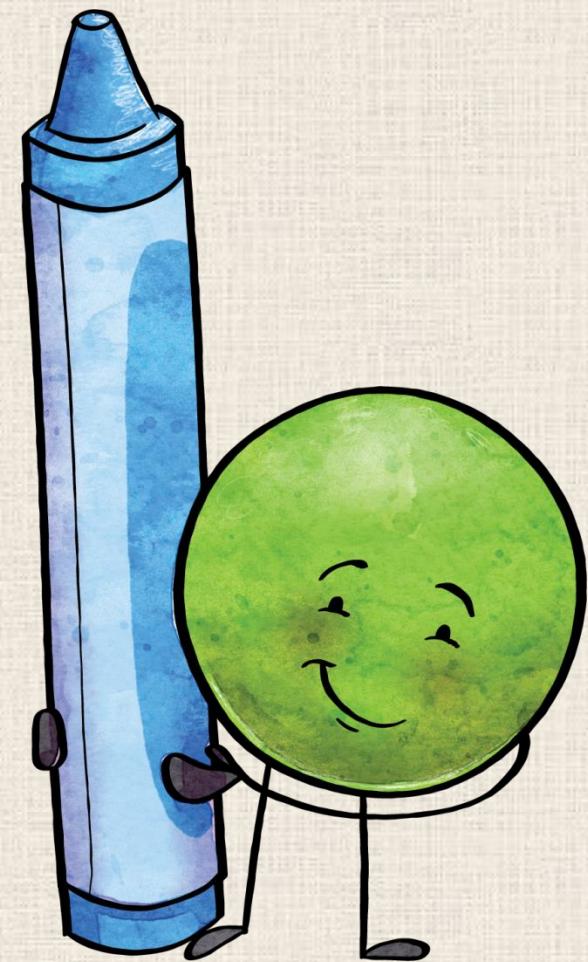


# 18 Silly Vocabulary Words That Teach Serious Skills in the Classroom

## Fun to Say Words

This handout accompanies the blog post “18 Silly Vocabulary Words that Teach Serious Skills in the Classroom.” [Check it out here](#) for even more ideas.





# Using Silly Words to Teach Serious Skills

These activities turn giggle-worthy vocabulary into meaningful practice with grammar, tone, etymology, and more. Whether you're building fluency or just having fun, these ideas make every word count.

## Word of the Week Box

Introduce one silly word each week. Students add it to their personal box and try using it in writing, conversation, or classroom games.

Bonus: Let students decorate their boxes during indoor recess or as a Friday reward.

## Vocabulary Challenge Stations

Use word cards for quick, skill-rich challenges:

- Match the word to its definition
- Use it in a sentence
- Create a comic strip or skit using 3+ words
- Vote on the "Most Fun Word to Say"

## Word Detective

Give students three clues that get progressively easier.

Example: "I am a verb. I mean to waste time. I start with L." → *lollygag*  
Students race to hold up or grab the correct card.

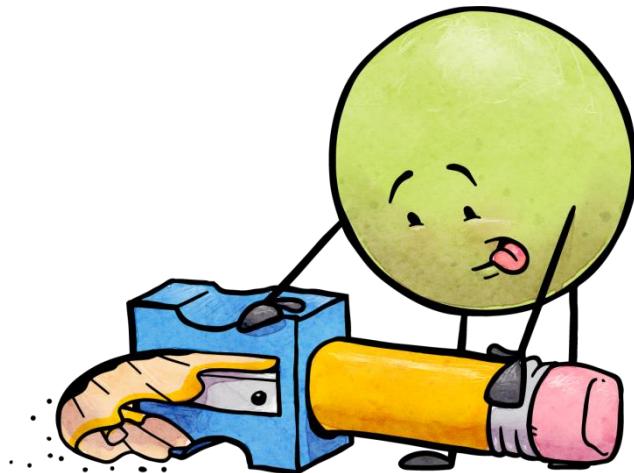
## Grammar Hunts

Use silly words to teach:

- parts of speech (e.g., *skedaddle* = verb, *borborygmus* = noun)
- etymology and word roots
- mentor sentences and grammar in context
- figurative language and tone

## Vocabulary Scoot

Place one card on each desk. Students rotate, writing definitions or drawing quick sketches. After guessing, they flip the card to self-check.



## **Memory Match with a Twist**

Spread cards face up. Call out clues like:

- “Find the antonym for stubborn”
- “Find the word that fits: The coach told us not to \_\_\_ before the game.”

