

Helping Your Child Build Vocabulary

spine



I'm Thinking of a Word

One of the most important components of the reading process is knowing what words mean. A large vocabulary gives a reader a strong advantage, and parents play an important role in their child's vocabulary development.

This activity offers a fun way to practice recognizing and knowing words. Even when a reader can decode—or sound out—a word, that doesn't necessarily mean he understands the word. Knowing words and their meanings will help your child become a better reader.

You might call this activity, "I'm Thinking of a Word." This game is similar to the game "I Spy." Begin by printing your child's vocabulary words on index cards or slips of paper. These words may come from his teacher, or you could select new words from a book or the newspaper. Place the cards upside down on a table or in a container, like an envelope or a paper bag.

Select a card without letting your child see the word printed on it. Give clues about the meaning of the word. "I'm thinking of a word that means..." Keep providing more clues until your child guesses correctly.

First, give clues that define or describe the meaning of the word. For example, if one of your child's vocabulary words is spine, start with the definition she is learning in school. "This is a part of the body and refers to the long row of bones that go down the center of your back." You can expand your child's vocabulary by offering another definition. "This word also can refer to the stiff, sharp points on an animal's back, like a porcupine, or on a plant like a cactus. It also can refer to the back part of a book where the pages are attached!"

If your child needs more clues, try giving the beginning sounds, letters, or a rhyming word. "This word rhymes with the word fine." When your child guesses the word correctly, show her the card and have her read the word aloud. Have fun with the words!

Children learn vocabulary words in a different way than adults do. They learn one part of a word's meaning and then add to their understanding of the word as they are exposed to it many times. This is one reason why reviewing new words and talking about their meanings are so important.



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