

Word Relationship Activities

Use these activities to help children build their vocabulary by thinking about relationships among words. Knowing how words relate to each other can deepen their understanding of the related words and help them make connections to new words.

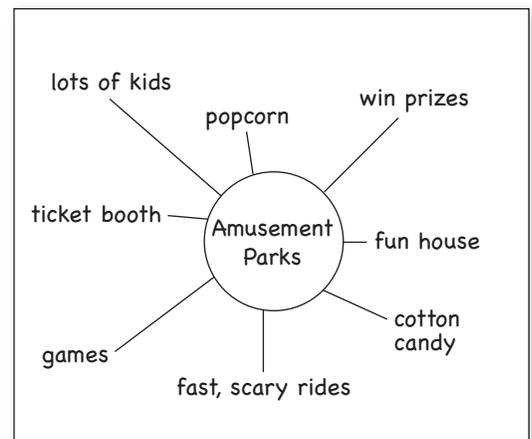
I. Categorizing Words

Purpose: Understand words and categories better by identifying words that belong in a group, sorting pictures and words into groups, and naming categories for sorted words

Materials: Pictures, large chart paper, drawing materials, T-chart and Venn Diagram (on pages 10 and 11)

Categorizing involves putting words into one or more groups, understanding what the words in a group have in common, and developing a better sense of the category by thinking about the words it includes. Use the following activities to build children's vocabulary and help them organize their thinking about specific concepts.

Make a Concept Web Show one or more detailed pictures for a category, or concept, that you want to discuss, such as *Amusement Parks*. Talk about what the picture(s) show and what children already know about the category. Prompt them with questions. Introduce and explain vocabulary you want them to learn. Then work with them to make a concept web to represent the information discussed. On the center of a large sheet of chart paper, write the category name and circle it. Around the circle, write the words and phrases discussed. Keep text brief, summarizing what children say. Read words as you write them. Have older children write some of the words. Draw lines to connect each word or phrase to the category. Children can draw or cut out pictures and add them to the web. Depending on the category, you could also attach to the web physical items, such as admission tickets or a popcorn box. If the category is discussed on subsequent days, add or have children add information to the web.



Ways to Get Around

cars	taxi cabs
buses	planes
bikes	boats

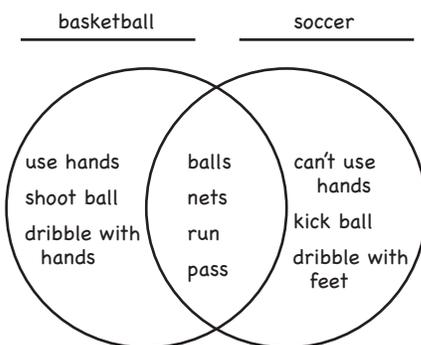
Names for One Category Tell children the name of a category, such as *Ways to Get Around*. Give at least one example of a word that fits the category, such as *cars*. Have them name as many things as they can that also belong in that category, such as *buses, bikes, taxi cabs, planes, boats*, and so on. Give clues about things that belong in the category or introduce some new vocabulary. Or say words that do or don't belong in the category. Have children decide which words belong. Make a list of words for the category as children talk and review it at the end.

Picture Sort Provide pictures of things related to two categories, such as *Things We Eat* and *Things Used for Cooking*. Include pictures whose names children know and some whose names are unfamiliar. Identify the two categories and a picture that belongs in each one. Then have children sort the remaining pictures into the two categories. Help them name each picture as they sort and discuss any unfamiliar picture names. After the pictures have been sorted, review the picture names for each group and have children tell how the items in a group are alike. Ask them if they know other things that belong in the categories. Build vocabulary beyond simple picture names by discussing what children know about the items.

Word Sort Display a large T-chart. At the top of the columns, write the names for two categories, such as *Summer* and *Winter*. Have children brainstorm words or phrases they know that belong in the first category. Prompt them with questions. Do the same for the second category. Suggest words and phrases. Have children decide in which category the words and phrases belong. Write or have children write the words on the chart. When finished, review the words in each column and discuss how they are alike.

As children's sorting improves, have them sort words into three or four categories. With older children, if you have two categories that have elements in common, such as *Basketball* and *Soccer*, show children how to use a Venn diagram to compare them. Words common to both categories are listed in the overlapping center part of the diagram. Words specific to each category are listed in the parts of the circles that don't overlap.

