# The Magic of Semantic Gradients (Continuums)!
Greatest thing since sliced bread!   By Janet Caruthers, Ed. S.

Continuums are a great way to learn new vocabulary words because it **shows** how the new word relates to words already in your students' vocabulary. As you are doing teacher read-alouds, shared reading, or guided reading, you will notice words that could be put on a continuum. I urge you to put the continuums on your walls and add to them whenever possible. As you first build the continuum and as you add to it throughout the year, it can lead to discussions that help students learn new words incidentally from each other. I inserted some pictures from one of my student's Book of Knowledge (an interactive notebook each child builds throughout the year as reference and proof of learning).

My students would add continuums to their book as I added new continuums on the Word Wall. Be sure to see the last picture where I tell you what went wrong on that entry.

This particular continuum was created when we read a story that had the word "drizzle" in it, and the students weren't sure what that was. We started with the title, "Water in the Air" (capital letters in the right place). Then put a word on each end that **the students already knew**. "A little" on the left and "A lot" on the right as reference points. We put "rain" and "snow" in the middle, and that became another reference point. Then with a little discussion, we added "dew" on the left and "hurricane" on the right. We added the rest of the words as they came up during the year. Thank you Lizbeth for letting me use your Book of Knowledge.
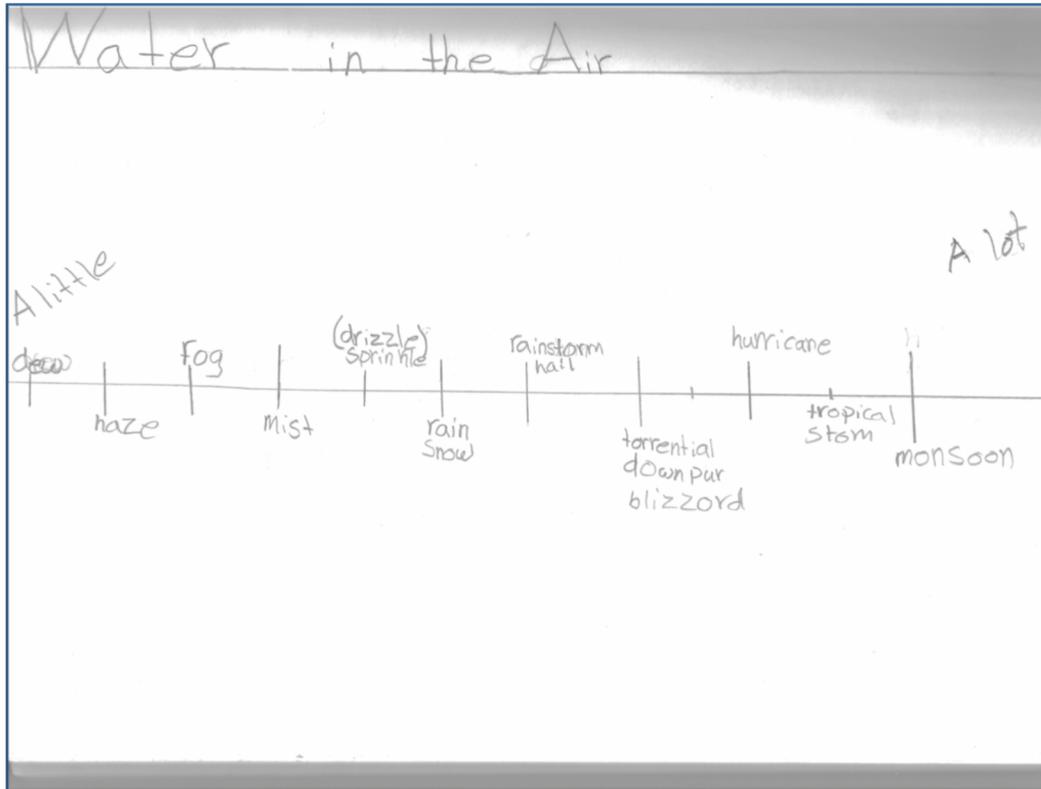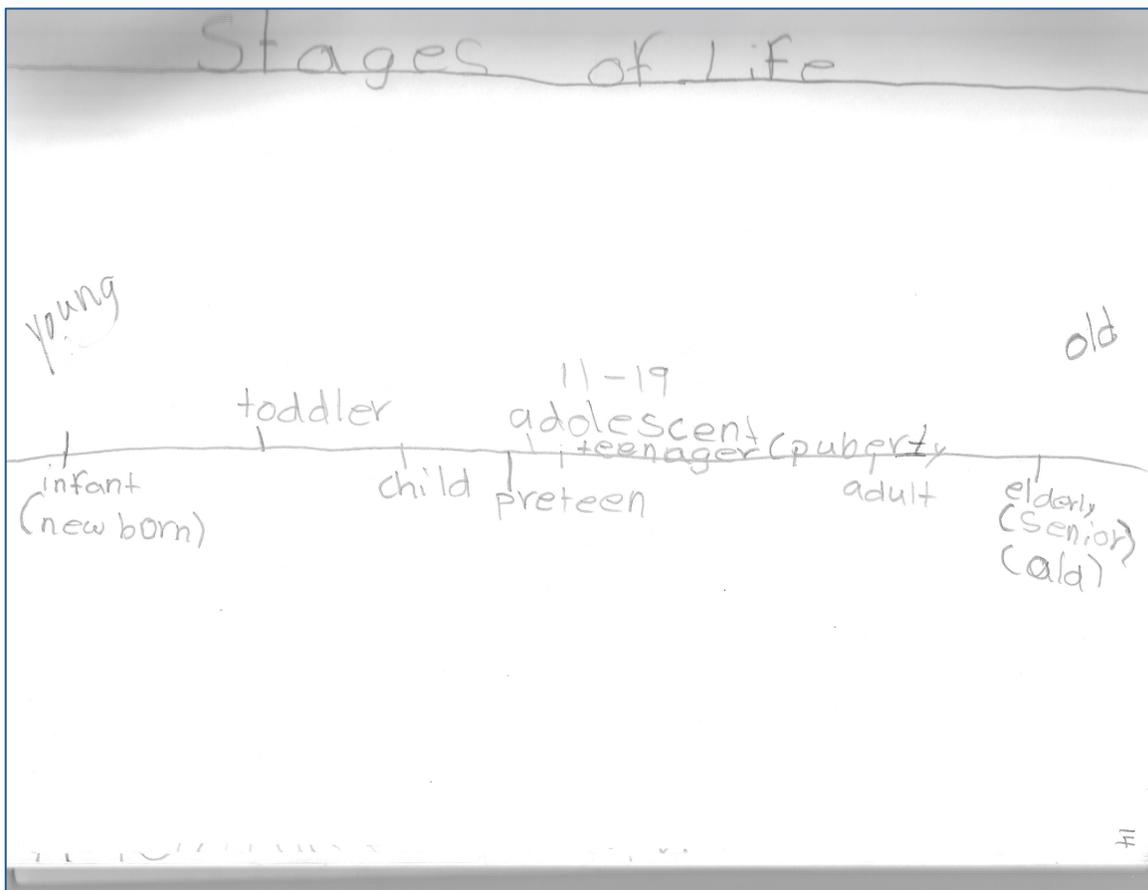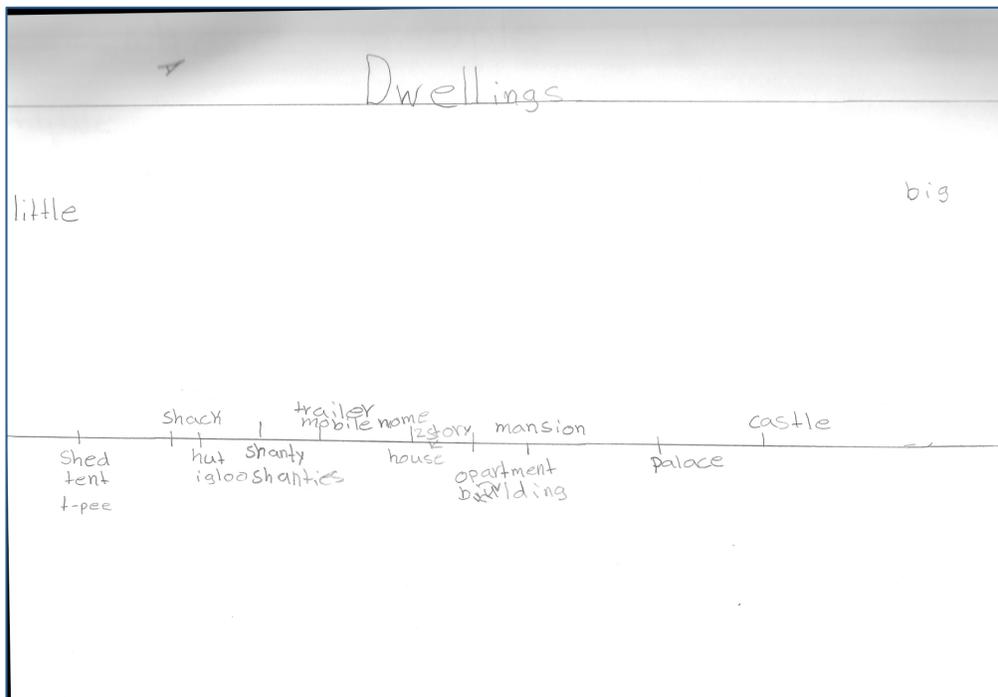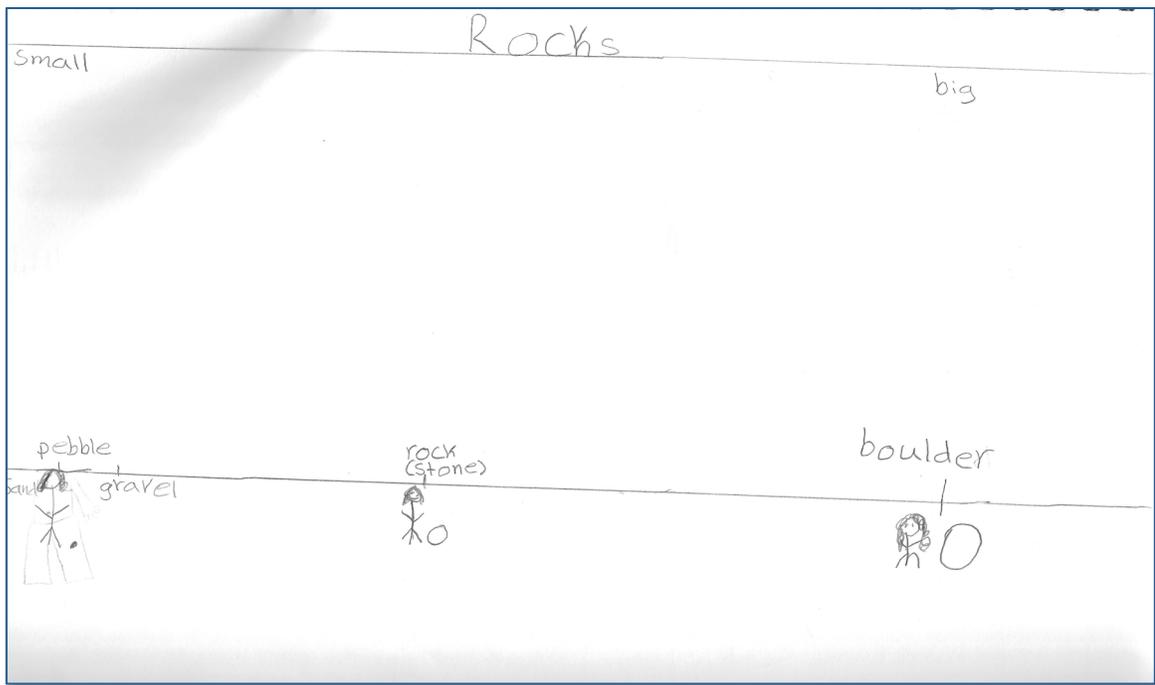
Directions for setting up the paper:

