

## Teaching Definition

**Key Stage 1: 1a) Draw on knowledge of vocabulary to understand texts.**

**Key Stage 2: 2a) Define: Give/explain the meaning of words in context.**

The verb 'define' is the root word of the noun 'definition', which itself means to state the exact meaning of a word, typically used in a dictionary.

*When we define something we can:*

- 1. state or describe exactly the nature, scope, or meaning of something.*
- 2. give the meaning of a word or phrase.*
- 3. make up or establish the character or essence of someone/thing.*

Oxford Dictionary, 2019.

However, there is more to the skill than just being able to provide a dictionary definition. Within KS1, children must be able to *draw on vocabulary to understand texts*. Within KS2, children must be able to *give/explain the meaning of words in context*.

National Curriculum, 2014.

To achieve a full understanding of any new vocabulary, it is important that children understand the words they encounter within the context in which they appear. By developing this skill, children will be able to make links between words they recognise and those they don't, using the word's context to help them interpret its meaning.

Teaching how to define words or phrases needs to be both explicit and implicit.

Explicit teaching is useful in a Guided Reading pre-read session. Prior to the session teachers may identify vocabulary that they predict children will find challenging, perhaps because it is very specific to the text or subject. Children will need to learn the meaning of these words in advance to enable them to gain an overall comprehension of the text. This can be achieved by presenting a word in multiple different contexts to construct meaning.

Implicit instruction would be where teachers model using techniques to check and consolidate the understanding of words as they are reading, using specific defining skills to identify the meaning.



## The skill

There are a number of skills that come under the umbrella of definition. Often, readers will use a variety of these when reading day to day material to interpret meaning. It is important that the skills are modelled by the teacher first, before the children practise and apply them throughout a range of different texts.

Pupils should be given age-appropriate texts, with the degree of challenge appropriately pitched, to ensure they can read and successfully apply these skills. Chosen texts need a range of challenging tier 2 vocabulary to facilitate practise and application.

## The strategies:

There are a number of strategies that can be used to support children with understanding new vocabulary. Each skill will need modelling and children then given the opportunity to practise and apply these skills through a range of contexts. They should also be encouraged to use these skills across the curriculum and in everyday reading.

### 1. Context clues

There are sometimes words or phrases that provide clues as to the meaning of an unfamiliar word within the same or adjacent sentences. Often children will be able to get a general feel for the context from the surrounding information and are able to make an educated guess - something experienced readers do naturally. Generally, however, authors are not taking into consideration different reading abilities. They have selected language for effect and are writing for a purpose. This can become confusing for an inexperienced reader as sentences can lack any context clues. Teachers should only model or direct children to this skill if the words are within a helpful context.

#### **Example:**

**Question:** When Jenny found out that her sister had carelessly smashed her phone screen, Jenny was vexed and let her sister know it.

**Answer:** If someone carelessly smashes something, it means that they did it casually and without caring. Phones can often be quite expensive, so vexed might mean that she is really annoyed about the situation.



## a. Definition

Sometimes the author provides the exact definition of an unfamiliar word within the sentence or elsewhere in the text.

### **Example:**

A terrapin is a reptile which has a thick shell covering its body and which lives partly in water and partly on land.

Definitions of words within the sentence context can be found on Collins online Cobuild dictionary - [www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english](http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english)

Another example of this is where the definition is placed after the word and separated by commas:

### **Example:**

In the winter you can see icicles, long pointed pieces of ice, hanging from guttering.

## b. Substitution

Teaching children that unfamiliar words can sometimes be substituted by others with a similar meaning, will help them check their understanding of new vocabulary. It is important to allow children to explore possible synonyms for original words, to enable them to make links between meanings. Teaching them that synonyms are words that have a similar (but not the same) meaning as the original word will allow them to replace a word in a sentence with another. They can then check if the sentence still makes sense, allowing links to be made between words and their meanings through the use of synonyms, helping them make an educated guess about the meaning of the original word.

### **Example:**

The ground had not received rain for months and was thirsty and dry. It was so parched that it had also cracked.