Summer	Winter
warm	freezing cold
sunny	snow
go to the beach	ice
swim	ice skating
camp	snowboarding
cook on grill	sledding



Identify the Category Name several related words, such as *throw*, *hit*, *run*, *pitch*, *catch*, *bat*. Have children name a category that includes all the words. (*Things You Do in Baseball*) Help them name additional items that belong in the category, such as *steal*, *slide*, *strike out*.

Odd Word Out Say a group of words—all should be related except one, such as *happy*, *glad*, *angry*, *cheerful*. Have children identify the word that doesn't belong (*angry*) and tell why. (*It doesn't tell about a happy feeling.*) Make the activity simpler by naming the category before you say the words.

TIP: Choosing categories For children with limited oral language skills, especially English-language learners, use categorizing activities to build basic language, such as names of foods, sports, months of the year, days of the week, and so on. For others, develop concepts related to texts in reading materials, read-aloud books, or other curricula.

2. Understanding Synonyms

Purpose: *Identify and generate words that have the same or almost the same meanings*

Write the word *big* on the board and have children read the word. Hold your hands far apart as you say, “Some whales are as big as a bus.” Remind children that some words mean almost the same thing as other words. (The term *synonym* is introduced in the first semester of first grade.) Help them brainstorm other words that mean almost the same as *big*, such as *large*, *huge*, *giant*, *tremendous*, *gigantic*, *enormous*. Remind them of words already discussed or introduce new vocabulary. Write the synonyms on the board under the word *big*. Read each word as you write it. Discuss things that can be described with these words. Have children say sentences using one of the synonyms. Ask questions that use the synonyms in a variety of contexts. For example, ask, “How would you feel if you ate a *gigantic* plate of spaghetti? (*very full*, *maybe a little sick*) Why? (*A gigantic plate of spaghetti would be a lot of spaghetti!*)

Repeat the activity to introduce other sets of synonyms.

big
large
huge
giant
tremendous
gigantic
enormous

fast quick

pleased
happy glad

Same	
glum	sad
angry	mad
terrific	wonderful

Variation 1 Have children replace a word in a sentence you say with another word that means the same thing. For example, say, “The *giant* pumpkin weighed over one hundred pounds!” Call on a child to repeat the sentence, replacing the word *giant* with another word with the same meaning.

Variation 2 Say three words children have discussed, two that are synonyms and one that isn’t, such as *scared*, *brave*, *fearful*. Have children tell which two words have the same meaning. (*scared*, *fearful*)

Variation 3 Write pairs of decodable synonyms on separate index cards. Give a card to each child. Ask a child to show and read his word. Ask who has a word that means the same as the word just said. Have that child show and read her word. Have others decide if the two words have the same meaning. Continue until every child’s word has been matched with another word. For more action, have children walk around the room and find a word buddy whose word means the same as their word.

Variation 4 Make two sets of word cards. Each set should consist of two or more decodable synonyms. Mix all the cards and have children group together the words that have the same or almost the same meaning.

Variation 5 Use a T-chart to record pairs of synonyms. Write the word *Same* at the top of the chart. Write a word in the left column, read it, and give a context sentence for it. Help children identify another word that has the same or almost the same meaning. Write or have children write the synonym in the right column next to the first word. Continue for other pairs of synonyms. Draw a horizontal line across the chart under each pair.

TIP: Oral vs. written activities for vocabulary Because rich vocabulary isn’t always decodable, the activities in this section are primarily oral. Vocabulary generated during discussions can be recorded on the board for easy reference during an activity, but children shouldn’t be expected to read or spell nondecodable words. As children are able to decode and encode more words, they can take a more active role in reading the words you display and in writing words.

3. Understanding Antonyms

Purpose: Identify and generate words that have opposite meanings

Materials: T-chart (on page 10)

Write *big* on the board. Have children read the word. Hold your hands far apart as you say, “Lots of kids fit in the big bus.” Then write the word *small* on the board. Read or have children read the word. Put your hands close together as you say, “The baby bunny was not big. It was small.” Ask if *big* and *small* have the same meaning. (*no*) Explain that *small* means not big and that *big* and *small* have opposite meanings—their meanings are as different as they can be.

