

Discover Interesting Words

Interesting words can be found in many books. Quality picture books often contain sophisticated vocabulary at a higher level than will be found in chapter books written “by formula” for beginning readers. Young children understand word meaning at a higher level than they can decode words. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to make vocabulary development a regular part of their read-alouds. Create the same expectation for learning new words as for reading...this is “who we are” and “what we do.” Turning students on to words can last a lifetime!

Author William Steig is the wordsmith master. He provides spectacular words in his picture books that give teachers ample opportunity to dig in and elevate their vocabulary study.

Steig was born in 1907. He grew up in a creative family and began selling his pictures and cartoons during the Depression. Eventually he became a cartoonist for The New Yorker magazine. His first children’s book, CDB! was published in 1968. Steig wrote over 30 children’s book including Caldecott winner, Sylvester and the Magic Pebble before his death in 2003 at the age of 95.

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble

Doctor DeSoto

Abel’s Island

The Amazing Bone

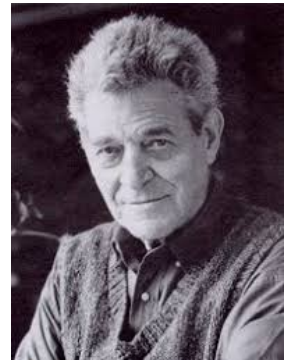
Pete’s a Pizza

Brave Irene

Amos and Boris

Shrek! (This book was the basis for the Dreamworks movie Shrek.)

And many, many more...



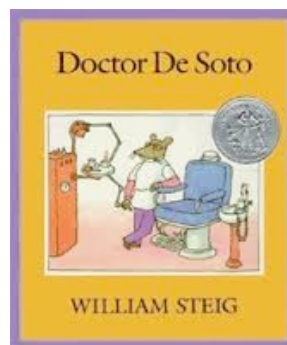
Below are brief descriptions of some of William Steig’s most popular stories. “Zesty” words, pulled from the books, are listed below. Can you focus on every word? Absolutely not. Pick several that jump off the page, stop, define and read on. After the story reading, revisit them and talk, talk, talk about the words again. Add them to your word wizard and challenge students to use them in their journal writing.

The purpose of exposing beginning readers to sophisticated vocabulary is to revel in the lusciousness of new words. Understanding each and every definition is not the point, coming to appreciate the “wide world of words” is.

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Doctor DeSoto

Written and Illustrated by William Steig



Doctor DeSoto is a dentist who also happens to be a mouse. He treats many different types of animals, but generally stays away from cats and other dangerous animals. Despite his better judgment, Doctor DeSoto agrees to help a pitiful fox in misery with a rotten bicuspid. While fixing the tooth, the good doctor realizes he will need a plan to outfox the fox. Ultimately, Doctor DeSoto demonstrates that size doesn't matter, being resourceful and smart does.

hoisted
bitterly
whimpered
dreamland
swaying
socket
dignity

delicate
pitiful
despite
mumbled
woozy
caressed

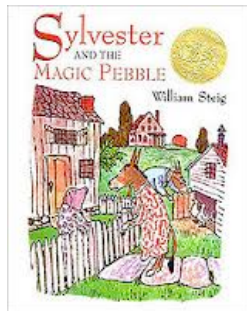
dainty
bicuspid
misery
extractor
shabby
dentine

timid
announced
quiver
winch
promptly
clenched

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Sylvester and the Magic Pebble

Written and Illustrated by William Steig



In a nearly tragic story, Sylvester, the donkey, finds a red pebble that grants wishes. Despite being excited by the prospect, Sylvester accidentally turns himself into a rock to escape a hungry lion. Despair sets in as Sylvester realizes he is alone and helpless.

