

Supporting Young English Learners by Becoming a Word Detective

Regional Educational Laboratories
West, Northwest,
Northeast & Islands

From the National Center for Education Evaluation at IES

Families and caregivers, you play an important role in your child's language learning. Children can learn new words every day by listening, speaking, writing, and drawing. The purpose of this activity is to help children engage with informational text by having them learn and practice using a small set of new words from the text. You will support your child while they read, talk, draw, play with, or write the new words.

Keep in mind:

- You and your child can use your home language or English, whichever is strongest for you.
- Learning new words in your home language will also help your child with English.
- Enjoy this time with your child. Learning together is fun!



Why teach words?

Talking, reading, writing, and playing with new words every day helps children to build their vocabulary.

Learning Goal: Children will build their vocabulary by using new words

Grades: Kindergarten–5th grade

Materials: A book or informational text, paper and pencils, pens, crayons, or markers, scissors

Let's be a word detective!

Follow the steps below. See the back for additional language supports.

Step 1: Read a story or informational text with your child. It may be something from their math, science, social studies, or English schoolwork, or other source such as a magazine.

Step 2: Together, **choose 5-8 words from the text** for your child to practice over a few days. Choose words that are new or interesting, words that appear multiple times in the text, words that are similar in both English and your home language, or words with multiple meanings. For younger children you may choose fewer words or focus on a single letter as well.

Step 3: Focus on one word for each day; younger children can focus on a letter. **You or your child can write the word** on a blank piece of paper. **Talk** about the word, **search** for the word in the text, **define** it, tell them what it is and is not, and answer any questions they may have about the word.

Step 4: Your child can **listen and look for that word** all day long, keeping track how many times they see or hear it. Older students may keep a list of where they see or hear the word.

Step 5: Check in with them and **ask questions about the word**, making connections to their day. How many times did they hear it? How was it used? Your child could write a sentence or draw a picture of how or where they saw the word being used.



Types of Informational Text for Your Child to Explore

- Books, stories, videos, or websites that share facts about something (animals, fruit, weather, sports)
- Schoolwork
- Cereal boxes
- Newspaper articles
- Text from a magazine
- Instructions (how to play a game, operate a new toy, etc.)

Ways You and Your Child Can Learn New Words Together

- Write (or trace) the word
- Talk about the meaning of the word; think of words that have the same meaning
- Draw or sketch a picture of the word
- Find words that rhyme with the word (or make them up)
- Use the word in a sentence
- Clap out the syllables
- Cut the word apart and put it back together
- Spell the word
- Scramble up the letters to make new words
- Bonus: Look for the parts of the word (smaller words within a longer word, roots, prefixes, suffixes)



Additional Language Supports

Consider using the questions and responses below as you talk about new words with your child.

Questions to Ask About New Words	Child Responses
What word did you learn today?	Today I learned the word ____.
What does the word mean to you?	The word I learned, ____, means ____.
Can you think of some other words that mean the same thing?	Another word that means the same thing is ____.
What would be an opposite of this word?	A word that means the opposite of my word is ____.
Where did you find this word today?	Today I found this word in/on ____.
Try using the word in a sentence. Can you include you or your friends in the sentence?	