

# Virginia Reads One Book<sup>®</sup>

## Strategies for Using Vocabulary

Your schoolwide reading event should be fun and engaging, and while it is a school activity, it should not be “schoolwork” or “homework.” Here are some ways to shift the vocabulary portion of the program from rote memorization to games and activities that can be used to explore vocabulary in a fun way that teachers, parents, and students can all enjoy.

**Vocabulary in Rhyme** – Challenge your students to create rhyming couplets that use each word in a way that shows the definition. You can do this in small groups by dividing your class into teams and giving each team a set of words to work on. Have each group come up with a fun way to perform their rhymes. (Example: If the word is *content* (happy), a couplet could be something like, “Long bike rides give me smiles; I’m content for miles and miles.”)

**Vocabulary Candy Land** – Make a board game out of the vocabulary list. Put the words on cards and give different point values to them based on their level of difficulty. Players that correctly provide the definition move forward the number of spaces corresponding to the point value. Be sure to add some wild cards in the deck that send players far forward or backward. And perhaps even play it outside by drawing the board with sidewalk chalk!

**Vocabulary Jeopardy** – Give the definition and have students guess the word. Give different point levels based on the difficulty of the word. You can be creative with the definition by not defining the word directly, but coming up with clues that provide enough context to lead them to the correct word. Or, give dictionary definitions for a lower point value clues and let the clues get a bit more vague and abstract for clues with higher point values.

**Vocabulary Charades** – Students take turns being given the definition of a word to act out, and the remaining students have the opportunity to guess the word being displayed. Turn it into a competition by assigning one point to the actor and the first correct guesser. The student with the most points wins.

**Vocabulary Pictionary** – This is just like the charades activity above except that instead of acting out the word, the student has to draw it out for others to guess. Scoring is the same if you choose to make it a competition.

**Vocabulary Bingo** – Pass out premade Bingo cards to your students that display some of the vocabulary words in random order. Not every word should be on each card, and be sure that none of the cards matches another. Play the game by calling out the definition of a word and giving students time to place a marker over the word that’s defined if it appears on their card. Repeat until someone completes a full row or column and shouts, “BINGO!”

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**Vocabulary Improv** – Select a vocabulary word to be the starting point for your activity. Use it in a descriptive sentence to start a story. Have students choose a new word from the list to add to the story, one sentence at a time. Let them try to do this without following the plot of your book.

**Synonyms** – Split students into teams, each with a different list of words. Give them a set time to search for synonyms of the words on their list (5-10 minutes), and then have them take turns competing against each other by listing off the synonyms of one word from their list one at a time until someone from the other team guesses the vocabulary word that has the same meaning. This activity can be scored if you like simply by tallying the number of synonyms given before the other team guesses. The more synonyms needed, the higher the score. The lowest score wins.

**Heads Up** – Give each student a post-it note with a vocabulary word on it, and have them affix it to their foreheads. Tell the students to mingle and interact with one another by sharing hints about what's on another student's forehead. Challenge your students to avoid sharing definitions or synonyms of the word. Instead they should provide contextual clues that can lead them to being able to guess the word. Give them a set time (3-5 minutes), and ask them to interact with at least 5 other students. When the time is over, ask each student if they can guess the word.

**Gibberish** – This is a fun creative writing activity. Have your students write a short story about one of your vocabulary words but replacing that word with a bit of gibberish. Ask them to include the word in the story at least 5 times. The challenge is to not directly define the word but provide enough context to help readers guess the replaced word. (Example: If the real word is *veterinarian*, the gibberish word could be *zumbel*. Oscar was limping yesterday, so I took him to visit the *zumbel*. The *zumbel* looked at one of his back legs...)

**Efficient Definitions** – This activity is great editing practice! Have students—separately or in teams—whittle down dictionary definitions of the words together to see if they can concisely define the word in as few words as possible.

**Word of the Day** – Select a word to highlight on a particular day and challenge students to see how many times they can work it into their conversations. This can be done every day during your reading event, but it can also extend beyond your time with the book. Continue using additional words from the book or elsewhere throughout the school year. You can even put your increased vocabulary on display by creating a paper chain, writing each mastered word on a small strip of paper and taping it into a circular link. Add a new link to your chain each day and watch it grow!

Reading aloud is a great way increase and grow your students' vocabulary, and we hope that these activities will build upon that practice to help these words fully stick. Even after your time with the book is over, continue to use the words learned just to reinforce the learning. And continue to revisit them in fun ways by replaying some of these games. You can play many of them again with new words throughout the year to make learning continue to be fun!