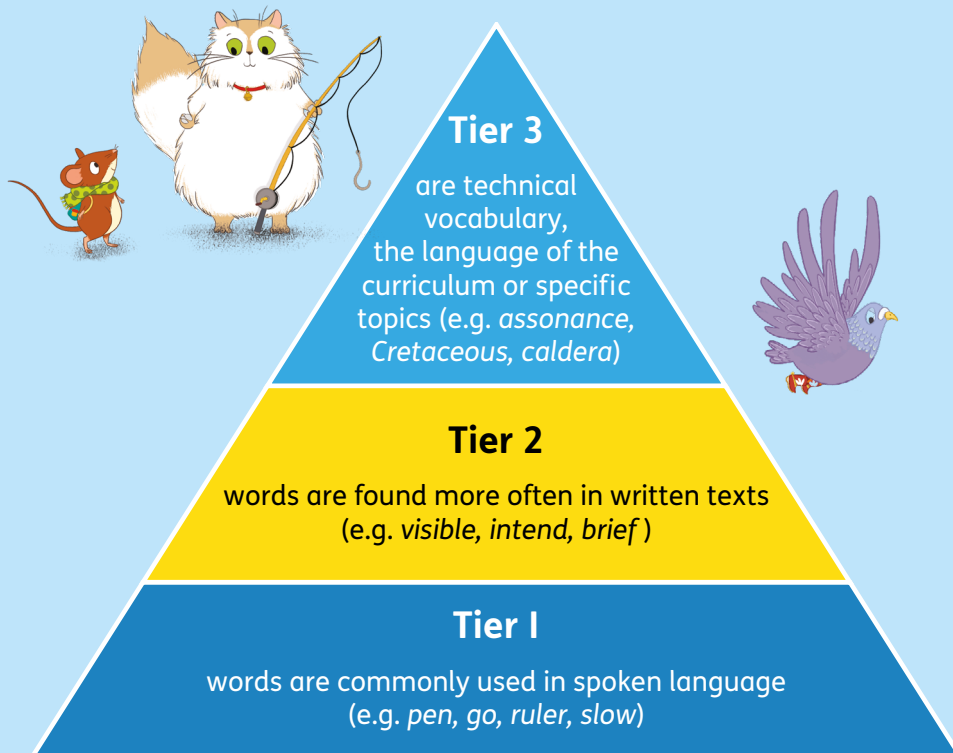
Introducing the 300 focus words

OXFORD

What are the 300 focus words and why are they important?

Oxford Reading Tree Word Sparks takes 300 of the most useful words for children to know and combines them with decodable text so that children develop their vocabulary and comprehension at the same time as mastering the mechanics of reading.

We have defined ‘most useful’ as words that are not usually found in everyday speech, and which have broad applications across the curriculum. In their influential book on vocabulary teaching, *Bringing Words to Life*, researchers Beck, McKeown and Kucan suggest dividing words into three tiers:



Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G. & Kucan, L. (2013) *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction* 2nd edn. New York: Guildford Press.

How were the words chosen?

The Word Sparks focus words were selected using data from the Oxford Children’s Corpus, the largest database of writing for and by children in the world. Our analysts:

- Found the most common words used by primary-aged children
- Took out the really common Tier 1 words (like **the**, **in**, **big**, **went**), ‘topic-based’ Tier 3 words (like **desert** or **magma**) and proper names (like **Google** or **Minecraft**)
- Focussed on the ones which tend to be Tier 2 words in lots of contexts (like **delicious** or **direction** or **vital**)

These focus words have been carefully arranged across the Word Sparks books to provide a clear progression, building in repetition so that children have the chance to meet each focus word in different contexts and across different genres, in both fiction and non-fiction.

What does “knowing” a focus word mean?

The focus words are words for children to get to know in different contexts. They might not grasp the word fully when they first meet it, but the built-in repetition means that they will ideally meet it several times. At first, children will get to know the words through hearing them and using them in spoken language. Later it will be through reading and maybe writing them. For example, a four-year-old might meet the word ‘**delicious**’. They probably won’t be able to read it or spell it, but if they can understand it in the context of the book and use it to describe their lunch one day, it is now a word they know. Later they will learn to read it, spell it and use it in their writing too. Please see the end of this document for frequently-asked questions about the words and more about the Word Sparks series.

