

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.

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". 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 recognises 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. 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. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means - the choices are there for a child who reads, and the story starts with the word.

On a chilly autumn morning, Mia and her dog went down to the pond. Dew sparkled on the grass. A herd of ducks paddled along the shore. 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. dew
4. sparkled
5. herd
6. shore

7. decision
8. patient
9. disappear
10. galloped
11. burst
12. proud
13. scrub
14. soapy

First grade story: The Lost Kitten

Read the story once. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means - the choices are there for a child who reads, and the story starts

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.

15. drowsy
16. whimper
17. investigate
18. timid
19. drenched
20. nervous
21. startle
22. bundle
23. nibbled

24. delighted

25. promised

26. daily

Second grade story: The Telescope

Read the story once. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means - the choices are there for a child who reads, and the story starts

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."

27. curious

28. telescope

29. evening

30. observe

31. gazed

32. gasped

33. tiny

34. gravity

35. cycle

36. prediction

37. data

38. banner

39. label

40. scholar

Third grade story: The Turtle Crossing

Read the story once. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means - the choices are there for a child who reads, and the story sta

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 cars are a predator they cannot outrun. 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.

- 41. journey
- 42. predator
- 43. survey
- 44. residents
- 45. symbol
- 46. persuaded
- 47. signal
- 48. ridiculous
- 49. outcome
- 50. triumph
- 51. method
- 52. solution

Fourth grade story: The Frozen Orchard

Read the story once. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means - the choices are there for a child who reads, and the story sta

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.

- 53. severe
- 54. orchard
- 55. fragile
- 56. frantic
- 57. ascend
- 58. dusk
- 59. weary
- 60. eager
- 61. evidence
- 62. obvious
- 63. extraordinary
- 64. accomplish
- 65. plentiful

Fifth grade story: The Summit

Read the story once. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means - the choices are there for a child who reads, and the story starts

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.

- 66. decade
- 67. frigid
- 68. altitude

- 69. cautiously
- 70. cease
- 71. companion
- 72. reliable
- 73. strategy
- 74. summit
- 75. immense
- 76. jubilation
- 77. avalanche
- 78. significant

Sixth grade story: The Sanctuary

Read the story once. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means - the choices are there for a child who reads, and the story starts

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.

- 79. reluctant
- 80. habitat
- 81. extinct
- 82. collaborated
- 83. diversity
- 84. chronological
- 85. hazardous

- 86. concise
- 87. resolute
- 88. sanctuary
- 89. unanimous
- 90. ingenious

Seventh grade story: The Debut

Read the story once. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means - the choices are there for a child who reads, and the story starts

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 the initiative: 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.

- 91. debut
- 92. distraught
- 93. capricious
- 94. punctual
- 95. rudimentary
- 96. compromise
- 97. dawdle
- 98. allocated
- 99. emphasized
- 100. exuberant
- 101. perceived

102. flaw

103. formidable

104. pondered

Eighth grade story: The Novice

Read the story once. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means - the choices are there for a child who reads, and the story starts

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 go after went awry, she discerned the opening and won. The result validated every long evening.

105. novice

106. imminent

107. meticulous

108. enigma

109. feasible

110. serene

111. avid

112. intricate

113. audacious

114. tedious

115. resilient

116. awry

117. discerned

118. validated

Ninth grade story: The Debate

Read the story once. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means - the choices are there for a child who reads, and the story sta

Nadia had been ambivalent about joining the debate team, but a dearth of members made her mandatory. Her first motion was hypothetical - a city with no cars - and her opponent was a cynic with a cursory grasp of the facts. Nadia stayed impartial in tone 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 impartial at all.

119. ambivalent

120. dearth

121. mandatory

122. hypothetical

123. cynic

124. cursory

125. impartial

126. distort

127. verify

128. faltered

129. rationale

130. credible

131. pertinent

132. elation

Tenth grade story: The Coalition

Read the story once. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means - the choices are there for a child who reads, and the story sta

The plan to close the neighborhood library seemed imminent, 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.

- 133. imminent
- 134. tumult
- 135. coalition
- 136. recalcitrant
- 137. tenuous
- 138. quantitative
- 139. assiduous
- 140. disparity
- 141. expedite
- 142. circumvented
- 143. retrospect
- 144. fortuitous
- 145. lax
- 146. precluded

Eleventh grade story: The Editor

Read the story once. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means - the choices are there for a child who reads, and the story sta

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 exemplary; 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.

