Authentic, Engaging, & Fun Vocabulary Activities & Games

For any set of words and students of all ages

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A little Background Information:

About 8 years ago, my school took a really good look at our school’s standardized test data (along with other local assessments) and broke it down among many different groups: grade levels, classrooms, boys vs. girls, income levels, etc. We analyzed results of individual learning standards in each area. The one area that seemed to consistently be in need of attention was vocabulary, specifically, understanding words in context. (This is apparently pretty wide-spread throughout the U.S., according to several recent newspaper articles). We all had our own theories about why data was not as good as we hoped, but the bottom line was that it wasn’t and that we needed to do something about it.

I hadn’t realized it then, but vocabulary instruction was about to become my newest passion. I took a couple of classes and learned a ton of great activities and strategies to use that were actually engaging and meaningful to students. It was then that I started to think "out-of-the-box" and created some of my own ideas.

I went so far as to get my reading endorsement, where vocabulary development and instruction became the focus of many of my projects.

The best part now is that my students have gotten so much out of this. They love vocabulary, and I have seen a major shift in their use of more descriptive words and their ability to make meaning out of unfamiliar words. They actually use strategies to figure them out rather than skipping over them. Of course, they have become better readers too!

If you are passionate about teaching vocabulary or just looking for some ideas, this is definitely for you. I hope that you can easily implement some of these ideas into your instruction. I’m always looking for new ideas, so please pass any on that you’d like. Thanks!
What's Included

1. Names and explanations for 17 different vocabulary activities and games that you can use with words from any story, unit, content-related text, etc.

2. An example of each activity with real words from a specific story that I have used.

3. Templates (Microsoft Word) for each activity so you can easily create your own.

4. My email address in case you have any questions—glutenfreeteacher@gmail.com.

*** I used fonts that I downloaded on many of these examples. Because you may not have them, I made sure that the templates are general fonts that are available in Microsoft word.
Vocabulary Activity Descriptions
(in alphabetical order)

***Note: Several of these ideas have been published in books, and I am not claiming to have invented them. Some activities I did come up with on my own. I am compiling a collection of activities that have been successful in my classroom and sharing those ideas with others.

**Applause, Applause** - There will be a list of statements, with each including at least one vocabulary word. The teacher will read them aloud and students will think about how much they would like to do each of them. Students clap louder for the ones they’d really like to do and a little for the ones they’d not like to do. They must be ready to defend their amount of clapping.

**Apples to Apples Game** - In order to do this activity, you need the board game *Apples to Apples*. Create cards with vocabulary words on them. (I usually make 5 or 6 sets.) Allow students to play the game as usual, except you swap out the green cards in the game with the vocabulary cards you created. Students will need the red cards in the game to play and to make connections to their vocabulary words. Play regular game. This is a class favorite that develops deep understanding of vocabulary!

**Cloze Passages** - This is an educational term for fill-in-the-blank types of activities. Students will use a word key to fill in the blanks of missing vocabulary words in sentences. The sentences have context clues to help them determine the correct answer.

**Connect Two** - Students choose two vocabulary words and write one grammatically correct sentence using both words. You could challenge them to a Connect Three or Four! I use the Apples to Apples word cards, and make it into a game by flipping over two cards and projecting them for everyone to see. They have to be first to come up with a sentence.
Examples vs. Non-Examples- This activity is in the form of a chart. The vocabulary words are in the left column. Students have to fill in the other two columns with words, phrases, or ideas that are examples of when the vocabulary word would be used and examples when it wouldn’t.

Guess the Word- This is very similar to RIVET, but it incorporates some practice with using context clues. It’s used to introduce new vocabulary words. In each sentence the vocabulary word is left out, but there are individual spaces where each letter will fit. Students read the sentence and use context clues to try and determine the missing word. If they don’t figure it out, the teacher adds one letter at a time until students can figure out the word. There’s space to write a student-friendly definition.

Have You Ever?- For this activity, there are situational sentences written using the vocabulary words. Students will raise their hands, clap, snap, stomp, or whatever action the teacher decides to show if they have ever done the situation being read. Students love to explain their experiences.

I Have Who Has? Game- This is a very popular game with math and other areas. There is a set of cards that groups use. The person who has the card that says, “I have the first card, who has...?” will read first. The rest of the group will listen to the question and will look to see if their card has the answer at the top. If so, they read their card and ask the question at the bottom of their card. This continues until they get to the last card which says, “Everyone, what word means...?”

I’d Rather- On a sheet of paper is one statement for each vocabulary word (containing the vocabulary word). They must be situational statements because students will cut them out or just rank them on the page to show, in order, which statements they’d most rather do to the ones they’d least like to do. It’s fun to have students do this individually, then have them compare with a partner to create a new order based on their conversation.
Idea Completions - These are sentence starters written that include the vocabulary words. Students must finish each sentence with an idea that makes sense and shows that they understand the meaning of the vocabulary word.

