Random Vocabulary Activity Ideas:

Illustrate the words. Show pictures or video clips that demonstrate the meaning of a word. Have students draw and label something illustrating the meaning of the word. This is not limited to concrete nouns -- a grim expression, a contemplative person or absurd conduct can also be drawn. The labels explain how the word and drawing fit. Drawing skills are not important; stick figures with accurate labels can succinctly express an idea as well as finely crafted caricatures. The infamous "flashcards" can be made more meaningful with illustrations, as well. Be sure, though, that the student doesn't replace an abstract idea with a concrete example of it. This can be done by showing different ways that the idea is expressed and having the students discover what makes them valid illustrations -- for instance, could news be grim? How?

Play "Quick Draw. "This doesn't have to be competitive, but it can be. See how quickly students can convey the essence of a words meaning on the board -- without words. This works especially well with words describing visual concepts, like many geography terms. Again, make sure students don't oversimplify things -- if you play this game repeatedly, make sure the students are using different ways to draw the words.

Play "vocabulary charades." Have students draw a word from a hat and act it out.

Give credit for finding the word used in the real world. Provide extra credit if a student hears or sees a vocabulary word anywhere outside of the vocabulary exercises. To get the points, the student has to write down the word, what it means, and where s/he heard it. Sometimes the students will purposely use the words so someone can say they heard it -- which just means they are incorporating it into their oral vocabularies. You can also find them online: go to a search engine that searches the news and type in the word. You'll find it in the headlines all over the world.

Use the words yourself. That prominently posted list can be your cue to slip words into other class work or discussions. Students may not even need the incentive of extra credit to start listening for them.

Have students answer questions that use the words. For example: "What are three ways you could tell a person had just received grim news?" "What are three things an impertinent person might say?" "What are three things that would disconcert you?" Doing this while the student has the meaning available gives the opportunity to process the meaning instead of guessing at an answer.

 Have students generate examples and non-examples for words. This can be done with visual or kinesthetic illustrations as well as verbal descriptions. Have students explain whether something is a good example of a word or not, and why they think so. For most groups, this activity should be practiced with familiar, concrete words first. It can be used to lay a solid foundation for "comparing and contrasting" and defending ideas in essays, especially if you encourage the students to use precise language and good sentences.

When you ask students to generate examples, if someone comes up with a "wrong" answer, it can be used as "a good non-example" to help clarify the meaning of a word. Remind students that learning is not about proving what you already know, but about asking questions to change what you don't know into what you do know.

Use "fill in the blank" exercises before you expect the students to use the words in sentences themselves. This is also a good way to test students, or to make the transition between working with the definitions available and recalling what the words mean on their own. Have a word bank with five vocabulary words and five sentences with blanks, and have the students decide which word goes in which blank. Your challenge will be constructing sentences, which only match with one word, so small groups of words are better. These exercises are also opportunities for you to give a wider scope to a word, and discuss how that word fits into a sentence that the students might not have considered.

Compose with the words. Only after a student has heard and read a word used correctly many times should s/he be expected to compose something original with the word. This can be a fun class activity, though, once a sizable list has accumulated. Students can take turns picking words from the list to add a sentence to an ongoing story - students will get a chance to hear the words they weren't sure of used by other students, and the sentences can be revised if the words are not used correctly. Eventually, students may enjoy composing absurd tales using the words.