What's in a Word?

Internet Lesson Plan
Grade level: 6-9

Teacher Activities

GOAL:
To utilize Internet resources to learn about words, their origins, and their usage through puzzles, games and other fun word activities.

OBJECTIVE:
At the end of the unit, the participant will be able to:

• Locate, define and use 2 new words presented on Web sites.
• Define and create a word ladder on-line as well as off-line using the word ladder rules outlined.
• Define an anagram.
• Create a list of favorite anagrams.
• Determine a word or phrase which has at least one anagram.
• Successfully solve a crossword puzzle, a hangman game, a "punzzle" and a word search.
• Describe a homonym and its use in the English language.
• Write a story filled with homonyms.
• Create a list of vocabulary words learned while completing these activities.

DURATION:
Two weeks, one hour of on-line time each day.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY:
Divide the class into pairs or small groups of approximately 3-4 participants each. Provide each group with a two-pocket folder. Distribute the activities in the left pocket of each folder to encourage problem-solving strategies within the group.
Have students utilize the right hand pocket of the folder to record their strategies, take notes, and track project completion. Students can store information they have gathered or printed from the Internet in this pocket as well. Encourage both on-line and off-line research through reference material.

PREREQUISITE:

A short introduction to the Internet with information on access and addresses is required before participants go on-line. Ensure that students are familiar with the World Wide Web and the browser they will be using.

ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION:

The activities in this unit will be evaluated on the basis of student participation and performance. Team folders will include information gathered in the process of completing the activities. Encourage cooperative learning, group process, problem-solving, competition, and the use of the Internet as these activities are completed. Serve as facilitator and guide throughout the activities.

OTHER RELATED ACTIVITIES:

- Post a Vocabulary Calendar in your room and post the word of the day. Discuss its definition and usage. You can also obtain a daily vocabulary word for your bulletin board from "Cool Word of the Day" at http://www.edu.yorku.ca/~wotd/.
- For teachers who are fascinated with words, join the Word Wizard Club at "The Word Wizard" at http://wordwizard.com/. This site offers word competitions, recently coined words and definitions, quotations and sources, street slang, along with selections from the world’s best diaries. You can even ask the Word Wizard questions about language.
- Or participate in "Fancy Word Parties" that allow you to dress up in a specific style of vocabulary and participate in on-line discussions of the language.
- For Activity #2: Words build bridges...and ladders! pair student groups and ask them to try to create word ladders for each other. Each group should give the other their starting and destination word. Use the same rules which where outlined on the Web page "Word Ladders" at http://ics.soe.umich.edu/~jmillr/wordladder.cgi. Students may use on-line and off-line dictionaries and a thesaurus to complete the activities. Remember each rung of the ladder must be a real word!
MATERIALS NEEDED BY TEACHER:

Two-pocket folders

TEACHER NOTES:

Words are such an important part of our daily lives that we often take them for granted. This lesson focuses on "words." Although students often study words in language arts or English lessons which concentrate on the mechanics and usage of words, they may not truly appreciate words. Many fun activities can be incorporated into the study of words which allows students to see vocabulary building in a new light.

This light-hearted lesson plan may be the perfect end to the school year. Use these activities to allow students to explore words in a new and exciting manner. Who knows, you may open the door to vocabulary and language development to those who were never interested before. Students will explore the words through puzzles, crossword activities, hangman, anagrams, word plays and other word-related games. Not only will students enjoy a break from the routine, they will also enhance their vocabulary as they complete the on-line activities.

As you and your students work with the following activities, keep in mind that some of them lend themselves to being printed and completed off-line instead of on-line. This aspect may be helpful and important if you have limited Internet connections.

In Activity #4: Crossword crazy, you can download one of two programs, Crossword Express or Across Lite, from "Puzzle Depot" at http://www.puzzledepot.com/puzzles/weekly.shtml to allow you to solve puzzles on-line. This site also offers an "Academic K-12 Vocabulary and Theme Crossword Creator" at http://www.puzzledepot.com/java/czplayer.shtml which contains the information needed to create your own puzzle.

What's in a Word?

Student Activities

ACTIVITY #1: TODAY'S WORD

How's your vocabulary? Most of us could probably use a little improvement. But it takes time and dedication to seek out new vocabulary words and integrate them in our daily conversation. Some Web sites have the sole purpose of expanding and enriching the vocabulary of its visitors.

- Visit the World Wide Web site "A Word a Day" at http://www.wordsmith.org/awad/index.html to find the word for the day.
  ✓ What is today's word?
  ✓ Define the word.
  ✓ Use the word in a sentence.
- Also visit the "Cool Word of the Day" Web site at http://www.edu.yorku.ca/~wotd/.
  ✓ What is today's word on this site?
  ✓ Define the word.
  ✓ Use the word in a sentence.
  ✓ Is this word listed in the thesaurus? If so, list three related words.
- If you need additional clarification on the meanings, refer to your classroom dictionary or the on-line dictionary, "American Heritage Dictionary" at http://www.lib.umich.edu/refshelf/AHD/.

ACTIVITY #2: WORDS BUILD BRIDGES--AND LADDERS!

You've probably heard the saying "words build bridges." The idea is that through words you can travel to foreign lands, experience exotic places, and participate in events beyond your imagination without ever leaving home. Thus, words build bridges to many rich experiences. But can words build ladders? The Web site "Word Ladders" at http://ics.soe.umich.edu/~jmillr/wordladder.cgi brings new meaning to the places words can take you.
Visit the "Word Ladders" Web page and build your own unique word ladders. Read the rules of the game carefully before you enter your starting and destination word. Use short words (two to ten letters) as longer ones may take too long to complete.