Keyword Method - This is a chart with columns for the vocabulary word, a student-created keyword, and a picture or sentence. Students think about what each vocabulary word means and come up with one word or phrase that reminds them of the keyword. This is not meant for synonyms. It is meant for students to think beyond those and to make connections to their lives that relate to the vocabulary words. Then, they can either draw a picture or write a sentence that depicts the vocabulary word and their keyword. Example keywords for ominous might be Halloween, thunder, or power going out.

RIVET - This is similar to the Guess the Word activity, except there are no sentences with context clues. This is used to introduce new words. The teacher writes one letter at a time, and students use phonics skills to try to guess the words aloud. The teacher continues to add a letter at a time while students put the sounds together. Once the word has been guessed, the teacher writes the rest of the word. There is space for student friendly definitions.

Scattergories Game - This is a variation of the board game Scattergories. The teacher or a student chooses any letter of the alphabet (or rolls the die if you have the actual game). Students will write one idea related to each corresponding vocabulary word that begins with the rolled letter. There is a game board sheet with blank spaces for each vocabulary word. I number my words so students know in which space to write their new ideas. Students play in teams. When time is up, each team shares their answers. If they are the only groups to get that answer, they get two points. If other groups have the same answer, they get one point.
**Swat-A-Word** - All vocabulary words are projected or written largely on the board. Students are split into 2 or more teams. Each team lines up at the board with a swatting tool (fly swatters or commercially made ones). The teacher gives clues and the two students at the front of their lines race to swat the answer the fastest. Then the next person is up.

**Taboo** - This is based on the board game, *Taboo*. Students make their own Taboo game cards. Each card has the vocabulary word at the top and three-5 “taboo” words listed underneath. The taboo words should be words that are somehow related to the vocabulary word. When it’s time to play, students get into groups of at least 4. The split up into two teams per group. During each group’s turn, one person is the clue giver and the rest of their team guesses. (The other team is silent.) The clue giver has one minute to explain their vocabulary word to their team using words (no actions, sounds, charades, etc) without using any of the taboo words (or forms of them ex- run, running, ran are all forms of the same word). For every word the team guesses, they get a point, and the clue giver continues to give clues until time is up. While they are giving clues, one person from the other team keeps an eye on the cards to make sure none of the taboo words are said. If so, they move onto the next word and lost a point. After each round, teams add up their points. You can determine how many points to play to our how many rounds to play.
Use the Clues - This is an activity to encourage students to use context clues to determine unknown words. I use it to introduce new words. Each vocabulary word is written in a sentence that has appropriate context clues to help students determine the meaning. Students analyze each sentence, using their context-clue skills and write two guesses for what the word means. The teacher reveals the answer (or students look it up), and they write down the real meaning under their guesses.

Word Associations - This activity encourages students to make connections with words. First, the teacher tells the students what word they are focusing on. The teacher reads several ideas to students, one-at-a-time. Each time, students clap to show if what the teacher said is related to the identified vocabulary word. Students can be called on to explain why they did or didn’t clap. You’ll be amazed at some of the connections students make.
Applause, Applause

The Unsinkable Wreck of the RMS Titanic, Unit 5, Week 2

Directions: Read all the statements to yourself. Think about how much you would like to do each of them. As I read each one aloud, clap louder for the ones you’d really like to do and a little for the ones you’d not like to do. Don’t clap at all if you’d really NOT want to do it. Be ready to explain why you are clapping as much or as little as you are.

Clap to show how much you would …

1. like to clean up the debris of a piñata
2. like to find green sediment at the bottom of a the bowl of tomato soup that I just ate
3. like to use sonar in a submarine to locate a great white shark
4. like to invent a piece of robotic machinery that will brush my teeth for me
5. like to be stuck in a cramped space with an angry grizzly bear
6. like to walk barefoot through the ooze in the Mississippi River
7. like to see a photo of the interior of my own stomach

You be the Teacher…

Directions: For each number, choose a vocabulary word and complete a sentence that requires your classmates to decide how much they would like to do it.

1. Clap to show how much you would like to __________________________________________
2. Clap to show how much you would like to __________________________________________
3. Clap to show how much you would like to __________________________________________
4. Clap to show how much you would like to __________________________________________
Cut out each word card. Use these cards in place of the green cards in the board game *Apples to Apples*, and play as usual.

