

# WORD WORK LESSON PLAN AND ACTIVITIES

Instructional  
Focus Based on  
the Words in  
the Book

**Word Work**

**The Mysteries of Harris Burdick**  
By: Chris Van Allsburg  
Grade Level: 4 / Guided Reading Level: 3

**Instructional Focus:**  
Synonyms

**Background:**  
In *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*, the author uses words to create mystery, suggest plot, and to support vocabulary development. To explore synonyms for key words in the book, students will choose synonyms for the words in the book. Encourage students to use clues from the book to determine the best-fitting synonym.

**Examples:**

book—story	hello—hi	happy
closed—shut	freezing—icy	laughing
above—on top	dog—hound	pretend

**Materials and Preparation:**

- A copy of *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Students' independent reading
- Synonym sorting mats (1 set per pair)
- Synonyms Word Work Practice (1 set per pair)
- Optional: Word Detective Extension Activity
- Optional: Synonym Hunt for Extension Activity

**Step 1: Introduce the Focus of Word Work**

**Introduce Synonyms**

- Explain to students that synonyms are words that have similar meanings. Good readers expand their vocabulary as they learn new synonyms. A dictionary or a thesaurus is a good resource for finding synonyms. Synonyms also enhance our writing abilities.
- Begin an anchor T-chart. On the left, write the word happy. Ask students to volunteer synonyms for happy. Record reasonable answers on the right-hand side of the T-chart.
- Continue adding to the anchor chart using the following words on the left side: book, hello, closed, freezing, above, and false. Record student responses on the right of the T-chart as each word is added.
- Note to students that we can find synonyms for all kinds of parts of speech.
- Then, ask students to come up with their own set of synonyms. Add any reasonable pairs to the anchor chart.

**Step 2: Connect Word Work to Reading**

**Synonyms in the Text**

- Tell students that there are many words in *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* that we can use to practice finding synonyms. Explain that this exercise will help us think more deeply about the few words that Burdick left for us.
- Display the words from the book listed below. Give each student a piece of paper or a whiteboard to record any ideas for synonyms as you read.
- Ask students to start thinking of possible synonyms for each word, but remind them that the **context of the words** is important for understanding their meaning. Encourage them to use the title, the other words in the caption, and the illustration for clues to come up with good synonyms.
- Remind students to be polite and not interrupt while you read.
- Read *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*.

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Step by Step Lesson Plan

**Word Work**

**The Mysteries of Harris Burdick**  
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**Step 2: Connect Word Work to Reading (continued)**

**Some examples of Synonyms found in the text:**

- wonder, tiny (pg. 1)
- under, rug (pg. 3)
- strange, skipping (pg. 5)
- mightily, pulled (pg. 7)
- place, answer (pg. 9)
- uninvited, pounding (pg. 11)
- harp, true (pg. 13)
- warmed, book (pg. 15)
- chairs, ended up (pg. 17)
- began, open (pg. 19)
- grew, brighter (pg. 21)
- swung, lantern (pg. 23)
- softly, goodbye (pg. 25)
- house, perfect (pg. 27)

**Step 3: Guided Word Work Practice**

**Interactive Exploration**

- Divide students into pairs.
- Provide each pair with a set of **synonym cards** (cut in advance) and a set of **synonym sorting mats**.
- Show students how to place each synonym card next to the sentence that best matches the boldface word. **Their goal, as a pair, is to correctly match all 20 synonym cards with the 20 sentences.**
- Explain that once they've matched all the synonym cards, they should glue them next to the correct sentence. Remind students that there is one synonym per sentence.
- Tell students this activity works best if they read each sentence aloud and work together to decide on the match.
- Set a timer for 15-20 minutes.
- Circulate around the room to observe, check in, and offer support as needed.
- At the end of the activity, review and discuss the correct answers with the whole group.
- Early Finisher Challenge:** If a pair finishes early, ask them to choose one sentence to illustrate. Then, have them come up with two additional synonyms for two different words in their chosen sentence. At the top of their illustration, they can create a title, and at the bottom, they can write their new sentence as the caption.

**Step 4: Independent Word Work Practice**

**Practice Page**

- Give each student a copy of the **Synonyms practice page**.
- Read the directions with the class.
- Tell the students to complete the practice page.
- Monitor students while they work.

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List of words in the book that  
match the instructional focus

Interactive Activity

**Synonym Cards**

**Directions:** Cut the synonym cards apart. Match them to the **boldface words** in the sentences on the sorting mat. There is one synonym per sentence.

pushed	mean
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**Synonym Sorting Mat**

**Directions:** Match each synonym card to **bold face words** in the sentences below. Once you've matched all the cards, glue them next to the matching sentence. There is one synonym per sentence.

Names: \_\_\_\_\_

She **shoved** him to the ground with force. (glue matching synonym card here)

"What a **cute** little pup!" the police man exclaimed. (glue matching synonym card here)

Full of **wonder**, he watched the fireworks explode. (glue matching synonym card here)

We couldn't take one more minute of the **constant** noise. (glue matching synonym card here)

"**Spaghetti** for dinner again?" he whined. (glue matching synonym card here)

Beautiful music filled the **air** as the trumpet played. (glue matching synonym card here)

**Jewels** poured out of his backpack as he tripped over the ledge. (glue matching synonym card here)

He asked, "Will we ever **arrive** at the lake?" (glue matching synonym card here)

Before he could close the gate, 12 **pigs** came dashing out. (glue matching synonym card here)

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**Synonym Hunt**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** You are a word detective! Hunt for words in your book, write them down, and come up with synonyms. Then, for a challenge, close your book and think of antonyms for the words on your list.

Word	Synonyms	Antonyms

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**Word Detective: Synonyms Extension Activity**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Be a word detective! Be on the lookout for **synonyms** while you read. Write the word that you find along with the title of the book where you found the word, the page, and the sentence with the word or phrase.

Word	Book Title	Page	Sentence

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**Synonyms**

**Directions:** Write a title and caption for the illustration below that matches the style of Harris Burdick. Then, circle 3 words in your title and caption, and write synonyms for those words on the lines below.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Synonyms**

**Directions:** Write a title and caption for the illustration below that matches the style of Harris Burdick. Then, circle 3 words in your title and caption, and write synonyms for those words on the lines below.

Names: \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Look at the list of words below. Circle the synonyms for each **bold face** word. Then write another synonym for the word in the blank column.

Word	Synonyms	Blank		
1. Good	great	fine	bad	unsure
2. Hot	on	roasting	spicy	boiling
3. Weird	bizarre	unusual	odd	terrifying
4. Ship	liner	vessel	sunken	map
5. Angry	red	upset	furious	happy
6. Jumped	bounced	places	leaped	them
7. Big	huge	enormous	giant	massive

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Optional Activity to  
Extend Engagement

Word Detective

Independent Practice Pages