Vocabulary by Grade: Stories

One story a grade, with its words to define from the context.



MASTERED BY

Children learn about 3,000 words a year through school, most of them from reading and being read to

ITEMS

174

Name: _____ Date: _____

Vocabulary is the best single predictor of reading comprehension, and the gap between children opens early and widens. Tier two words are the useful middle: not everyday words a child already has ("dog", "run"), and not subject words a textbook will define ("photosynthesis"), but the words that carry meaning across subjects - "observe", "gradual", "reluctant". Each word here comes with a sentence to work it out from, because that is how words are actually learned: met in a context, guessed at, met again. A child can show they own a word three ways - define it, explain it in their own words, or use it in a sentence that only makes sense if they know it. Any of the three counts.

What to expect: A child usually recognizes a word long before they can define it, and can use it in a sentence before they can explain it. "Reluctant means... like when you do not want to" is a fair answer at first. Working the meaning out of the sentence is the skill worth practicing - a child who can do that learns words without you. Watch for a child who gives the definition of a word that sounds similar, or who can only give one narrow use: both mean the word is half-learned and needs more contexts.

Kindergarten story: The Muddy Pond

Read the story once - the words in bold are the ones being asked about. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means. The story

On a chilly autumn morning, Mia and her dog went down to the pond. Dew sparkled on the grass. A herd of cows stood on the far shore, and ducks paddled in the water. Mia made a decision: she would be patient and quiet, so the ducks would not disappear. But her dog was not patient. He galloped straight into the muddy water! The ducks burst up into the air. Mia was proud of her dog for swimming, but he was a mess. At home, Dad had to scrub him in the tub with soapy water.

1. chilly
2. autumn
3. pond
4. dew

5 sparkled

6 herd

7 shore

8 decision

9 patient

10 disappear

11 galloped

12 muddy

13 burst

14 proud

15 scrub

16 soapy

First grade story: The Lost Kitten

Read the story once - the words in bold are the ones being asked about. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means. The story

Ben was drowsy on the couch when he heard a whimper outside. He went to investigate. Under the porch was a timid kitten, drenched from the rain and shaking. Ben was nervous, but he spoke softly so he would not startle it. He brought a bundle of towels and a dish of milk. The kitten nibbled a little, then crept out. Ben was delighted. Mom said they could keep it if nobody claimed it, and Ben promised to feed it daily.

17 drowsy

18 whimper

19 investigate

20 timid

21 drenched

22 nervous

23 startle

24 bundle

25 nibbled

26 delighted

27 promised

28 daily

Second grade story: The Telescope

Read the story once - the words in bold are the ones being asked about. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means. The story

Leo was curious about the stars, so Grandpa set up his old telescope in the evening, when the sky went dark. "Let us observe Jupiter," Grandpa said. Leo gazed through it and gasped. He could see tiny moons! Grandpa explained that gravity keeps the moons going round and round in a cycle. Leo made a prediction: the moons would be in a different place tomorrow. He was right. He wrote it all down in his data notebook, and his teacher put it on the classroom banner with the label "Our Scholar."

29 curious

30 telescope

31 evening

32 observe

33 gazed

34 gasped

35 tiny

36 gravity

37 cycle

38 prediction

39 data

40 banner

41 label

42 scholar

Third grade story: The Turtle Crossing

Read the story once - the words in bold are the ones being asked about. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means. The story

Every spring the turtles in our town make a slow journey from the pond to the sandy field to lay eggs. The road is in the way, and a fox is a predator that waits by the field for the eggs. Our class did a survey and found that most residents did not know. So we made signs with a turtle symbol and persuaded the mayor to put up a signal light. Some people said it was ridiculous. But the outcome was a triumph: this year, not one turtle was hurt. Ms. Ruiz said we had used a good method: find the problem, then find a solution.

43 journey

44 predator

45 survey

46 residents

47 symbol

48 persuaded

49 signal

50 ridiculous

51 outcome

52 triumph

53 method

54 solution

Fourth grade story: The Frozen Orchard

Read the story once - the words in bold are the ones being asked about. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means. The story

A severe frost was coming, and Grandma's orchard was full of fragile blossoms. "If they freeze, there will be no apples this year," she said. We were frantic. Then Dad had an idea. He said heat rises, so if we lit small fires between the rows, the warm air would ascend and protect the blossoms. We worked until dusk, and then all night, weary but eager. At dawn the evidence was obvious: the blossoms were fine. Grandma said it was an extraordinary thing to accomplish, and that fall the harvest was plentiful.

55 severe

56 orchard

57 fragile

58 frantic

59 ascend

60 dusk

61 weary

62 eager

63 evidence

64 obvious

65 extraordinary

66 accomplish

67 plentiful

Fifth grade story: The Summit

Read the story once - the words in bold are the ones being asked about. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means. The story

Maya's class had trained for a decade, it felt like, but it was really only two months. Now they stood at the base of the mountain in the frigid dawn. "The altitude will make you tired," Ms. Okafor said. "Go cautiously." Halfway up, Jonah wanted to cease and go back. Maya was his companion and would not leave him. "You are more reliable than you think," she told him. Their strategy was simple: ten steps, then rest. When they reached the summit, the view was immense and the jubilation was loud enough to start an avalanche, Jonah joked. It was a significant day.