1. Draw a horizontal line across the middle of a landscape oriented paper.
2. Above the line on the far left, write a word your **students already know** that means lesser (Ex. a little,   slow, small,…) on the far right above the line, write a word your students already know that means the opposite (a lot, fast, large,…)
3. If you can, put a word in the middle to become another reference point.

Then put a couple of words on a horizontal line going from least to most, smallest to largest, starting with the word that prompted the creating of that continuum. Be sure to display these and also have students copy it and keep in a bound folder so other words can be added throughout the year. Ex: "Bodies of Water" – drop, puddle, pond, lake ... ocean. If these are displayed all year, you can add to the continuum when you learn about another "Body of Water."

A story had the word "adolescent" in it, so we built this continuum. I did it on the board and students copied it into their own interactive Book of Knowledge. This activated the new word and was available for adding to it and referring to it in both reading and writing.

Rocks

Small   big

pebble   rock   boulder
      gravel   (stone)
sand

Dwellings

little   big

                    shack   trailer   castle
                              mobile home
                              12story mansion
shed   hut   shanty   house   palace
tent   igloo shanties   apartment
t-pee   building

When I was teaching a workshop for teachers in Collier County, we created a continuum for bodies of moving water. After adding brook, creek, stream, river, sea, and ocean, someone suggested "estuary." That lead to a discussion, and we all learned something new that day. That is another great thing about continuums, **they can lead to great learning discussions.** (For more continuum topics, see Chapter 4 in The New Book of Knowledge A Teacher Guide.)