Students race to grab the matching card and flip it to confirm.

## **Speed Sort Challenges**

Sort cards into categories:

- part of speech
- syllable count
- positive vs. negative connotation
- silly vs. serious tone

Play timed rounds, team relays, or tournament-style.

## **Vocabulary Charades**

Students act out a word silently while peers guess.

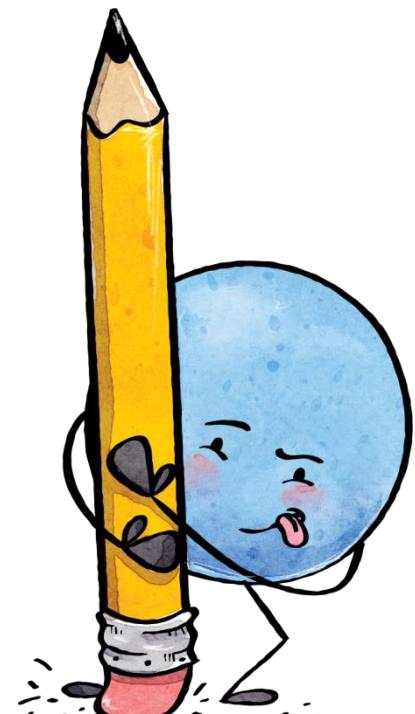
Perfect for expressive words like *kerfuffle*, *lollygag*, or *skedaddle*.

## **Back-to-Back Showdown**

Two students stand back-to-back with a card each.

On “Go!”, they flip and race to use the word in a correct sentence or define it aloud.

Winner keeps the card!





## 18 Delightfully Odd Words That Make Students Giggle—and Learn

Each word below includes a definition, a classroom-friendly example, and a quick origin story to keep things authentic and engaging.

### 1. lollygag

**Definition:** to fool around, dawdle, or procrastinate

**Origin:** first documented as “lallygag” in 1862, likely blending “lolly” (tongue) and “gag” (trick).

**Example:** Quit lollygagging and get ready for school. We’re leaving in 10 minutes!

### 2. diphthong

**Definition:** two vowels working together to make a new sound

**Origin:** Linguists started using this term in the 15th century. Words like “sound,” “noise,” and “annoy” are great examples.

