

LEXICOGRAPHER: OR WRITE YOUR OWN DICTIONARY

GRADES 4 - 12

Center(s)

Vocabulary

Skills

When they keep a personal record of newly acquired vocabulary words, students learn vocabulary as an aspect of self-directed and self-regulated learning. They practice using context clues and reference materials to determine word meanings, and they explore the relationship between word forms.

Description

A lexicographer is someone who writes dictionary definitions. In this activity, students gather their own list of unfamiliar or unusual words during independent reading and, at the vocabulary center, enter them into their own personal dictionaries.

Mini-Lesson

When first introducing this activity, take a moment to describe what a lexicographer does. (They record the English language, as it is actually used, by writing and editing dictionary definitions.) Then explain that while they are not expected to record the entire English language, each student

should attempt to record the words that he or she personally learns during the course of the semester or year. Model the activity by showing students an example of your own new word list. Then demonstrate how you look for context clues and research a word's correct definition. You may want to emphasize that the same words won't be new to everybody. Because of our various life experiences and reading backgrounds, different people know different words. Writing a personal dictionary is not competitive! While there's bound to be some overlap, every dictionary will have a different number of entries. And because students are writing definitions in their own words, they might vary from one dictionary to another. You may also want to do a quick review of different parts of speech if necessary.

Center Prep

- Students' personal dictionaries
- Students' personal word lists
- Pencils or pens
- Reference materials (dictionaries, online resources, glossaries, etc.)
- Written center instructions

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Overview and Tips for Classroom Implementation

Teachers in the primary grades often use personal dictionaries and word journals to give students an additional opportunity to engage with frequently used words, help with spelling, or to use as a resource when writing. The principle is the same but this activity adds a level of independence by encouraging students to come up with their own list of words.

The personal dictionary can easily be adapted for any classroom or content area. And if your school is practicing a whole-school literacy program, students can be encouraged to add words from *all* classes into one personal dictionary. This will give them an opportunity to see how language is related across disciplines and help them make new connections between content.

Step 1: Gather a Word List

This step should become an ongoing part of daily routine. Students should get in the habit of recording new words whenever they encounter them during independent or group reading, or as they listen to presentations. One of the easiest ways to

do this is by using vocabulary bookmarks. You can offer students pre-printed bookmarks that have blanks for new words and a space to note where they were spotted. Older or more independent learners can simply keep a folded sheet of paper in each book or carry a small memo book with them to record new words. Each student should bring his/her own word lists to the vocabulary center.

Step 2: Research

Students use dictionaries, online resources, context clues, and textbook glossaries to determine the definitions of new words.

Step 3: Write Definitions

Each definition should include the word's part of speech: noun, verb, adjective, adverb, etc. Then a definition should be written in the student's own words. Finally, students should make a notation of where they first encountered the word.

Tip: Students can add illustrations to their definitions if desired. This is particularly useful for visual learners or if the dictionary is going to be used as a supplemental a study aid.

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Overview and Tips for Classroom Implementation (continued)

Tip: There are many ways to create dictionaries. Students can write definitions on index cards and file them alphabetically. Or, at the beginning of the school year or semester, they can label pages of a 60-page spiral-bound notebook with pages assigned to each letter. Because the frequency of initial letters varies (more words start with S than with Q, for example), you might want to assign the pages as indicated here. Feel free to change this as necessary depending on your discipline's vocabulary trends.

Letter	Number of pages	Letter	Number of pages
A	3	N	2
B	2	O	2
C	4	P	4
D	4	Q	1
E	2	R	2
F	2	S	5
G	2	T	2
H	2	U	2
I	2	V	2
J	2	W	2
K	2	X	1
L	2	Y	2
M	3	Z	1

Tip: This activity can serve as a great formative assessment tool. You might notice some students are encountering so many new words that they can't enter them all into their dictionaries. You might find that some students claim they aren't encountering new or unfamiliar words on a regular basis. In either case, work with the students to find differentiated texts. All students should be reading texts that are challenging, introducing them to new vocabulary and new ideas, but not so difficult that the students are frustrated.

Tip: Personal dictionaries can be kept in the classroom with other center work or students can carry them from class to class for easy reference. There are obvious advantages to giving students access to their dictionaries at any time, but if there's a good chance students will misplace or forget them, you may want to keep them safely in the classroom. Use whatever method works best for your situation.

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Overview and Tips for Classroom Implementation (continued)

Tip: Whenever it's appropriate, encourage student lexicographers to include possible word forms as part of the definition. For example, if they're defining *vertex* they can make a note that its plural form is *vertices*. If they're defining *diplomacy* they can make a note that *diplomatic* is the adjective form and that a *diplomat* is someone who practices diplomacy.

