

The Gift of Words: Reading and Games



Some children start kindergarten with double the vocabulary of others. Knowing many words and understanding them are important in developing thinking skills and in getting ready to read. Here are some ways to add to your child's school readiness with the gift of new words. It's never too early to start!

Reading

Read often to your child, both old favorites and new books from the library. Comment on new words you find in books or wherever you come across them.

- Use place words such as up, down, right, left. Talk about opposites: in and out, up and down, on or off, hot or cold, fast or slow.
- Use synonyms—words that mean the same thing. If your child talks about the time after dinner, respond using the word “evening.”
- Pick out a new word, and tell your child what it means. Use it in a clear context frequently, even over-using it for fun! If the day's word is “excellent,” use it for anything that day that's good. The next day, find another to have fun with—like “magnificent.”
- Carry a small book or two in your car, purse, or backpack to use during those “waiting times.” Or download some children's e-books to your tablet or phone.
- Visit your library for books on subjects that interest your child. Many children love books about animals or machines, and these books can introduce new words.

Games

Play simple word games.

- Try a yes-no game to teach about questions. “Are you purple?” “Can a tree talk?” Let her try asking you questions.
- Play a mystery game. Give clues and let your child guess. “It's yellow. We buy it at the grocery store. You throw away the outside and eat the inside.” Add clues until she guesses “banana.” “She comes to our apartment every day. She usually leaves something. She wears a uniform.” He guesses “mail carrier.” Try reading a definition from a child's dictionary and letting him guess the word. Turn it around. “Is a vehicle a person, a building, or a car?”
- Play with categories, differences, and similarities. “How is a banana different from an apple and an orange? How are they alike?”
- Sing simple songs and recite nursery rhymes together.
- Enter into your child's games. Have fun playing house, with her playing the mommy or your son playing the daddy. Talk about what different members of the family do.

 **For related Web resources, see “The Gift of Words: Reading and Games” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>**

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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