

Letter to the Tutor

***Sometimes I will refer to your tutee as a male and sometimes a female. It gets way too confusing using He/She, him/her, his/hers. ☺

You are going to make a huge impact on your little student. This is why:

*The size of one's vocabulary is a strong predictor (some say the strongest predictor) of academic success. So by focusing on building vocabulary, you will be “**setting up your little tutee for academic success!**” It's an awesome mission!*

A huge gap exists between the students who have a strong vocabulary and the ones with a weak vocabulary. This gap begins when some children enter school with a strong vocabulary (the "haves") and others with a weak vocabulary (the "have-nots"). The haves acquired their vocabulary at home through quality conversations and nightly story sessions, while the have-nots were deprived of those language experiences. This gap widens daily as the “haves” learn new words faster and easier, while the “have-nots” continue to struggle. A lack of vocabulary results in poor reading comprehension and impedes academic success. Many of the textbooks, reading books, and assessments were written for the "haves."

So, you will be instrumental in turning your little student from a “have-not” into a “have.” You will be helping him build a storehouse of words to draw upon when reading, writing, and learning in general. **You will be making a true difference in a child's life!**

This guide is to be used with the *Illustrated Dictionary of Everyday Things* – the book I wrote based on over 27 years of teaching students in high-poverty schools just like the ones you are helping. Over the years, I made a list of common, everyday words my students didn't know but should have, and that list became this book. I was astounded by the common words they did not know. My latest surprise was when the word “ceiling” was in a story, and not one of the 24 first graders knew what it was, which means they were not able to visualize what was happening and not understanding that part of the story. When I pointed up and asked what that was called, they said “roof.” I found that only 24% of 117 2nd graders knew the difference between their chin and their cheek. Many weren't sure about major body parts like ankle and wrist. So, don't assume your tutee knows even the most common word, s/he just might not know it! Your tutee REALLY needs your help!

The beauty of one-on-one tutoring is you are able to give him/her time to think and talk – something teachers can't take the time to do. Yes, you are building vocabulary, but also confidence, self-esteem, neatness, oral language skills, and making him/her feel special. Everything you need is in this guide, but there are other teaching aids on my website, ChildrensLiteracyPublications.com. (Tutor Page.)

The heart of the Dictionary Project is for the students to build their own "Book of Knowledge" as evidence of what they've learned from the dictionary, and more. So, there will be two different scenarios for tutors. Which scenario fits your situation?

Scenario A, you are going into a classroom where the teacher is actively working with her students helping them build their "Book of Knowledge" Notebook.

Scenario B, your tutee is not building their "Book of Knowledge" Notebook with a teacher – either it isn't being assigned, or you are volunteering in an independent tutoring program, not working directly with a teacher.

Just read the section below for your situation.

Scenario A: The teacher has already had your tutee draw/trace and label an object in his "Book of Knowledge" Notebook. This means that she/he has spent a few minutes teaching the parts of the object. So, you will be reinforcing her lessons, which will be a great help to the struggling child.

1. **Check your tutee's labeling in his Book of Knowledge** – Teachers really don't have time to do this. Have your tutee tell you about the parts that she labeled and act impressed. Build her confidence. Be sure that the labels are spelled correctly and written on the horizontal. Then check to be sure that the labeling line is actually touching the part being labeled. That is a common error 2nd graders make, and the teacher doesn't have enough time to check each child's work. Help him make corrections if needed. That's a good way to discuss the labels, which is great. The more he talks about it, the more he will remember.
2. **When the labels are correct, then it's time for "Thinking & Talking" about the object.** This might be your favorite part of your tutoring sessions. See the "Thinking & Talking" section of the Tutoring Guide (If you don't have a physical copy of the Tutoring Guide, you can download one from www.ChildrensLiteracyPublications.com.)

This is the time you give your tutee the gifts of **time to think** and **time to talk**. This is so needed for the struggling students. Even though teachers make a point of calling on each student, there just isn't enough time to wait for each struggling student to think and answer. Many of the struggling children you will tutor, lack critical thinking and have not developed oral language skills. By following my suggestions in this section, you will be helping your tutee in amazing ways. In addition to giving him a storehouse of words to draw upon, you will also be building word relationships, building broader concept knowledge, extending concepts, developing oral language skills, building his confidence and more...! Just follow the guide. It's really easy.

