

## Children's vocabulary shrinking as reading loses out to screen time, says Susie Dent

### Level 1: Elementary

**Article summary:** This article is about children's language development in the 2020s. It focuses on the UK and the impacts of screen time, reading and other aspects on children's English language skills and vocabulary acquisition.

**Time:** 60 minutes

**Skills:** Reading, Speaking, Writing

**Language focus:** Prefixes (*un-*, *over-*)

**Materials needed:** One copy of the worksheet per student

#### Key:

1. campaign
2. critical
3. beneficial
4. chore
5. curiosity
6. origins
7. lexicographer
8. regret
9. encourage
10. shrink

- b. Ask students to work individually or in pairs to complete the sentences using the words from the previous activity. Encourage students to read complete sentences to you when they give answers so that you can check their pronunciation of the key words.

### 1. Warmer

- a. The purpose of this activity is to teach students about the role of a *lexicographer*, a person who researches, writes and edits dictionaries. Read the list of items in question 1 aloud. Check that students understand the meaning. Then have students work in pairs to answer the questions. As a class, check the answers to question 1. Then invite volunteers to share their opinions on question 2 with the class.

#### Key:

*A lexicographer does NOT tell people that their language is wrong or 'bad' and do NOT create their own new words for the dictionary. They do everything else on the list. / Students' own answers*

#### Key:

1. chore
2. lexicographer
3. beneficial
4. campaign
5. encourage
6. regret
7. origins
8. critical
9. curiosity
10. shrink

### 2. Key words

- a. Ask students to work individually or in pairs to match the words and the definitions and then find the words in the article. Tell students that some words may appear in a different form in the article. Allow a few minutes for students to check answers in pairs or groups before checking answers with the whole class.

### 3. Comprehension check

- a. Students can work individually or in pairs to do this activity. Encourage students to underline the section in the article where they found the answers. Then have them correct the false statements in the space below the sentences. To extend, have students share more true or false statements about the article.

#### Key:

1. False – Children today spend less time reading than they did in the past.
2. False – Dent thinks that the internet can help children with language development.
3. True

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4. *True*
5. *False – Conversations in daily life are really important for language skills.*
6. *False – Dent believes that students should learn foreign languages also.*

#### 4. Key language

- a. This activity focuses on the prefixes *un-* and *over-*. Remind students of the meaning of the word *prefix* (a group of letters added to the beginning of a word to change its meaning). Tell students that prefixes can be added to words, adjectives or adverbs. As an example, explain that the prefix *re-* means 'again', so *redo* means 'do again.' Call on volunteers to read each of the explanations aloud. Explain that *un-* has two different meanings. The meaning depends on the word it's used with. Elicit the answers from the class.

**Key:**

1. *un-*
2. *over-*

- b. Have students work in pairs to read the words in the table and guess the meanings. Then tell them to look through the article to find one more example of a word with *un-* and a word with *over-*. As a class, elicit the meanings of all the words in the table, including the new words from the article.

**Key:**

1. *unexpected*
2. *overusing*

- c. Have students work in pairs to choose the correct words from the table to complete the sentences. Check answers as a class. To extend, invite students to make their own sentences with the remaining words in the table.

**Key:**

1. *unlock*
2. *oversleep*
3. *unexpected*
4. *overusing*
5. *unhappy*
6. *excited*

#### 5. Discussion

- a. Students discuss the questions in pairs or groups. Ask them to justify their opinions, referring to their own experiences or beliefs whenever possible. Invite volunteers to share their answers with the class. To extend, ask students to share what they learned from discussing the questions with their classmates.

#### 6. In your own words

- a. The purpose of this activity is to encourage students to reflect on what they learnt from the article. Remind students of the campaign to help children learn vocabulary at lunch. The children learned the origins and definitions of interesting or unusual English words. Read the first part of the directions aloud. Explain to students that *Who*, *What*, *Where*, *When*, *Why* and *How* are question words. Questions with these words can help us describe an event or make a plan. Have volunteers read each of the bullet points aloud. Check for understanding. Then put students in pairs or small groups. Tell them to think of ideas for a new campaign. They can start by making a list of ideas, then choosing one idea to focus on. They should take notes to answer all of the questions in the list.
- b. Have students present their campaigns to the class. Take a class vote to choose the students' favourite campaign. Encourage students to share one positive thing about each group's campaign.