



## Better Words

### Grades K-2

#### Rationale

- ✚ English contains words with a variety of meanings. The Common Core standards expect that students will be able to distinguish meaning among closely related words. By increasing their familiarity with similar and related words beginning in the early grades, students will continually expand their vocabulary. A varied, wide-ranging vocabulary has positive implications for communication, expression, and advancement during students' academic years and for the career paths they choose as adults.

#### Goal

- ✚ To use a thesaurus to identify synonyms and better word choices to use in speech and writing

#### Standards

- ✚ **L.K.5d** Distinguish shades of meaning among verbs describing the same general action (e.g., *walk, march, strut, prance*) by acting out the meanings.
- ✚ **L.1.5d** Distinguish shades of meaning among verbs differing in manner (e.g., *look, peek, glance, stare, glare, scowl*) and adjectives differing in intensity (e.g., *large, gigantic*) by defining or choosing them or by acting out the meanings.
- ✚ **L.2.5b** Distinguish shades of meaning among closely related verbs (e.g., *toss, throw, hurl*) and closely related adjectives (e.g., *thin, slender, skinny, scrawny*).

#### Objectives

- ✚ Students will act out or demonstrate synonyms of adjectives or verbs.
- ✚ Students will identify a thesaurus and use it to identify synonyms for nouns, verbs, or adjectives.
- ✚ Students will use synonyms to verbally respond to a piece of literature.
- ✚ Students will discuss word choice and reasons why synonyms are selected for use when speaking or writing.

#### Materials

- ✚ Multiple copies of grade-level reference books (See **Teacher Tips** for suggestions)
- ✚ One grade-level fiction title (See **Teacher Tips** for suggestions)
- ✚ **Student Activity: Boring Words Become Better Words**
- ✚ **Student Activity: Better Word Strips** and **Boring Word Bank**
- ✚ Chair
- ✚ Glue stick or tape

- ✚ Notebook rings (optional)
- ✚ Scissors (optional)

## **Procedures**

- ✚ Begin by placing a chair in front of students and sitting in it. Say, **“I can sit in this chair. There’s nothing wrong with the word *sit*, but it’s a boring word. People say *sit* all the time. There are better words that I can use to describe what I do in this chair. I can slouch.”** Demonstrate *slouch* and continue with actions like *sprawling* in the chair, *squatting* in the chair, *placing* yourself in the chair, or *plopping* onto the chair.
- ✚ Ask students to stand up and space themselves apart so that each person has room to move. Say, **“Let’s walk.”** Demonstrate *walk* either in place or around the room and have students walk along with you. Then stop and say, **“There’s nothing wrong with the word *walk*, but it’s another boring word. Let’s march instead of walk. *March* is a better word for *walk*.”** Demonstrate *march* and have students march with you. Then continue to demonstrate words like *hike*, *step*, *stroll*, *strut*, *tiptoe*, or other related words.
- ✚ Have students sit down. Show a thesaurus to the class. Say, **“This is a thesaurus. A thesaurus is a book of words that have the same or almost the same meaning. People use a thesaurus to find better words to use when they talk or write.”** Flip through the thesaurus and show students how the information is presented. Then, read the entries for *sit* and *walk*. Discuss the words that you demonstrated with the class and any additional words listed in the thesaurus.
- ✚ Distribute the ***Student Activity: Boring Words Become Better Words***.
  - Divide students into four groups and give each group one word: *good*, *bad*, *like*, or *nice*. Students can select the word for their group or teacher can assign the word to each group.
  - Tell students that they must use a thesaurus and work together with their group to find and write down better words for the boring word that they were given. Older students can record their words on one ***Boring Words Become Better Words*** page per group. Younger students may find it easier to write individual words on the ***Better Word Strips***. Have one or more copies of a thesaurus available to each group.
  - Circulate and be available to answer questions. Give students at least 10-15 minutes of work time.
  - Have each group share the better words that they found for their boring word. Post the pages or strips in the classroom so that students can see them.
  - To wrap up the lesson, discuss what made the words that students chose better words than the word they were given at the beginning of the activity. Also talk about why each group chose the words that they did. You might say, **“People might use better words because they enjoy the sound of the words, they want to use longer or more difficult words, or they are tired of using the same words all the time. Tell why your group chose the better words that it did.”**
- ✚ In your next session, review the better words for *good*, *bad*, *like*, and *nice* that students found during the last session.
- ✚ Say, **“Today, I am going to read a story. Then, I will ask you to tell me your thoughts about the story, but you can’t use the words *good*, *bad*, *like*, or *nice*. Use**

**better words to tell what you are thinking.”** Read one of the suggested titles to students. Then, ask them to express their thoughts and opinions about the story using better words.

