

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

### Level 1: Elementary

#### 1 Warmer

a. A *lexicographer* is a person who helps to make dictionaries. Discuss the questions.

1. Mark (✓) the things you think lexicographers do.

- ☐ learn about the history of words
- ☐ write definitions and example sentences
- ☐ tell people that their language is wrong or 'bad'
- ☐ study how people use words in real life
- ☐ make notes about grammar and pronunciation
- ☐ create their own new words for the dictionary

2. Do you think a lexicographer is an important job? Why?

3. Can you think of other jobs in the area of languages or linguistics?

#### 2 Key words

a. Choose the correct word to match each definition. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context. Tell students that some words may appear in a different form in the article.

chore

curiosity

beneficial

campaign

critical

- 1. an organised action or activity to reach a goal \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. extremely important \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. something that brings good or helpful results \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. something that you must do; a boring routine \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. a strong desire to learn or understand something new \_\_\_\_\_

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regret

encourage

origins

shrink

lexicographer

6. the place where something begins or comes from \_\_\_\_\_
7. a person who researches, writes and edits dictionaries \_\_\_\_\_
8. to feel sad or disappointed about something you did \_\_\_\_\_
9. to support something or cause it to happen \_\_\_\_\_
10. to get smaller in size, amount or value \_\_\_\_\_

#### b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.

1. I hate cooking! I think making dinner every night is a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Meryl loves languages. She wants to be a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Exercise and healthy foods can be \_\_\_\_\_ for everyone.
4. The university organised a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ to raise money.
5. Social media can \_\_\_\_\_ people to make new friends.
6. Do you \_\_\_\_\_ quitting your job and moving to a new country?
7. Some scientists study the \_\_\_\_\_ of life on Earth.
8. Be safe! It's \_\_\_\_\_ to wear a seatbelt when you drive.
9. Young children have a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ and creativity.
10. Don't put your clothes in the dryer for a long time. They might \_\_\_\_\_.

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*Exclusive: Countdown lexicographer urges families to read, talk and play word games to help language development*

**Sally Weale**

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- 1 Children's vocabulary is shrinking as kids spend more time using screens and less time reading. The lexicographer Susie Dent is encouraging families to read, talk and play word games to improve language development.
- 2 "I'm not saying no to all screens," Dent said. "I think technology plays a huge role in improving children's vocabulary, if it's used in the right way."
- 3 Dent said English-language speakers had always been afraid of new technology.
- 4 "The Victorians were scared of the postcard. They thought it would affect the beauty of the language because people had to fit text into a very small space. And the same happened with the telegram – there was a lot of fear over that. And then that increased with the invention of the internet.
- 5 "There are many ways the internet is helping. For example, it encourages variety in the English language. But there is a difference between overusing it and using it in ways that can be beneficial."
- 6 Dent is leading a new campaign. She's working with an unexpected partner – Soreen malt loaf (a brand of bread). Their aim is to teach children vocabulary at snack time.
- 7 Soreen lunchbox loaves will include fun words such as kerfuffle and hullabaloo, with definition and origins to encourage children's curiosity.
- 8 "This is really close to my heart because I spend my life trying to encourage people, especially children, to enjoy the dictionary. I think it has more drama and magic and adventure than almost any other book I can imagine," Dent said.
- 9 "For me the biggest worry is the differences between children who read and have good vocabulary and those who don't. It's a well-known effect that children who read improve their vocabulary much more quickly."
- 10 "Dialogue or conversation in daily life is really important, also word-based games. This is another way that going online can help, because there are so many brilliant word games."
- 11 Dent also believes that learning a foreign language can play a critical role in developing a love and understanding of English. "If there's one thing I could change, it would be to encourage students to study foreign languages at school."
- 12 She added "It might seem like a chore, but I don't think anyone ever regrets learning a foreign language."

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#### Glossary:

**kerfuffle:** a noisy and disorderly activity or argument

**hullabaloo:** a noisy and chaotic situation or problem

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Read the article again. Decide if the statements are True or False. Then correct the false sentences in the space below.

1. Children today spend more time reading than they did in the past. True / False
2. Dent thinks that the internet cannot help children with language development. True / False
3. A new programme will use lunchtime and lunch foods to teach children vocabulary. True / False
4. Reading plays an important role in children's vocabulary development. True / False
5. Conversations in daily life are not important for language skills. True / False
6. Dent believes that students should learn the English language only. True / False

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#### 4 Key language

a. Read the meanings below. Then choose the correct prefix.

1. the opposite of; the reverse of: **un-** / **over-**
2. more than usual or too much: **un-** / **over-**

b. Read the words in the table. Look at the article and find new words to add.

<b>-un</b>	<b>-over</b>
unhappy	overexcited
unimportant	overconfident
unpack	overthink
unlock	oversleep
(1) _____	(2) _____

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#### c. Complete the sentences with a word from the table.

1. Please \_\_\_\_\_ the front door to let the neighbour in.
2. I set three alarms tonight. I'm worried that I'm going to \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Julie was surprised when her friend rang from the aeroplane. The call was \_\_\_\_\_.
4. My brother is on his mobile phone 12 hours a day. I think he's \_\_\_\_\_ it.
5. Tony was very \_\_\_\_\_ today. He lost his wallet in the park.
6. Children often get \_\_\_\_\_ for fun events like parties and holidays.

#### 5 Discussion

##### a. Discuss these questions.

1. What are the positive and negative things about screen time for children?
2. Do children in your country have similar problems with vocabulary skills? Why?

#### 6 In your own words

##### a. The article discussed a campaign to help students learn vocabulary at lunch time. Work in pairs or groups. Create your own campaign to support children's language development. Use the questions below to help you plan.

- **Who:** Who is the campaign for? How old are the children? What skills do they need to learn?
- **What:** What does the campaign include? Will you write words and definitions somewhere? Will you give children short stories to read?
- **Where:** Where is the campaign based? At home, at school or in public places like shops, restaurants and libraries?
- **When:** How long will the campaign last? How often will children see it?
- **Why:** Why is this campaign a good idea? Why will children like it?
- **How:** How will you make the campaign happen? Do you need special materials, money or support from other people?

##### b. Share your campaign with the class. Take a vote to choose your favourite campaign.