Vocabulary Activity

The Grapes of Wrath

John Steinbeck

**Objective:** This activity will help the students learn new words in the context of their reading. Hopefully the students will not only learn the vocabulary but will learn strategies for understanding new words as they read and using their reading to increase vocabulary.

**Timing:** This activity should take place after the students have started the novel, but not finished it. It is a good activity to do while the students are engaged in the text. They need to have already gotten into the text and noticed some of the new words in order to create a need for this activity. You don’t want them to have finished the novel already because they need time and text afterwards to practice finding and defining words on their own. This activity will most likely take 2 class periods. One to teach the students
how to understand words from the context and look them up, and the other to have them teach each other the words and play the game.

**Step 1: (5 minutes)** Pick two or three words from the novel that the students most likely will not know. Have them write down what they think the words mean. For example: Languid(159) relinquished (104).

**Step 2: (5 minutes)** Show the students the words in context and let them write down what they think the word means again.

**Step 3: (7 minutes)** Look up the words together as a class. Ask if they understood more from the context. Discuss how we can learn new words from reading.

**Step 4: (5 minutes)** Assign each student to find one word in the novel that they did not know before, or that they think the majority of the students do not know. They will need to find a word, show the context, define it and come up with a way for the class to remember the word. They will need to write their word on a small slip of paper. Their assignment can be done as homework. Emphasize the fact that they will be teaching the class so they don’t forget. Do an example of one word in front of the class.

**Next Class Period**

**Step 5: (20 minutes)** Have the students teach their words to the class. After they teach to the class they will drop their slip of paper in a hat.
Step 6: (5 minutes) After every student has taught their word to the class, take some time to review. Tell the students there will be a competition and let them mingle with each other, refreshing their memories on what they just taught.

Step 7: (15 minutes) Divide the class into 3 or 4 groups. The first group picks a representative to come up to the front of the class. That representative gets one minute to pull as many words out of the hat as he or she can. The representative reads the definition and waits for the team to guess. He or she can only pull another word out when the team guesses the correct word. After the first team goes, have the second team goes and so forth.

Step 8: The game continues until all of the words are gone. Whichever team has the most slips at the end wins.

Step 9: (5 minutes) Discuss: Were the words hard to learn? What helped you remember certain words? How will reading be easier now that you know these words?

Step 10: (5 minutes) Have the students write a paragraph about an issue in the book using the words they just learned. You can either have them share the paragraph with a neighbor or just turn it in.

Note: The game can also be played as charades.