68 decade

69 frigid

70 altitude

71 cautiously

72 cease

73 companion

74 reliable

75 strategy

76 summit

77 immense

78 jubilation

79 avalanche

80 significant

Sixth grade story: The Sanctuary

Read the story once - the words in bold are the ones being asked about. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means. The story

The wetland behind the school was going to be paved into a parking lot. Our class was reluctant to let that happen. We found out it was a habitat for a heron that is nearly extinct in our state. We collaborated on a report: the diversity of species, the chronological record of floods the marsh had soaked up, the hazardous runoff it filtered. At the meeting, Priya was concise and resolute. The vote to make it a sanctuary was unanimous. It was, Ms. Lee said, an ingenious piece of work.

81 reluctant

82 habitat

83 extinct

84 collaborated

85 diversity

86 chronological

87 hazardous

88 concise

89 resolute

90 sanctuary

91 unanimous

92 ingenious

Seventh grade story: The Debut

Read the story once - the words in bold are the ones being asked about. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means. The story

Sam's band had its debut at the spring fair, and he was distraught about it for a week. The drummer was capricious, the singer was never punctual, and the equipment was rudimentary. "You can compromise, or you can dawdle and miss it," his sister said. So Sam took charge: he allocated one job to each person and emphasized the two songs they could play well. The crowd was exuberant. Nobody perceived the flaw in the second chorus. Afterwards a teacher said the band was formidable, which Sam pondered all the way home.

93 debut

94 distraught

95 capricious

96 punctual

97 rudimentary

98 compromise

99 dawdle

100 allocated

101 emphasized

102 exuberant

103 perceived

104 flaw

105 formidable

106 pondered

Eighth grade story: The Novice

Read the story once - the words in bold are the ones being asked about. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means. The story

Amara was a novice at chess, and her first tournament was imminent. Her coach was meticulous: every evening they replayed games until the openings were no longer an enigma. "It is feasible to win," he said, "if you stay serene." Her first opponent was an avid player with an intricate, audacious style. Amara found it tedious to defend for an hour, but she was resilient. When his opening went awry, she discerned the weak spot and won. The result validated every long evening.

107 novice

108 imminent

109 meticulous

110 enigma

111 feasible

112 serene

113 avid

114 intricate

115 audacious

116 tedious

117 resilient

118 awry

119 discerned

120 validated

Ninth grade story: The Debate

Read the story once - the words in bold are the ones being asked about. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means. The story

Nadia had been ambivalent about joining the debate team, but a dearth of members made it easy to say yes. Her first motion was hypothetical - a city with no cars - and her adversary was a cynic with a cursory grasp of the facts. Nadia kept her tone level and let the evidence do the work. When he tried to distort her point, she asked him to verify it. He faltered. The judges called her rationale credible and her closing pertinent. Her elation on the bus home was, she admitted, not prudent to show quite so loudly.

121 ambivalent

122 dearth

123 hypothetical

124 adversary

125 cynic

126 cursory

127 distort

128 verify

129 faltered

130 rationale

131 credible

132 pertinent

133 elation

134 prudent

Tenth grade story: The Coalition

Read the story once - the words in bold are the ones being asked about. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means. The story

The plan to close the neighborhood library looked settled, and the response was tumult. A coalition formed: retirees, parents, a few recalcitrant teenagers who never admitted they used it. The board's reasoning was tenuous and its numbers, on inspection, quantitative fiction. Marcus was assiduous with the records and found the disparity between the stated cost and the real one. The board tried to expedite the vote; the coalition circumvented that with a petition. In retrospect, the fortuitous part was a lax clerk who forgot to file the closure notice, which precluded it entirely.

135 tumult

136 coalition

137 recalcitrant

138 tenuous

139 quantitative

140 assiduous

141 disparity

142 expedite

143 circumvented

144 retrospect

145 fortuitous

146 lax

147 precluded

Eleventh grade story: The Editor

Read the story once - the words in bold are the ones being asked about. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means. The story

The school paper's new adviser was didactic and the old staff were incorrigible, so the first meeting was an altercation. Lena, the editor, kept her composure. She surmised that both sides wanted the same thing and proposed a conciliatory rule: every claim gets substantiated before print. The adviser called it judicious; the staff called it grueling. By spring the paper had won an accolade, and the adviser, cognizant of who had done the work, made an unobtrusive exit from the front page.

148 didactic

149 incorrigible

150 altercation

151 composure

152 surmised

153 conciliatory

154 substantiated

155 judicious

156 grueling

157 accolade

158 cognizant

159 unobtrusive

Twelfth grade story: The Commencement

Read the story once - the words in bold are the ones being asked about. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means. The story

The commencement speaker was a venerable judge whose camaraderie with the graduates was, at first, surreptitious: she had sat in the back of their debate finals for four years. Her speech avoided hackneyed advice. She told an anecdote about her own precocious, mercurial first year and the extenuating circumstances that exculpated her later. "Prosperity is transient," she said. "Integrity is not." It was restrained, tactful and, the students agreed, not superfluous.

