

WORD BIRD

The idea of WORD BIRD is to increase children's interest in new words and their meanings.

You can make your own WORD BIRD puppet or you can purchase one (she comes with an egg container!) from www.puppetsforlearning.com.au . On this same website, you will find some pictures and templates to download on the *Puppet Inspiration* page. Read on to find out how you can use these.



WORD BIRD is usually used in early childhood education settings and in the first two years of school. She becomes a well-loved character. Find her a basket for her nest or a box full of shredded paper.

The procedure goes something like this:

1. Each day, the teacher decides upon the special word to study. It should be a word that will be useful, that can be used throughout the day and that will extend a student's everyday vocabulary. Some examples from teachers are: rummage, spout, saunter. Verbs and adjectives are particularly good to include as these are often deficient with children who have poor language. It's great if the words are sourced from a book that is read at storytime or a class activity.

After the word is chosen, the teacher writes it on a slip of paper and puts it in WORD BIRD's egg container. Then she pops it under her.

2. When it comes to WORD BIRD's laying time, the teacher brings her down and make her squawk and carry on. Some teachers choose a child to find the egg under WORD BIRD and allow them to open it up. At this stage of education, many children cannot yet read and that's perfectly fine. This activity is not about reading or spelling (but this may happen incidentally).

3. It's time to look at the word and for the teacher to say it. The teacher might make WORD BIRD look very proud about laying the egg – or possibly exhausted. She shows the word, rewrites it on the board and says it clearly.

4. The teacher now leads a discussion about the length of the word, the start sound (she might comment on the letter at the start too). Students are encouraged to say the word slowly. The teacher makes sure ALL students can say the word correctly as *saying* a word is an important part of the learning process. For words with more than one syllable, the word is clapped out as the word is said. WORD BIRD's beak can be opened and closed with each syllable too.

5. IMPORTANT: The very special thing about WORD BIRD is this: she lays eggs but she doesn't know what they mean. The following is very important as it assists in students learning to ask for meaning and also in them learning to generate definitions.

The teacher makes WORD BIRD say: "What does _____ mean?"

The teacher then defines the word for WORD BIRD. If she can, she pairs the word with a gesture or mime. This is really powerful for helping students remember words.

Following this, students are given examples with the word used in sentences. Care is taken to use examples that relate to the students' experiences. Students are reminded about when the word came up previously (in storytime or in an activity).

Multiple meanings must also be explored. (SPOUT = the spout of a teapot, a whale spout, spout out some exciting news). Also the word is used in several different forms where possible. For example, RUMMAGE can be RUMMAGED and RUMMAGING.

Next, students are encouraged to use the word in a sentence. A few students might be asked different questions using the word. Choice questions are good for this as they can be phrased so the student uses the new word. For example, *“Would you rummage around in the toybox to find your lunchbox... or would you rummage around in your schoolbag to find your lunchbox?”*

6. After exploration and discussion of the word, it is re-written on a coloured paper egg and stuck to the WORD BIRD wall. (A template to make a WORD BIRD wall chart is on the website). By the end of the week, five new eggs/words will be on the wall... and by the end of term, around 50 new words will be displayed!

7. The current word is used lots throughout each day – and children praised specifically for using WORD BIRD’s new word. *But the teacher also revisits old words.* Repetition and use across several settings is the key to new word learning. The teacher is sure to let OTHER teachers know each day’s word (the art teacher, physical education teacher, maybe the word can be used at assembly time).

8. The WORD WALL keeps growing. Some teachers like to introduce a variation where students take turns to bring in a word for WORD BIRD. She explains to students that not only does WORD BIRD like to *lay* WORDS, she likes to *eat* WORDS -not worms! These words are written on the WORM shapes (coloured worms cut using the template provided) and the student feeds the word to WORD BIRD. WORD BIRD carries on and exclaims how delicious the word is. She asks “How do I say this word?” and then “What does _____ mean?” If the student is not clear in explaining, the teacher ensure she models WORD BIRD being confused. These WORM WORDS (one or two) are also stuck on the wall each week.

9. Each week, the teacher notifies parents/caregivers about the 5-7 words that were explored the PREVIOUS week (it might be 5 words from the eggs, and 2 from the worms). Some have a regular feature in the school newsletter called WORD BIRD’S WORDS. There is a picture on the website you can download and use. An explanation is added like: *“Last week, Foundation and Year One Students studied these words: RUMMAGE, SPOUT, SAUNTER, RAVENOUS, DESPISE. Talk about these words, use them in sentences. Praise your child for using them!”*

10. Finally, an activity sheet is available for download called EXPLORE WORD BIRD’S WORD. This is done at least once a week. Either the teacher chooses the word to be explored from the current day or from previous days, or the student might choose from a few options. The teacher has them COPY the word (remember- the focus is not spelling) from a short list of choices that is provided on their table. (Copying from the board is not recommended as this often results in incorrect duplication and reinforcement of incorrect spelling). Next the teacher shows the students how to point to each speech balloon and respond verbally. The students are then instructed to draw a picture in the box relating to the word.

Most importantly, for word-learning ... make it fun, meaningful and interesting!

- *Credit goes to super teacher Imogen Hodson for showing me her Word Bird concept many years ago.*
- *This tipsheet along with templates, pictures and worksheet is available free from PUPPETS FOR LEARNING www.puppetsforlearning.com.au under PUPPET INSPIRATION.*
- *The WORD BIRD puppet can be purchased, along with a plastic egg container from the website.*