

Vocabulary Sentences:

Each story of the week features 5 vocabulary words. Some of these may be familiar to students, but generally these are not commonly known (or used) by the average fourth grader. The idea is for the student to make them part of their arsenal of word crafting tools by putting them to use, constructing sentences that will stretch their writing skills and vocabulary usage. Each vocabulary word comes with at least one sample sentence on the back of the sheet, and frequently several sample sentences. These are used as models to show how the word can be used. It took time for me to think of good quality sentences as a model, so I expect students to take their time when they construct their own.

Rating the sentences:

Typically 3 of the 5 words are bolded and underlined; it is these words for which the students are required to write sentences, and up to this point each was worth 5 points (15 points total); however, I am elevating their point value to 10 points each (retroactively doubling previous scores). The other two words are optional and can result in a few extra credit points, though I have been known to be generous for exceptional sentences. It is always a good idea to attempt sentences for all five words since the extra credit can help offset ratings of those required sentences that did not achieve their full point value.

I am very fussy about these sentences, and they play a significant role in determining a student's language arts grade. It is expected that all words will be spelled correctly, writing will be neat (cursive not required and this can be done on the computer if desired), proper (as opposed to sloppy) grammar must be used, and above all, each sentence will be evaluated by its content; the student must demonstrate an understand of the word and how it is properly used by the **context** of its surrounding words. Let's take the word **envious**:

The man was envious. – no credit because there is no context. It does not demonstrate an understanding of the meaning.

The boy watched enviously as his friend accepted the gold medal for winning the race. – full credit, and maybe some extra for a sentence such as this one.

Partial credit can also be given, and points are taken off for spelling and grammatical errors, so it is important that students really think about their sentences, rereading and revising as needed. I will not give any credit for a sentence that seems to be little more than a copy of the model on the back of the sheet. Vocabulary words do not truly become our own until we struggle with its usage at least a little; craftsmanship is not developed quickly, but over time. Parents are encouraged to give their opinions pointing out context and grammatical problems as long as they do not supply the solutions for word crafting (though I don't mind helping out with grammar or spelling if this speeds up the process). Helping a child with the use of a dictionary or thesaurus as tools is most acceptable; but caution: this can be a fatiguing process to some students. Different children have different tolerances, so let your child's tolerance level be your guide; apply these lexicon skills only in small spurts for some.

Weekly Vocabulary Tests:

Beyond the writing of sentences, students are responsible to understand the meanings of all five words since all 5 are tested each week along with the reading comprehension test. Tests are never memorized definitions; rather the matching up of incomplete sentences with a word bank, in which students must select the best choice from the weekly five vocabulary words to complete the sentence whose context suggest one of the vocabulary words.

Students who take this assignment seriously will not only make a positive impact on their language arts grade, but more importantly develop excellent writing habits that will carry them through their academic careers and beyond.