
VISUAL THESAURUS
LESSON PLANS
TEACHER'S GUIDE



LESSON 1:
**INTRODUCTION TO THE VISUAL THESAURUS:
WORDS HAVE MULTIPLE MEANINGS**



OBJECTIVE

After completing this lesson, students should have a better understanding of some common words, including an understanding that simple words may have multiple meanings. Students also learn of the value of using a Thesaurus as part of their writing process. By learning more of the options for word choice, students can better express themselves.

LANGUAGE FOCUS:

Vocabulary development

Students are asked to perform three major tasks:

- 1) understand meanings associated with a common adjective and explore vocabulary related to a common adjective;
- 2) make meaningful connections between the adjectives they chose and the words multiple meanings;
- 3) learn and practice new vocabulary by writing sentences or a story incorporating the various words they've explored.

MATERIALS NEEDED :

None (Only the Visual Thesaurus)

VARIATIONS:

Individual: lesson as given; “Challenge” section can assigned or omitted based on level of students or time frame

Small Group: students work in groups of 2-3, share words they chose and explored, talk about ways they can make their language more interesting and varied using the vocabulary, write a short play using the words

Whole class: teacher features an “adjective” of the day; above lesson is adapted using just that adjective

ESL/LEP: students should go through each of the adjectives as a means of expanding vocabulary; it’s very important to turn off all parts of speech except adjective. Then, in consult with instructor or peer tutor, help students understand relationships among the words; for example, with adjectives, introduce a “simple” way of understanding relationships as a matter of degree...+ for somewhat more, ++ for much more (big, huge [+], gigantic [++]).

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS: Level III, grades 6-8

Writing:

General skills and strategies of the writing process (S. 1), including narrative accounts (S. 1.7) and composition based on personal attitudes or experience (S. 1.8)

Use of descriptive and figurative language, including thesaurus use for effective word choice (S. 2, 2.1)

Use of grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions, including use of adjectives to convey different meanings (S. 3, S. 3.5)

Reading:

Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process (S. 5), including using a variety of strategies to extend vocabulary, improve understanding of definitions, and compare and verify words meanings, shades of meaning, and word differences in context (S. 5.3)

LESSON 2:
**EXPLORING DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE WITH
DIFFERENT PARTS OF SPEECH**



OBJECTIVE

Students gain experience writing, choosing appropriate language, and understanding parts of speech. Students learn that words have multiple functions when used in different contexts. Through these exercises, students gain practice in writing, and learn how word choice can affect both meaning and intent.

LANGUAGE FOCUS:

Understanding parts of speech

Students are asked to perform four major tasks:

- 1) free write in response to a picture or scene;
- 2) identify parts of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverb) from their own writing;
- 3) explore new vocabulary;
- 4) compose a story about the picture or scene employing the new vocabulary. As a challenge, you may ask them to write in a specific genre or style.

MATERIALS NEEDED :

pictures from magazines or books for essay inspiration (optional)

VARIATIONS:

Individual: lesson as given; “Challenge” section can assigned or omitted based on level of students or time frame (In this lesson Part 2 (Next Steps) and Part 3 (Challenge) are very similar. You may want to assign only one of these to students)

Small Group: group of students work on same picture, collaborate on descriptions, then team write a story using the picture

Whole Class: similar to Small Group only whole class works from a picture or scene supplied by teacher. Students can “chain write” the story or write short stories individually, then turn in for evaluation or to share in groups

ESL/LEP: the lesson as given is appropriate with some modifications: in step (4), students can add to the lists they’ve created rather than “exploring relationships” and for each new word, VT definitions should be written down, then students can construct either individual sentences or create a story

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS: Level III, grades 6-8

Writing:

General skills and strategies of the writing process (S.1), including prewriting strategies such as outlining and brainstorming (S. 1.1), evaluation of own and other’s writing (S. 1.4), writing narrative accounts (S. 1.7) and writing in response to literature or ideas with the ability to state a reflective opinion (S. 1. 12)

Use of descriptive and figurative language, including thesaurus use for effective word choice (S. 2, 2.1)

Use of grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions, including use of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs to convey different meanings (S. 3, S. 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6)

Use of age-appropriate spelling, capitalization, and punctuation (S. 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, at teacher’s discretion)

Reading:

Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process (S. 5), including using a variety of strategies to extend vocabulary, improve understanding of definitions, and compare and verify words meanings, shades of meaning, and word differences in context (S. 5.3)

NOTES:

Note 1: The standards used in these lessons follow the McREL guidelines, concentrating on grades 6-8, primarily in the Language Arts (writing, reading, listening, and speaking). Abbreviated Standards are listed here.