**Words:**
- somersault
- limelight
- gymnastics
- bluish
- throbbing
- skidded
- hesitation
- cartwheels

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Directions: Write the word that makes the most sense in the blank, using the words in the key. Each word will be used only one time.

winced    prolong    warily    confront    peered
bleak     compassion   sprawling    consumed

1. My best friend decided to __________ me and ask why I was so upset with her.
2. After getting sick from my mom’s cooking, I __________ ate dinner the next time she cooked.
3. I __________ at the thought of having to eat spinach with olive juice for dinner. YUCK!!!
4. Instead, I __________ as much pizza for lunch as I could so I wouldn’t be hungry for the spinach and olive juice dinner.
5. Maybe I will get lucky and I’ll be able to __________ dinner so I won’t have to eat it until later.
6. Going to Disney World on a __________, rainy, cold day wouldn’t be much fun.
7. __________ out onto the couch, the dog was ready to take a nap.
8. Parents must have lots of __________ when they pull a giant splinter out of their son’s finger by removing it slowly and carefully.
9. Mandy __________ out her bedroom window to see what was making all of that noise in her back yard.
Connect Two
Words from Unit 4, Week 1 - Weslandia

Choose two vocabulary words from this story. Write ONE sentence, and use both words in the sentence. Circle the vocabulary words in each sentence.

Example: Each ancient civilization had its own strategy for finding food and shelter.

1. __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

2. __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

3. __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

4. __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

5. __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

6. __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
## Examples vs. Non-Examples

**Directions:** For each vocabulary word, write as many examples and non-examples as you can think of.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Non-Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bluish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>cartwheels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>gymnastics</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>hesitation</td>
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<tr>
<td>limelight</td>
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<td>skidded</td>
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<tr>
<td>somersault</td>
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<tr>
<td>throbbing</td>
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<tr>
<td>wincing</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Directions: While the teacher reveals one letter at a time, try to guess the missing word using the context clues. Guess out loud, and try to guess before the whole word is written.

1. If you look very closely in the __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ of the picture, you can see a deer nestled between two trees. **Background**

2. The __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ of a desert, which includes sand, cacti, and a radiant sun, is very different than the landscape of a busy city, which includes large buildings, stoplights, and pedestrians. **Landscape** - pictures or images that shows what the land looks like in a specific area

3. My cousin’s favorite toy to roll across the floor is a __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ fire truck with a pretend hose and ladder. **Miniature**

4. The time when the dinosaurs roamed the earth were from a __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ time. **Prehistoric** - describing an object or a period of time before histories were written

5. After my brother knocked down my building made of Legos, my dad __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ it for me. **Reassembled**
Guess the Word
Special Effects in Film and Television- Unit 3, Week 5

Directions: While, the teacher reveals one letter at a time, try to guess the missing word using the context clues. Guess out loud, and try to guess before the whole word is written.

1. If you look very closely in the _____ _____ _____ _____ of the picture, you can see a deer nestled between two trees.

2. The _____ _____ _____ _____ of a desert, which includes sand, cacti, and a radiant sun, is very different than the landscape of a busy city, which includes large buildings, stoplights, and pedestrians.

3. My cousin’s favorite toy to roll across the floor is a _____ _____ _____ _____ fire truck with a pretend hose and ladder.

4. The time when the dinosaurs roamed the earth were from a _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ time.

5. After my brother knocked down my building made of Legos, my dad _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ it for me.
Have You Ever?

The Stormi Giovanni Club, Unit 4, Week 4

Raise your hand to show if you have ever...

- been told that you have a cavity
- created a cavity inside of something else
- found a tree that had a cavity inside of it

- used a combination lock to keep something safe
- seen a combination somewhere in your house
- unlocked a combination and replaced it later

- seen an episode of the show Wheel of Fortune
- created an episode of something in a series of shows on YouTube or another website
- seen an episode of your favorite show twice

- watched someone else demonstrate something
- demonstrated how to tie your shoes for another person
- learned how to do something after someone demonstrated for you

- had to be strict toward a brother, sister, or cousin of yours
- thought that your parents are not strict enough
- wanted your teacher to be more strict

- met a high profile person
- envisioned what you would do or say if you met your favorite high profile person
- been glad to be a low profile person
I have the first card.
Who has the word that means the collection of all your accomplishments?

I have repertoire.
Who has the word that means total craziness and chaos?

I have pandemonium.
Who has the word that means a challenge?

I have feat.
Who has the word describing a person who is showing a lot of grief or sorrow?

I have mourner.
Who has the word describing a child doesn’t have parents to live with?

I have orphan.
Who has the word that means something or someone who people will remember forever?

I have legend.
Who has the word that means to be completely flabbergasted or speechless?

I have dumbfounded.
Who has the word describing an item that looks identical but is a remake of the real one?

I have replica.
Who has the word that is a condition that people have that can make them sneeze or be sick if?

