

## Improving vocabulary

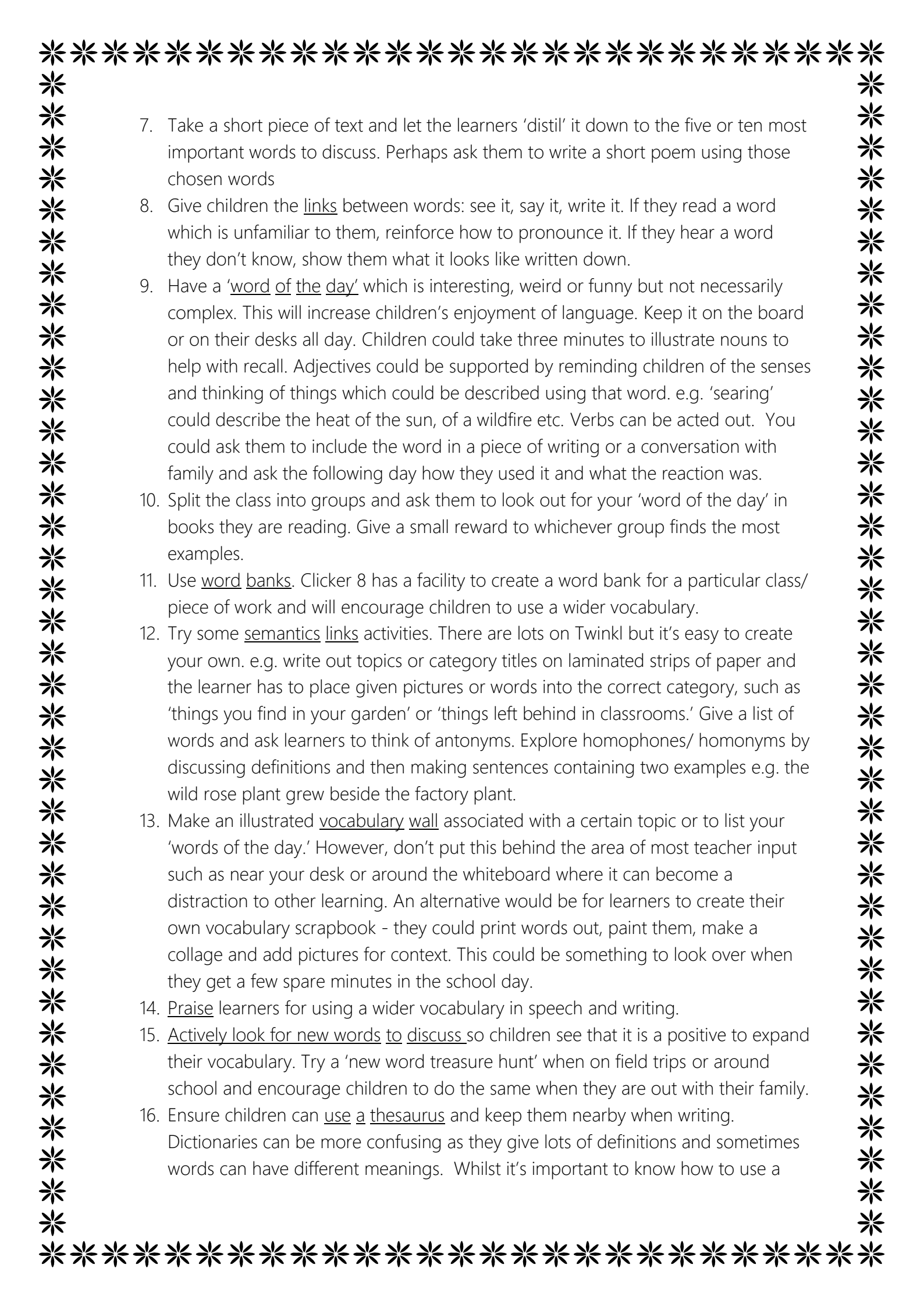


### The importance of vocabulary

Children need a wide vocabulary not only to achieve their academic potential but also to express their ideas, wishes and feelings, to be able to read and enjoy more books and to communicate socially with others. They also need to be able to discuss concerns such as their health or bullying in order to keep themselves safe. The earlier children are exposed to language, the better. Studies have shown that the number of words children learn in their early years is directly linked to their success as adults. Strong language skills can influence friendships, family connections, career, academic success and happiness, yet as many as four in ten children don't have language skills at the level they need. It is important that we help children to increase the number of words they understand and can use in speech, reading and writing in order to give them better life chances.