Note 2: The ESL variations given are most suitable for intermediate and advanced learners. The Visual Thesaurus is somewhat complex for beginners, though lessons appropriate for this group are noted below.

LESSON 3:
**MAKING AN ARGUMENT:
EFFECTIVE USE OF TRANSITION WORDS**



OBJECTIVE

To explore and understand the use of transition words in context and to write own persuasive essay using transition words

LANGUAGE FOCUS:

Using Transition Words

Students are asked to perform three major tasks:

- 1) understand and explore new forms of transition words;
- 2) examine how transition words are used in an editorial or persuasive essay;
- 3) write their own persuasive essay using transition words.

MATERIALS NEEDED :

Editorial piece or persuasive essay that features transition words, supplied by students, teacher, or accessed from newspaper Web site

VARIATIONS:

Note: teacher may wish to supply editorial or persuasive essay, particularly if it can relate to some current event or class topic

Individual: lesson as given; “Challenge” section can assigned or omitted based on level of students or time frame

Small Group: students collaborate by “chain writing” an editorial or persuasive piece. This can be in writing or out loud; each student contributes a new sentence which has to begin with an appropriate transition word

Whole Class: since transition words are a part of using language persuasively, this lesson can be applied to many different kinds of writing including letters of complaint, editorials, recommendations, etc.; teachers can bring in an essay to respond to or a local situation for students to write about

ESL/LEP: the lesson as given is very good for ESL/LEP students. It may help to simplify the transition word list to just one or two examples instead of the more extensive list provided in the student lesson

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS: Level III, grades 6-8

Writing:

General skills and strategies of the writing process (S. 1), including drafting and revising (S. 1.2), evaluation of own and other's writing (S. 1.4), using content, style, and structure appropriate to specific audiences (S. 1.5) and writing a persuasive composition that conveys a judgment, provides context, is aimed towards a specific audience, and supplies evidence or support (S. 1.10)

Use of the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing (S. 2), including explicit use of transitional devices (S. 2.4) and using paragraphs and sentences to organize writing (S.2.2)

Reading:

Uses the General skills and strategies of the reading process (S. 5), including using a variety of strategies to extend vocabulary, improve understanding of definitions, and compare and verify words meanings, shades of meaning, and word differences in context (S. 5.3)

Understands specific devices an author uses to accomplish his or her purpose (e.g., persuasive techniques, style, literary form or genre)
(S. 5.5)

Reflects on what has been learned after reading and formulates ideas, opinions, and personal responses to texts (S. 5.6)

Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts (S. 7), including magazines and advertisements (S. 7.1)

NOTES:

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LESSON 4:
**EXPLORING COLOR VOCABULARY:
 SHADE, METAPHOR AND WIDER LITERARY
 AND CULTURAL MEANINGS**

**OBJECTIVE**

To explore color terms, and related meanings and metaphors, in cultural and literary context.

LANGUAGE FOCUS:

Using and understanding color terms and related meanings

Students have three major tasks to complete:

- 1) use the main colors to explore synonymous color terms and related metaphorical meanings of color words;
- 2) recognize the extent to which the basic color terms are used metaphorically or analogically;
- 3) write a description or story using the color terms and associated meanings.

MATERIALS NEEDED :

Any one of the following: color wheel, fashion or home decorating magazines with color words, box of Crayons, markers, or other art materials with color words

VARIATIONS:

Individual: lesson as given; “Challenge” section can assigned or omitted based on level of students or time frame. In this lesson, both Part 2 (Next Steps) and Part 3 (Challenge) are essay exercises. You may want your students to do only one essay.

Small Group: students can collaborate on a description or work in groups to explore different colors

Whole Class: teacher can use a color a week and explore the meanings in depth-focus on student understanding of color terms as metaphors for emotional and intellectual states as well as ways of categorizing people; can then be used as a lesson in appreciating diversity and understanding cultural perceptions.

ESL/LEP: lesson as given is appropriate, though categorizing meanings may be beyond intermediate students’ abilities

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS: Writing:

General skills and strategies of the writing process (S. 1), including drafting and revising (S. 1.2), evaluation of own and other's writing (S. 1.4), using content, style, and structure appropriate to specific audiences (S. 1.5) and writing a persuasive composition that conveys a judgment, provides context, is aimed towards a specific audience, and supplies evidence or support (S. 1.10).

Use of the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing (S. 2), and use of descriptive and figurative language, including thesaurus use for effective word choice (S. 2.1)

Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process (S. 5), including using a variety of strategies to extend vocabulary, improve understanding of definitions, and compare and verify words meanings, shades of meaning, and word differences in context (S. 5.3)

Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts (S. 6) and the use of language to convey mood, image, and meaning (S. 6.7)

NOTES:

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LESSON 5:
**UNDERSTANDING SCIENCE VOCABULARY
AND CATEGORIZATION**



OBJECTIVE

To expand students' knowledge and understanding of scientific language and categorization as related to commonly known plants and animals.

