

# Tools for Instruction

## Shades of Meaning

Synonyms have similar meanings, but they also have small differences, or shades of meaning, in relation to one another. Their meanings can differ by intensity, degree, or quality. As students become familiar with shades of meaning, they can use more precise language to describe ideas, emotions, and events. Provide opportunities for students to explore words with different shades of meaning to help them become more aware of nuances in word choice as they read and write.

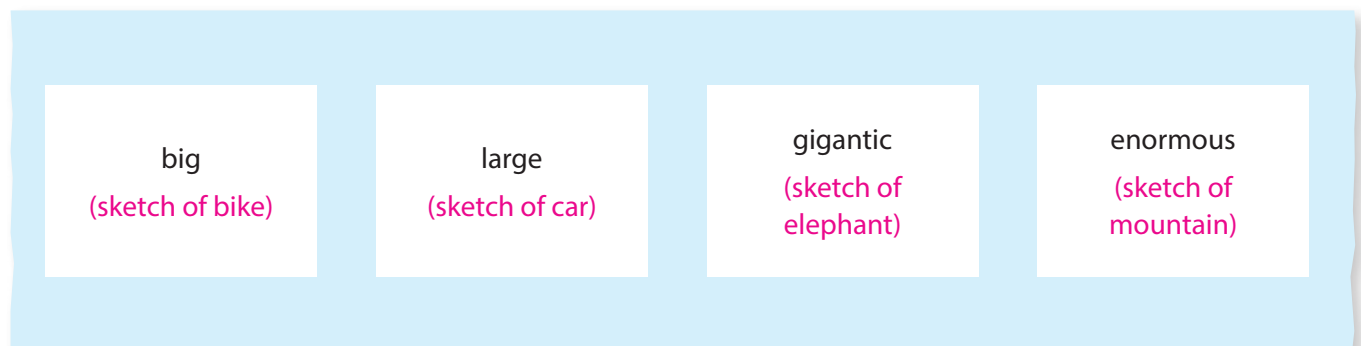
### Step by Step 30–40 minutes

#### 1 Introduce shades of meaning.

- Display the words *large* and *enormous* and read them aloud.
- Ask students what is the same about the words. (They both mean “big.”)
- Say, *These words are synonyms. They both mean “big.” However, each word describes a slightly different kind of “big.”*
- Have partners discuss the difference between *large* and *enormous*. Ask them to think of examples of things that are large and examples of things that are enormous. (*Enormous is bigger than large; a car is large, a mountain is enormous.*) Then ask volunteers to share their ideas and examples with the larger group.

#### 2 Model distinguishing shades of meaning.

- Ask students to brainstorm more words that mean “big.” (*huge, gigantic*)
- Write each word on an index card and display them. Say, *These words show different levels of “big.”*
- Ask students to share examples of items that illustrate the meaning of each word. Based on students’ ideas, add a simple drawing to each card.
- Model how to arrange the words in order according to size.



**3 Provide guided practice distinguishing shades of meaning.**

- Have students write the words *skip*, *hop*, and *leap* on index cards.
- Ask students what is the same about the words. (They describe types of jumps.)
- Ask partners to take turns demonstrating each type of jump.
- Have partners compare the meanings of the words. Ask, *Which word describes a big jump? Which word describes a small jump?*
- Have partners arrange the cards in order of degree. Have them explain their thinking to each other and then to the larger group. (The words *skip* and *hop* are small types of jumps that can be arranged in either order. *Leap* is a bigger type of jump.)

**4 Provide independent practice distinguishing shades of meaning.**

- Ask partners to work together to brainstorm a list of words that describe different ways of using your voice. List the words. (whisper, say, yell, talk, speak, sing, mumble, shout, hum)
- Point out that these words don't necessarily have an order of intensity or degree (as in Steps 2 and 3). The goal is to notice that each word has a slightly different meaning.
- Have partners take turns demonstrating each way of using their voices.
- Then have partners take turns using each word in an oral sentence. Ask volunteers to share their sentences with the larger group.

**Check for Understanding**

If you observe...	Then try...
students not being familiar with one of the words	providing several examples that show the meaning of the word. (The horse is big. The elephant is enormous.) If the word is a verb, demonstrate the meaning by acting it out for them.