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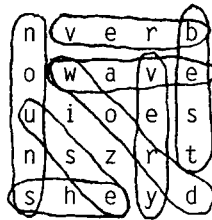
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# WORD PUZZLES FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

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Suppose you were asked to name all the kinds of word puzzles you use in your classroom.

Probably the crossword puzzles would be the first kind you'd mention. Then perhaps you'd think of the word-search puzzle, a square of letters in which words are spelled vertically, horizontally, and diagonally.



Most teachers say it's easy to come up with two or three kinds of word puzzles for use with pupils, but it's hard to find a wide variety. It's handy, however, to be familiar with a number of different kinds, since word puzzles are useful for vocabulary development.

## Multiple Meaning Puzzles

Throughout the vocabulary development program, we work with students on the multiple meanings of words. Multiple-meaning puzzles can reinforce our teaching.

In this type of puzzle the root word is given at the top of the page. Then clues are given to help the pupil think of expressions, compound words, and phrases which point up the multiple meanings.

Manchester (1979) provides puzzles which point up twenty-five meanings each for such words as step, hand, pin, foot, round, skin, stone, table, show, and run.

The following example shows his treatment of  
RUN

Each definition below should suggest to you an expression which contains the word run. For example, "a person who finishes second" is called a runner-up.

1. A quarrel \_\_\_\_\_
2. Best hit in baseball \_\_\_\_\_
3. Ordinary or average \_\_\_\_\_
4. Rehearsal \_\_\_\_\_

If you came up with home run, run of the mill, and dry run for 2, 3, and 4, you've caught on to the approach of multiple-meaning puzzles. These puzzles can help your students with idioms and colloquialisms as well as multiple dictionary definitions.

### Content-Area Puzzles

The word puzzle approach can be used to develop content area vocabulary. The rebuses, scrambles, cryptograms that appear in the Quiz Book of the American Revolution (Banks, 1975), for example, can enrich the teaching of history. Wouldn't your students enjoy finding these hidden names? (p. 9)

In each sentence a patriot is hidden

We give his first name,

But you must find his last name

somewhere in the sentence.

Underline it when you do.

1. Thomas had radical ideas that sometimes caused pain even to his friends.
2. John knew that sometimes it was the pen, rather than cocked pistols, that can change a man's mind.
3. The cannons roared but Ethan and his boys ran to the fort wall, enjoying the battle.

Many middle-graders manage to locate Thomas Paine, John Hancock, and Ethan Allen in these three sentences.

### Anagrams

Anagrams help students with spelling as well as with vocabulary development. The simplest anagram puzzles involve unscrambling a group of letters and rearranging them to spell a word. The following anagram puzzle is a bit more difficult in that each set of scrambled letters can be rearranged to spell two different words (Edwards, 1977, p. 17).

1. THSO shot host
2. AREF \_\_\_\_\_

3. SYLA \_\_\_\_\_

4. ATEH \_\_\_\_\_

Did you get these sets of scrambled letters? Did you get at least one word? The answers are--2. fear, fare; 3. slay, lays; and 4. hate, heat.

Another form of anagram, called "Vocabagram" by Nurnberg and Rosenblum (1966, p. 51), involves taking the letters of a given word and rearranging them to form the word defined.

Examples: wary = twisted (answer = awry)

atom = a ditch around a castle  
(answer = moat)

1. rave = declare to be true over

2. tore = mechanical memory \_\_\_\_\_

3. sure = a trick \_\_\_\_\_

4. tome = a speck of dust \_\_\_\_\_

The definitions no doubt led you to the words rote, ruse, and mote. For ease of preparation, you might want to combine these two types of puzzles when designing a worksheet for your class. You can just scramble the letters of whatever words you want to teach, supply the definitions, and have your students enjoy solving puzzles.

### Graphic Puzzles

Solving a graphic puzzle gives a student the same kind of satisfaction a cryptologist feels about breaking a code. What pupils wouldn't enjoy translating stand  
I  
into "I understand"?

Magazines as well as workbooks are good sources of graphic puzzles. The following examples were chosen from among the contest winners of an airline magazine competition. (Kutina, 1981, p. 69)

HEAVEN - PENNIES _____	YYY MEN	N O T T U B	YOUR COAT	1 3 5 7 9 11 VS. U
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A skillful graphics puzzle reader will come up with "pennies from heaven," "three wise men," "button up your overcoat," and "the odds are against you."

Pupils enjoy creating graphics puzzles as much as solving them. Perhaps you would want to sponsor a classroom contest in which your pupils create graphics puzzles for each other to figure out.

### Palindrome Puzzles

Words which are spelled the same way backward and forward are called palindromes (pop, madam). Some complete sentences have this "same backward and forward" characteristic: Madam, I'm Adam; A man, a plan, a canal, Panama.

Students can be introduced to palindromes through the following type of puzzle (Orleans, 1977, p. 48).

For each clue write a word that is exactly the same spelled forward or backward.

1. midday noon
2. young dog \_\_\_\_\_
3. observes \_\_\_\_\_
4. mother \_\_\_\_\_

Orleans supplies twenty other words that share the "same backward and forward" characteristic of pup, sees, and mom.

More classroom mileage can be gained from the palindrome concept if you link it to reversals. Some children whose reversal tendencies last beyond their primary grades can be encouraged to pay close attention to order of letters via the following type of puzzle (Manchester, 1979, p. 37).