- Ask students to express their thoughts and feelings about the first chapter if *Donavan’s Word Jar* is the selected title.
- ✚ Have students work individually or in their groups from the last session to use a thesaurus to find better words for boring words from additional titles suggested for the activity, books in the classroom library, or student journals and other work samples. ***Student Activity: Boring Words Become Better Words*** or the ***Better Word Strips*** can be used according to teacher discretion or student choice.
  - Use the ***Boring Word Bank*** as a resource for students who are struggling to find boring words in books, journals, or work samples.
  - Students can write individual words on ***Better Word Strips***. Strips can then be hole-punched and placed on individual notebook rings.
  - The ***Boring Words Become Better Words*** page can be used to create lists of individual better words or multiple possibilities of better words for one boring word per page. These pages can then be filed in the back of personal student dictionaries.
  - The activity from the last session can be repeated with students choosing their own four words for the class as it continues to build its Better Word Wall
  - Students can look up and write better possibilities for boring words after each chapter of *Donavan’s Word Jar* (or another chapter title of the teacher’s choosing) is read. When the class has finished the book, students will have created a better word list or wall for a specific title. This activity can be repeated for additional titles three or four times throughout the year and the results for each list or wall hung in the classroom.
- ✚ When time ends, say, **“Last time, we acted out better words for *walk*. Who would like to act out or show a better word that was found today?”** Encourage students to refer to both the boring word and the better word that they found when presenting their demonstrations.
- ✚ **Closing:** Ask students to talk about a character from another story, a favorite activity, or a person, substituting as many better words for boring words as possible.

### **Teacher Tips**

- ✚ Here are some fiction titles that include unusual vocabulary or that focus on words:
  - *Max’s Words*, by Kate Banks, illustrated by Boris Kulikov
  - *The Barber’s Cutting Edge*, by Gwendolyn Battle-Lavert, illustrated by Raymond Holbert
  - *Donavan’s Word Jar*, by Monalisa DeGross, illustrated by Cheryl Hanna (chapter book)
  - *Slop Goes the Soup*, by Pamela Duncan Edwards, illustrated by Henry Cole
  - *Fancy Nancy*, by Jane O’Connor, illustrated by Robin Preiss Glasser
  - *Roller Coaster*, by Marla Frazee
  - *Frog in a Bog*, by John Himmelman
  - *The Boy Who Cried Fabulous*, by Leslea Newman, illustrated by Peter Ferguson

- *Thesaurus Rex*, by Laya Steinberg, illustrated by Debbie Harter
- ✚ For suggested reference books, consider:
  - *Kingfisher First Thesaurus* by George Beal and Martin Chatterton
  - *Scholastic Children's Thesaurus*, by John K. Bollard
  - *Oxford First Thesaurus*, by Andrew Delahunty
  - *The American Heritage Children's Thesaurus* by Paul Hellweg
- ✚ Use academic language:
  - Better words that have the same or almost the same meaning are **synonyms**. For younger students, refer to the academic term. For older students, replace lesson wording with the academic term.

### **Extension Activities**

- ✚ Find a simple recipe and have students re-write it using better words. *Mix* could become *combine*, *mingle*, or *toss*. *Chop* could become *bust*, *hack*, or *smash*. Use the revised recipes to talk about how word choice can affect meaning, even when the chosen words are synonyms.
- ✚ Students can illustrate synonyms so that the illustration shows the meaning of the word in some way. For the word *damp*, the letters of the word can be cut out, briefly placed in water, and then displayed after they have dried to show the meaning of the word. *Enormous* could be illustrated by the entire class on a horizontal sheet of butcher paper. Each student or small group of students would be responsible for drawing or representing one letter in the word.
- ✚ Create a deck of better words for a list of boring words. Post the list of boring words where students can see it to play a variation of *Go Fish*. A player chooses a boring word from the list and says, “Do you have a better word for \_\_\_\_\_?” The other player either gives the card from his or her hand that is the better word or tells the first player to “Go Fish.” (The game could also be known as *Go Better*.) The player with the most matches when there are no more boring words (or who has matched all of the cards in his or her hand) wins the game.
- ✚ Tell students that they need to be a “Boring Word Buster” each week. Post a boring word in the classroom.
  - Students then have one school week to find a better word for that boring word. They can ask family members or other adults at school for help. They can use words that they might read in books or hear on television. However, students can't ask you for help in finding a better word.
  - When students have found their better word for the week, they have to whisper that word (younger students) or a sentence that uses that word (older students) to you. Then, record the words that are heard and keep track of when each student has “busted” that week's boring word by placing a check mark or sticker on a chart of student names. At the end of the week, review the better words that students found with the entire class and add any new words to the classroom word wall.
  - If incentives are used in the classroom, students could receive a certificate or other token for “busting” all four boring words in a month or a specified number of words in a grading period.

✚ Introduce antonyms to students. Have them demonstrate or illustrate opposite actions and adjectives as they did with better words and synonyms. Discuss antonym pairs that are not actions or adjectives, such as *adult/child*, *boy/girl*, *man/woman*, *up/down*, *left/right*, and *night/day*. Some suggested titles are:

- *Exactly the Opposite*, by Tana Hoban
- *Dot*, by Patricia Intriago
- *Black? White! Day? Night!* by Laura Vaccaro Seeger



## Better Word Strips

\_\_\_\_\_ is a better word for \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ is a better word for \_\_\_\_\_.

## Boring Word Bank

talk	get	happy	sad	stop	go
see	look	part	love	hurt	mean
eat	run	fun	funny	glad	mad
great	then	scared	stuff	big	little
said	fine	well	hot	cold	lots
hard	easy	give	take	try	very
make	want	really	think	fast	slow
help	more	do	thing	kid	people
job	amazing	beautiful	because	interesting	sometimes