Key words – likewise, also, too, similarly, same, like.



## c. Antonym

Sometimes the author might use two words within a sentence that have opposite meanings and this can help children infer meaning. The use of the conjunction helps children understand that the meanings are opposite.

### Example:

I thought the lion would be fierce, however it turned out to be quite tame.

Key words – but, however, though, unlike

## d. Etymology/Morphology

This is the study of the origin of words. Understanding how words are formed and their relationship with other words will strengthen a child's vocabulary by enabling them to make links, allowing them to infer a word's meaning. Knowing a word's root will help them understand the meaning of other words with a similar root. It is important that children are taught the meaning of root words, prefixes and suffixes and their impact on the meaning of a word. Children should learn where words originated from and how to modify their meaning.

**Prefixes and suffixes** – the author uses prefixes and suffixes to alter the meaning of familiar root words.

### Example:

He could rebuild the bridge - rebuild has the prefix 're' which means to do again. The root word is 'build' so it means to build again.

**Root words** – can be identified within words to help identify its meaning.

### Example:

What is Cardiology? 'Cardio' means relating to the heart and 'ology' means 'the study of', so it must mean the study of the heart.

# Define



## 2. Categorise

To enable children to gain a deeper level of understanding of vocabulary and to be able to make secure links, they need to be able to categorise vocabulary and draw upon prior knowledge. This needs to be developed across the curriculum to gain a wide range of vocabulary.

### **Example:**

Knowing that 'Jupiter' and 'Saturn' are both planets, or 'exhilaration' and 'enthusiasm' are both feelings of excitement will help them understand links within their vocabulary and their importance.



## Skills ladders

Use the skills ladders for KS1 and KS2 to support children to use their defining knowledge when discussing texts.

### Key Stage 1

Identify the word.
Identify what you need to do. E.g. find a synonym, find and copy, find the meaning
Read the word aloud.
Read the word in the sentence or sentences.
Choose and use a strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use context clues</li><li>• Think about the word group</li><li>• Try a synonym</li><li>• Chunk the word</li></ul>
Decide on the meaning or word(s).
Check your choice makes sense.

<h1>Define</h1>	
	<b>1a</b> Draw on knowledge of vocabulary to understand texts

# Define



## Key Stage 2:

Identify the word.

Identify what you need to do.

E.g. find a synonym, find and copy, find the meaning

Read the word aloud.

Read the word in the sentence or sentences.

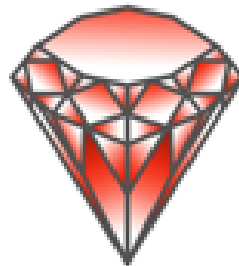
Choose and use a strategy:

- Use context clues
- Categorise
- Substitute a synonym
- Use etymology
- Make an inference

Decide on the meaning or word(s).

Check your choice makes sense in the context.

# Define



**2a**

Give/explain the meaning of words in context



## Activities

The following activities will support children to embed how to define new vocabulary when exposed to it within texts.

- Heads up (new vocabulary on heads)
- Charades
- Make glossaries/ encyclopaedia entries
- Act it out (mime)
- Word arrays – take 2 words from the word pot. Children to try to connect words.
- Word clouds, e.g. [www.wordle.net](http://www.wordle.net)
- Action – acting out the word in pairs, groups or altogether.
- Song or Rap
- Spell it out song - give me a... give me a... give me a... what does it spell?
- Word rap – say the word... clap the word... read the word... act the word... shout the word... whisper the word
- Eye Spy
- Games such as Scrabble, Bananagrams, word bingo
- Scavenger Hunt
- Word pairs – same, opposite, similar or unrelated
- Word relay – shout out definition/context, students discuss, shout out 'word' and one child from the team goes to the front to find the word from a group.
- Anagrams
- Odd one out
- Pairs (synonyms or word and definition)
- Riddles
- Pictionary
- Guess who?
- Taboo
- Ordering/scale/vocabulary ranking/word cline
- Matching, dominoes
- Sort the words – similar/not similar in meaning to...
- Zone of relevance
- Make word association maps
- Play Pointless, Scattegories, Word Bingo
- What's the same, what's different?
- Morphology and etymology (exploring the make-up and meanings of parts of words)
- Draw a picture of a character or setting after reading description (or wanted poster)

