

## Personal Dictionary

**Overview:** Like a word wall, a personal dictionary gives a student an individualized reference resource. The difference between a word wall and a personal dictionary is that in a personal dictionary, students not only have access to the word itself, but to a definition of the word as well. Sample personal dictionary pages are included at the end of this activity.



**Procedure:** A personal dictionary can be made using a 3 ring binder and alphabetic tabs. As students learn new vocabulary, spelling, content or sight words, they can be added to their dictionaries along with a definition. The definition can be as simple as a picture of the word such as “airplane” or it can be a sentence with more description. This will depend on the needs and reading ability of the individual students. Words are added one at a time as they are encountered and are put on separate sheets of paper – one page per word. Pages should be filed under the alphabetic divider according to the first letter of the word. Students should be taught to go their personal dictionary to locate and discern the meaning and spelling of words they either encounter or want to write. Therefore, a personal dictionary can be used both as a tool to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words or as a tool to help students spell words they wish to use in their writing. The key is to teach students how and when to use them and to keep them handy for student access.

### ASOL Covered in this Activity:

**3E--RW 4d:** The student will demonstrate comprehension of information in reference materials by using dictionaries, glossaries, and indices.

**Extension Idea:** Have a dictionary scavenger hunt. Students place their dictionaries on their desks. Give them a list of pictures representing words in their dictionaries. Have the students locate the words and copy the print word next to it. [For students who cannot handwrite, once they have located the page, a peer can help to print the word.]

**6E--RW 1c:** The student will seek clarification and meaning support when unfamiliar words are encountered while reading by using word reference materials.

**Extension Idea:** When reading through an unfamiliar non-fiction text, students highlight words for which they do not know the meaning. Students then look up the unfamiliar words using an online dictionary such as <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/Dictionary.html>. Discuss each of the

words and their meanings with the students so that they can then create a page to add to their personal dictionaries. Come back to this text in the next lesson. If students do not remember the meaning of the highlighted words, have them look them up in their personal dictionaries.

**7E--RW 1d:** The student will seek clarification and meaning support when unfamiliar words are encountered while reading by using word reference materials.

**Extension Idea:** Before students read a new text the teacher will go through the text and find words that they think will be unfamiliar to the students and highlight them. The teacher will then create dictionary pages for each unfamiliar word and place them in the student's personal dictionaries. Then when students read the new text, the teacher will stop at each highlighted word and ask the students if they know the word. If they cannot define it, the students should look up the words in their dictionaries and then relate to the teacher what is the definition.

**8E--RW 1c:** The student will seek clarification and meaning support when unfamiliar words are encountered while reading by using word reference materials.

**Extension Idea:** Once students understand how to use their dictionaries and have been taught to recognize that some words might be unfamiliar to them, provide students with text to read independently (or a peer may read it to them) and instruct them to look up any words they do not know. The teacher then observes students as they move through the text and takes data on how many (and which) words the student looks up. Peers reading to students should be encouraged not to tell students when to look up a word, but to let the student lead.

**HSE--RW 2a:** The student will consult reference materials (dictionaries, online vocabulary supports) to clarify meaning of unfamiliar words encountered when reading.

**Extension Idea:** Find or Define it! Have students place their dictionaries on their desks. Students take turns selecting an index card with a word written on it from a jar or other container. They can choose to define the word, find it in their dictionary or pass it to another student. If they pass it to another student that student *must* find or define it. Students get a point for each word they find or define correctly.

**HSE--RW 3d:** The student will demonstrate understanding of figurative language and word relationships by interpreting simple figures of speech encountered while reading.

**Extension Idea:** When reading unfamiliar text, students will highlight figurative language or phrases for which they do not know the meaning, (idioms, similes, metaphors). Instruction will be offered on the meaning of each figure of speech and the words representing it. Students will find or draw a picture to represent its meaning and place it in their personal Figures of Speech Notebook (such as My Book of Idioms). Students can use these personal reference books to look up meaning of figurative language at other times.

**Materials Needed:**

3 ring binder  
Alphabetic dividers  
Computer with internet capability  
Index cards  
A variety of appropriate non-fiction texts  
highlighters

**Instructional Setting:**

classroom

**Community Connections and/or Peer Interaction:**

Peers can help read text to students or help to highlight words in text that students do not know. Words encountered in or associated with the community can also be included in the dictionary.

**Functional Activity/Routine:**

Words encountered during the day as part of the schedule or as part of functional activities should be included in the dictionary.

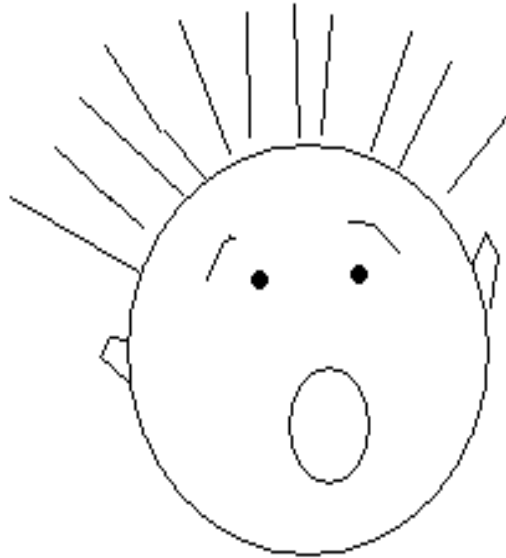
**Strategies to Collect Evidence:**

Evidence can be collected in the form of teacher data collected on words looked up independently from text. Student work samples, from the dictionary scavenger hunt, with accompanying anecdotal recording describing the process the student used to complete the work might also be considered.

**Specific Options for Differentiating this Activity:**

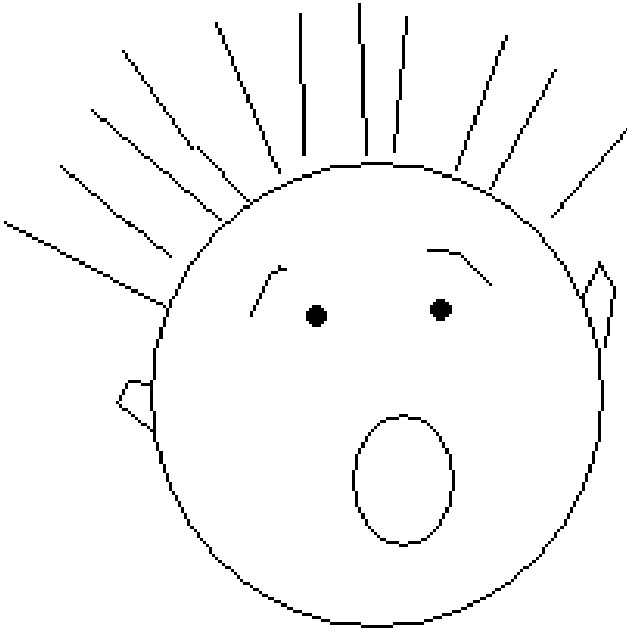
The personal dictionary can be created on line using Boardmaker Plus software so that a student can access his/her dictionary with a switch and scanning. Dictionary pages can be created by peers or teachers working with students who cannot write either by typing definitions on the computer or by having a peer or teacher write the definition for the student. Because the dictionaries are personalized for each student, different colors of paper and sizes and color of fonts can be used to accommodate visual needs.

**Sample Dictionary Page: Simple**



**Afraid**

Sample Dictionary Page: More complex



**Afraid**

Adjective: To be scared or  
frightened

*e.g.* I was *afraid* of the big dog.

Sample

Dictionary Page: Adapted

A f r a i d