(Note: Once you begin building your word ladder there will be references to dictionaries and a thesaurus at the bottom of the page. If you utilize one of these links, you will have to re-key the "Word Ladders" Web site address to return.)

After you complete the word ladder, print your results and place it in the group folder.

Follow the pattern from your starting word to your destination word. Use a red pen to mark the letter that changed as each word progressed on the ladder. Include the definition and meaning of each word.

How many words did you already know?

ACTIVITY #3: ANAGRAM I.Q.

In elementary school you learned about synonyms and homonyms, but did you ever learn about anagrams? It's been said that "all of life's wisdom can be found in anagrams." This sure sounds like something which needs to be explored further. To learn more about anagrams, visit the Web site "Internet Anagram Server" at http://www.wordsmith.org/anagram/index.html.

• What is an anagram?
• What is a person called who composes anagrams? (You may have to hunt for this fun fact!)
• Visit the "Anagram Hall of Fame" section. List five of your favorite anagrams.
• See if you can come up with a word or phrase which contains at least one anagram.
• Additional anagram exploration can be completed at the Web site "Anagram Insanity" at http://Infobahn.COM/pages/anagram.html.

ACTIVITY #4: CROSSWORD CRAZY

One way to expand and improve your vocabulary while having fun is to complete crossword puzzles. Many people partake in a daily or weekly ritual of completing the crossword puzzle found in newspapers or magazines. Some people even consider crossword puzzles to be a hobby.

• Try your hand at a few crossword puzzles by visiting the Web site "Puzzle Depot" at http://www.puzzledepot.com/puzzles/weekly.shtml.
• Test your vocabulary and brain power by completing the crossword puzzle listed. You will need to print out the puzzle in order to solve it.
• If you have time, try an additional on-line crossword puzzle at "Fun Crosswords" at http://www.ncl.ac.uk/~n340219/crossword.html.
ACTIVITY #5: HANGMAN'S ON THE NET

At some point in our lives we have all played a game of hangman. When was the last time you played this game of wit? Believe it or not, even hangman has gone to the Internet. The '90's version of this childhood game can be found at the Web site "Kids Corner" at http://kids.ot.com/. Try your hand at solving the hangman puzzle at this site.

• Where you able to successfully solve the puzzle?
• What was the solution?

Now that you are warmed up, let's progress to a higher level of hangman. Go to the Web site "Hangman" at http://www.allmixedup.com/hangman/.

• Were you able to successfully solve the puzzle?
• What was the solution?
• Compare this on-line '90's version of hangman to the traditional paper and pencil version. Which do you prefer and why?

ACTIVITY #6: WHAT'S IN A DEFINITION?

The true test of your vocabulary is your comprehension of definitions. How clever are you at creating definitions that fool even the best communicator? Now's your chance to participate in an Internet definition guessing game which not only tests your knowledge, but your creativity as you try to fake others out with made-up definitions. Explore this definition guessing game at the Web site "Fake Out!" at http://www.hmco.com/hmco/school/dictionary/. Go to the "Grade 6 and above section" of the Web site.

• Explore each of the words.
• Guess the definition for each.
• Submit your guess to the site.
• Try your hand at making up a definition.
• Go to the dictionary (on-line or off-line) and locate the true definitions. How did you do with your guesses?

ACTIVITY #7: TWISTED PUZZLES

So you think you love word puzzles? What about puzzles with a twist? Puzzles with a twist or "punzzles" are configurations of letters, numbers, words, lines, and symbols twisted together in a puzzle whose purpose is to stretch and exercise your brain. To explore this type of puzzle, visit "Punzzles " at http://www.puzzledepot.com/books/punzzle1.shtml.

• Read through the rules and examples provided. Move down to "Try Some Puzzles on Your Own" where you will find 10 different punzzles. Try your hand at solving them. Write down your solutions before checking the answers.
ACTIVITY #8: A HOME FOR HOMONYMS

Although you already know the unpredictability of the English language, there is one aspect which truly cannot be predicted by any rules of grammar or diction. That is the homonym. Webster's Dictionary defines a homonym as "a word which agrees with another in sound, and perhaps in spelling, but differs in significance." To translate, a homonym sounds like another word, but means something entirely different. To further explore what some refer to as the prime numbers of the English language, visit the Web site "Alan Cooper's Homonym's" at http://www.cooper.com/alan/homonym.html.

- What is a homonym?
- According to this site, what are "fractonyms"?
- What is homophone?
- What is a homograph?
- Go to the list of homonyms and write a story including as many homonyms as possible.
- After you have completed your story, go through it and highlight each homonym. List the definition for each homonym.

ACTIVITY #9: IN SEARCH OF WORDS

As you communicate, you may often find yourself searching for just the right word or phrase to express yourself. Another fun and entertaining way to improve your vocabulary in addition to other skills is to search for words hidden in word puzzles. Try your hand at a few by visiting the Web site "John's Word Search Puzzles" at http://www.macconnect.com/~jrpotter/puzzles/usa.spml.

- Find a word puzzle of the United States of America. Print the puzzle and locate as many of the words as you can.
- If you thought that was easy, try another puzzle at http://www.macconnect.com/~jrpotter/states.spml. Select a state to get a word search puzzle with the names of its cities hidden in it.