

Four Benefits of Word Search Puzzles

1. They Are a Great Way to Introduce and Reinforce Vocabulary

As I teach lessons across different content areas in my classroom, I have found that it is so important to help my students learn and understand the new vocabulary they are exposed to. Supplementing the launch of a new unit with a word search puzzle helps introduce my students to important vocabulary. For my students, this has almost always led to increased retention of content specific vocabulary. I have also used a word search puzzle for a vocabulary review. At the conclusion of a unit, I will give my students a puzzle. When they find a word, if they know the word and can define it, they highlight the word on the puzzle. If they still are unsure about the word meaning, they circle the word. This provides me a quick visual snapshot of my students understanding of key vocabulary.

2. Word Searches Help My Students with Their Spelling

Since I started teaching many years ago, I have noticed a decline in my students' ability to spell words accurately in their writing. As technology in society has increased, things like autocorrect and spellcheck have increased the perception by many people that it is no longer necessary to spell words well. In addition, with the increased demands on my time in the classroom, I have found that I have less and less time to teach spelling to the extent I would like. I have found word search puzzles to be helpful in helping my kids become better spellers. This has been especially true with content specific vocabulary.

3. Word Search Puzzles Encourage Problem Solving Skills

Completing a word search puzzle requires the ability to work through it logically and strategically. Students who become proficient at completing a word search learn to make a plan for the best way to approach the puzzle. I have found that as my students persevere in problem solving in this systematic way, their ability to make a plan for how to approach other problems seems to increase. Their stamina and perseverance increases and they show increased willingness to stick with a problem.

4. Word Searches are an Intrinsic Motivator for My Students

My students love word search puzzles! They want to complete them. They find them fun. I love finding things my students are intrinsically motivated to want to complete. On occasion, I will allow my early finishers to complete a word search puzzle. I have found that the kids look forward to this. It provides them an easy activity that reinforces vocabulary and encourages systematic problem solving!

All things considered, word search puzzles are certainly not a required classroom activity. They should be used sparingly and should never be used as a "time filler." But, I have found that the thought that they have no value in the classroom has not been true for my students. Meaningfully incorporated into the rigorous content and the lessons I am teaching, is a fun, active way for the students to reinforce their learning.