Help children brainstorm other words that mean the opposite of *big*, such as *little*, *tiny*, *teeny*, *itty-bitty*. Remind them of words already discussed or introduce new vocabulary. Record the words in a T-chart, putting the word *big* on the left and the antonyms on the right. Point out that the words on the right have similar meanings and mean the opposite of *big*.

Ask questions about things that are not big. Model how children can respond using the phrase “not big” and a word from the right column. For example, ask, “Is a ladybug big?” (*No, a ladybug is not big. A ladybug is little.*) Use a similar question-and-answer format to discuss things that are big. For example, ask, “Is an elephant tiny?” (*No, an elephant is not tiny. An elephant is big.*)

Repeat the activity to introduce antonyms for other words, such as *mad* and *good*.

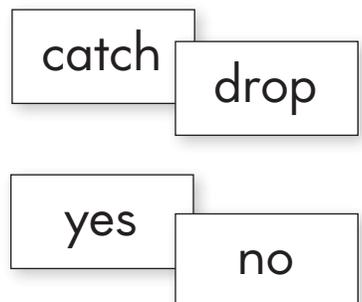
Variation 1 Simplify the activity by having children generate one word that means the opposite of a word you give.

Variation 2 Say three words, two of which are antonyms and one that isn’t, such as *sleepy*, *nice*, *mean*. Have children tell which two words have opposite meanings. (*nice*, *mean*)

Variation 3 With older children, write pairs of decodable antonyms on separate index cards. Give a card to each child. Ask a child to show and read his word. Ask who has a word that means the opposite of that word. Have that child show and read her word. Have others decide if the two words have opposite meanings. Continue until every child’s word has been paired with an opposite.

Variation 4 Say pairs of words, either synonyms or antonyms. Have children say “same” if the two words have the same meanings or “opposites” if they have opposite meanings.

big	small little tiny
mad	glad happy joyful
good	bad terrible awful



TIP: Understanding homonyms Homographs and homophones are two types of homonyms. *Homographs* are words that are spelled the same but have different meanings and origins. They might sound the same, as in *bat* (club) and *bat* (winged creature), or have different pronunciations, as in *bow* (ribbon on a gift) and *bow* (bend down). *Homophones* are words that sound alike but have different meanings and spellings, such as *to*, *too*, *two*.

Homographs present comprehension challenges because children have to use context clues to determine which meaning of a word makes sense in a sentence they read or hear. Homophones present spelling challenges because children must match the meaning of a word with its correct spelling.

4. Understanding Homographs (Multiple-Meaning Words)

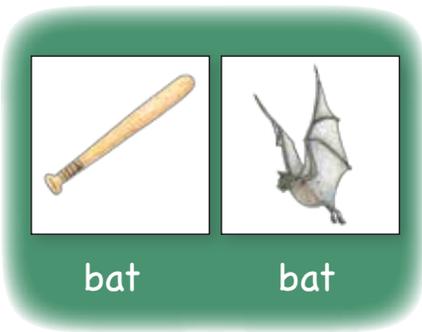
Purpose: Identify multiple meanings for a homograph

Materials: (optional) Pictures

On the board, far apart, display or draw a picture of a baseball bat and a bat (winged, flying creature). Write *bat* under each picture. Have children read the words. Remind them that some words are spelled the same, but they have different meanings. Explain, for example, that the word *bat* can be something you use to hit a baseball or an animal with wings that lives in a cave. Remind children that when they see or hear words like these, they have to use clues in the sentence to figure out which meaning makes sense. Give several context sentences for both meanings of *bat*. After each sentence, have children point to the picture on the board that shows which meaning of *bat* was used in the sentence.

Do a similar activity for other multiple-meaning words, such as *tag* (a game, a card for a gift), *patch* (a bit of fabric, a bit of land, to fix) and *fly* (an insect, to go up in the air). If the meanings can't be shown easily in pictures, have children say abbreviated definitions for the word. For example, for *tag*, they could say "game" or "gift card" to identify the meaning used in context sentences.

Variation 1 Have children draw pictures to illustrate the multiple meanings of a word. Have them write or dictate context sentences or explanations for the words.



Variation 2 Write a few multiple-meaning words children have discussed, such as *bug* (bother, insect), *top* (lid, spinning toy), *pen* (something you write with, place where a farm animal lives), *bark* (outside covering of a tree, sound a dog makes). Give clues about both meanings of a word. Have children tell which word you are describing. For example, for *pen*, say, “This word tells about something you use for writing AND a place where pigs live.” To make it more challenging, don’t list answer choices on the board.

