

# Vocabulary Building Activities

Simple, playful ways to grow your child's word bank every day

*A free starter collection from Why Play Learning*

## Why Vocabulary Matters

A rich vocabulary is one of the strongest predictors of reading success — and of confident communication throughout life. Children who know more words find it easier to understand what they read, express their ideas clearly, and engage with new topics.

The wonderful thing is that vocabulary grows naturally through rich conversation, wide reading, and playful exploration. You don't need to drill word lists. The activities in this collection are designed to weave new words into everyday life in ways that feel fun, not formal.

■ **Children learn new words best when they encounter them several times, in different contexts, and when the words connect to something they care about. Keep it conversational and follow your child's interests.**

## A Starter Collection of Activities

1

### ■ Word of the Day

#### What it is:

A simple daily ritual that introduces one interesting new word and makes it stick.

#### How to play:

Choose a word together each morning — from a book you're reading, something in the news, or just a word that sounds interesting. Write it somewhere visible, talk about what it means, and try to use it naturally throughout the day. At bedtime, see if your child can remember it and use it in a sentence.

#### Take it further:

*Keep a running Word of the Day journal. After a month, look back together — how many words can your child still remember and use?*

## 2

### ■ Shades of Meaning

#### What it is:

An activity that helps children understand that words aren't just right or wrong — they carry different weights and feelings.

#### How to play:

Take a simple word like *happy* and brainstorm a whole family of related words together: *pleased, cheerful, delighted, ecstatic, overjoyed*. Then arrange them in order from mildest to strongest. You can do this with emotions, temperature, size, sound — almost anything.

#### Take it further:

Make a 'word ladder' on paper, with the mildest word at the bottom and the most intense at the top. Display it and add to it over time.

## 3

### ■ Word Maps

#### What it is:

A visual way to explore a new word from every angle, perfect for children who like to draw or doodle.

#### How to play:

Write a new word in the centre of a page and draw four boxes around it: **What is it? — What is it like? — What are some examples? — Draw it.** Work through the boxes together through conversation, then let your child fill them in.

#### Take it further:

Once you have several word maps, bind or clip them together into a personal Word Book — a vocabulary resource your child has made themselves.

## 4

### ■ Would You Rather... Words

#### What it is:

A playful game that gets children thinking carefully about the difference between similar words.

#### How to play:

Present two near-synonyms and ask which your child would rather be, or which they'd rather have happen. For example: *Would you rather be famished or peckish? Furious or irritated? Drenched or damp?* There are no wrong answers — the fun is in the discussion about why one word feels stronger or different.

#### Take it further:

Let your child make up their own 'Would You Rather... Words' questions for you to answer. This shows real ownership of new vocabulary.

## 5

### ■ Reading Aloud Together

#### What it is:

The single most powerful vocabulary-building activity available — and it never stops working, no matter how old your child is.

#### How to play:

Read aloud regularly from books that are slightly above your child's independent reading level. This exposes them to richer language than they'd encounter on their own. When an interesting or unfamiliar word comes up, pause briefly: 'Ooh, that's a great word — what do you think it might mean from the story so far?' Then explore it together.

#### Take it further:

Keep a small notebook nearby when you read aloud. Jot down any wonderful words you both notice. These become your own family word collection.

## 6

### ■ Word Play Writing

#### What it is:

A low-pressure writing activity that encourages children to be adventurous with language rather than sticking to words they know they can spell.

#### How to play:

Give your child a playful writing prompt and challenge them to include at least two or three words from your recent Word of the Day collection or word maps. Examples: *Write three sentences about a grumpy dragon. Describe your perfect breakfast using five interesting adjectives.* Celebrate any adventurous word choices, whatever the spelling.

#### Take it further:

Over time, these small pieces can be collected into a 'Brilliant Words' writing folder — a lovely record of growing confidence and creativity.

## Quick Reminders for Vocabulary-Rich Days

<b>Talk lots</b>	Rich conversation is the foundation of a wide vocabulary. Narrate, wonder aloud, and discuss everything.
<b>Read widely</b>	Varied books — fiction, non-fiction, poetry, comics — expose children to a much wider range of words.
<b>Never dismiss a question</b>	When your child asks 'what does that mean?', that's a golden moment. Explore it together.
<b>Use new words yourself</b>	Children absorb language from the people around them. The more varied language they hear, the better.

---

*Every new word your child learns is a small window opening onto the world. These activities are just the beginning — the fuller collection goes deeper, with printable resources, themed word banks, and more. Watch this space! ■*

---

© Why Play Learning | [whyplaylearning.com](http://whyplaylearning.com) | Free to share with home-educating families  
This resource may be printed and shared freely. Please do not sell or alter it.