@templarwilson



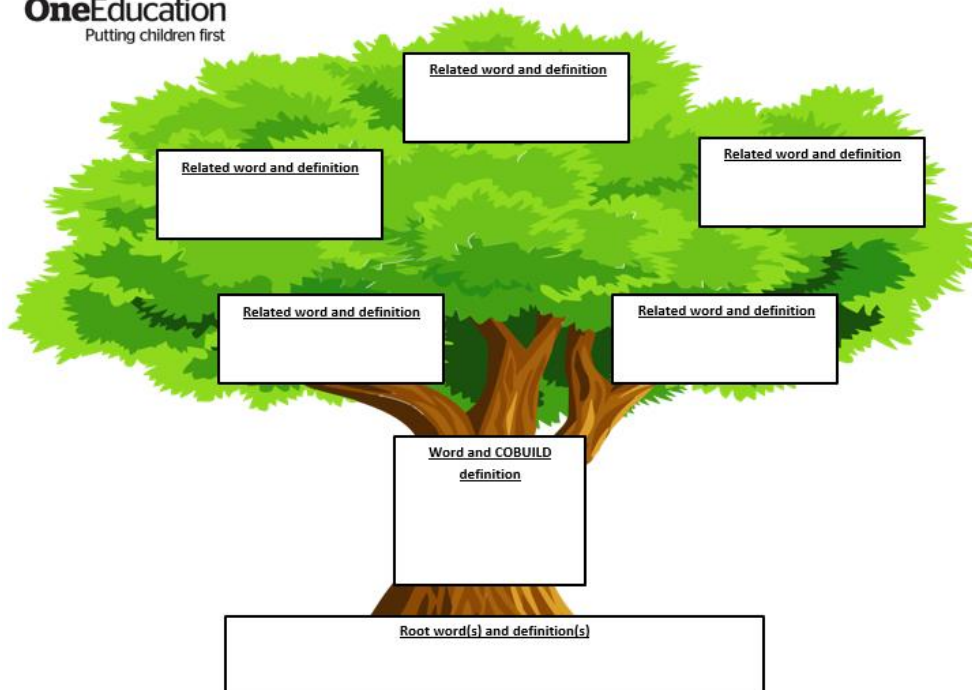


## Skill: Word families

- **Use of root words to explore other vocabulary:** Children can investigate root words and explore the meanings of words within the same word family. This can create links to a much wider breadth of vocabulary and support in understanding unfamiliar words they come across.



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## Skill: Synonyms

Exploring synonyms and words with familiar meanings can develop children's vocabulary. Using resources such as 'shade of meaning', 'word arrays' and 'zones of relevance' can not only increase their exposure to new words developing comprehension, but can also support their understanding of language precision and authors' choices.

- **Shade of meaning:** children write down synonyms in order of strength or relevance. ([www.pinterest.co.uk](http://www.pinterest.co.uk))

good	nice	bad	walked	sad	happy
super	lovely	nasty	crept	upset	glad
pleasant	likeable	mean	tiptoed	gloomy	joyful
brilliant	gracious	lousy	marched	somber	merry
excellent	pleasing	terrible	strutted	depressed	thrilled
amazing	admirable	unpleasant	shuffled	Miserable	delighted
marvellous	courteous	disagreeable	trudged	paraded	ecstatic
terrific	congenial	wretched			elated
scared	pretty	said			
afraid	cute	stated			
shaken	lovely	whispered			
spooked	beautiful	announced			
aghast	gorgeous	boasted			
horrified	exquisite	declared			
petrified	stunning	remarked			
terrified	dazzling	exclaimed			