Variation 3 With older children, give practice with homographs that have different pronunciations, such as *bow* (ribbon on a gift) and *bow* (bend down); *live* (dwell, reside) and *live* (alive); *wind* (moving air) and *wind* (to turn something around). Write the homograph on the board, say one pronunciation for it, and explain the meaning for that pronunciation. Say the other pronunciation and explain that meaning. Point out that some words are spelled the same, but they don’t sound alike and their meanings are different. Tell children they have to think about the meaning to know how to say the word correctly. If possible, write on the board decodable context sentences for each meaning and underline the homographs. Give children time to read a sentence silently and think about the meaning of the underlined word. Call on a child to read the sentence and tell which meaning is used in the sentence. Or read the sentence to children and have them tell you the meaning of the underlined word.

I tied a blue bow on the gift.

5. Word-Relationship Games

Purpose: Have fun with related words

Materials: Index cards, number cube, small classroom objects, paper bag, Word Card Template (on page 12), pennies or plastic chips, (optional) hand puppet

Name All Things Name a category. Challenge children to name as many things as they can for that category. Make tally marks on the board to keep track of the words they say. Possible categories include the following: *Animals with Four Legs, Animals That Live in Water, Animals with Fur, Things to Wear, Kinds of Fruit.*

Roll and Name Write categories on separate index cards, such as *Games, Things at a Zoo, Kinds of Furniture, Things at School.* Place the cards facedown in a stack. Have children take turns choosing a card, reading the category (or you read it to them), and rolling a number cube. The number on the top of the cube shows how many things the child has to name for the category. If the child can do that, she keeps the card. If not, the card goes back into the stack.

Name That Category Whisper the name of a category to a child or group of children. Have the child or group name things that belong in this category. Have others guess what the category is.

Word-Pair Concentration Have children play Concentration by matching pairs of synonyms, antonyms, or homophones. Use only one type of word at a time and be sure words are decodable. Write word pairs on separate index cards. Show one pair of words and explain what makes them a match. (*They have the same meanings. They have opposite meanings. They sound the same.*) Mix the cards and spread them facedown on a table. Have children take turns choosing two cards, reading them, and telling if they make a match. If so, the child keeps the cards. If not, the child returns the cards facedown in their original positions. Play until all cards are matched. For greater challenge, have children use the words correctly in sentences or explain their meanings in order to keep a pair.

For multiple-meaning words (homographs), write the same word twice on separate index cards, such as *bat* and *bat*. Children play the game the same way as above, but to keep a pair they have to explain both meanings of the word or say two sentences, one for each meaning.

difficult hard

hot cold

meat meet

bat bat

The Same Game Say a word that has many synonyms, such as *big*, and challenge children to name as many words as they can that mean the same or almost the same. Make tally marks on the board to track the number of words they say.

Say the Opposite Explain that Olly Opposite loves opposites. (You can use a hand puppet to represent Olly.) Tell children you will say a word and point to someone. That person has to say a word that means the opposite of the word you said. As a variation, say pairs of antonyms or synonyms and have children give a big cheer only if the words are opposites.

Do the Opposite Use Olly Opposite again (see above). This time, give children commands to do, such as *act happy, frown, stand up*. For each command, children should do the opposite. (*act sad, smile, sit down*)

