



Vocabulary Games

Balderdash

Context: Reading

Category: Vocabulary

Used with sixth grade independent reading. Idea came from commercial game, "Balderdash." Students in my reading classes encounter new words in their silent reading book choices, and try to find "Stumpers" for Friday's game. Students must show the word to me ahead of time, and I look over their definitions to see if they've written "dictionary" type meanings. We have a cookie/candy jar ready, along with a can stuffed full of commercial tickets with students' names on them, earned for various homeroom/language arts compliances, answers, etc.

Student writes the "stumper" on the overhead (very motivational), white board, or old green chalkboard. Without repeating, three definitions are read aloud.

A name is drawn out of the can. That student guesses which definition was correct. All definitions sound as though they are possible, because students look up a word that sounds as though it could be the meaning. For example, for "cantankerous" a student might think of canker sores at first glance and look for that word in a dictionary. Changing the meaning to fit the word form is a good challenge. If the meaning is guessed correctly, the student guessing gets two "Stumper Treats." The presenter gets one. Other way around for the incorrect guess.

Further, the presenter reads the sentence from the silent-reading book where the word appeared in context.

We post the "stumpers" on the wall and watch for them in further passages.

Extra-credit is awarded for learning a new word and sticking one's neck out.



Vocabulary Concentration Game

By Anita Bowling

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Context: literature, grades 7-12

Category: vocabulary

I have been using this game for many years, and every class I've used it with has loved it. It really seems to be effective in helping students to learn the definitions of new words. This game is based on the old TV game show "Concentration." I use a purchased board, but other teachers who have used this idea have used tag board with library card pockets glued to it. The number of card pockets used is up to you; I use fifteen -- three rows of five pockets each. Each pocket contains a card on which has been written a vocabulary word that the students have been studying. The words should not be on the sides of the cards that are visible to the students.

We start at a random place in the classroom, and the first person chooses a card. That student has 10 seconds to give the correct definition. If correct, the student gets a point in the scoring. If incorrect, the card goes back on the board, and the next student chooses a card. After a few incorrect answers, the teacher should be sure to put the cards back into different slots than where they began; this is the "Concentration" part. The students must watch carefully so that they will choose a card that contains a word that they know they can define. As we add vocabulary words throughout the year, we have more and more possibilities for the game, and we have some rousing competitions. Eventually, we have a "Concentration Tournament" and a grand champion. This person receives a prize. Sometimes I will give small daily prizes, too -- bookmarks, stickers, candy, etc.

Word Wizards

By JoLynn Plato

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Context: This can be used at multiple levels. It has been tested in seventh grade language arts classes with multiple ability levels. The class size usually consisted of two 26-student seventh grade English classes.

Category: vocabulary

Teaching the relevance of vocabulary can be a challenge, especially when it is a struggle to get students to read quality literature. "Word Wizards" can help give relevance to challenging vocabulary.



As my seventh graders study words from their vocabulary books, they have the opportunity to find "word wizards:" their vocabulary words in the real world. When a student hears or reads our vocabulary words outside of school, s/he is encouraged to hand it in for extra points (usually 1/2 point per word wizard). The students must include where they heard the word and the context in which it was witnessed. They get credit only if the word was used correctly. Students appreciate this activity because they can strengthen their grade with some extra "insurance." I appreciate this activity because my students venture into quality literature and critical listening. It is a fun way of showing them that vocabulary is not simply a subject to be memorized and forgotten: it is all around us. I even find myself hearing "word wizards" and wondering if my students will bring them in the next day! It is most rewarding when students bring in quality literature that is packed with vocabulary words. They get the points, and I get them reading.

Vocabulary Blues

By Nicole Wilson

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Context: 8th grade language arts

Category: Select One

Materials: Vocabulary words Big BLUE ball (or any size)

I use this activity shortly before a vocabulary test.

Procedures: At the beginning of class, have students look up or review vocabulary definitions (make sure everyone has the same definition!) After this task, have students get into a large circle (standing up). Call out a vocabulary word and shoot the ball to a student. If he/she cannot give the definition, have him/her pass it to another student. If this student cannot recall the definition, they pass it again. If the third person cannot recall the definition, they must leave the circle to look up the word. While they are out, call out another word and pass the ball again. Eventually, the "missed" words should come up again. I like to give little treats to those students who answer a definition correctly--This is a good motivator! Once all vocabulary words have been called, have students go back to their seats and write as many definitions as they can remember. I could not believe how much more they remembered their vocabulary through using this activity. We had a lot of fun, and the students learned their vocabulary --This cured our VOCABULARY BLUES. If you decide to give this a try, email me and let me know how it goes!



Million-Dollar Essay (an I-Search paper)

By Connie King

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Category: writing

Situation: 11th grade English

Students are given an assignment sheet that contains the following information:

The student is walking down the street and is given a bag by an unknown person. The bag contains a million dollars. After an exhaustive search for the owner, the authorities award the million dollars to the student, who can spend it any way he/she wishes. Because the government is in a forgiving mood (you can tell this is fiction), there are no taxes on this. From this point, students have to research what they would spend the money on, and they must account for every penny. This is real-world research, in which they consult newspapers for real estate ads, visit car dealers, call travel agents and so on. I usually give them about three days to do this. The paper must be written in the form of an essay (not just a list of items and their costs).

Students find this fun and informative and a chance to indulge their wildest dreams. I usually do this close to the beginning of the school year because it gives me the opportunity to see what their writing skills are and how much initiative they are willing to take. The assignment gives students the chance to do research on a practical level instead of copying material from an encyclopedia.

Vocabulary Bingo—A Review Game

Have students hamburger-fold a sheet of paper until, when opened, it forms 16 squares. Students then write their vocabulary words in the squares, with the center square as a free spot.

OR—Have students create cards for all the vocabulary words. They should shuffle the cards and place them on their desks to create a Bingo card.

Call out the definitions and students play Bingo.