**Example:** Choir, hold the second vowel sound in the diphthong until the end of the note.

### 3. skedaddle

**Definition:** to run away quickly or flee

**Origin:** Civil War slang meets classroom chaos

**Example:** The raccoon skedaddled the moment it saw the flashlight beam.

### 4. flibbertigibbet

**Definition:** a silly or flighty person who talks too much

**Origin:** Middle English mischief in one breathless word

**Example:** She’s a total flibbertigibbet during group work, but she keeps us laughing.

### 5. cattywampus

**Definition:** askew or out of alignment

**Origin:** Southern charm meets crooked bulletin boards

**Example:** Your poster is hanging all cattywampus; let’s fix it before open house.

### 6. borborygmus

**Definition:** the sound of a stomach rumbling

**Origin:** a fancy word for “tummy growls,” borrowed from Greek

**Example:** Please excuse my borborygmus; I skipped breakfast.

## 7. hootenanny

**Definition:** an informal gathering with music and fun

**Origin:** Appalachian roots and classroom celebrations

**Example:** We're planning a hootenanny to celebrate finishing our poetry unit.

## 8. brouhaha

**Definition:** a noisy commotion or fuss

**Origin:** French flair for hallway drama

**Example:** There was a real brouhaha when the fire drill interrupted recess.

## 9. snollygoster

**Definition:** a clever but unprincipled person

**Origin:** political insult turned vocabulary lesson

**Example:** That snollygoster in the story tricked everyone into giving him their snacks.

## 10. zounds

**Definition:** an exclamation of surprise or frustration

**Origin:** Shakespearean drama for everyday mishaps

**Example:** Zounds! I forgot my homework again.

## 11. bumbershoot

**Definition:** an umbrella

**Origin:** whimsical weather vocabulary from early 20th-century slang

**Example:** Don't forget your bumbershoot; it's supposed to rain during recess.

## 12. ragamuffin

**Definition:** a scruffy or poorly dressed child

**Origin:** from street urchins to recess royalty

**Example:** He came in from recess looking like a cheerful ragamuffin.

### 13. **harebrained**

**Definition:** silly or reckless in thought or action

**Origin:** likely from the idea of a skittish hare, quick but not always wise

**Example:** That harebrained idea to build a rocket out of soda bottles actually worked!

### 14. **hoity-toity**

**Definition:** acting snobbish or overly fancy

**Origin:** from 18th-century slang mimicking snooty behavior

**Example:** She got all hoity-toity about her glittery pencil case like it was made of gold.

### 15. **kerchoo**

**Definition:** a playful version of a sneeze sound

**Origin:** onomatopoeia meets classroom giggles, perfect for sound-based lessons or silly sentence starters

**Example:** He let out a giant kerchoo and scattered his spelling words across the desk.

### 16. **bumfuzzled**

**Definition:** confused or bewildered

**Origin:** Southern slang with a twist - great for tone, synonyms, or character reactions

**Example:** I was completely bumfuzzled when the math test had no numbers!

### 17. **gobbitygoo**

**Definition:** silly or jumbled speech

**Origin:** invented mash-up that feels like a cousin to gobbledegook - great for figurative language or nonsense poetry

**Example:** His explanation was pure gobbitygoo, but somehow we understood it.

### 18. **snickeroodle**

**Definition:** a giggle mixed with a snort (playful mash-up)

**Origin:** invented word that blends snicker + oodle - perfect for emotion-based vocabulary or character traits

**Example:** She let out a snickeroodle when the teacher said “platypus pajamas.”

**lollygag**

**diphthong**

**skedaddle**

**flibbertigibbet**

**cattywampus**

**borborygmus**

**hootenanny**

**brouhaha**

**snollygoster**

**zounds**

**bumbershoot**

**ragamuffin**

**harebrained**

**hoity-toity**

**kerchoo**

**bumfuzzled**

**gobbitygoo**

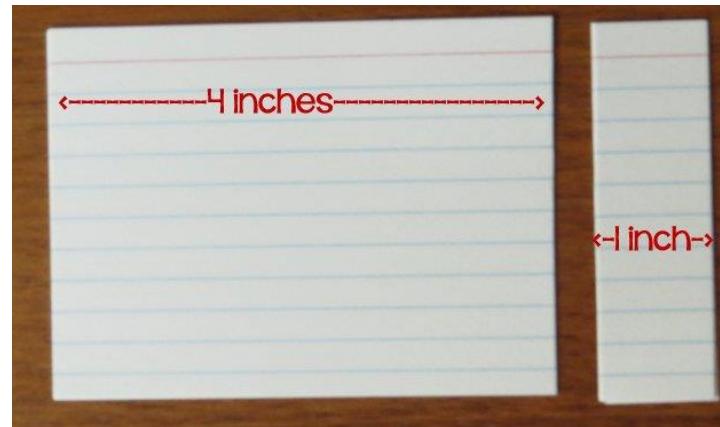
**snickeroodle**

# Vocabulary Card Storage Boxes - Extra Chewing Gum

Using Extra Chewing Gum storage boxes, you can have storage boxes ready for index cards in minutes. First, remove the cardboard from the plastic container. It slides right out.

The boxes are the correct size vertically, but too short horizontally. For standard 3 by 5-inch index cards, you must cut off one inch from one side to create 3 by 4-inch cards.

Three-by-four-inch-sized cards fit perfectly inside the plastic box.



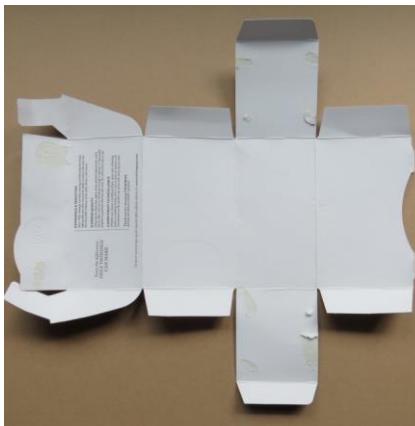
# Vocabulary Card Storage Boxes - Tea Boxes

Different companies use different measurements when creating their packaging. These three will work, but I prefer the design of the Twinings box the best.



## Step 1

Open **one** box to use as a template.  
Do not open the other boxes.



