Strengthening language awareness through everyday activities

These examples are based on John Loughran's (2010) book, published by Routledge:

What expert teachers do – enhancing professional knowledge for classroom practice

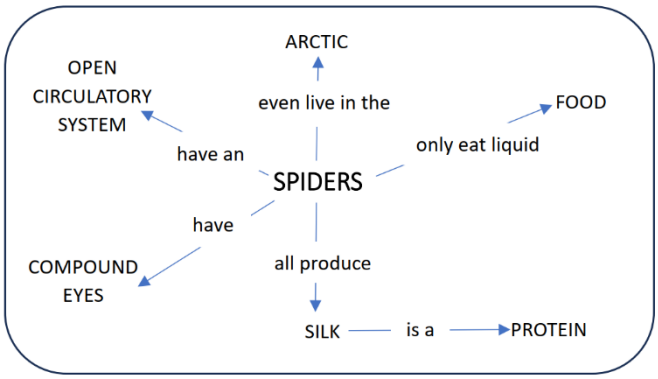
This book provides theoretical and practical insights into different kinds of tasks teachers can give to students. Read through the following descriptions and discuss:

A. *What does the activity require from students?*
B. *In what ways are these activities language aware OR what changes can be made so that these activities are language aware?*
C. *How could these activities be introduced to students – what instructions are needed?*

1. Prior knowledge

a. Semantic map

A semantic map requires students to share what they know about a topic and to also make connections between different pieces of information. If students work in pairs or small groups to make a semantic map, they can share their knowledge and try to build a bigger picture together. After studying a topic, students can return to their semantic maps and correct them as well as expand them.



b. Frayer model

The Frayer model asks students to share their prior knowledge in four different ways. These different types of information provide insight into the depth of a student's understanding and help the teacher to see what students know and how they apply their knowledge to the world around them.

Essential characteristics - contain vitamins and minerals - come from non-woody plants - are a direct part of a plant, e.g. stem, leaf, bulb, root, tuber, fruit or seed	Non-essential characteristics - colour or size - whether they grow above or below the earth - what part of the plant is eaten - whether they have to be cooked or not
Examples - carrots - potatoes - lettuce - cucumbers	Non-examples - tree fruit, e.g. apples, oranges, bananas - mushrooms - sugar, honey, maple syrup - woody vines plants, e.g. grapes

VEGETABLES

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- leeks	- woodycane plants such as raspberries

2. Processing

a. Adding headings/sub-headings

One way of helping students to find the key ideas in a text is to ask students to add their own headings and subheadings to a text. This encourages students to read the text more slowly and carefully and to look for the key idea. The headings and subheadings that students come up with help teachers to see what students have paid attention to in the text.

b. Question grid

The question grid encourages students to ask different questions based on the information they have or to guide the kind of information they would like to get.

Why	Why do bears hibernate?	
When	When do bears mate?	
How	How long do bears live?	
Who	Who studies bears?	
Where	Where do bears live?	
What	What do bears eat?	

c. Information grid

An information grid encourages students to look more closely at the information they have and to recognise the different kinds of information being presented in a text. Although the example here is from a children's story – The Gruffalo – this activity could also be used with historical figures and in other subjects too.

character	physical description	special words used	special activities
the Gruffalo	orange eyes, black tongue, purple prickles…	'My favourite food!' 'You'll taste good on a slice of bread!'	looking for food being scary
the mouse	little and brown	'I'm the scariest creature in the wood!'	walking in the wood avoiding danger

