

Word Jars

The word jars strategy is a novel way to create a bridge between word learning at school and home (Barger, 2006). The core of this strategy is heightening student awareness that words appear everywhere, not just within trade books or texts.

I suggest introducing this strategy with a read aloud that highlights children who are curious about words and collect them in unusual ways! Reading aloud from recommended sources such as *Max's Words* (Banks, 2006), *Donovan's Word Jar* (DeGross, 1994), *The Boy Who Loved Words* (Schotter, 2006), or *The Word Collector* (Wimmer, 2012) works perfectly. Each of these books highlights a child who loves and collects words of all sorts! For instance, in *Max's Words*, Max collects words by cutting them out of magazines, cereal boxes, and books—similar to the word jars strategy, making this an ideal selection to read aloud before introducing the strategy.

The word jars strategy for word collection provides great energy and conversation about words. The following word jars strategy table shows you the steps to engage students in word collecting.

Strategy: Word Jars

Pillar: Vocabulary

Grade Level:

- ☒ K
- ☒ 1
- ☒ 2
- ☒ 3
- ☒ 4
- ☒ 5
- ☒ 6

Instructional Grouping:

- ☐ Whole Group
- ☐ Small Group
- ☒ Individual

Consider This:

- Inform parents about the word jar strategy through whatever means you use to communicate.
- Encourage parents to participate at home with their children.
- Encourage students to describe the strategy to their parents.

What is it? The word jars strategy focuses on heightening word awareness. It also bridges the gap between word learning at school and home. Students collect words at home, place them in a jar, and bring those words to school to share with classmates.

Why is it Important? Students benefit from learning words through direct instruction, reading independently, and within their environment. Each of these settings adds depth and breadth to students' vocabularies.

What works in the classroom?

Simple Steps

1. Students use plastic jars (either school supplied or found at home) to collect unfamiliar and interesting words from home. These words could come from food boxes, labels, magazines, informational mail or flyers, or other sources. Students simply write the word on a slip of paper or they can physically cut out the words from the source and slip inside the jar.
2. Each night—or at least several times a week—students write the word (or cut the word from the source) and discuss the word's meaning with their family or caregiver.



3. Once a month or so, students bring the jars back to school and share words with their classmates. Students may also trade words with one another.
4. When students bring their jars back to class, try one of the following activities. There are many ways you can creatively use word jars in your classroom.
 - a. Students volunteer to share the most interesting, challenging, or extraordinary words they've collected with the whole class or in a small group.
 - b. Have students dump their words on their desk or table and categorize the words in any way that makes sense to them. For example, they could organize them alphabetically, by part of speech, by morphemic elements such as prefixes or suffixes, or by topics.
5. You can also use this as an opportunity for students to classify their words as tier one, tier two, or tier three.

References

- Banks, K. (2006). *Max's words*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
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