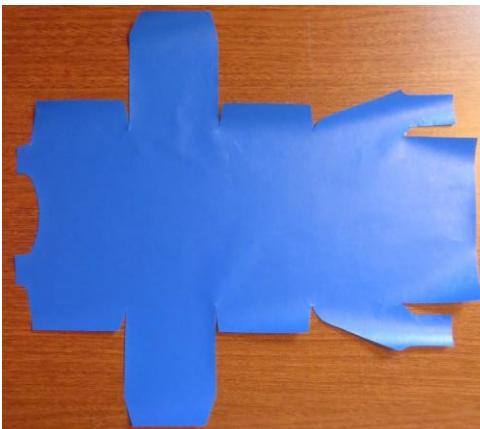
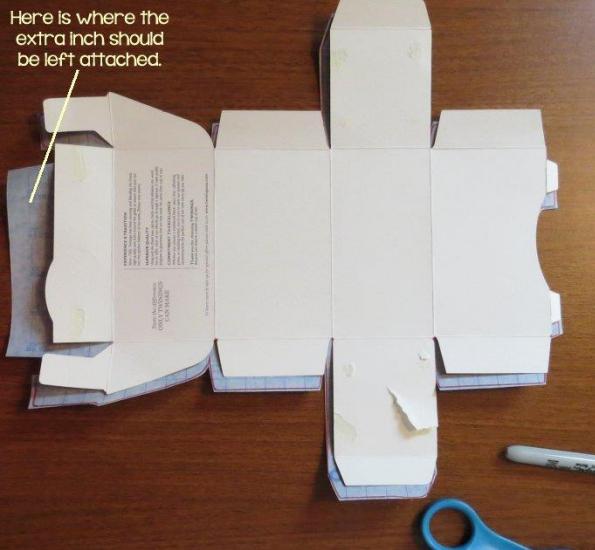
## Step 2

Place the template on the backside of Con-Tact paper. Trace around it with a marker. Important note: Add an extra inch to the pattern on the lid of the box. By doing so, the Con-Tact paper can be folded under for a neat edge. After tracing the box, cut out the shape.



### Step 3

When using a Twinings box, cut off the bottom of the logo to make the box have a straight edge.



### Step 4

Remove the wax paper backing from the Con-Tact paper.

### Step 5

Wrap the Con-Tact paper from the front to the back of the box, saving the sides for last.



### Step 6

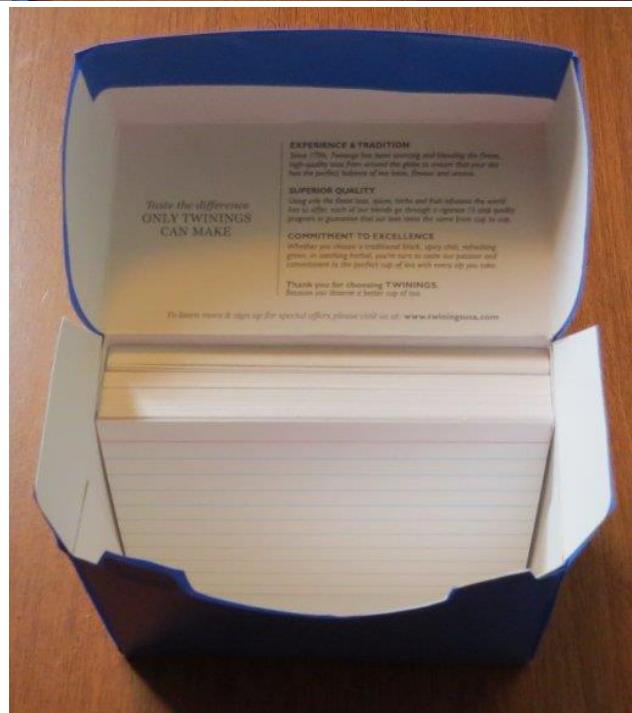
Fold in tabs on the sides and lid areas before wrapping the side pieces and the front of the lid.



## Step 7

Fold the front lid section over the inside of the box for a neat finished edge on the lid. You may need to trim off any Con-Tact paper that sticks beyond the edges of the box as it is sticky.

As you can see in the photo, the box is the perfect size for storing index cards.



## Vocabulary Activities to Do with Word Cards

☞ These games take the basic “spread and hold” model and stretch it into partner games, whole-class movement, and creative word play. They also reinforce **multiple layers of word knowledge**, not just definition recall, but part of speech, context, nuance, and usage.

### 1. Vocabulary Scoot

Place one card on each student's desk (front side showing).

Students “scoot” from desk to desk, writing down the definition or drawing a quick sketch for each word.

Bonus: have them flip the card after they've guessed to self-check.

### 2. Memory Match with a Twist

Spread out words face up. Teacher calls out a clue (“Find the antonym for stubborn” or “Find the word that fits this sentence: The coach told us not to \_\_\_ before the game.”).

Students race to grab the matching card, flip it over to prove it with the definition or example sentence.

