

## Jigsaw Vocabulary

**LEVEL:** Low intermediate and above

**TIME REQUIRED:** Parts of two class periods or a total of about an hour

**GOALS:** To learn or review vocabulary words; to practice dictionary skills; to collaborate with peers; to practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing; to engage in peer-to-peer teaching

**MATERIALS:** Chalkboard with chalk or whiteboard with markers; paper and pencils or pens; dictionaries or access to an online dictionary; vocabulary words written on cards or slips of paper; poster paper (one sheet per vocabulary word); tape; Vocabulary Graphic Organizer (see page 48); a way to keep time

**OVERVIEW:** This activity introduces students to vocabulary through the jigsaw strategy. “Expert groups” are assigned one vocabulary word; group members work together to define the word, generate example sentences, create illustrations, and make a poster they will use to teach the word to classmates. Multiple interactions with the vocabulary increase students’ understanding of the words.

### PREPARATION:

1. Select the vocabulary words you want students to learn (six to ten words is recommended). The words can be from a text you plan to read or related to an upcoming lesson topic. Write each word on a card or slip of paper. For some words, you may need to provide context

or indicate the part of speech that you want students to use. For instance, if you want to use the word *film*, you need to indicate whether students should define it as a noun or verb and give the context (a movie or a thin layer of material).

2. Decide how you will group students. In a jigsaw, students work with two different groups. You can distinguish between the groups by calling one the “home group” and the other the “expert group.” Home groups should have the same number of students as there are vocabulary words; if you plan to introduce six words, each home group should have six students. If your class does not divide evenly, assign additional students to the home groups rather than creating an extra group with fewer members than the number of vocabulary words. The number of home groups can vary depending on your class size, but there should *not* be more home groups than vocabulary words. (It is possible to have more vocabulary words than home groups.)

**Note:** See Variation 1 for using this activity with large classes.

### PROCEDURE:

1. Explain the jigsaw procedure to students. Say, “We will do a jigsaw activity to learn new vocabulary words. You will work in two different groups. First, you will be in a home group. Then you will move to an expert group to learn about a new word. After that, you will go back to your home group to share what your expert group learned.” If this is the first time you have used a jigsaw with your

students, you can illustrate the steps on the board as you explain, with arrows to show movement.

- 2.** Have students form their home groups. Each home group should have six members if there are six vocabulary words, seven members if there are seven words, and so on. Students can form groups on their own, or you can assign them to groups or use some other method you like. Have each home group go to a specific area of the classroom.
- 3.** Tell students, “Each member of the home group will get a number. This is the number of your expert group. After we begin the activity, all the people who have number 1 will get together, all the people with number 2 will get together, and so on.” Students can count off in their home groups, number themselves alphabetically according to their first names, or use another method. Note that if groups have “extra” students—more than the number of vocabulary words—then some students in the group will have the same number and move to the same expert group together.
- 4.** If this is the first time your students will complete a jigsaw, you can practice the procedure. Have students practice moving from home groups to expert groups, then back again. Make sure students know where to go to meet their home-group members and where to go to meet their expert-group members.
- 5.** While students are still in their home groups, explain that each expert group will get one new vocabulary word. Tell students that the members of the expert group will work together to gather information and create a poster, and that they will use the poster to teach their classmates in the home group about the word their expert group has been given.
- 6.** Tell students to move to their expert groups.
- 7.** Explain the task expert groups will complete. As you discuss the activity, list the requirements on the board:
  - Choose a vocabulary word.
  - Find the word’s part of speech.
  - Find the word’s dictionary definition.
  - Write a definition in your own words.
  - Draw a picture showing the meaning of the word.
  - Write two sentences that use the word.

Say, “Each expert group will be assigned one vocabulary word. You will work together to create a poster that contains the word, its part of speech, the dictionary definition, and a definition in your own words. You will also create an illustration that shows what the word means and write a minimum of two sentences using the word.”

- 8.** Continue to explain the activity by saying, “When the expert groups have finished their posters, you will return to your home groups. Then, each home group will visit all of the vocabulary posters to learn the new words. At each poster, the group member who is the expert on the word will explain the information to everyone else in the home group.”
- 9.** If necessary, explain each part of the poster and allow time for questions. It may help to create a sample poster with a familiar word as you explain the tasks. Model writing the word and part of speech on the poster. Then, look up the word in the dictionary, or have a student volunteer do so. Write the dictionary definition on the poster and then use it to write a definition in your own words. Quickly sketch an illustration that shows the meaning of the word and write two

example sentences. Your students can assist you with the ideas for each part of the poster.

- 10.** Tell students that while they are in their expert group, they will also need to think about how they will present the information to the members of their home group. The expert group should agree on how they will share the meaning of the word and explain what is included in the poster so that the information is taught consistently.
- 11.** Distribute the vocabulary words by having each group choose a card or slip of paper with one of the words written on it, and tell groups to begin working. While students create their posters, move around the room to check for understanding and answer any questions. Set a time limit, depending on your students' ability level; 10 to 15 minutes might be reasonable the first time students do this activity. Periodically remind groups about how much time they have left to work. When each expert group finishes its poster, group members should tape the poster to the wall or display it on a table so that it will be easy for home groups to see.

If you are dividing the jigsaw activity over two class periods, expert groups should have enough time during the first class to finish their posters and to discuss how they will present the information; begin the second class period with Step 12.

