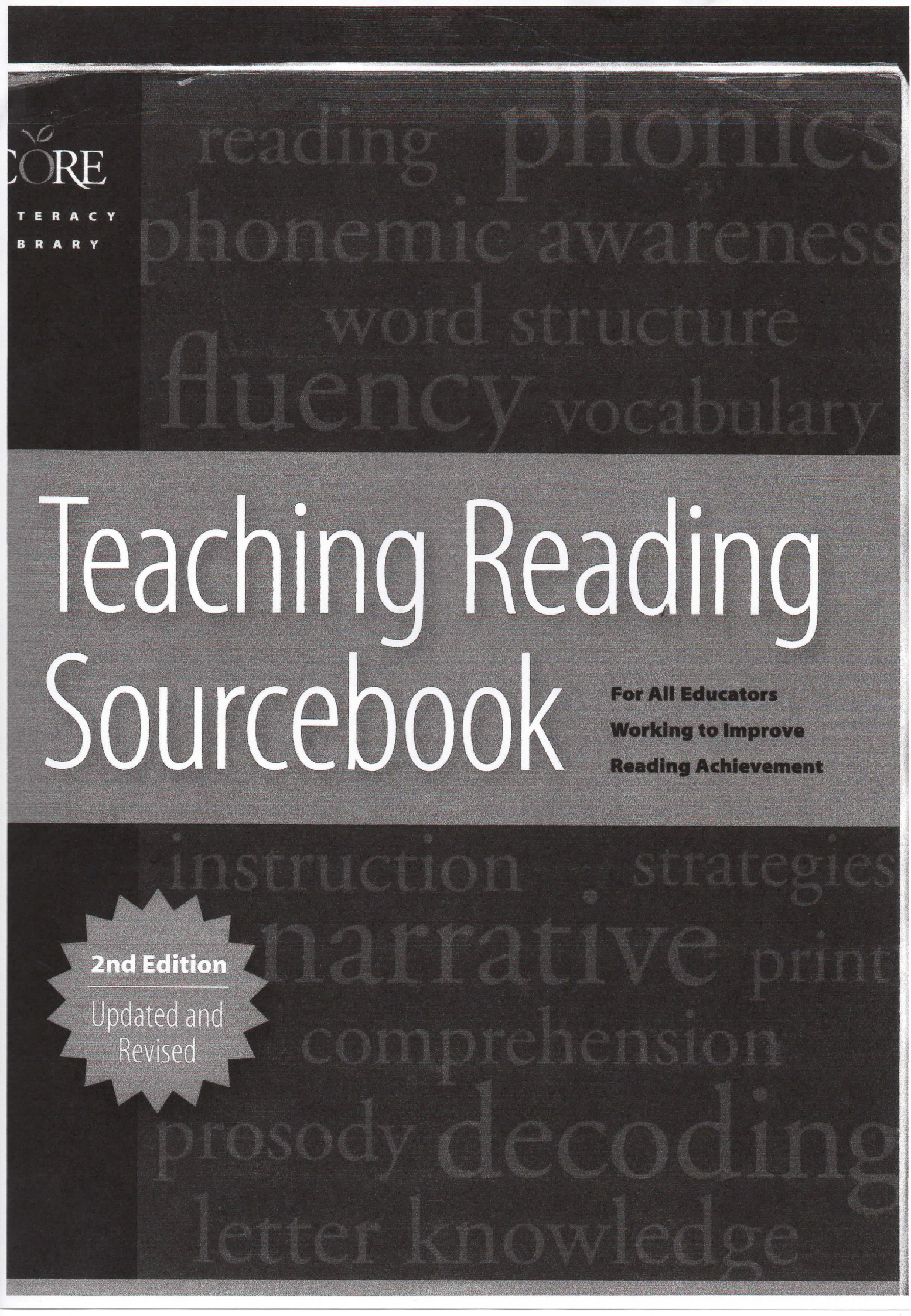
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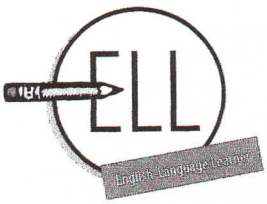


Cognate Awareness

One method of building vocabulary among English-language learners whose language shares cognates with English is to capitalize on students' first-language knowledge (August et al. 2005). Cognates are words in two languages that share a similar spelling, pronunciation, and meaning. Students often can draw on their knowledge of words in their native language to figure out the meanings of cognates in English. Because of their common Latin and Greek roots, as well as the close connections between English and the Romance languages, English and Spanish share a large number of cognate pairs.

COGNATES
words in two languages that share a similar spelling, pronunciation, and meaning

FALSE COGNATES
pairs of words that are spelled the same or nearly the same in two languages but do not share the same meaning

Second-language learners do not automatically recognize and make use of cognates (Nagy et al. 1993; Nagy 1988). Recent studies indicate that explicitly identifying cognates supports English-language acquisition for Spanish-speaking students (Carlo et al. 2004; Bravo, Hiebert, and Pearson 2005). When selecting cognates for instruction, it is important to focus on cognates that Spanish speakers are likely to know from their everyday Spanish use (Bravo, Hiebert, and Pearson 2005). These types of cognates include pairs that are high-frequency words in both English and Spanish (e.g., *animal/animal*) and pairs that have a high-frequency Spanish word and a low-frequency English word (e.g., *enfermo/infirm*). Dressler (2000) found that it is possible for Spanish-speaking students to make connections between cognates on the basis of sound alone. Thus, students who are not literate in Spanish but are orally proficient in the language can benefit from instruction in cognate awareness, as can students who are literate in Spanish.

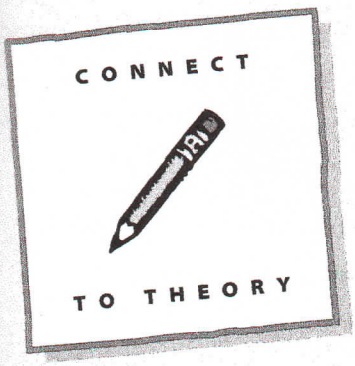
SEE ALSO . . .
English/Spanish Cognates, p. 64

English/Spanish cognates fall into several different categories: cognates that are spelled identically, cognates that are spelled nearly the same, cognates that are pronounced nearly the same, and false cognates. False cognates are pairs of words that are spelled identically or nearly the same in two languages but do not share the same meaning.

Categories of Cognates in English and Spanish

Category	Definition	English	Spanish
▸ **Cognates** have the same meaning	spelled identically	chocolate* doctor hotel	chocolate doctor hotel
	spelled nearly the same	class family music	clase familia música
	pronounced nearly the same	baby equal peace	bebé igual paz
▸ **False Cognates** have different meanings	spelled identically	pan pie red	pan (bread) pie (foot) red (net)
	spelled nearly the same	exit rope soap	éxito (success) ropa (clothing) sopa (soup)

*Based on Rodriguez 2001. *English word borrowed from Spanish*



You may be surprised how many English/Spanish cognates can be found in a typical text selection. Using the list below, identify cognates in the sample text "Marine Mammals" (p. 768); for example, *animals* and *animales.* Then consult an English/Spanish dictionary to make sure the meaning of the Spanish cognate has the same meaning as the English word in the text. (See Answer Key, p. 800.)

SPANISH WORDS: animales, marino, océano, imposible, aire, criatura, comparación, impulso, reaccionar, miles, número, grupo, filtros, material, *gigantes, abundante, planeta, población,* proteger