

Word Sorts

Description

A Word Sort (Gillet & Kita, 1979) is the classification of words into categories using prior knowledge and experiences. There are two types of Word Sorts, open and closed. In a closed Word Sort, the categories are predetermined. In an open Word Sort, the students are asked to consider characteristics and meanings of the words and then group the words into categories.

Purpose

Word Sorts are used to help students learn vocabulary, analyze, and classify based on characteristics or meanings. Students connect prior knowledge to new conceptual understanding acquired through reading or an inquiry-based unit of study.

Connection to Inquiry and Standards:

Students show their own level of understanding of concepts through classifying and categorizing. Natural connections are made between what they are learning and what they already know from prior experiences. Students provide evidence, reasons, and explanations for how and why they classified the terms and communicate these to their peers. Pennsylvania Reading/Writing/Speaking/Listening Standards addressed by this strategy include 1.1 Learning to Read Independently (vocabulary development) and 1.3 Reading, Analyzing, and Interpreting Literature (word recognition skills and vocabulary development). Additionally, 1.6 Speaking and Listening is addressed as students communicate with one another as they classify.

Materials

Index cards. Markers. String tied together at the ends to form a circle (need enough for each category for each group).

Procedure

Students write vocabulary words that are important to know on 3x5 index cards or paper cut to the same approximate size. Use one word per card. Each group needs one set of the vocabulary cards. Give students the string circles - one per category. As the students sort, they place the cards inside of the circle. Circles can be overlapped like Venn diagrams. If it is a closed Word Sort, share with the students the categories that were selected. If it is an open Word Sort, the students should read through all of the words, group them into categories (using lots of communication and discussion), and label their categories. Give students ample time to work and then share their classifications.

Resources

Gillet, J. & Kita, M.J. (1979). "Words, Kids, and Categories." *The Reading Teacher*, 32, 538-542.

Tompkins, Gail E. (1996). *50 Literacy Strategies: Step by Step*. Columbus, OH: Merrill