

Using Word Games

Blachowicz, Camille and Donna Ogle. Reading Comprehension: Strategies for Independent Learners. New York: Guilford Press. 2001.

Word awareness can be encouraged by using both homemade and commercial games focusing on words and word play.

To select games to make, use, and adapt, consider these guidelines:

1. Games should be simple to use without teacher intervention.
2. Vocabulary level should be appropriate.
3. Play should call on students to use the words in some meaningful way.
4. Games should utilize outside resources (e.g., dictionary, class notebooks) for self-checking.
5. Games should limit the number of players so that all players are involved.

Class-constructed games follow one of six models:

1. **Matching card games** work on the pairing principle like Rummy or Fish.
2. **Race-and chase board games** (example- Parcheesi) require a start/finish design on board, markers, and spinner/number cubes
Synonym Match is played with a stack of word cards and the synonym cards arranged face up next to the board. After spinning or rolling, student picks up a word card and locates its synonym and if correct moves the number of spaces. The dictionary is the authority. Harder versions involve using the words in original sentences.
3. **Memory games** involve finding matches and remembering cards (example- Concentration)
Play with a maximum of 25 cards – 12 word cards, 12 match cards and 1 wild card to create a 5x5 grid.
4. **Bingo** can be played with any size group.
Begin with students laying out sets of word cards in a 5 x 5 grid and placing markers on the word that match the definition given.
5. **Pencil-and-paper games** (examples- Categories and Word Challenge)
In Categories, students draw a suitable size grid (2x2 for younger- up to 5x5 for older) and label the top of each column with a category. Then one student flips through a book and chooses a word whose number of letters matches the number of rows. The answers need be begin with the same letter. Players are given a time limit to fill in as many squares as possible. Players get 5 points for every square they fill in that no other player has filled in; 2

points for every category square filled in that others have filled in, but with other words; and 1 point for every category square where someone else has the same word. Inappropriate entries may be challenged and carry no points if they are not suitable.

Word Challenge is played with preset categories to think about particular characteristics of words. Common categories might include “synonym/similar,” “antonym/different,” “example,” and “related word.” Then the rules follow the ones above in Categories.

6. **Guessing games** (examples-Twenty Questions and Word of the Day)

Twenty questions is an excellent verbal game that can be adapted to help students think about the words they are learning. A student selects a word card from a prepared deck. Other students take turns asking “yes or no” questions. Asking team gets 20 questions. If a student guesses the word correctly, they will select the next word. If no one guesses the word, the first player gets another turn.

Word of the Day for some classrooms means a set of clues is prepared and put on the board. An envelope is placed below the clues for guesses and these are discussed at the end of the day. Another version is that a teacher chooses a word that will be used throughout the day. At the end of the day, the teacher asks students whether they can identify the word of the day and tell what it means. Students become keen listeners for new words when this approach is used.

Suggested list of Commercial Word Games for the Classroom

Allen, Janet. Words, Words, Words: teaching vocabulary in grades 4-12. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse. 1999.

Balderdash
Boggle
Charades
Listen Up!
Outburst
Oodles
Password
Pictionary
Probe
Scattergories
Scrabble
Taboo
Win, Lose, or Draw
Word Yahtzee