



Vocabulary Classroom Activity

Tiered Terms

Overview

Words fall into different “tiers” based on how often we use them and in what contexts. Understanding these tiers helps educators make purposeful choices about which words to teach and how. This activity provides two student-friendly tasks for each vocabulary tier:

- **Tier 1—Everyday Words:** Basic words students already use (e.g., cat, run, ball)
- **Tier 2—Descriptive & Academic Words:** More precise or mature words (e.g., gigantic, examine, helpful)
- **Tier 3—Domain-Specific Words:** Words tied to specific subjects (e.g., habitat, evaporation, citizen)

Focus: Oral language and vocabulary development across word types

Grade Range: K-2

Goal: Support student vocabulary growth by exploring and applying Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 words in varied, meaningful ways.

Materials Needed

- Printed activity page(s)
- Optional: picture cards or anchor charts
- Writing/drawing tools

Facilitation Tips

- Use real-life connections to make abstract words more meaningful.
- Encourage students to use new words in conversation, storytelling, and writing.
- Model Tier 2 and Tier 3 words in full sentences and compare them to Tier 1 words.

Wrap-Up Questions

- Which word helped you be more specific in your thinking?
- Can you find a Tier 2 or Tier 3 word in a book we’ve read?
- How could you use one of today’s words in a sentence?

Tier 1: Everyday Words

Activity 1a: Word Match and Use

- Match the pictures with the correct everyday word. Then choose two and use them in a sentence or drawing.

Activity 1b: Everyday Word Hunt

- Look around your classroom. Find 3 everyday words you see or use. Draw them and label each one.
- **Extension Activity:** Write a sentence using one of your words.

Tier 2: Descriptive & Academic Words

Activity 2a: Word Upgrade

- Start with a basic word. Choose a more descriptive word and draw or act it out.

Activity 2b: Sentence Stretchers

- Complete each sentence using a descriptive word. Try to make your sentence more interesting.

Tier 3: Domain-Specific Words

Activity 3a: I'm Learning About..."

- Draw something from a science or social studies topic. Label it with Tier 3 vocabulary.

Activity 3b: Word Sort by Topic

- Cut out the words and sort them into two groups: Science Words and Social Studies Words.

Extra

Tier Word Lists and Tier 3 Word Cards by Grade Level

These pages can be used to extend vocabulary instruction beyond the core activities. The **Tiered Word Lists** provide grade-level-aligned examples of Tier 1, 2, and 3 words across science and social studies content areas, and can be helpful for lesson planning, anchor charts, or choosing vocabulary to highlight during instruction. The **Tier 3 Word Cards** can be printed, cut, and used for small group discussions, sorting tasks, center activities, word walls, or quick review games to reinforce content-specific language. The **Create Your Own** page gives students or educators a chance to generate custom word cards aligned to classroom topics or student interests.

Student Name: _____

Tier 1 Words

Word Match

Directions: Cut out the words and past them with the correct picture. Choose 2 words to use in a drawing. Write a sentence using your two words.



ball	dog	sun	run	hat
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cat

dog

hat

run

baby

mom

ball

sun

Create Your Own Tier 1 Everyday Words

[illegible]

Student Name: _____

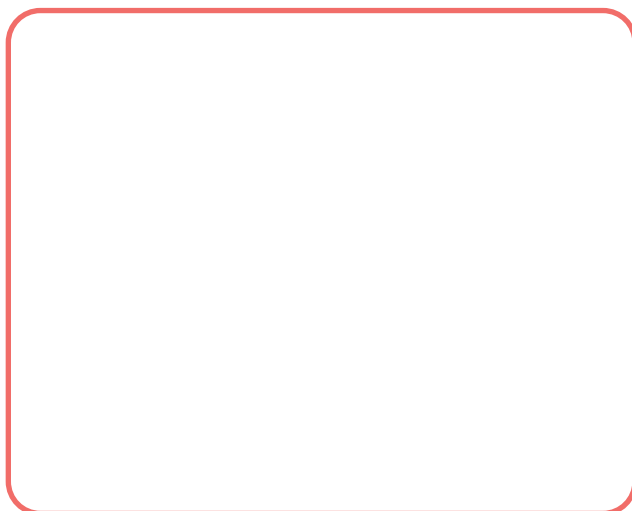
Tier 1 Words

Everyday Word Hunt

Directions: Look around your classroom. Find 3 everyday words you see or use. Draw them and label each one.







Extension Activity: Write a sentence using one of your words.

Student Name: _____

Tier 2 Words

Word Upgrade

Directions: Start with a basic word. Choose a more descriptive word and draw or act it out.

Word		New Word
Big	→	Enormous
Nice	→	Kind
Good	→	Fantastic

Word		New Word
	→	
	→	
	→	

Student Name: _____

Tier 2 Words

Sentence Stretchers

Directions: Complete each sentence using a descriptive word. Try to make your sentence more interesting.

Sentence Starter

The elephant was _____



Completed Sentence

The elephant was enormous and gentle.

My friend was _____



My friend was kind and caring.

The concert was _____



The concert was fantastic.

Sentence



New Sentence

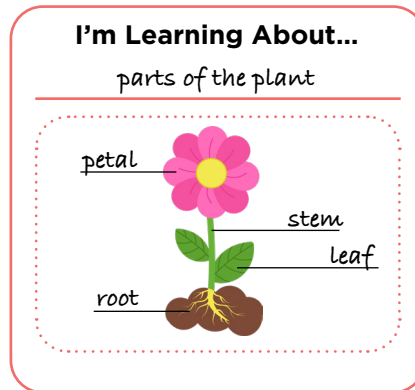


Student Name: _____

Tier 3 Words

“I’m Learning About...”

Directions: Draw something from a science or social studies topic. Label it with Tier 3 vocabulary.



I’m Learning About...

Write a sentence about your picture and include your labeled words:

Student Name: _____

Tier 3 Words

Sorting Words

Directions: Cut out the words and sort them into two groups: Science Words and Social Studies Words.

Science	Social Studies

✂

habitat	economy	erosion	government
citizen	energy	weather	election

Student Name: _____

Tier 3 Words

Word Sort

Directions: Sort the words in the correct column. (Page 1 of 2)

Science	Social Studies

**Discover
Literacy**

Word Sort



election

Tiered Word Lists

Kindergarten Science		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
sun	observe	habitat
water	describe	life cycle
tree	compare	living
rock	sort	temperature
plant	change	nonliving

Kindergarten Social Studies		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
home	rules	community
school	share	responsibility
friend	safe	citizen
help	leader	symbol
flag	fair	fair

Tiered Word Lists

First Grade Science		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
light	measure	motion
sound	data	matter
air	predict	energy
food	explain	liquid
rain	question	solid

First Grade Social Studies		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
family	choices	map
town	needs	timeline
job	respect	culture
money	compare	government
park	problem	tradition

Tiered Word Lists

Second Grade Science		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
animal	investigate	ecosystem
tree	record	life cycle
soil	conclude	erosion
wind	explain	weathering
sun	identify	properties

Second Grade Social Studies		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
city	important	geography
school	responsibility	constitution
store	problem	historical figure
house	solution	economy
road	decision	historical event

Kindergarten Tier 3 Words



habitat	life cycle
living	temperature
nonliving	community
responsibility	citizen
symbol	fair

First Grade Tier 3 Words

 motion	matter
energy	liquid
solid	map
timeline	culture
government	tradition

Second Grade Tier 3 Words



ecosystem

life cycle

erosion

weathering

properties

geography

constitution

historical figure

economy

historical event

Create Your Own Tier 3 Words