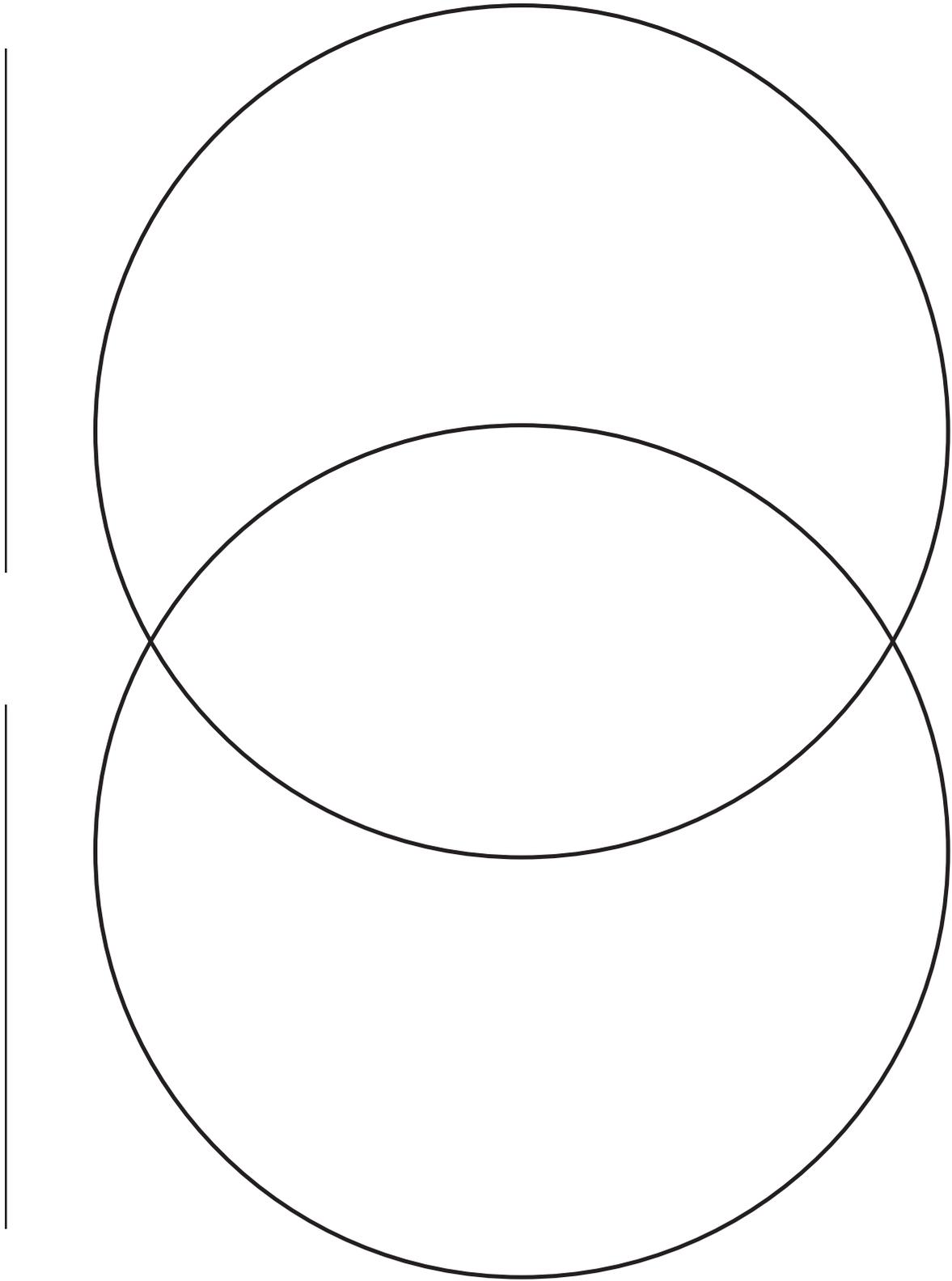
Synonym/Antonym Bingo Make a list of 16 pairs of decodable synonyms. Write one word from each pair on the board. Give each child nine pennies or plastic chips and a copy of a 3 x 3 grid (see the Word Card Template). Have children write on their bingo card nine words from the board. Tell them they can use any of the words and put them in any box on their card, but they can only use each word once. Say words that are synonyms of the words on the board. Tell children to look for a word on their bingo card that has the same meaning as the word you say. If their card has a synonym, they should cover it with a penny or chip. Mark on your list the words you say. Play until someone covers three words in a row, column, or diagonal.

You can adapt the directions above using 16 pairs of antonyms. Have children cover the word that means the opposite of the word you say.

A large empty T-chart grid consisting of a vertical line and a horizontal line intersecting at the top center, forming two columns and two rows. The grid is intended for students to write their responses to the directions below.

Directions: Label the columns and list appropriate information in each. For example, on the left, list story events and on the right, list why they happened. Or on the left, write what you think will happen in the story and on the right, write what actually happens.

Venn Diagram



Directions: On the lines, write the names of two things to be compared. Where the circles overlap, list characteristics that the two things have in common. In the non-overlapping areas, list characteristics that are unique to each thing.

Template for Letter, Word, or Picture Cards

Directions: Show a picture or write a letter, a combination of letters, or a word in each box. Cut the boxes apart along the dotted lines.