160 venerable

161 camaraderie

162 surreptitious

163 hackneyed

164 anecdote

165 precocious
166 mercurial
167 extenuating
168 exculpated
169 prosperity
170 transient
171 integrity
172 restrained
173 tactful
174 superfluous

Answer Key

Kindergarten story: The Muddy Pond

1. a little bit cold
2. the season after summer, when leaves fall
3. a small lake
4. little drops of water on the grass in the morning
5. to shine with little flashes of light
6. a group of animals together
7. the land at the edge of the sea or a lake
8. what you choose to do
9. able to wait without getting upset
10. to go out of sight
11. the fastest way a horse runs
12. covered in mud
13. to break open all at once
14. pleased about something you did
15. to rub hard to get something clean
16. full of soap

First grade story: The Lost Kitten

17. sleepy
18. a small crying sound
19. to look closely to find out
20. shy and easily scared
21. soaking wet
22. worried and a little scared
23. to surprise someone suddenly
24. a group of things tied together
25. to take tiny bites
26. very happy
27. to say you will really do something
28. every day

Second grade story: The Telescope

29. wanting to know
30. a tool that makes far-away things look close
31. the end of the day, before night
32. to watch carefully
33. to look at something for a long time
34. a quick breath in when you are surprised
35. very small
36. the pull that makes things fall down
37. something that happens over and over in the same order
38. to say what will happen before it does
39. facts and numbers you collect
40. a big sign or flag
41. a tag that says what something is
42. someone who studies and knows a lot

Third grade story: The Turtle Crossing

43. a long trip
44. an animal that hunts other animals

45. to ask lots of people questions
46. someone who lives in a place
47. a picture that stands for something
48. to talk someone into something
49. a sign that tells you something
50. very silly
51. how something ends up
52. a great win
53. a way of doing something
54. the answer to a problem

Fourth grade story: The Frozen Orchard

55. very bad or strict
56. a field of fruit trees
57. easily broken
58. wild with worry
59. to go up
60. the time when it starts getting dark
61. very tired
62. really wanting to
63. facts that show something is true
64. easy to see or understand
65. very unusual and amazing
66. to finish something well
67. lots

Fifth grade story: The Summit

68. ten years
69. very cold
70. height above the ground
71. carefully
72. to stop
73. a friend who goes with you
74. can be counted on
75. a plan for winning
76. the top of a mountain
77. very large
78. great joy
79. a huge slide of snow down a mountain
80. important

Sixth grade story: The Sanctuary

81. not wanting to
82. where an animal naturally lives
83. no longer existing
84. to work together
85. variety
86. in time order
87. dangerous
88. short and to the point
89. determined
90. a safe place
91. everyone agreeing
92. very clever

Seventh grade story: The Debut

93. a first appearance
94. very upset
95. changing suddenly for no reason
96. on time
97. basic; not developed
98. each side gives up something to agree
99. to waste time
100. to set aside for a purpose
101. to stress as important
102. full of energy and joy
103. to notice or understand
104. a fault
105. impressive and a little frightening
106. to think deeply

Eighth grade story: The Novice

107. a beginner
108. about to happen
109. extremely careful
110. a mystery
111. possible to do
112. calm and peaceful
113. eager and enthusiastic
114. very detailed and complex
115. bold and daring
116. long and boring
117. able to bounce back
118. gone wrong
119. to see or understand clearly
120. to confirm as true

Ninth grade story: The Debate

121. having mixed feelings
122. a shortage
123. supposed; imagined for argument
124. an opponent
125. someone who believes people act only from self-interest
126. quick and not thorough
127. to twist out of shape or truth
128. to check that something is true
129. to hesitate or stumble
130. the reasons behind something
131. believable
132. relevant
133. great happiness
134. sensible and careful about the future

Tenth grade story: The Coalition

135. uproar
136. an alliance for combined action
137. stubbornly uncooperative
138. weak; slight
139. relating to amount
140. showing great care and persistence
141. a great difference
142. to speed up
143. to find a way around
144. looking back on the past
145. happening by lucky chance
146. not strict enough
147. to prevent

Eleventh grade story: The Editor

148. intended to teach, often too much so
149. not able to be corrected
150. a noisy argument
151. calmness

152. to guess
153. intended to make peace
154. to provide evidence for
155. showing good judgment
156. exhausting
157. an award or praise
158. aware
159. not conspicuous

Twelfth grade story: The Commencement

160. worthy of respect due to age or wisdom
161. friendship among a group
162. secret; stealthy
163. overused; trite
164. a short, interesting story
165. developed early
166. changing suddenly and unpredictably
167. making an offense less serious
168. to clear of blame
169. wealth and success
170. passing quickly
171. honesty and strong principles
172. controlled
173. considerate in dealing with others
174. unnecessary