

# Tip Sheet: Use Child-Friendly Definitions for New Vocabulary

## FOR PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

For additional support on this topic, visit <https://bit.ly/QTDefine> to view a short video.

### WHY?

Quality children's books use rich, sophisticated vocabulary. However, if children don't understand the words, it may be difficult for them to understand the story. Definitions explain the exact meaning of a word, but definitions found in dictionaries can be worded in ways that make it difficult for children to understand. Explaining what words mean with **child-friendly definitions** supports children's understanding of the story while teaching them new vocabulary. Children with a rich oral vocabulary tend to have more academic success.

### WHAT?

Child-friendly definitions explain what a word means using simple everyday language. They are easier for children to understand. Here are few examples of child-friendly definitions with their dictionary definitions so you can see how they are different.

#### *Produce*

Dictionary definition: to compose, create, or bring out by intellectual or physical effort

Child-friendly definition: When someone produces something, it means they make it.

#### *Container*

Dictionary definition: a receptacle for holding goods

Child-friendly definition: A container is a place to put things for storage.

#### *Brave*

Dictionary definition: showing mental or moral strength to face danger, fear, or difficulty

Child-friendly definition: When someone is brave, they do something even though they're afraid.



### TEACHER TIP

It's helpful to read the book ahead of time and think about sophisticated vocabulary in the book. There may be too many words to define during one reading, so how do you know which ones are worth teaching?

Ask yourself these two questions:

- Is this word essential for understanding the book?
- Is this a word that children will use again?

Mark these words in the book with a sticky note so you remember to discuss them as you read.

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Here are ways you can use child-friendly definitions with the children in your group:

1. Prior to the read aloud, identify words in the book that children may not know.
2. Look up the definitions in a dictionary.
3. Most words can mean different things, so decide which meaning you want to teach to your group. Ask yourself how the word is used in the book.
4. Rephrase the definition in simple words that children are likely to understand.

Here are some starter stems to help you write child-friendly definitions:

### Verbs

- "When someone \_\_\_\_\_, they \_\_\_\_\_."
- Example: "When someone *sprints*, they run very fast for a short time."

### Nouns

- "A \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_."
- Example: "A *container* is a place to put things for storage."

### Adjectives

- "When something (someone) is \_\_\_\_\_, it (they) \_\_\_\_\_."
- Example: "When someone is *clever*, they are very smart and have good ideas."

### Adverbs

- "When someone (verb) \_\_\_\_\_, they \_\_\_\_\_."
- Example: "When someone does something *deliberately*, they do it on purpose."