- 147. didactic
- 148. incorrigible
- 149. altercation
- 150. composure
- 151. surmised
- 152. conciliatory
- 153. substantiated
- 154. exemplary
- 155. grueling
- 156. accolade
- 157. cognizant
- 158. unobtrusive

Twelfth grade story: The Commencement

Read the story once. Then tap each word and have the child say what it means - the choices are there for a child who reads, and the story starts

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, impetuous first year and the extenuating circumstances that vindicated her later. "Prosperity is transient," she said. "Integrity is not." It was restrained, prudent and, the students agreed with some jubilation, not superfluous.

- 159. venerable

160. camaraderie

161. surreptitious

162. hackneyed

163. anecdote

164. precocious

165. impetuous

166. extenuating

167. vindicated

168. prosperity

169. transient

170. integrity

171. restrained

172. prudent

173. jubilation

174. superfluous

Answer Key

Kindergarten story: The Muddy Pond

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

First grade story: The Lost Kitten

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

Second grade story: The Telescope

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

Third grade story: The Turtle Crossing

41. a long trip
42. an animal that hunts other animals
43. to ask lots of people questions
44. someone who lives in a place
45. a picture that stands for something
46. to talk someone into something
47. a sign that tells you something
48. very silly
49. how something ends up
50. a great win
51. a way of doing something
52. the answer to a problem

Fourth grade story: The Frozen Orchard

- 53. very bad or strict
- 54. a field of fruit trees
- 55. easily broken
- 56. wild with worry
- 57. to go up
- 58. the time when it starts getting dark
- 59. very tired

Fifth grade story: The Summit

- 66. ten years
- 67. very cold
- 68. height above the ground
- 69. carefully
- 70. to stop
- 71. a friend who goes with you
- 72. can be counted on

Sixth grade story: The Sanctuary

- 79. not wanting to
- 80. where an animal naturally lives
- 81. no longer existing
- 82. to work together
- 83. variety
- 84. in time order

Seventh grade story: The Debut

- 91. a first appearance
- 92. very upset
- 93. changing suddenly for no reason
- 94. on time
- 95. basic; not developed
- 96. each side gives up something to agree
- 97. to waste time

Eighth grade story: The Novice

- 105. a beginner
- 106. about to happen
- 107. extremely careful
- 108. a mystery
- 109. possible to do
- 110. calm and peaceful
- 111. eager and enthusiastic

- 60. really wanting to
- 61. facts that show something is true
- 62. easy to see or understand
- 63. very unusual and amazing
- 64. to finish something well
- 65. lots

- 73. a plan for winning
- 74. the top of a mountain
- 75. very large
- 76. great joy
- 77. a huge slide of snow down a mountain
- 78. important

- 85. dangerous
- 86. short and to the point
- 87. determined
- 88. a safe place
- 89. everyone agreeing
- 90. very clever

- 98. to set aside for a purpose
- 99. to stress as important
- 100. full of energy and joy
- 101. to notice or understand
- 102. a fault
- 103. impressive and a little frightening
- 104. to think deeply

- 112. very detailed and complex
- 113. bold and daring
- 114. long and boring
- 115. able to bounce back
- 116. gone wrong
- 117. to see or understand clearly
- 118. to confirm as true

Ninth grade story: The Debate

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

Tenth grade story: The Coalition

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

Eleventh grade story: The Editor

- 147. intended to teach, often too much so
- 148. not able to be corrected
- 149. a noisy argument
- 150. calmness
- 151. to guess
- 152. intended to make peace
- 153. to provide evidence for
- 154. serving as a model
- 155. exhausting
- 156. an award or praise
- 157. aware
- 158. not conspicuous

Twelfth grade story: The Commencement

- 159. worthy of respect due to age or wisdom
- 160. friendship among a group
- 161. secret; stealthy
- 162. overused; trite
- 163. a short, interesting story
- 164. developed early
- 165. acting without thinking
- 166. making an offense less serious
- 167. to clear of blame
- 168. wealth and success
- 169. passing quickly
- 170. honesty and strong principles
- 171. controlled
- 172. careful and wise
- 173. rejoicing
- 174. unnecessary