- 12.** Have students meet in their home groups; tell students that they will work with their home group to learn all the new vocabulary words. As they learn the words, they will record the information on a Vocabulary Graphic Organizer (page 48). Say, "Each member of your home group is an expert on a different vocabulary word, but everyone needs to learn all the words. Your home group

will visit each of the vocabulary posters. The group member who helped to make the poster will present the information to everyone else in the home group. When your home group arrives at the poster your expert group made, you will explain the word and information on the poster to your home group."

- 13.** For the next part of the activity, students will use the organizer. You can draw it on the board so that students can see it as you explain how to use it. Each student can draw his or her own organizer; make sure students draw wide enough rows to have space for clear notes and drawings. Tell students that as they visit each vocabulary poster, they should write down the word and its meaning, then draw a quick picture and write anything else that will help them remember the word and its meaning. You can model completing one row of the organizer with a word of your choice. Tell students that they do not need to copy down the whole poster, but they should choose the information that will help them understand and recall the meaning of each word.
- 14.** Tell students how much time they will have at each poster for the expert to explain the word and for group members to write down the information. (The time will vary depending on the length of your class period, the level of your students, and the number of posters; you might need to allow students about three minutes at each poster, with about 30 seconds of transition time between posters.) Tell students you will signal when the groups should rotate to the next poster.
- 15.** Review the steps with students and allow time for questions. Number the posters, by either writing a number at the top or using a sticky note, and assign each home group a letter. Tell the home groups which poster they will start with: for example, you can begin with

Home Group A starting at Poster 1, Home Group B at Poster 2, and so forth. When it is time to rotate, Home Group A moves to Poster 2, Home Group B moves to Poster 3, and so forth, with the last home group moving to Poster 1.

- 16.** Give students a signal to begin. Keep track of time as you move around the room to monitor the discussion and clarify any instructions. When enough time has passed, signal students to rotate. Continue until all home groups have visited each poster.
- 17.** Have students work in groups of three to review the vocabulary words. Students can take turns discussing the meaning of each word, add any missing information to each other's definitions, and clarify understanding. You can set a specific amount of time for this and circulate around the room to observe.
- 18.** Review each word as a class. One way to review is to discuss each word and the agreed-upon meaning with your class as you fill in the information on a blank organizer (projected or copied on the board) so that students can add information to their own organizers if they need to. This will ensure that your students understand the meanings in the context you intended and are prepared for the text or lesson in which they will see the vocabulary.

## EXTENSIONS

- 1.** Have students create a puzzle or vocabulary quiz as a review of the words. This can be done individually, in pairs or groups of three, or by each home group. Have groups exchange and complete each other's puzzle or quiz.
- 2.** Have students plan a skit or write a short dialogue containing the new words. Each home group can write a script and then perform the skit or dialogue for the whole class or one other home group.

- 3.** Have students write a story or paragraph containing the new words. Depending on the set of words, this could be a fictional story or an informational text. This writing can be done in pairs, groups of three, home groups, or newly formed groups.
- 4.** Have students use the words to create a rhyme or song that demonstrates that they understand the meaning of each one.

## VARIATIONS

- 1.** If you have a very large class, you can run two identical jigsaw activities at the same time. For instance, if you have a class of 80 students, and you want to use the activity with eight vocabulary words, you could divide your class in half so that you have two groups of 40 students. Then treat each half as if it were a separate class. Divide each half into five groups of eight students each; these are the home groups. Number the group members 1 to 8 so that each student is responsible for joining one expert group. Then follow the procedure described above so that you are running two concurrent jigsaw activities, using the same vocabulary words, at the same time.
- 2.** This activity can be used to review vocabulary rather than introduce it. At the end of a unit or after your class studies a set of words from a text, have students complete the same activity, but with review as the purpose.

Another option for review is to assign parts of this activity for homework. Within expert groups, individual students can be assigned parts of the task to complete, such as finding the dictionary definition, rephrasing the definition, and writing example sentences. At the beginning of the next class meeting, expert groups come together for ten minutes to complete the posters. Home groups can then rotate and use each of the posters to complete the organizer as a review.

- 3.** You can use a “write around” format rather than a jigsaw approach. This variation is an option for large classes. In this case, students would work in home groups the entire time, and expert groups would not be used. The rotation and elements of the poster are the same, but there is a different task during each rotation. Each group is assigned one of the vocabulary words to start with during the first rotation. However, in this variation, groups rotate to a different poster for each of the vocabulary words. By the end of the activity, they will have completed tasks related to many or all of the words.

The tasks can be divided as follows:

- a.** Rotation 1: Add the word, part of speech, and dictionary definition to the poster. (Note that this is the first word, assigned by distributing one vocabulary card to each group.)
- b.** Rotation 2: Rephrase the definition into your own words. (Note that students have moved to a new poster and complete a task related to a different vocabulary word from the one they worked with during Rotation 1.)

- c.** Rotation 3: Write an example sentence using the word. (Groups are working with their third word.)
- d.** Rotation 4: Write another example sentence using the word. (Groups are working with their fourth word.)
- e.** Rotation 5: Add an illustration that conveys the meaning of the word. (Groups are working with their fifth word.)

After the information has been added to all the posters, groups rotate to each one and discuss the information in order to complete the organizer. Alternatively, once the posters are complete, you can provide a teacher-led review of the information and complete the organizer as a whole class to ensure consistency.

This activity was written by **Amy Hanna**, who has taught ESL to students in primary school, university, and adult education classrooms; trained teachers in TESL methods; and developed materials for English-language programs in the United States and abroad.

### Vocabulary Graphic Organizer

Word	Meaning	Other Notes/Drawing