

What's in a Word?
Word Connections

Activity, Time and Materials

ACTIVITY:

Words are used to portray emotions, feelings, ideas, memories, and so much more. A word to one person can mean an entirely different thing to another person. This activity was created to address the various uses of words across a variety of skill levels and to help each person learn from the events and experiences that his or her peers have encountered. The word tasks presented are meant to help assist with word-finding difficulties that we all experience, but that become more pronounced with age, memory difficulties, deconditioning, or after other ailments, such as a stroke or similar traumatic experience. These tasks are also useful in creating lasting friendships through common memories and experiences, or in supporting new learning through others' accounts, opinions, and recollections.

This activity consists of varying complexity levels related to word-generation tasks. The first session concerns associations. We all have a thought process, memory, or word that comes to mind when we hear another word. Through these associations, we can start conversations and learn more about others. We also can use word associations to build topics and extend interactions. Another session relates to analogies. These consist of taking a given word and making a comparison. Others in the group can then build on this and make similar comparisons using parallel reasoning or generating their own personal connection. A third session involves the creation of a poetic personal experience statement, message, or "life lesson"

along the lines of a poem or proverb. Words have been used in many poetic forms to portray numerous lessons, life experiences, and insights.

The sessions can be dealt with independently, or built upon one another and then used as a group across multiple meetings. Each session can be completed either verbally or in writing. A recreational therapist, activities coordinator, artist, writer, teacher, or volunteer can direct these sessions.

TIME:

Ninety minutes to four hours and thirty minutes over three sessions. (Thirty to ninety minutes per activity or session, with the length of each session varying based on the participants and the amount of detail provided. The total amount of time used for each activity within this lesson plan will vary based on the individual participant's abilities, recollections, timeframe, and the cultural context he or she may apply.)

MATERIALS:

- Pencils, pens, colored pencils, crayons, markers, paints
- Paper, construction paper, card stock
- The book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*

“THREE PLAGUES” (LONELINESS, BOREDOM, HELPLESSNESS):

This activity can be done by individuals, in pairs, or as a large group. The pairs and group settings are beneficial in supporting connections with peers, which helps to decrease the sense of loneliness. These group interactions will also help to facilitate new friendships and interactions with peers based on commonalities and new learning.

The information that is generated can then be shared with peers and younger or older populations. It is in this way that the sense of helplessness will be addressed, in that individuals will, in a sense, be teachers through their own life experiences and the recounting of personal events. Helplessness can also be addressed in the group setting, as individuals can build off of their peers’ words and experiences.

This activity addresses the plague of boredom in that it creates an inner energy and creativity. One’s mental flexibility and word-generation skills will also be targeted by way of these activities. Boredom and loneliness will be alleviated through the memories that are stirred and the connections that are made. These activities may encourage future interactions among peers by breaking the ice, so that people feel connected to those in their surrounding home environment.

ASSOCIATED MEDICAL STUDY:

A study published in the *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* found that the association between a region within one’s neural language system and the rise in age-related word-finding difficulties indicates that atrophy due to age did contribute to more word-finding and word-production errors. It is reported that, as one ages, word-finding difficulties do arise and activities to address word-finding skills are vitally important. Documented research indicates that word-finding tasks support cognitive growth and maintenance.

*--Shafto, M.A., D.M. Burke, E.A. Stamatakis, P.P. Tam, and L.K. Tyler. “On the Tip-of-the-Tongue: Neural Correlates of Increased Word-finding Failures in Normal Aging.” *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 19 (December 2007): 2060-2070.*

Activity Plan

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES AND EXPLANATION FOR THE PERSON DIRECTING THE ACTIVITY

PLAN:

This activity can be used with a variety of sections from the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. A particular chapter can be chosen and inserts or stories from that section can be used to open each individual's thought processes. Story selections from Chapter 3, The Storm Hit Suddenly, can be used during the wintertime to address word-recall tasks related to blizzard and snowstorm events. Specific recollections from Chapter 2, The Powerful Lake, can be presented to initiate thought processes regarding various lessons and legends individuals may already be familiar with. Items from Chapter 5, Knee-High to a Prairie Dog, can be read and referenced when trying to formulate a poetic personal experience statement, message, or "life lesson" along the lines of a poem or proverb for the third part of this activity.

Sundogs and Sunflowers should be made available as a reference point and initiation piece for the participants' thoughts. The book also can be used to help facilitate interactions and word-finding skills based on the various chapters and themes presented.

SESSION 1 - ASSOCIATIONS (30 TO 90 MINUTES):

(Time needed depends on the skill level of the participants, the number of people involved, and the amount of detail provided.)

I. For this first activity, instruct individuals to write five random words. They can then use their own words or switch with other individuals if this task is being completed as a group. Individuals should then be instructed to build on the words written on the paper by writing other words that come to mind when thinking of the random words chosen. This can continue to be built upon and expanded into stories, word maps, and drawings.

For example, five random words were chosen: snow, warm, pink, mountain, wood.

A) Associations:

- Snow – blizzard
- Warm – blanket
- Pink – sunsets
- Mountain – hiking
- Wood – Grandpa

B) Stories (these stories can be discussed and shared verbally as a large group or in smaller groups with partners):

Snow – blizzard (memories of being snowed in and wishing for snow so that school would be cancelled, hard times during snowstorms, etc.)