### Strategies to improve vocabulary:

1. Take time for 1:1 conversations in which wider vocabulary can be modelled and practised. Let the child choose what they want to talk about. Children can often understand more words than they can use so don't over simplify too much when it is the adult's turn to speak.
2. Play fun word games such as I-spy, Scrabble, Story Cubes, Pictionary, Cadoo, Boggle, Word A Round, Slug in a Jug and Bananagrams.
3. Expose children to a rich vocabulary by choosing texts carefully and discussing the meaning of any words they don't know.
4. Explore words using word maps – pick a word to focus on and look at definitions, synonyms, antonyms, conjugations or other words from the same root (e.g. swim, swimming, swum, swam, swims, swimmer), pictures and connotations. Practise using the word in sentences.
5. Allow children to free write about anything they are interested in and share with the rest of the class if they wish to. Don't correct the work – just let them enjoy the act of writing.
6. Create real reasons to use language e.g. when writing letters, make sure they go to their intended recipients. Let them speak to school visitors. Give them responsibilities which require using language such as taking messages, giving a presentation, making a list, running a club or teaching peers or younger children new skills.

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7. Take a short piece of text and let the learners 'distil' it down to the five or ten most important words to discuss. Perhaps ask them to write a short poem using those chosen words
  8. Give children the links between words: see it, say it, write it. If they read a word which is unfamiliar to them, reinforce how to pronounce it. If they hear a word they don't know, show them what it looks like written down.
  9. Have a 'word of the day' which is interesting, weird or funny but not necessarily complex. This will increase children's enjoyment of language. Keep it on the board or on their desks all day. Children could take three minutes to illustrate nouns to help with recall. Adjectives could be supported by reminding children of the senses and thinking of things which could be described using that word. e.g. 'searing' could describe the heat of the sun, of a wildfire etc. Verbs can be acted out. You could ask them to include the word in a piece of writing or a conversation with family and ask the following day how they used it and what the reaction was.
  10. Split the class into groups and ask them to look out for your 'word of the day' in books they are reading. Give a small reward to whichever group finds the most examples.
  11. Use word banks. Clicker 8 has a facility to create a word bank for a particular class/ piece of work and will encourage children to use a wider vocabulary.
  12. Try some semantics links activities. There are lots on Twinkl but it's easy to create your own. e.g. write out topics or category titles on laminated strips of paper and the learner has to place given pictures or words into the correct category, such as 'things you find in your garden' or 'things left behind in classrooms.' Give a list of words and ask learners to think of antonyms. Explore homophones/ homonyms by discussing definitions and then making sentences containing two examples e.g. the wild rose plant grew beside the factory plant.
  13. Make an illustrated vocabulary wall associated with a certain topic or to list your 'words of the day.' However, don't put this behind the area of most teacher input such as near your desk or around the whiteboard where it can become a distraction to other learning. An alternative would be for learners to create their own vocabulary scrapbook - they could print words out, paint them, make a collage and add pictures for context. This could be something to look over when they get a few spare minutes in the school day.
  14. Praise learners for using a wider vocabulary in speech and writing.
  15. Actively look for new words to discuss so children see that it is a positive to expand their vocabulary. Try a 'new word treasure hunt' when on field trips or around school and encourage children to do the same when they are out with their family.
  16. Ensure children can use a thesaurus and keep them nearby when writing. Dictionaries can be more confusing as they give lots of definitions and sometimes words can have different meanings. Whilst it's important to know how to use a

dictionary, if a child asks about an unfamiliar word, it's sometimes easier and more effective to discuss it with them and give them a clear definition appropriate to their ability.

17. Encourage speaking and listening activities e.g. discussing ideas either for or against a given topic, drama, role play, show and tell, team building exercises.
18. Demonstrate wider vocabulary by using a word the learners may be unfamiliar with within a sentence, but repeat the sentence and replace the unfamiliar word with a synonym they will know. This will contextualise the new word and when they've heard it a few times used correctly in different sentences, they should remember it.
19. Don't introduce too many new words at one time. Five words a week is a good start, chosen dependent on age/ ability.
20. Most children need exposure to a word up to twelve times before it becomes something they can understand and use appropriately.

Books with more strategies and ideas to help improve vocabulary:

*Jumpstart! Literacy* by Pie Corbett

*Once Upon a Word* by Jess Zafarris

*Storyteller's Word a Day* and *Word a Day 2* by Mrs Wordsmith

*Vocabulary Ninja* by Andrew Jennings

If you are at all concerned about a Halton learner's speech, language and communication skills, please find information and support on the Local Offer [here](#).