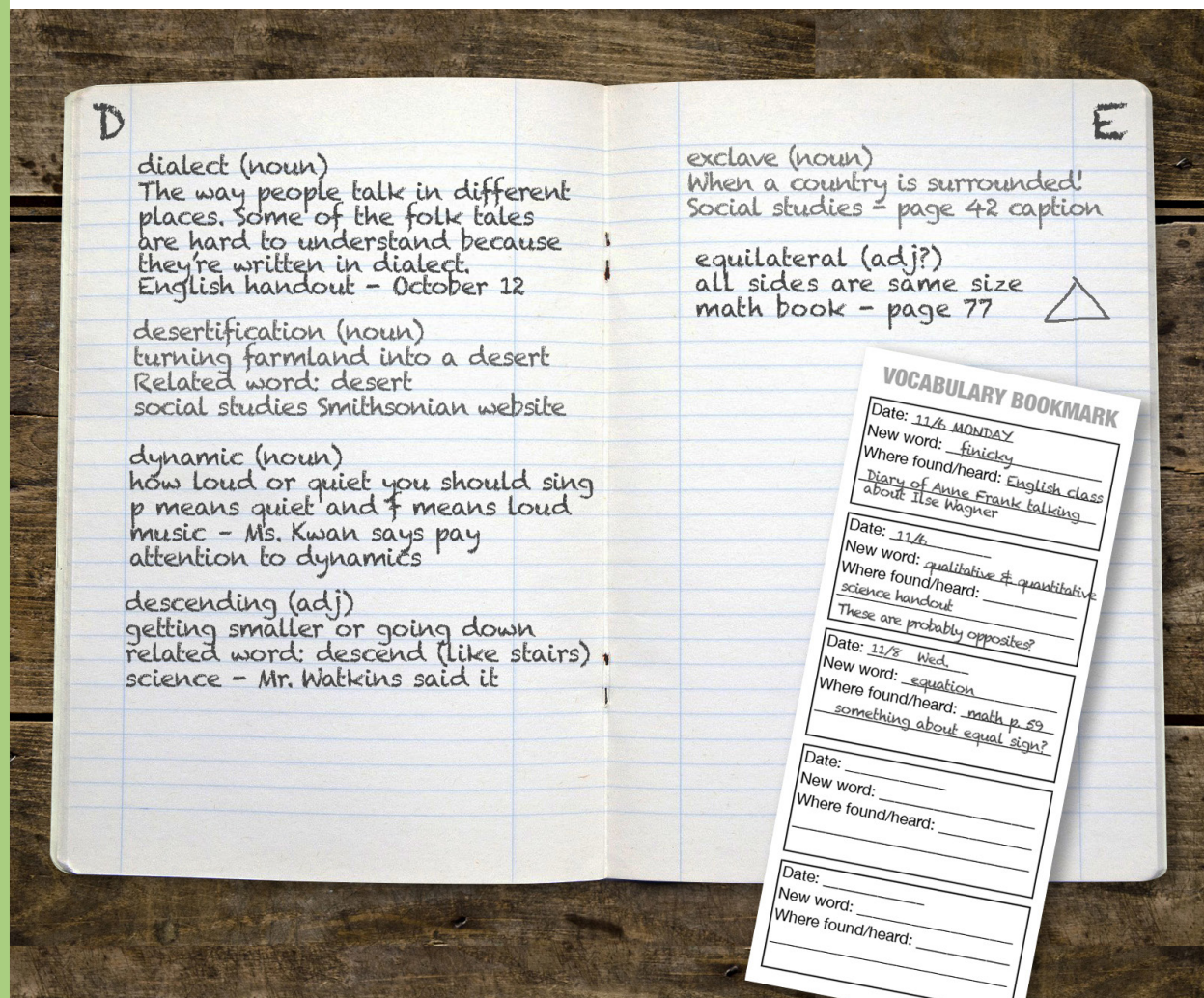
Tip: Occasionally use this vocabulary center as an opportunity for students to share dictionaries with their group mates. They can discuss their favorite new words; add a classmate's word and definition to their own dictionary (it's not cheating or stealing, it's sharing knowledge!); or simply celebrate how many new words they've learned. This self-reflection is an important part of developing growth mindset in students and helps to create lifelong learners.

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Here is an example of a 7th grade student's personal dictionary. In this case, the student is creating one dictionary for all of his classes, with vocabulary from science, social studies, ELA and music in one place.



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VOCABULARY BOOKMARK

Date: _____
 New word: _____
 Where found/heard: _____

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