Here are some sets of definitions. If you get the correct answer for the first definition, simply reverse its spelling and you have the correct answer for the second definition. For example, suppose your two definitions were to spoil and a male sheep. The first answer would be MAR. Reverse the spelling and you have the second answer - RAM.

1. Cooking tools pots stop Cease
2. Apply gently \_\_\_\_\_ Not good
3. Reside \_\_\_\_\_ Wicked

## 4. Gratuity \_\_\_\_\_ Deep hole

This type of puzzle helps pupils focus on the differences between dab and bad, live and evil, tip and pit.

Palindrome puzzles can even include riddles, according to Willard Espy (1982, p. 72). He suggests that each of the couplets below defines two words, the first the reverse of the second in spelling but otherwise unrelated to it. Guess the words.

If I bore you by boasting and putting on airs,  
Turn me around, and I'm something one wears.

(brag, garb)

A river will do this, though shallow, though deep;  
Turn it around, and it likes eating sheep.

If the riddle above led you to the words flow and wolf, you're good at palindrome puzzles.

Tom Swifties

Generations of students have enjoyed putting together Tom Swifties. A Tom Swiftie is a sentence in which the final adverb has a catchy relationship to certain other words in the sentence. Examples:

"Our hot dogs are good," the cook said frankly.

"Stop marching," the captain said haltingly.

Students who are just getting acquainted with Tom Swifties can handle this form of wordplay best in the following type of puzzle (Mountain, 1982, p. 2).

Choose the adverb that fits best in each blank.

half-heartedly, stiffly, testily, genially

"There's too much starch in my shirt," the man said

stiffly.

"I failed my exam," the student said \_\_\_\_\_.

"I think I'll rub my lamp," Aladdin said \_\_\_\_\_.

"I tore her valentine in two," the lover said \_\_\_\_\_.

Tom Swifties can focus your students' attention on adverbs, but verbs too can be exercised in much the same way. In a recent Readers Digest (Kinney, 1984, p. 93) these sentences offered interesting possibilities for classroom discussion on choice of final verbs.

"I wish I were back in the forest," she pined.

"So you think you're a big wheel," he spoke.

"The cattle must move faster," he prodded.

### Rhyming Riddles

Rhyming riddles, often called Hink-Pinks, provide word-puzzle activities for teaching synonyms and definitions as well as rhymes (Tyson & Mountain, 1981).

Here's an example of a lesson to get middle-graders started on composing rhyming riddles. Ask your pupils for three synonyms for an adjective--wonderful, for instance. Perhaps they'll respond with great, super, terrific. Then ask for three nouns that rhyme with the adjectives. Perhaps they'll say great bait, super trooper, terrific Pacific.

Tell them they have composed the answers to some rhyming riddles. Now all they have to do is come up with the questions, such as:

What do you call wonderful fishing tackle?

Great bait.

What do you call a wonderful police officer?

Super trooper.

What do you call a wonderful ocean? Terrific Pacific.

### Word Shapes

Word shapes range from very easy to very difficult. The square below (Fletcher, 1969, p. 8) is from a book of easy word puzzles.

1 S	2 L	3 O	4 W
2 L			
3 O			
4 W			

1. not fast

3. a place to bake things

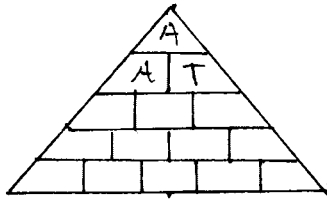
2. what mothers feel for children

4. past tense of go

Another type of shape puzzle helps students learn to use context clues. To fill in the triangle below, a reader has to figure out what word belongs in each blank in the following paragraph. Each successive word must contain all the letters of the previous word plus one new letter. For example, a succession of words might be - I, it, sit, tips, strip.

Betty saw \_\_\_\_ man. He was \_\_\_\_ the  
corner with his Siamese \_\_\_\_.

He stepped on a sharp \_\_\_\_ and  
dropped his \_\_\_\_\_ of books.



A pupil who used context well will soon come up with: a, at, cat, tack, and stack. Your students may want to write triangle puzzles for each other.

### Puzzle Competitions

Youngsters who enjoy word-play should find out that they may be starting a lifetime hobby, since word-play contests abound in magazines. New York Magazine regularly carries word-play features, some of which are anthologized in such books as Thank You for the Giant Sea Tortoise (1971) and Maybe He's Dead (1981). Mary Ann Madden compiled both of these volumes from winning entries in the magazine competitions.

The literary limericks competition brought forth this version of *Moby Dick*, reprinted in the latter volume (p. 221).

Captain Ahab had queer mental flaws.  
Moby Dick (got his leg) was the cause.  
Harpooned in the flank,  
Dick and Ahab both sank  
I think it was better than Jaws.

This type of example might inspire some of your students to try to encapsulate the plot of a novel or play in a limerick.



The word-play feature, "National Challenge," is carried in many Sunday supplement magazines. Perhaps your students would enjoy responding to a challenge like this one (Newgate, 1981, p. 29):

National Challenge No. 218

Your challenge is to invent a humorous crossbreed.

Examples: Cross a tortoise with a hare,  
and you get an animal that is going  
nowhere fast.

Cross a crane with a skunk, and  
the result is an animal that can really  
raise a stink.

Cross a praying mantis with a  
moth, and you get a bug that says grace  
before it eats your suits.

Mailing in entries to "National Challenge" competition is certainly an advanced type of word-play, but maybe your students can grow to enjoy this type of fun if you begin by exposing them to a variety of word puzzles.

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