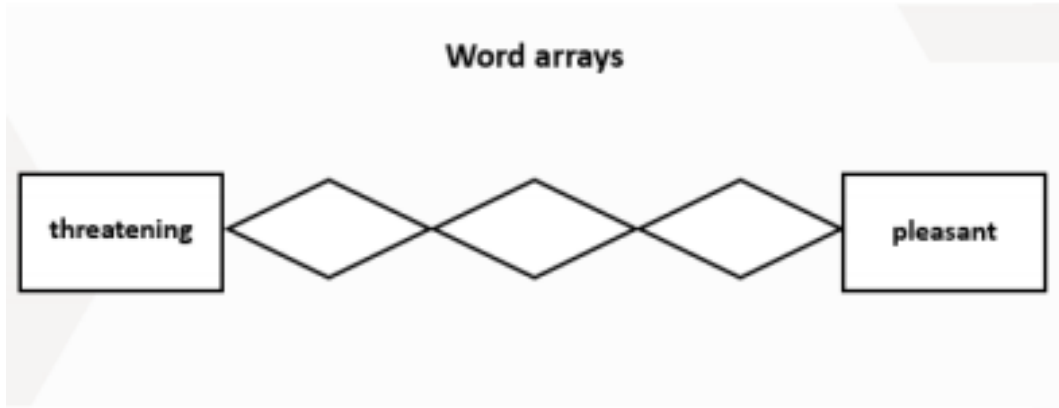
- **Zone of relevance:** children record vocabulary within 'zones'. The more relevant vocabulary should be in the middle in the smallest circle. The less relevant the word, the further the word is placed away from the centre.



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- **Word arrays:** children should start with the word on the left and aim to travel to the antonym on the right by choosing near synonyms to develop a scale of words turning from one meaning to the other.



- **Thesaurus work:** find synonyms using a thesaurus. This can be great for pre-teaching guided reading.

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Vocabulary Pre-teaching

Use a dictionary to find the meanings of the words in bold. Use a thesaurus to find synonyms for these words. Draw an icon for the word to help you remember the meaning.

The First World War, often called The Great War, was an enormous and **devastating** event in the early 1900s.

devastating <i>shaking and extremely upsetting</i>	→ <i>overwhelming</i> → <i>overpowering</i> → <i>cutting</i>	
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In most places, wealth was growing and people were comfortable and countries were **thriving**.

thriving <i>prosperous</i> <i>flourishing or prospering</i>	→ <i>prosperous</i> → <i>successful</i> → <i>glourishing</i>	
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Before the First World War, many countries were allies with one another and they had defence **treaties**.

treaties <i>signed contracts between states</i>	→ <i>alliances</i> → <i>pacts</i> → <i>contracts</i>	
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Germany declared war on Russia, and then, on 3rd August 1914, they declared war on France.

declared <i>announced officially</i>	→ <i>announced</i> → <i>proclaimed</i> → <i>offered</i>	
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# Define



**Skill: Definition:** When learning the meaning of new vocabulary, children need to see these words repetitively. Activities such as 'match up', 'pictowords' and 'spin the wheel' can really help embed understanding.

- **Match-up:** match up the word with its relevant picture.



- **Pictowords:** children write the word in a chosen font, size, shape, style and colour that matches its meaning.



<http://ashleyviola.pbworks.com/>

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# Define

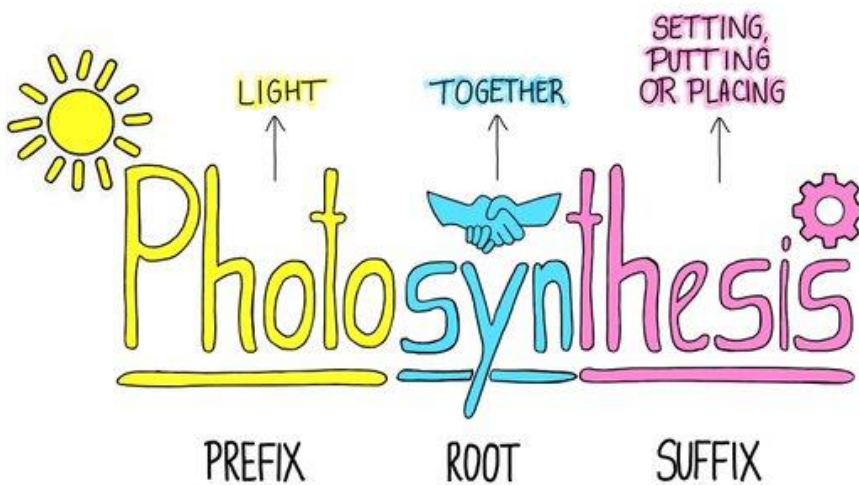


- **Spin the wheel:** Children spin the wheel and follow the instructions for a new word they have learnt.