3. **Time to work with the labels.** Section III of this guide and also on the website www.ChildrensLiteracyPublications.com, you will find a really neat activity to do with your tutee called "Activity Sheets —Combining Vocabulary, Phonics, and Spelling." The teacher might assign this same worksheet, but that's okay because you will be setting your tutee up for success by doing it twice. In this activity, I took certain letter combinations that make sounds out of each label and put the letter combinations in a "Sound Bank" at the bottom of the page. The student is supposed to look at a label and decide which letter combination goes in the blanks in that label. You can talk about the sound the letter combination makes. He fills in the missing letters, then crosses off the letter combination in the Sound Bank. He can check his spelling by using the Word Bank on the page. (Ex: cr__n — the "ow" is missing in "crown") This activity reviews the new vocabulary while also reviewing phonics (letter sounds) and spelling. It sounds harder than it is, you'll see.
4. **After you have done three or more objects, there are forms for review activities.** Review over time, called spaced review, is the most effective form of review. It is more likely that your tutee will remember the words, if you review them over time. There are activities in Section IV or www.ChildrensLiteracyPublications.com that you use after you have studied 3 objects. It will be great if you can take time to do some of these review games and activities.
5. There are **other activities** for some of the objects on the Tutor page of my website. www.ChildrensLiteracyPublications.com.

Scenario B: You are working in a classroom where the teacher is not having her students draw/trace objects and label them in their "Book of Knowledge" Vocabulary Notebook or you are part of an independent tutoring program. Your tutee will need a "Book of Knowledge" Notebook.

1. **Teaching the parts of objects.** It is the parts of objects that my students (and your tutee) need to learn. All the students know the meaning of the word "dog," but do they know the parts of the dog, like "paw?" These are the types of things you will be teaching your little tutee. You will do this through simply looking at the picture in *The Illustrated Dictionary* with parts labeled and talking about the object and its parts.
2. Then, to **activate** the new words, you will help your tutee draw or trace the object into his/her "Book of Knowledge Interactive Vocabulary Notebook" (let's call it Notebook). Then help her label the parts. This is very important for retaining the information! You will have to explain that the labels are to be written on a horizontal line and the "labeling line" must touch the part being labeled and stretch to the label the way it is done in *The Illustrated Dictionary*. Really insist that it is precise and neat. After doing a couple of labeling sessions, your tutee will be able to do it neatly. It would be great if you would also trace or draw the object and model correct labeling. You can do this on a blank piece of copy paper. As you are both working, you can talk about the label and the object and the parts. You know how kids love to work along side us.
3. **When the labels are correct, then it's time for "Thinking & Talking" about the object.** This might be your favorite part of your tutoring sessions. See the "Thinking & Talking" section of the Tutoring Guide (If you don't have a physical copy of the Tutoring Guide, download one from www.ChildrensLiteracyPublications.com.)

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4. You will see a suggested book for each object. You don't need to read the suggested book, but if you have a book that shows the featured object, that would be nice. This is important because he sees the object in a setting... in a context.
5. **After you have done three or more objects, there are forms for review activities.** Review over time, called spaced review, is the most effective form of review. It is more likely that your tutee will remember the words, if you review them over time. There are activities in Section IV of this guide or www.ChildrensLiteracyPublications.com that you use after you have studied 3 objects. It will be great if you can take time to do some of these games and activities after you have worked with three or more objects.

I would suggest that you:

- do one object per week.
- review that object before going to the next object.
- study body and face first.
- sometimes let your tutee choose the object to be studied.
- use realia (real objects) to teach the parts or to review the parts if possible. Many of the objects to be studied are things available to you all the time (parts of body, clothing, etc.), but other objects could be brought from home. If you choose the object to be studied, you will know to bring the real object(s), but if the student chooses the object, perhaps you could bring the real object(s) the next session and use as review.
- sometimes ask your tutee to make up and **tell** you the definition of some of the labels [talk only]. S/he should generate the definition NOT look it up. Ex: paw. If he/she says, “It is what you call the foot of a dog,” that’s great.
- read the suggested stories (or talk about pictures in the book) with your tutee if there is time. You could even use the story or picture book as review later. The school library will have most of these. If you can’t find these, perhaps you can find others or go to the public library. Any Mother Goose book with pictures will be very helpful. You don’t have to read a story for every object, but you might find the object in a picture book and simply show and talk about it.
- combine objects. Ex: back, front, side of car can be taught together. Objects with only a few parts labeled can be combined with another object that is appropriate. Ex: Parts of a Needle with clothing. Parts of a Hat with clothing.

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