

The Wildest Word: Connecting the Seemingly Unconnectable (uncommon uses of adjectives and verbs for a subject)

Emily Dickinson once wrote, “The wildest word consigned to language is No.” Based on the notion that a word might be the wildest word, or most cautious word, etc., the following technique can be used successfully in all grades, with adaptations for primary. The exercise develops the concept of personification, as well as expansion of verb and adjective usage.

- 1) Pass out a sheet with the adjective list and verb list back-to-back. Direct students to choose one adjective from the list and create a title on their writing paper using the word this way: if someone chooses “quiet,” the title would be “The Quietest Word.” If they choose a word like “dangerous,” remind them that they would simply place the word “most” in front of the adjective.
- 2) Have them turn to the verb side, point to any verb in any column, and go up and down that column while looking away from the sheet until you say “stop.” Tell them to circle the word they landed on or closest to. Repeat this process with a different column. Tell them to jot down those two verbs somewhere above their title on their writing sheet.
- 3) Tell students that the first three words of the poem will start with the words of their title. Demonstrate the technique with a poem titled *The Wildest Word*. Put that title on the board. Let them know the poet had landed on the verbs “toss” and “capture.” Write those verbs above the title. The first line begins this way, “The Wildest Word is _____.” Write this on the board under the title.
- 4) Tell them they will be choosing an object not necessarily considered to have the attribute of the adjective. For example, an immediate connection with wildness might be something like a cheetah chasing an antelope or an inanimate object that can move wildly, like a roller coaster. Surprise them with the object: “The Wildest Word is buttercup.”
- 5) Tell them that the rest of the poem will be a kind of poetic proof of a buttercup’s wildness, in which the two verbs have to be used for the proof. (Inform them that the form of the verb can be changed.) Demonstrate by continuing the sample poem:

The Wildest Word

The wildest word is buttercup,

the way it *captures* the meadow
in its yellow-flowered beauty,

tossing butter-cupped petals
into the wind.

Adaptations: Use the primary grades' verb and adjective lists, and direct them in writing a poem using only one verb for the action of the chosen object. The following is a sample of a student's poem which uses "skillful" for the chosen adjective, "climb" for the verb from the list, and the noun "eraser" for the object:

The Most Skillful Word

The most *skillful* word is *eraser*.
It *climbs* all over mistakes
like a mountain climber
trying to find his way to the top.

Danny, 2nd Grade

Sample Poems:

The Saddest Word (verbs: *forget, spill*)

The saddest word is flower,
the way it can be *forgotten*,
standing all alone,
in full blossom,
just like a fragile cup
spilling a sweet fragrant scent.

Rebecca, 5th grade

The Most Mischievous Word (verbs: *erase, capture*)

The most mischievous word is lightning,
erasing the dark in its flash,
and shutting off lines in thunderous blows.
How it *captures* the earth
like a butterfly in a jar.

Riley, 5th grade