<http://eisforexplore.blogspot.com/>

- **Skill: Etymology/morphology:** teaching children where words originate from and how prefixes and suffixes can change meanings is a powerful way of opening up the key to a wider bank of vocabulary. Children should explore the meanings of the syntax and make links.



@BTeachbio

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# Define



**Skill: Application:** whilst learning new words and their meanings, it is important for children to apply this knowledge.

- **Word mat:** Children have the chance to explore a word in depth, look at synonyms, antonyms, morphology, using it in sentences and drawing it.

<p>Use it in my own sentence</p> <p>The man was very noticeable because he was extremely tall.</p>	<p>Word</p> <p>Noticeable</p>	<p>Word detective</p> <p>notice - to see something or hear something able - can do something notable - important/interesting note - something to write down notorious - something/someone who's known for something bad. not - from latin 'notus' meaning 'known'</p>
<p>It is... (my examples)</p> <p>In the playground, the mural is noticeable because it's big. At home my room is noticeable because it's the only one with blue wallpaper.</p>	<p>COBUILD definition</p> <p>Something that is noticeable is very obvious, so that it's easy to see, hear or recognise.</p>	
<p>It isn't (my non-examples)</p> <p>A tiny ant is not very noticeable.</p>	<p>Image</p>	<p>Synonyms</p> <p>obvious clear striking</p> <p>Antonyms</p> <p>hidden inconspicuous</p>

- **Words in different contexts:** children pose problems using words or create different sentences where their contexts are altered and they need to use synonyms, conjunctions, cause and effect and solutions.

**We need to be able to make a judgement about progress.**

**'Because, But, So', e.g.**

Millie was infallible because...

Millie was infallible but...

Millie was infallible so...

Hochman (2017) and Needham (2018)

<https://tomneedhamteach.wordpress.com/2018/02/21/lexical-vocabulary-inching-3-because-but-so/>

**Posing problems, e.g.**

Are you infallible if you lose your coat?

Beck (2005)

Describe how someone acts that shows...

Tell me about a time when you were...

Describe some things that could make a person feel...

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## Questioning

It is important for teachers to read extracts prior to the lesson to identify and select specific vocabulary that they want pupils to discuss and define. Questions about definition would normally include words or phrases such as:

- what does the word suggest?
- tell us
- define the word
- synonym
- meaning
- means
- describes
- the same as

It is likely that questions that assess children's understanding of vocabulary will only require one piece of information for the answer. However, the answer will not always be literally within the text, children will be expected to draw upon their knowledge of a wider vocabulary, often having to recall synonyms to help identify meaning. They may also be expected to use more than one reading skill, such as inference, in order to provide the correct response. Therefore, they may need experience of this beforehand.

### Graphic response formats:

'Defining' questions are sometimes represented in different formats. Often, they require a short response, such as 'find and copy one word' and this will need additional teacher modelling. Other times they are written in a tick box or 'matching' format.

35 ...it **dawned on me** that the dice ought to belong to a game...

Which of the following is closest in meaning to *dawned on me* as it is used here?

Tick one.

- |                     |                          |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| began to worry me   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| became clear to me  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| made me feel better | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| puzzled me          | <input type="checkbox"/> |

22 She came. And I still **vividly recall**...

What do the words *vividly recall* mean?

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### The quality of answers expected:

Questions should be clear and require an accurate or specific answer. If the question requests the pupil to 'write one word' then this is the expected outcome and anything else should be deemed incorrect.