While reading this story to children, the room will become very quiet. The children are imagining how it would feel being separated from their parents, with little hope of rescue in sight. Thankfully, through a twist of fate, Sylvester converts back into a donkey with his parents by his side. Relief sweeps through the faces of the children as the message hits home. Family is more important than possessions.

extraordinary
vanished
bewildered
Inquiring
miserable
aimlessly
sorrow

flaming red
gratifies
muttered
nook
hopeless
alfalfa
scene

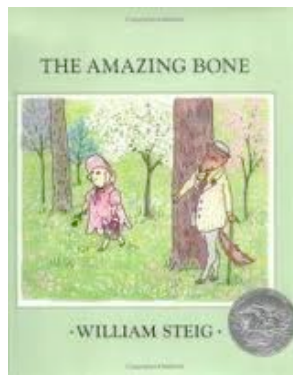
remarkable
fetlock
paced
gully
endless
pickled sassafras
embraces

ceased
perplexed
scold
concluded
stone-dumb
timothy compute
exclamations

Discover Words

The Amazing Bone

Written and Illustrated by William Steig



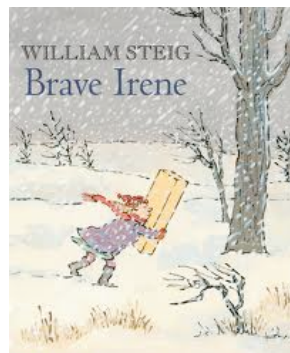
This 1977 Caldecott Honor Book is a fun read filled with harrowing adventures. Sweet, pink Pearl, the pig, finds a talking bone on her way home from school. Excited at all the prospects, they become fast friends but soon have to defend themselves from several adversaries. In the end, we see that true friendship and bravery will triumph all.

brilliant	dawdled	gawking	gaffers	spat
tenderly	murmured	imitate	pattering	rheumatism
flabbergast	sparkled	trilling	pleasant	boulder
cloaks	fierce	commanded	surrendered	boldness
sprig	seized	embrace	villain	ravenous
dotes	wily	duped	flourish	pitiful
determined	disgusted	softhearted	odoriferous	chatterbox

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Brave Irene

Written and Illustrated by William Steig



Irene's mother created an exquisite gown for the duchess but is too sick to deliver the garment in the impending storm. Young Irene insists that she can accomplish the task and sets out for the palace. Many mishaps complicate Irene's journey, but with tenacity and perseverance her mission is complete.

coaxed
helter-skelter
shrieked
snatched
flounced
muffled
chattered
fret

splendid
errand
duchess
wrenched
waltzing
clutching
strode
aristocrats

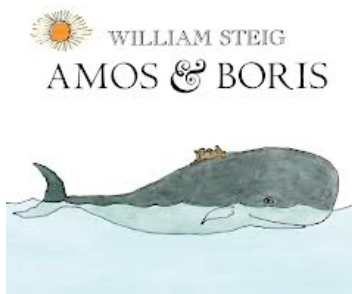
resented
yodeled
wrestled
bumbling
shuffling
gazing
meddling
ceased

cautioned
heed
walloped
ill-tempered
furrows
plunged
delirious
cherished

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Amos and Boris

Written and Illustrated by William Steig



From the back cover of the book comes this apt story synopsis:

“Amos the mouse and Boris the whale: a devoted pair of friends with nothing at all in common, except good hearts and a willingness to help their fellow mammal. They meet after Amos sets out to sail the sea and finds himself in extreme need of rescue. And there will come a day, long after Boris has gone back to a life at sea and Amos has gone back to life on dry land, when the tiny mouse must find a way to rescue the great whale.”

Amos and Boris is the “just-right” book to read close to the end of school. The poignant message, “we will be friends forever even if we are not together,” is a perfect culmination of a wonderful year.

Navigation	necessities	compass	sextant	savage
Rodent	immensely	enterprise	phosphorescent	marveled
Luminous	gazing	vast	universe	akin
Overwhelmed	desperately	evaded	afloat	treading
Cheer	dreadful	loomed	mammal	privilege
Creature	frazzle	spluttering	leisurely	admiration
Admiration	delicacy	quivering	grandeur	abounding
Ambitions	curious	fascinated	plankton	grateful