# Vocabulary practice for 3rd grade: five words, three days

Peabody blog · Words and levels · updated 2026-10-04

Third grade is when reading vocabulary takes off. A simple at-home routine, how Peabody's stories teach five words each, and why words need several days to stick.

Third graders meet a flood of new words in what they read, and the ones that stick are the ones they meet several times, on several days, in sentences that make the meaning clear. A good routine is small: a few words, used often, checked cold on different days. Peabody (peabody.kids) builds that into every story for readers from 2nd grade up: five vocabulary words, each used at least three times, a quick warm-up before the next story, and a word only counts as sticking after three right days. It's free through the end of 2026.

## Why vocabulary matters more in 3rd grade

Around third grade, many children shift from mostly learning to read toward reading to learn. Books get longer, sentences get more complex, and more of the words are ones kids rarely hear in conversation: reluctant, gradually, ancient, investigate.

A child who can sound out reluctant but doesn't know what it means will read the page and miss the point. That's why vocabulary becomes such a big part of reading comprehension from here on.

## A simple routine: five words a week

You don't need a workbook. Try this:

1. Choose five words from what your child is reading, or from the list below. Words they'll meet again are best.
2. Day 1: meet them in a sentence. Read the sentence together. Ask, "What do you think it means?" before you explain. Guessing from the sentence (context clues) is a skill in itself.
3. Days 2 to 5: use them. At dinner, in the car, at bedtime. Ask your child to use one in a sentence about their day.
4. Check them cold. The next morning, before any reading, ask what two of the words mean. A word they get right on three separate days is sticking.
5. Keep the misses. Any word they miss rolls into next week's five.

That last part matters. Most of the benefit comes from coming back to a word, not from the first meeting.

## Why "right after the story" isn't enough

Getting a word right five minutes after reading it shows it's in short-term memory. What you want is for your child to still know it next week. Memory research has a name for that gap (learning versus performance), and it's why spreading practice across several days works better than cramming the same amount into one sitting. Smaller studies of children learning new word meanings find the same pattern.

## How Peabody's stories teach five words

For readers at a 2nd-grade level and up, every story Peabody writes includes five vocabulary words picked for the child's level:

- Each word appears at least three times in the story, in different sentences, so the meaning builds from context.
- The writer is told which words your child has already met, so each story brings fresh ones.
- Stories are short: 8 to 20 pages. At a 3rd-grade level a page is one paragraph of about 40 to 65 words.
- Tap a new word to hear it.

Around each story:

- Before: a quick warm-up. Each word comes with three possible meanings, and your child picks one. Words from earlier stories that are due for review come back here, missed words first.
- After: a short word check and four to six questions about the story.
- Each step has a Skip button for tired evenings.

A word becomes sticking only after it's right in the warm-up on three different days in a row, and a later miss sends it back to practising. Sticking words come back for keeper checks about a week, and then a month, later. The details are in how Peabody tracks the words your child knows.

An honest note: a three-choice question can be guessed one time in three, and picking the right meaning isn't the same as using the word in conversation. That's why one right answer never counts, and why the most useful thing a grown-up can do is ask, out loud, the next day.

## What grown-ups see

With a free grown-up account, each child's page shows every word they've met, labelled new, practising or sticking, with the most recently missed at the top, the meaning, and what they got on their very first try. It also suggests one question for tonight, like "Ask them to use gradually in a sentence about their day," or "Ask them where investigate happened in the story."

## 3rd grade vocabulary words to try

A starter list of words third graders often meet in books. Pick five and use them all week:

- Feelings and character: curious, cautious, reluctant, stubborn, frantic
- Time and change: ancient, gradually, hesitate, predict, journey
- Seeing and finding out: investigate, observe, glimpse, remarkable, wander
- Things and places: enormous, fragile, scarce, shelter, swift

## More ideas for context clues

- Cover the word. Read a sentence with the word hidden and ask what word could go there. Then reveal it.
- Find the hint. Many sentences explain a hard word nearby: "The bridge was fragile. It looked like it might break." Ask your child to point at the hint.
- Make it silly. "Would you rather be cautious or frantic near a sleeping dragon?"

## Free 3rd grade stories

Try one of Peabody's own 3rd-grade stories in the free library, no account needed: The Otter's Rock or Pecos Bill. Then make one of your own with five new words inside.

## Questions parents ask

### How many vocabulary words should a 3rd grader learn a week?

There's no single right number. A handful of words, met and used on several different days, tends to stick better than a long list studied once. Ask your child's teacher what their class is working on.

### What's the best way to practise vocabulary at home?

Meet a word in a sentence, use it out loud over several days, and check it cold the next morning. Words that are right on three separate days are sticking; missed words roll into next week.

### How does Peabody choose vocabulary words?

For readers from 2nd grade up, the AI picks five words that fit the story and the child's level, steering clear of words the child has already met, and uses each at least three times. Code checks the story before it's shown.

### Is Peabody free for 3rd graders?

Yes. Peabody is free through 31 December 2026, with no sign-up. Each child can make up to three new stories a day and read the library as much as they like.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/vocabulary-practice-3rd-grade