

Become a Word Detective!

Often as adults we may come across a word in a newspaper or magazine that might make us second guess ourselves on its meaning. Imagine how often this may happen to a beginning reader when he comes to a word he may not be able to read or understand. In order to alleviate some of the stress he might feel when he encounters one of these words, try making it into a game and help him to become a “Word Detective.” You may even want to find him a special detective hat and magnifying glass to use, so he can be a Vocabulary Sherlock Holmes!

What You Need:

- Lined notebook paper or computer with a word processing program
- Pencil
- Dictionary
- Story or book of his choice



What to Do:

1. Use a lined sheet of notebook paper or a computer with a word processing program to help him create a three column chart with several rows.
2. Label the first column, “Word.” This will be the narrowest column needed, as it will only need to fit one written word.
3. Next, label the second column “What I think the word means based on how it’s used in the story.” This column will need to be at least 3 inches wide.
4. Label the third column “What I know it means after looking it up in the dictionary.” This column will also need to be at least 3 inches wide.
5. Now, have him begin reading a story or book of his choice. Explain to him that as he reads he will need to be a “Word Detective” looking for words of which he is unsure of the meaning. If he wants to wear his hat and use his magnifying glass to add some more excitement, then this is a good time for it!
6. As he finds a word that he is unsure of, have him write the word on the chart in the first column. Next, have him make a guess about the word’s meaning using the words in the story or pictures on that page. These are what educator’s refer to as the “context clues” for the word (understanding context is a crucial part of building excellent reading skills).
7. Next, have him write this guess in the second column, “What I think it means based on how it is used in the story.”
8. Now have him use his word detecting and dictionary skills for one more step. Have him look the word up in the dictionary to find the true meaning of the word, and then fill in the final column on the chart.
9. Finally, discuss with him what he found in the dictionary to ensure that he truly does have a clear understanding of the word’s meaning.

This activity will help to teach him a valuable skill to use as he reads and as he encounters words he is unfamiliar with. He will be a word detective for many years to come!