3. LINKING

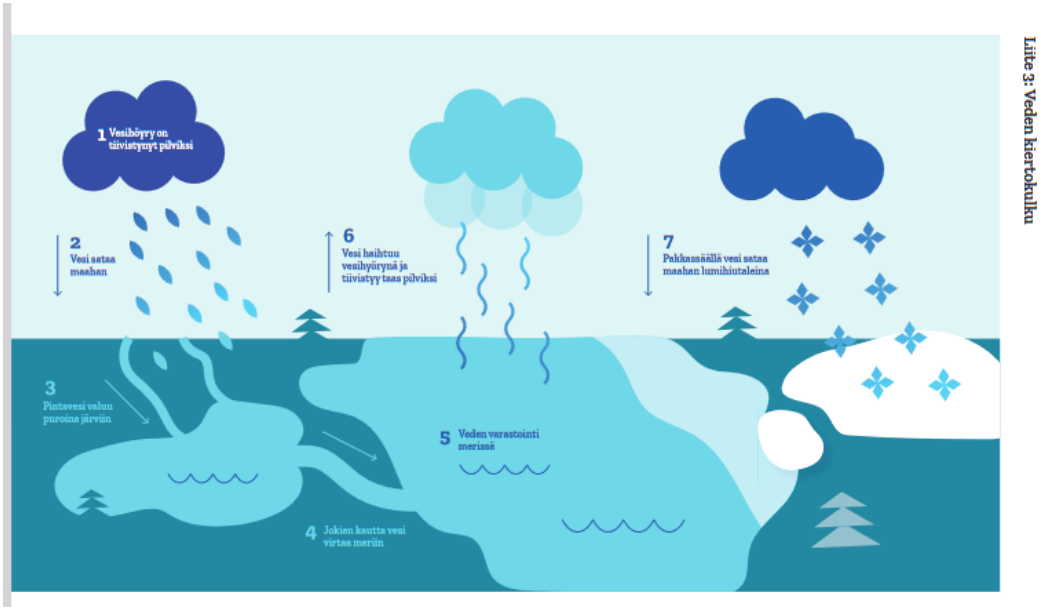
a. *What if* questions

What if questions invite students to consider what they know and to also make links with the wider world. *What if* questions can be used in lots of different subjects and topics. For example, *What if* people didn't have bones? or *What if* cars had not been invented? or *What if* the moon was further away from planet earth?

b. Labelled diagram

Labelled diagrams are a useful way of combining pictures and text, as well as for presenting processes and relationships. Students can create and label their own diagrams, add their own labels

to a given diagram, or add prepared labels to a given diagram. This example of a labelled diagram of the water cycle comes from the KuTiMat project.



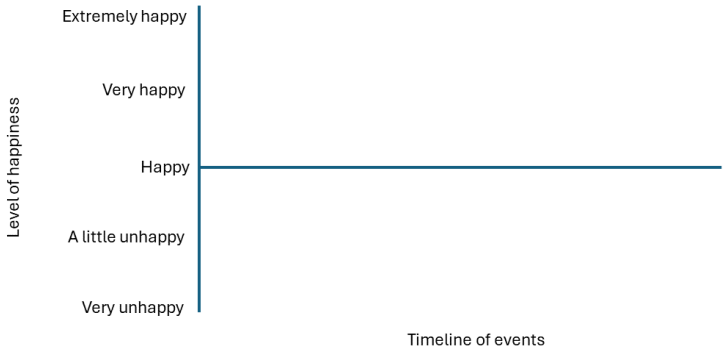
4. Translation

a. Role-play

Role play activities can be used across the curriculum in many different subjects. Students can act out scenes from stories, events or different processes, such as water changing from a solid form into liquid and a gas, the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly or an electricity circuit. Role plays can help to make abstract ideas more concrete.

b. Fortune lines

Fortune lines can be used to illustrate the relationship between events and emotions. The horizontal axis represents the order of events which students have identified as important and the vertical axis represents the emotion, for example happiness or fear, when something happened. This activity can help students to make connects between what happens and how individuals experience events. These events could be historical, from a story or from life in school, e.g. looking back over the first semester.



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5. Synthesizing

a. **What can you work out?**

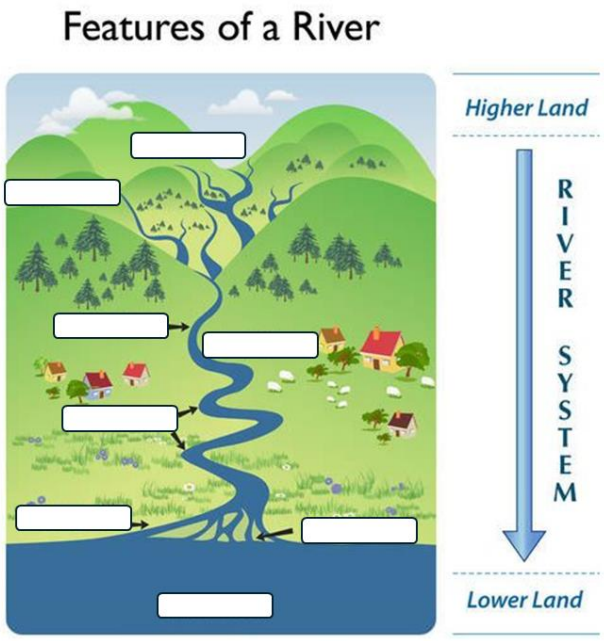
In this activity students are provided with an object, for example a map or a picture, and they are asked what they can work out from it. This activity could be used to introduce a new topic or to review a topic – helping students to bring together different insights to create the bigger picture.

b. Design & create a learning artefact

A different way of exploring how students have made sense of a theme, topic or unit of work is to ask them to choose or design an artefact that creatively shares their understanding. This artefact could be a poster of what they have learnt or it could be an object that illustrates an important idea or key 'take away' from the unit of work.

c. Continuum – placing words

In this activity, students place relevant words and phrases in order or add them to a picture. Part of the task is to explain why the words should be out in a particular place. Other students can agree, add further information or make a suggestion to change it. The illustration or picture can indicate where the words could be placed. This can be a small group or a whole class activity.



Loughran's book contains many more examples, but hopefully these are useful ideas and this activity has also helped you to see how language awareness can be a natural, useful part of everyday school tasks.