



Synonyms and Antonyms Increments of Meaning

Synonyms are words that mean the same or nearly the same. Yet even in words that are synonyms for one another, there is an increment of meaning, the words do not mean exactly the same thing. The mental images that are created in the person's brain are slightly different when they hear or read each of the words. For example, the word large and the word huge. For most, the word huge represents something that is bigger than large, while big may be a word that indicates something smaller than large.

Antonyms are words that mean the opposite. If given the words large, there are many antonyms for this word—small, tiny, little, and so on. Like the synonyms, these antonyms of the word “large”, are a series of synonyms for the word “small”, and each of them has an increment of meaning that creates the same sort of visual in the mind of the person who hears or reads the words.

Following are several activities to have students participate in that will help them grasp the concept of “increments of meaning”, and understand that word selection is important when making a visual picture for the reader.

Lists of Words

The following lists of words demonstrate the concept of “increments of meaning”.

List #1: enormous, huge, large, big, gigantic, mammoth, extensive, full-size, expansive, gargantuan, immense, colossal

List #2: small, tiny, miniscule, little, teeny, minuscule, minute, diminutive, slight, petite, miniature, pint sized

List #3: beautiful, gorgeous, lovely, good-looking, stunning, striking, attractive, dazzling, magnificent, pretty, cute

List #4: quiet, still, silent, soundless, hushed, mute, taciturn, reticent, noiseless, tranquility

List #5: ugly, homely, unattractive, hideous, revolting, unsightly, repulsive, plain, unadorned, gruesome, repugnant

List #6: hot, warm, steamy, tropical, burning, scorching, boiling, blistering, sizzling, searing, sweltering, roasting

List #7: cold, cool, frigid, chilly, freezing, icy, frosty, wintry, glacial, sub-zero, polar, biting

List #8: happy, glad, ecstatic, thrilled, joyful, cheerful, in high spirits, exultant, pleased, content, cheery, delighted, jovial, on cloud nine

Ways to Use the Lists of Synonyms

Order ‘Em

1. Divide students into groups of 3-4.
2. Give students one of the lists.
3. Discuss 2-3 words on the list. Ask students to create an image in their minds about the word you say. For example, with the word “quiet”, I may picture a library. If you say the word “hushed”, I may think of a funeral. The question then is this, which of those images creates a sense of the **MOST** quiet or **LEAST** quiet. I might say funeral is more quiet than a library. If that is the case, then the word “quiet” is less without noise than “hushed”. It is the conversation around the process of determining the level of meaning that you are driving toward. Each group could order the words differently. You are encouraging them to discuss the thoughts.
4. Invite them to order the words from most to least, or least to most, and put them on a chart.
5. Ask students to add other words to the lists that are synonyms, and then order those words as well.

Variation:

Have students brainstorm a list of words for a specific adjective, adverb, or verb. Think about the word selected as this can create a challenge. Repeat the process. Note: the thesaurus and definition on the computer can be helpful in finding additional words with similar meanings.

Comparison Challenge

1. Divide students into teams of 4-5.
2. List noun categories for the students.
 - a. Examples: Animals, Places, Categories (not names) of people—aunt, sister, brother), Food, Modes of Travel, etc.
3. Ask students to brainstorm a list of nouns that fit in each of these categories
4. Combine the lists
5. Ask students to take words from the list of synonyms and associate or put them with the nouns.
 - a. Example: elephant, dragon, rhinoceros, cat, cow, giraffe would be animals that you could associate with the synonym cluster for “large”, “ugly”, or both “cool” and “hot”, dependent on which way you want to describe the word. These animals could also be associated with a list of words that could range from “docile” to “ferocious”, or other group of synonyms/antonyms that you have created.
6. Ask the teams to create comparison sentences using nouns and synonyms from the list of words they have.
 - a. Example: An elephant is mammoth and unattractive, but a rhinoceros is huge and really ugly.
 - b. Example: A house cat is small and quiet, but an elephant is gigantic and loud.
or A house cat is small and quiet, but a goldfish is tiny and soundless.
7. Have teams share sentences with one another, giving 1 point for each sentence comparison that make sense.

Musical Shares

Materials: Cards with the synonyms written on them

CD Player and Music (be sure that the lyrics are appropriate)

1. Each student draws a word card from the deck of cards
2. When the music begins to play, student moves and dances to the music
3. When the music stops, student finds a partner and dramatically says the word on his/her card. When saying the word, the student should his/her voice—volume, expression, rate; his/her body language to communicate his/her understanding of the word; and his/her ability to connect with the other person to communicate the meaning of the word.
4. Students exchange the word portrayal with one another, each tacking a turn
5. Music resumes, student begins to dance and move
6. Music stops and the process continues

Mystery Word

Materials: Cards with synonyms written on them

Tape or clip so word can be placed on the back of someone's shirt/blouse

CD Player and Music (be sure that the lyrics are appropriate)

1. Each student draws a word card from the deck of cards
2. Student finds another person and has that person stand with his/her back to them, and clips or tapes the word to the person's back WITHOUT telling them the word.
3. Process is repeated with the students reversing the roles
4. Start the music, and students move around the room
5. When the music stops, the students pair up
6. Student "A" looks at the word on the back of Student "B" and gives them a synonym for the word. Student "B" tries to guess the word on his/her back.
7. Student "B" looks at the word on the back of Student "A" and gives them a synonym for the word. Student "A" tries to guess the word on his/her back.
8. If either or both Student "A" or "B" guess the word that is on their back, they continue to play, however when the music stops, they tell the new partner the word on their back and use it in a sentence that clearly indicates that the student understands the meaning of the word.
9. Play continues until everyone has identified the word on his/her back.



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