### 3. Speed Sort Challenges

Sort into categories: part of speech, syllable count, positive vs. negative connotation, silly vs. serious words, etc.

Do it timed, in teams, or tournament-style.

### 4. Vocabulary Charades

Student draws a card and must act out the word (no speaking).

Peers guess the word, then the actor flips the card to check.

Works especially well with your “silly words” list—kerfuffle and lollygag act-outs are hysterical.

### 5. Back-to-Back Showdown

Two students stand back-to-back with a card each.

They flip when the teacher says “Go!”

First to use the word in a correct sentence (or say the definition) keeps the card.

uesses the word.

## **6. Word Detective**

Teacher gives three clues that get progressively easier.

Example: "I am a verb. I mean to waste time. I start with L." → *lollygag*.

Students race to hold up the right card.

## **7. Story Chain**

Each student draws a card and must add one sentence to a collaborative story using the word on the card.

Encourage silly twists. It makes even dry words memorable.

## **8. Four Corners Vocabulary**

Post signs in corners: "Synonym," "Antonym," "Part of Speech," "Sentence."

Teacher holds up a word card, students walk to the corner that matches the clue given.

Example: "Go to the corner that shows you know the antonym."

## **9. Vocabulary Dominoes**

On the front of each card: the word. On the back: one clue (synonym, antonym, example, or sentence with a blank).

Students "domino" them by matching the front of one card to the back of another.

## **10. Hot Seat**

One student sits with their back to the board. Teacher (or another student) holds a vocabulary card on their forehead.

Classmates can't say the word but must give clues using synonyms, antonyms, or sentences.

Student in the hot seat guesses the word.

# Word Detective Clues

- The teacher gives three clues that get progressively easier.

Example: "I am a verb. I mean to waste time. I start with L." → *lollygag*.

- Students race to hold up the right card.

## **lollygag**

Clue 1: I am a verb. People do this when they avoid getting work done.

Clue 2: I mean to waste time or dawdle.

Clue 3: I start with the letter **L**.

## **diphthong**

Clue 1: I am a linguistic term.

Clue 2: I describe two vowels working together to make a new sound.

Clue 3: You hear me in words like "noise" and "sound."

## **borborygmus**

Clue 1: I am a noun.

Clue 2: I describe a sound your stomach makes.

Clue 3: I'm a fancy word for "tummy rumble."

## **flibbertigibbet**

Clue 1: I am a noun. I describe a type of person.

Clue 2: I mean a silly, flighty, or scatterbrained person who talks too much.

Clue 3: I start with **F** and sound like a tongue-twister.

## **cattywampus**

Clue 1: I am an adjective. I describe something's position.

Clue 2: I mean crooked, askew, or not lined up straight.

Clue 3: I start with **C** and sound funny to say.

## **brouhaha**

Clue 1: I am a noun. You might hear me in a noisy cafeteria.

Clue 2: I mean an uproar, fuss, or noisy excitement.

Clue 3: I start with **B**.

## **bumbershoot**

Clue 1: I am a noun. I am an everyday object.

Clue 2: I'm a funny, old-fashioned word for an umbrella.

Clue 3: I start with **B** and end with **shoot**.

## Ready to build a stronger vocabulary toolkit?

Whether you're teaching word meaning, structure, or usage, the *Beyond the Dictionary* and *Root Prefix Suffixes* series offer skill-rich, teacher-friendly resources that make learning stick. Be sure to download the free sample weeks for each. Your next favorite vocabulary activity might be waiting inside!

## Beyond the Dictionary Sample Week

# Greek and Latin Roots & Affixes

## Sample

# Greek and Latin Roots & Affixes

## Sample Week

# THE BEST DEAL

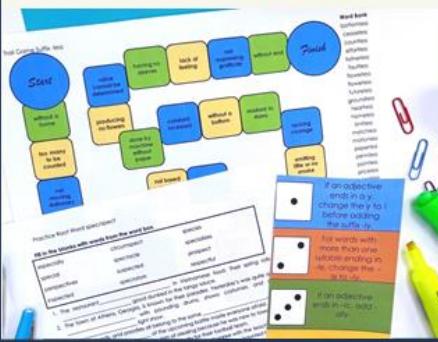
# Vocabulary Power Pack

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## Games, Word Work, Organizers

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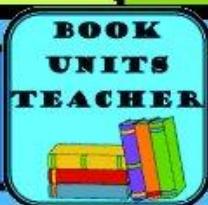


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