Activity

GOBBLEDYGOOK, GIBBERISH, TOMMYROT AND TWADDLE

Make up believable definitions for five nonsense words then challenge yourself to use them in a short piece of writing. Fool your family and friends!

What should I do?

Explore a dictionary

If you have a physical (book) copy of a dictionary, go get it! There are lots of online dictionaries available, however, and we'll be looking at some of these. Collins' is not specifically for children, but we think it's pretty good: https://www.collinsdictionary.com/.

Others you could try include Cambridge Dictionary (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/), Oxford Learner's Dictionaries (https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/), Kids Wordsmyth (https://kids.wordsmyth.net/we/), and Wikipedia lists even more - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_online_dictionaries.

You might like to make some comparisons between electronic and hard copies of dictionaries – what are the pros and cons of each?

Get to know your way around the dictionaries you've chosen to use by looking up the following words in at least two different ones. Then explain your definition to someone else:

- definition
- etymology
- pronunciation
- derivation
- origin

(Make sure you look at the UK English spellings rather than US.)

As you browse the dictionaries, and maybe even a thesaurus too, keep a note of any unusual words that you discover and like. You can use these later in your writing.

Read others' nonsense words

The English language is always changing and developing and, throughout history, lots of authors have invented new words that we now consider familiar.

You may already know some of the wonderful words that Roald Dahl created in his books: remember whizzpoppers, biffsquiggled and huggybee from The BFG? See 10 more of his Gobblefunk words on this BBC Newsround page: https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/36405434.

Perhaps the most famous use of nonsense words is in Lewis Carroll's poem from *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* – 'Jabberwocky'. You can read it online here on the Poetry Foundation's website: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42916/jabberwocky

After reading, why not have a go at making up definitions for the following?

brillig	slithy	gyre
toves	mimsy	gimble
wabe	mome	outgrabe
borogoves		
raths		

What's incredible about this is that although this is completely made up language, you can probably still work out which words are acting as verbs and which nouns or adjectives, and so will have some idea of what might be going on! What is it that gives you the clues to this? Try and explain your thinking to someone else.

(In the story, Humpty Dumpty later has a good attempt at defining the words himself, and Wikipedia also has some possible interpretations: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jabberwocky#Possible_interpretations_of_words. How close to these definitions did *you* get?!)

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Invent some words of your own

There are lots of things you can do to create new words. Try these three suggestions that might help:

1. When explaining Jabberwocky, Humpty Dumpty says, "'Slithy' means 'lithe and slimy'. 'Lithe' is the same as 'active'. You see it's like a portmanteau, there are two meanings packed up into one word." People do this all the time with words: have you ever heard anyone use the word 'hangry' meaning hungry and angry? Why not try making your own portmanteau, e.g. what could you call that feeling when you're excited, but also a little bit anxious? Anxcited? Excious?
2. Onomatopoeia is when a word describes a sound and actually makes that sound itself when you say it aloud, e.g. roar, squawk, grumble, chatter, crunch, fizz, etc. Stop and listen to some of the sounds about you. Choose one and try to spell it out with the phonemes you can hear it make – can you write something and get someone else to read it aloud to check it forces them make the noise you'd wanted?
3. Try playing with prefixes and suffixes to invent words that sound *plausible* (look that word up!). You can download a good list of the most common ones from Scholastic here: http://teacher.scholastic.com/reading/bestpractices/vocabulary/pdf/prefixes_suffixes.pdf. It might help you to put a few into a grid and then mix and match until you've found a word you like the sound of, e.g.

Prefixes		Suffixes
anti	bounce	able/ible
de	green	al
dis	light	ation/ition
mis	picture	ic
pre	run	ing
super	sing	ism
under		less
		ly
		ment
		ness

What could pre+**sing**+ation+al+ly ('presingationally') mean? Something done in a similar way to how opera singers warm up their voices before a concert?!

What about 'underbouncement'?!

Call my bluff!

You should by now have made a collection of the following:

- unusual real words that you have discovered;
- your own newly-invented words.

You're going to use these to produce a short piece of writing. It can be whatever sort of writing best suits your words. You could have a go at part of an adventure story, an information text about the discovery of a new animal or plant, a letter of complaint about something you've bought… anything you like!

The big challenge is that you need to use around 5 of your nonsense words so well that anybody reading instantly understands what they mean. You need to also use some of the unusual real words and get people to wonder if these have been made up. Can your family and friends work out which are the nonsense ones and which the real, or can you successfully trick them?

You can evaluate just how good your made-up words are by asking a reader to define them after having read your piece of writing. If the person can use the context to help them guess well, that means you have probably done a very good job!

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Share your work

How might you share your work with your friends and your teacher(s)? Can you film yourself reading, or take photographs, then email or upload to a shared area? Could you create a duplicate of your work to post?

You can tweet what you've been up to using the Twitter handle @BabcockLDPEng and the hashtag #BabcockEnglishAtHome.

IMPORTANT: If you decide to share your finished work publicly, just remember everything you have been taught about staying safe online, and do check with the person who looks after you before posting anything.

Things that could help me

If you are struggling to think of what to write, try taking a story or poem or nursery rhyme that you know well and rewriting the events to include your new words. What could you do to tell the tale of Little Miss Muffet?

Little Miss Muffet

Sat on a tuffet,

Eating her curds and whey;

Along came a spider,

Who sat down beside her

And frightened Miss Muffet away!

It's always really helpful to talk about your ideas for writing with someone else before you begin. Who could you chat to?

Change it up! ...Go further!

A) Explore some of the activities that Word Central has to offer (http://wordcentral.com/):

- Choose words you particularly like or that have captured your interest and contribute to Word Central's Build Your Own Dictionary: http://wordcentral.com/byod/byod_index.php. Browse some of the entries by others.
- Try to learn a new word each day and use it in conversation! You could check out Word Central's 'daily buzzword' if you liked: http://wordcentral.com/buzzword/buzzword.php This includes a daily quiz question to test your word wizardry.
- Have a go at some of Word Central's games: http://wordcentral.com/games.html.

B) Find out more about different authors' invented words and compile your own mini dictionary of them. Include your new ones too!

Notes for parents and teachers

You can find lots of suggestions for dictionary activities with a simple search, e.g. from Scholastic at https://www.scholastic.com/parents/books-and-reading/raise-a-reader-blog/family-dictionary-games.html, although many rely on children having access to hard copies, rather than online versions.

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