



Building Vocabulary Using Homonyms

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Helping students broaden their vocabulary skills should begin very early by exposing them to words with more than one meaning. Recognizing and understanding more than one meaning for a word demonstrates the depth of a student's vocabulary, while knowing when and how to use multiple meaning words defines the quality. Having quick recall of multiple meanings for words also enables us to laugh at and appreciate the wittiness of puns and other common forms of humorous or figurative language.



Using *homonyms* to teach everyday vocabulary makes creating lessons for all age groups easy due to the extensive list of multiple meaning words from which to choose. The term "homonym" refers to words that are spelled the same and sound the same but have different meanings (e.g., Dad deposits money in the **bank**. Jack climbed the snowy **bank**). "Homonyms" also refers to *homographs* and *homophones*. *Homographs* are words that have the same spelling but different meanings (e.g., Her **fine** china was broken into pieces. Going to the movie is **fine** with me.). Homographs pronounced differently are *heteronyms* (e.g., The **record** has 12 songs on it. Did you **record** the songs yourself?). *Homophones* are words that sound the same but have different spellings/meanings (e.g., It is a **chilly** day. Dad puts **chili** on his hot dogs.).

Important Skills with Homonyms

When studying homonyms (and all their categories), students should be able to:

- Understand that most words in the English language have more than one meaning;
- Recognize that homonyms can be different parts of speech;
- Match different meanings in context with the correct homophone;
- Choose one word from a group to complete a number of sentences;
- Use homonyms in different contexts;
- Identify incorrect usage of homophones in sentences;
- Present homophones correctly in writing (e.g., using **chilly** day, not **chili** day);
- Comprehend use of multiple meaning words in figurative language/idioms (e.g., Why did the king always draw straight lines? He was the **ruler!** Can students explain why the idiom is funny?).

Fun Activities with Homonyms

Use the following fun activities when presenting lessons about homonyms!

- Give short homonym or other vocabulary pretests before lessons begin and evaluate students' understanding. Give a posttest after completing the lessons and compare. Reteach or review if necessary.
- Choose age-level-appropriate homonyms/vocabulary for students. For example, use "saw" for younger students and write it on the board. Ask students to write/say the word in sentences. Have students read/say their sentences aloud; teacher writes them on the board. Students can see that "saw" means: "Dad used a saw (noun) to cut the limb." "I saw (verb) Jane today." "Can you saw (verb) the board in half?" This is a good visual lesson.
- Create a *Word Wall* labeled homonyms, homographs, heteronyms, and homophones. Add words from vocabulary lessons or examples that present themselves during the school day.
- Have students search for homonyms in textbooks. Control the assignment by defining the page numbers for the search. This way the teacher can preview the pages and be prepared to coach the students to find words they may have missed. Have students list the words they find, their meaning in context, and any other meanings the students may know. Share findings on the board. Post findings on a *Word Wall*.
- Write three (or more) sentences on the board that will use the same homonym/homograph to fill in a blank. Give possible choices for the missing word. Have students choose **one** word which fits **every** sentence. Some of the word choices may fit other sentences, but one word should fit all sentences.
- Assign homework where students read old newspapers and magazines and highlight multiple meaning words with a highlighter. Have your students tell what the words mean in their contexts and other meanings they know. Post findings on a *Word Wall*.



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