**ST. MUNGO’S ACADEMY**

**ENGLISH & LITERACY**

**THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING A**

**RICH VOCABULARY**

***“One forgets words as one forgets names. One's vocabulary needs constant fertilizing or it will die.”*** (Evelyn Waugh)

**(A note for Parents/Carers)**

**Five reasons why rich vocabulary is crucial to your child's success**

* **It gives your child the ability to say what he or she means. By having several words at their disposal for describing an event or emotion, they can be explicit when sharing their ideas and opinions.**
* **It helps your child understand what other people are saying and what she/he is reading. Vocabulary is the foundation for comprehension. Unfamiliar words become holes in the text, preventing your child from completely understanding what he or she has just read.**
* **It bolsters their ability to grasp ideas and think more logically. The greater number of words your child has, the more he/she can interpret ideas from others and express his/her own ideas.**
* **It boosts your child’s power of persuasion. Having a rich vocabulary will help your child communicate in a more engaging way. Relying on one or two words to describe an idea will be repetitive and not as persuasive, as relying on a vocabulary of 10-15 similarly descriptive terms.**
* **It helps your child make a good impression on others. How articulate your child is constitutes a big part of the impression she or he makes on others throughout life.**

**(Notes for Pupils)**

**The importance of vocabulary in Writing**

**Every good mechanic has a toolbox full of tools. Some tools are used more than others, but each one has a specific purpose.**

**In much the same way, writers have a ‘toolbox’. Just as a really good mechanic can pull out the right tools to make a good engine even more powerful, a good writer can pull out the right tools at the right time to make good writing even more powerful.**

**One tool that can ‘power-up’ your writing is a strong vocabulary.**

**No one talks like that, though, so why is it so important?**

**We use spoken and written words every day to communicate ideas, thoughts and emotions to those around us. Sometimes we communicate successfully but sometimes we’re not quite so successful. *“That’s not what I meant!”* becomes our mantra (an often repeated word or phrase). However, a good vocabulary can help us say what we mean.**

**When you’re faced with a writing assignment, a good vocabulary is an indispensable tool. If you have several synonyms (words with similar meanings) in your repertoire, you’ll be able to choose the best word for the job. Avoid vague words like ‘stuff’ or ‘things’ - these words do not give the reader a clear idea of what you really good mean.**

**You need to work on building a rich vocabulary so that you can choose the stronger, more descriptive words in your writing. It makes your work more sophisticated and, often, more thought-provoking for the reader.**

**It is also crucial to have a rich vocabulary when you tackle Close Reading-type papers. The SQA has stated that a great obstacle to success in this area is a lack of vocabulary from which pupils can draw. Many of the Nat 5 and Higher ‘Vocabulary Expansion’ worksheets contain words from past papers; these will undoubtedly help you prepare for the sort of testing vocabulary you are likely to face in examinations.**

**How you can develop a stronger vocabulary**

**If you don’t have a strong vocabulary yet, the first way you can develop one is with a couple of tools: a thesaurus and a dictionary. A thesaurus (a book that lists synonyms and antonyms) is a helpful tool, but it is essential (very important and necessary) that you use a dictionary along with it. For example, imagine that I want to say that putting an engine together is difficult.**

**However, I want a more descriptive word than ‘difficult’. What other word could I use? A thesaurus might give me choices like these: ‘complex’, ‘intricate’, ‘tricky’, and ‘thorny’. It’s important to have a good sense of the meanings of each word. The next step, then, is for me to look the words up in a dictionary to be certain of their meanings.**

**Notice that each word has a slightly different meaning. Which meaning seems to work best when talking about an engine? Since an engine has many complexly interrelating (connected together like a puzzle) parts, the word ‘intricate’ seems to be a great choice. Putting an engine together can definitely be intricate work. My choice is made. The thesaurus and dictionary have saved the day and have helped me develop my vocabulary!**

**Another way to develop a wide vocabulary is to read challenging books that contain rich vocabulary. These books will help you see the words in context (in their natural settings). The context can help you guess the meanings of the words and can give you a good sense of how they should be used.**

**Write down words that you don’t know and look them up. Try to find them elsewhere, and write down the sentences you find. Listen for them in the world around you. Write down the sentences that you hear. Study these words when you can, and look for opportunities to use them in your speaking and writing.**

**When tackling the ‘Vocabulary Expansion’ exercises on this website, begin by writing the basic definition of the word. Then write three sentences containing the word. The sentence context must demonstrate that you understand how to use the word appropriately. For example, if the word is ‘voracious’, it’s no use just writing: ‘The boy was voracious’ – this doesn’t demonstrate any understanding of how to use the word. You’d be far better off writing a sentence such as: ‘After playing in the game of football, the boy was so hungry that he had a voracious appetite.’**