I have allergy.
Everyone, what word describes small pieces of paper used to celebrate?
I’d Rather

Put the items in order from the things you’d most rather to do to the things you’d least rather do. Be ready to explain to a partner why you organized them the way you did.

a. hesitate to run when there is a hungry grizzly bear chasing me

b. have to retreat to my room when everyone is going swimming in the summer

c. get to choose the most superior pizza as dinner for my family

d. climb into the attic of a haunted house

e. live close the beach on a sweltering hot day

f. find logical answers to all of my math problems

g. build an annex onto my house

h. never ever be criticized by anyone

i. become a legacy known for having the world’s smelliest feet

j. bake a typical birthday cake
Idea Completions
The Unsinkable Ship of the R.M.S. Titanic- Unit 5, Week 2

Directions: Complete the sentence starter with an idea that makes sense and shows that you understand what the underlined vocabulary word means.

1. I'd like to invent a **robotic** ____________________________________________ that would be used to ____________________________________________.

2. If I scooped out some rain water from the gutter, some **sediment** that would be left at the bottom of the cup would be ____________________________________________.

3. It would be dreadful to be **cramped** in ____________________________________ with ____________________________________________.

4. When I picked up the **ooze** on the shore it reminded me of ____________________________________________.

5. If I got the chance to use **sonar** one time, I would use it to ____________________________________________.

6. After a hurricane, most of the **debris** on the ground was made up of ____________________________________________.

7. A doctor would have to use special equipment to view the **interior** of ____________________________________________.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary Word</th>
<th>Keyword and/or Picture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dalmatian</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>frilly</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>promenading</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>sprained</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>substitute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RIVET- Teacher Key
Vocabulary Words for Maniac Magee

1. __ __ __ __ __ __  orphan (pg. 5)

2. __ __ __ __ __ __  legend (pg. 8)

3. __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ pandemonium (pg. 25)

4. __ __ __ __ __ __  allergy (pg. 48)

5. __ __ __ __ __ __  confetti (pg. 74)

6. __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ dumbfounded (pg. 87)

7. __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ repertoire (pg. 97)

8. __ __ __ __ __ __  mourner (pg. 116)

9. __ __ __ __ __ __  replicas (pg. 123)

10. __ __ __ __ __  feats (pg. 141)

11. __ __ __ __ __ __  ecstatic (pg. 149)
Vocabulary Words for *Maniac Magee*

1. __ __ __ __ __
2. __ __ __ __ __
3. __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __
4. __ __ __ __ __ __
5. __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __
6. __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __
7. __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __
8. __ __ __ __ __ __
9. __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __
10. __ __ __ __ __
11. __ __ __ __ __ __
Scattergories

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. 
8. 
9. 
10. 

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Taboo Cards

Turkey
- carve
- dinner
- meat

Cranberry Sauce
- red
- fruit
- sweet

Stuffing
- bread
- turkey
- dressing

Family
- mom
- dad
- together

Leaves
- many
- color
- rake

Pilgrims
- sail
- boat
- Plymouth Rock

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Directions: Use the strategies we discussed to figure out the meaning of the unknown word. Write down two guesses for each word. We will write down the actual meaning together.

1. Standing in the water, I look at a stretch of algae as far as I can see.

   ____________________________  ____________________________

2. I wonder what strange and beautiful creatures lie concealed in the underwater forest.

   ____________________________  ____________________________

3. I walk along the sand and admire the wild driftwood shapes, polished by the waves and sun.

   ____________________________  ____________________________

4. After a long day of amazing discovery, I head for one of the hammocks under the palm trees.

   ____________________________  ____________________________

5. I have often lamented my bad habit of daydreaming during classes.

   ____________________________  ____________________________

6. I pause beside a tidal pool at watch crabs, sea urchins, and other strange animals.

   ____________________________  ____________________________

7. “Martin!” Ms. Smith says sternly, “Wake up, and get to work!”

   ____________________________  ____________________________
Questions of the week: 1.

Directions: Use the strategies we discussed to figure out the meaning of the unknown word. Write down two guesses for each word. We will write down the actual meaning together.

1. Example: Standing in the water, I look at a stretch of algae as far as I can see.

   __________________________  __________________________

2. __________________________  __________________________

3. __________________________  __________________________

4. __________________________  __________________________

5. __________________________  __________________________

6. __________________________  __________________________
Word Associations
For The Stormi Giovanni Club Unit 4, Week 4

If what I say is related to cavities, clap twice:
- filled up
- deep
- dark
- stringy
- cell phone
- moustache

If what I say is related to combination, clap twice:
- standing in line
- safe
- mixture
- specific order
- personal items
- band vault

If what I say is related to bronze, clap twice:
- computer screen
- cell phone
- heavy statue
- third place medal
- green and blue
- yellowish-brown

If what I say is related to cannon, clap twice:
- bronze
- Thanksgiving
- playing a guitar
- cotton candy
- damage
- devastation

If what I say is related to depressed, clap twice:
- funeral
- death
- smiles
- blowing your nose
- emotional

If what I say is related to fashioned, clap twice:
- creation
- creative
- scissors
- glue
- tying your shoes
- checking out a library book

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