Word Sparks words by Level

Oxford Level 1	Oxford Level 1+	Oxford Level 2	Oxford Level 3	Oxford Level 4	Oxford Level 5	Oxford Level 6
bright delicious disappear enter especially exactly explain finally forward join past several	appear attention believe dangerous huge important journey notice practise problem return safe sign special twice useful	choose clear direction early fierce interest lead often perfect plenty possible reason single stable tight wonderful	able arrive beginning beside between calm careful chance check entrance exclaim fact late pattern perhaps probably promise rather real realise search tiny understand within	among announce apart attach audience awful bare complete confuse decision delight desperate effort final forever friendly hardly imagine introduce powerful protect provide simple unusual	action act ancient belong centre choice contain conversation create distant effect impossible information learn narrow nervous object ordinary otherwise popular present remain strength value	approach beneath certainly challenge common courage curious discover during explore free glance immediately instant least lonely mysterious particular prepare receive remind usually wise worth



Oxford Level 7	Oxford Level 8	Oxford Level 9	Oxford Level 10	Oxford Level 11	Oxford Level 12
arrival atmosphere attempt capture consider cover deal determined difference entire fine ignore less necessary opportunity position pressure prove send situation somehow success support warning	accept admit appearance calm cautious community course direct double excellent figure form massive mention natural opinion personal pleasant prevent regular shall struggle truth unless	abandon advantage amaze anxious cause declare demand describe eager expression fair familiar gentle nearly precious release replace scene share straight survive throughout unknown welcome	account affect arrange collapse concern dread generate glare innocent lack miserable peculiar produce remove response rid satisfy scatter style surely suspicious texture wander whilst	ability access active apparently avoid aware claim connect constant control cruel defeat despite develop evidence frantic gaze glimpse hesitate influence intend occur presence proper ruin slight steady swift therefore trade visible worn	astonish available bound brief broad central contact details emerge exist firm freedom furious gradual honest increase multiple rare refuse require role seek seize signal structure stumble suffer supply task unconscious various vision



Frequently-asked questions

Why choose 300 focus words?

While 300 words might seem like a drop in the ocean compared to all of the words that children encounter on a daily basis, these words act as **key facilitating words**, words that will unlock the meaning of other words children meet in their wider reading and the stories they listen to, enabling them to understand and enjoy the texts they read independently. By focusing on these 300 words, we ensure that every child has the opportunity to discover these words and learn to use them, leaving nothing to chance.


Word Sparks draws on data from the Oxford Children's Corpus, a huge database of children's language. The focus words have been carefully chosen because they are the words that children encounter when reading and need in order to express themselves in their speech and writing. These are words that are crucial for communication.

What is the Oxford Children's Corpus?

The Oxford Children's Corpus is an electronic database of real and authentic children's language—the only one of its kind in the world. It contains language written for children (around 60 million words) and also language written by children (more than 386 million words), drawn from the BBC 500 Words competition. The Oxford Children's Corpus is used by researchers to study language and by linguists to help compile children's dictionaries and other language teaching resources.

How can the books be decodable if they have these ambitious words in them?

There are two types of Word Sparks books, both of which have decodable text for the children.

- **Partner Texts**, where the reading is shared between an adult and a child, have a richer and more complex text for the adult to read to the child, supporting comprehension and language development. In these books, the focus words usually appear on the adult pages (unless the focus words are themselves decodable).
- **Non-partner Texts** are for children to read aloud to an adult. For these books, the focus words are introduced in discussion boxes (using this symbol ). They are designed to prompt discussion about the word and its meaning.

What if these words look too easy for my children/too hard for my child?

Every child is different – they come to the classroom having had a wide range of life experiences and very different starting points. They all have an individual vocabulary, and will probably have words linked to their own particular interests which we want to treasure. The aim of Word Sparks is to give all children access to at least these useful words. For children who already know lots of the words, meeting them again in Word Sparks books will help to consolidate their knowledge. And for children who don't already know the words, Word Sparks can help to broaden their vocabulary.

What teacher support is included to help me introduce and embed the 300 focus words?

Each book comes with notes on the inside front and back cover to support adults reading with the child. There are definitions of each of the words in the book, plus useful questions to ask children to probe their understanding. More detailed teaching notes are available on Oxford Owl; these are designed for use in guided/group or one-to-one reading sessions. They include questions and discussion points focussing on the text, plus follow-up speaking and listening and vocabulary activities, supported by photocopiable activity sheets.

How does Word Sparks work alongside other series in Oxford Reading Tree?

All books in Oxford Reading Tree are levelled using the Oxford Levels system which determines text difficulty. The child text in Word Sparks has been levelled using the same criteria, so that you can be confident that, for example, a Level 5 Word Sparks book is pitched at the same level of challenge as a Level 5 book from other Oxford Reading Tree series. We would recommend that a child reads widely at the appropriate Oxford Level to gain confidence and fluency and to experience a range of genres. You might like to give a Word Sparks book to a child who has already read some texts at their level so that they can engage with the discussion around the focus words with confidence.



Want to know more?

Take a look online

For more information on the resources for **Word Sparks**, visit www.oxfordprimary.co.uk/wordsparks

For more information on how you can help every child to progress with their reading using **Oxford Levels**, visit www.oxfordprimary.co.uk/levels

For more information on the unique database of children's language known as the **Oxford Children's Corpus**, visit [our website](#)



**Word
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Contact us

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