Warm – blanket (memories of making quilts with parents, a favorite blanket story, stories of different uses for blankets, etc.)

Pink – sunsets (favorite places to watch sunsets, memories of times at the lake and ending the perfect day with beautiful sunsets, etc.)

Mountain – hiking (memories of hiking trips into various mountain ranges and camping adventures, favorite mountains to visit, the first time seeing a mountain, etc.)

Wood – Grandpa (memories of Grandpa and his woodworking hobby, an expansion of other uses with wood and making furniture, etc.)

- C) Word Maps:
- Snow – blizzard
 - Warm – blanket
 - Pink – sunsets
 - Mountain – hiking
 - Wood – Grandpa

Using the words previously chosen, individuals can draw a word map with the chosen word and then expand on it with additional words that are associated or related. The map component is generated by thinking of a word that ties back to the original word, and then continuing to build on this topic by adding another word that is related to the new word. This can be made into a diagram on paper and used as a support during story recollection time. For example:

- Snow → blizzard, no school, snowmen
- Christmas, family, presents, Santa
- winter, cold, icy, bad roads, dark nights
- sports, Olympics, skating, skiing, snowshoes

D) Drawings: Participants can use art materials to create artwork that portrays the words chosen for the above tasks. Individuals can use pictures to portray memories of words, or the meanings of the words to that particular individual based on his or her past experiences. An artist should be utilized with the exercise to help guide the participants.

SESSION 2 - ANALOGIES (30 TO 90 MINUTES):

(Time needed depends on the skill level of the participants, the number of people involved, and the amount of detail provided.)

I. For this second session, individuals can use a previous association task and then build on it by using comparative reasoning. They can also switch association words with other individuals if this task is being completed as a group. Individuals will be instructed to take the first component that they had initially thought of with their associative reasoning and then make a comparison using similar reasoning. The following are a few examples of analogies:

- Snow is to blizzard, as wind is to windstorm or tornado
- Warm is to blanket, as cold is to ice cubes
- Pink is to sunsets, as blue is to sky
- Mountain is to hiking, as hills are to sledding
- Wood is to Grandpa, as bread is to Grandma

2. The associations made will vary for each individual person. The analogies generated, as well as the participants' stories, can be shared with their peers. Another option is for participants to take the first part of the analogies and have a friend complete the second half, afterwards discussing the different thought processes or why certain comparisons were chosen. This activity addresses cognitive-linguistic and intellectual skills, in conjunction with word-finding skills. Here are a few examples:

Snow is to _____, as wind is to _____
Warm is to _____, as cold is to _____
Pink is to _____, as blue is to _____
Mountain is to _____, as hills are to _____
Wood is to _____, as bread is to _____

Snow is to blizzard, as _____ is to _____
Warm is to blanket, as _____ is to _____
Pink is to sunsets, as _____ is to _____
Mountain is to hiking, as _____ are to _____
Wood is to Grandpa, as _____ is to _____

_____ is to blizzard, as _____ is to windstorm
or tornado
_____ is to blanket, as _____ is to ice cubes
_____ is to sunsets, as _____ is to sky
_____ is to hiking, as _____ are to sledding
_____ is to Grandpa, as _____ is to Grandma

SESSION 3 - POETIC PERSONAL EXPERIENCE STATEMENT, MESSAGE, OR "LIFE LESSON" GENERATION (30 TO 90 MINUTES):

(Time needed depends on the skill level of the participants, the number of people involved, and the amount of detail provided.)

I. A more complex or abstract word-finding activity is to have the participants create a poetic personal experience statement, message, or "life lesson" along the lines of a poem or proverb. These poetic personal experience statements should be based on the words and associations as chosen in the previous session. Past memories or experiences with those words can now be utilized. The following are a few examples:

"Snow can turn into a blizzard in the blink of an eye."
"Never go out in a snowstorm unprepared."
"A warm blanket is a sought after thing."
"Blankets can warm your body, but not your heart."
"The pinkest pinks can be seen in the fall sky."
"Sunsets are God's way of saying good night."
"Hiking a mountain is like facing internal challenges."
"Mountains aren't worth climbing without the correct hiking gear and mindset."
"Grandpas always know how to judge a true piece of wood."
"The grain of wood fits best in a grandpa's hand."

2. Individuals should then transform these poetic personal experience statements, messages, or “life lessons” into cards using pencils, pens, colored pencils, crayons, markers, paints, paper, construction paper, or card stock. These cards then should be sent to loved ones or be used as quotes to hang around the facility. These messages also can be used as discussion pieces to further expand on other individuals’ memories or what the sayings may mean to them.

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Heidi received her Master of Science degree in Speech-Language Pathology from Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM), as well as a Bachelor’s degree in Spanish. Heidi has experience working in public schools, the private practice setting, and the hospital. She is employed full-time at Sanford Health as an adult in-patient therapist for the rehabilitation unit, and works part-time with children for the private practice Beyond Boundaries. She is experienced in facilitating therapy programs that address speech and language deficits, cognitive-linguistic difficulties, memory problems, and communication difficulties that result from strokes, brain injuries, and other medical problems. Heidi spends her spare time with her husband, family, and friends, and enjoys traveling, scrapbooking, quilting, and doing numerous outdoor activities.