LANGUAGE FOCUS:

Understanding Science Vocabulary and Categorization

Students are asked to perform four major tasks:

- 1) hypothesize about a specific plant or animal, thinking about its scientific name, categories, and characteristics of the organism;
- 2) understand the complexity of the scientific naming and language that can be used to describe commonly known plants and animals;
- 3) learn new concepts and vocabulary associated with common plants and animals; and
- 4) compare and contrast scientific language with creative writing language.

MATERIALS NEEDED :

None (other than the Visual Thesaurus) although students may want to refer to books such as a biology text book or an encyclopedia to research scientific names or additional animal/plants characteristics.

VARIATIONS:

Individual: lesson as given; "Challenge" section can be assigned or omitted based on level of students or time frame

Small Group: students can collaborate on plant and animal descriptions or work in groups to explore different plants and animals

Whole Class: teacher can chose science words or concepts that relate to in-class science curriculum to reinforce concepts and knowledge from areas other than Language Arts.

ESL/LEP: lesson as given is appropriate, though categorizing plants and animals and differentiating scientific and creative writing may beyond intermediate students' abilities

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS: LIFE SCIENCES:

Understands biological evolution and the diversity of life (S. 7)

Level II, Grade 3-5

Knows that there are similarities and difference in the appearance and behavior of plants and animals, and different ways that animals can be grouped (S. 7.2)

Level III, Grade 6-8

Knows ways in which living things can be classified (e.g., taxonomic groups of plants, animals, and fungi; groups based on the details of organisms' internal and external features; groups based on functions served within an ecosystem such as producers, consumers, and decomposers) (S. 7.5)

Understands the nature of scientific knowledge (S. 11)

Level IV, Grade 9-12

Knows ways in which science distinguishes itself from other ways of knowing and from other bodies of knowledge (e.g., use of empirical standards, logical arguments, skepticism) (S. 11.1)

LANGUAGE ARTS:**Writing:**

General skills and strategies of the writing process (S. 1), including using content, style, and structure appropriate to specific audiences (S. 1.5) and writing that is aimed towards a specific audience using evidence or support (S. 1.10)

Use of the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing (S. 2, 2.1), including use of paragraphs and sentences to organize writing (S 2.2)

Reading:

Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process (S. 5), including using a variety of strategies to extend vocabulary, improve understanding of definitions, and compare and verify words meanings, shades of meaning, and word differences in context (S. 5.3)

Reflects upon what has been learned after reading and formulates ideas, opinions and personal responses to text (S. 5.6)

Gathers and uses information from reading for research purposes, including assessing the appropriateness of an information source for a research topic (S. 4.5)

Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts (S. 7), including the ability to identify and compare sources for different purposes (S. 7.1, 7.2)

NOTES:

Note 1: The standards used in these lessons follow the McREL guidelines (<http://www.mcrel.org>), concentrating on grades 6-8, primarily in the Language Arts (writing, reading, listening, and speaking). Abbreviated Standards are listed here.

Note 2: The ESL variations given are most suitable for intermediate and advanced learners. The Visual Thesaurus is somewhat complex for beginners, though lessons appropriate for this group are noted below.

OTHER USES FOR THE VISUAL THESAURUS:

Word-of-the-Day types of activities are good to use with the VT. Students use the VT to further define and understand the word of the day. Or, use the word of the day from the New York Times Learning pages.

Use the VT to explore meanings of and expand upon spelling lists.

Students can use the VT to expand their own vocabulary using a vocabulary journal. Every day, students write down words they particularly like from a reading or words they don't know and use the Visual Thesaurus to define the words and explore related meanings.

Remember “Mad Libs”? There are several websites for mad libs, though www.funbrain.com is one of the easiest and clearest to navigate. Students can fill in the mad lib, generate the story, then use the VT to explore vocabulary options for the words they chose. Or, use the word lists generated in the above exercises as sources for mad libs. Ultimately, students can write their own by using one of the stories created in the VT lessons (or through some other lesson), then selectively choosing nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs to eliminate and replace with blanks. The whole class can then exchange their mad libs for fun!

For ESL/LEP: the VT is a great way to explore irregular verbs. Since the VT gives the non-tensed form, it is best to work from a list or a reading with irregular past tense verbs, have the student enter them into the VT search box and find the corresponding verb.

For ESL/LEP: The VT also provides an interesting way to explore two word verbs (phrasal verbs). Most of the separable and non-separable forms are available. Students can identify any synonymous forms, both single words and related phrasal forms.