STEM
teaching tools

"Word Catchers"

For use with STEM Teaching Tool #66 | stemteachingtools.org/brief/66

Purpose	Word Catchers are co-constructed between teachers and students. They are designed to help students, especially multilingual learners, develop and use science- and phenomena-related words and phrases that support their sense-making. Word Catchers offer students important and useful words and phrases with brief definitions readily available to use when they share their ideas, such as when they speak, draw, or write.
Description	Word Catchers capture and represent important science- and phenomena-related words and phrases along with defining statements (e.g., pictures, student-generated explanations, example phrases). Word and phrases are added to the Word Catcher as they are nominated and may be later organized by topic. These organizers are posted around the learning environment so that students can easily see and use them. The Word Catcher is co-constructed by teachers and students to create a public knowledge base that supports the development and use of productive science- and phenomena-related words and phrase, such as onomatopoeias and specialized vocabulary.
	An E-Word Catcher is an alternative to posting charts around the learning environments. Slides (e.g., Google Docs, Google Slides, PowerPoint) are a great way of making these organizers multimodal, capturing defining statements, pictures, and sounds.
Use	Word Catchers can be used at any grade level – elementary school students, for example, could nominate more invented or descriptive words for sharing their observations and reasoning; high school students, for example, could use add specialized vocabulary to refer back to when sharing their ideas through speaking and/or writing.
	Teachers or students add words or phrases to the catcher as new forms of communication are introduced and/or developed. In addition to key terms in the content area, the Word Catches can also include word and phrases that relate to the science and engineering practices (e.g., changing ideas, drawing explanations). Students can refer to the Word Catchers and choose which words and phrases to use when sharing their ideas through speaking and/or writing.
	The Word Catcher could be used in a variety of ways, from listing the words and phrases on poster paper as visual cues to having a pre-designed structure like the students could have in their notebooks. Word Catchers can be visible at all times for teachers and students to add and refer to, especially during the initial stages of making sense of a natural phenomenon or engineering problem.