

## Vocabulary “BINGO” Instructions for School (and Home)

**WHO:** Your students or children and you

**WHAT:** Playing the happily addictive game of Vocabulary “BINGO”

**WHERE:** Any room in your school (or home) with tables or desks and chairs or benches

**INGREDIENTS:** Vocabulary “BINGO” cards, vocabulary words list, chips, blackboard, white board or flip chart, marker and/or vocabulary words printed out

**WHY:** Because students get to play with words, and playing with words makes reading and writing a lot less intimidating. Vocabulary “BINGO” is a fun and highly effective way to help students learn how to spell and pronounce new words, learn their meanings, and use them in proper context. To “level up” fun and intensity, you can use the game to remind the students of the definitions or challenge them – perhaps, for bonus points – to share the definitions. Plus, there will never be a loser in this game. Even if a student doesn’t get “BINGO,” she wins simply by playing the game.

**HOW:** 1) Announce:

The objectives: To have fun learning new words and their meanings.

How a card wins: Five chips in a row: straight across, up or down, or diagonally.

Free space: It means what it says.

2) Since each card comes with 24 blank spaces, create or use a vocabulary word list of at least 24 words. For younger children, such as first-and-second-graders, a 24-word list is fine. If you work with middle or high school students, I’d suggest a 35-word list. I encourage the creation of lists based on news articles, novels or picture books, non-fiction books, poems, and “challenging” words. Rhyming words, proper nouns, words from historical events, places, and holidays also make for great lists. Invite students to suggest words or categories for your lists. Let there be no limit to how many ways you uncover for word play.

3) Invite students to randomly fill their cards with words from the word list. If students fill in the words, it will help them learn the words faster. However, for younger students, and when you’re short on time, it might be prudent for you to fill in the cards in advance and then pass them out. To save time, you can make two to four copies of the same card. That means several students will win each round, which will make them very happy.

4) Pass out chips. Use colored paper squares, or coins (which the children LOVE), or checkers, or even, when you can afford it, M&Ms. Be creative.

5) Call out the words, one by one, in random order. Write each word on the flip chart or blackboard, so that students can clearly see it as they play.

6) When students get five words in a row, and call out Vocabulary “BINGO”!, pause the game. Ask one student to call out the words as you verify them. If they’re correct, invite the class to celebrate. Then move on to the next game.

Have fun and share some stories about your Vocabulary “BINGO” experiences by emailing:

[caroline@carolinebrewerbooks.com](mailto:caroline@carolinebrewerbooks.com)

## Two of my favorite Vocabulary “BINGO” stories!

Elizabeth, the fourth grader I coached for some of the 2006- 2007 school year, fell head over hills in love with Vocabulary “BINGO” and wanted to play every time I visited. It was a new and exciting way for her to get more acquainted with words. Vocabulary “BINGO” felt to Elizabeth more like play than “learning,” which for her had always been painful.

These “BINGO” games were also a big hit with the Special Education middle-schoolers who told me (almost angrily) they wanted to play in class rather than learn academics. Instead of being upset, their thirst for more games motivated me. I created “BINGO” cards based on rhyming words, proper nouns, historical figures and places, and themes from reading materials we used.

The Friday before Christmas break that school year, my colleague Joshua Smith joined the teacher and me as we led the students in Vocabulary “BINGO” using words from a short book the children had read on the pyramids of Egypt. The teacher gave a Reese’s Cup to each student who got “BINGO,” and I gave each winner a quarter. We had six students. (Fourteen were assigned to the class). I told them their teacher and I would give them a surprise at the end of class.

After an hour of play, not a single student was ready to quit, and undoubtedly quite a few didn’t realize how much they were learning.

The teacher and I awarded each student \$1.00 as a surprise. They were all ecstatic. Some jumped up and down as if they’d won the lottery. It was something to see. I knew they’d enjoy getting the dollar, but I didn’t expect to see that kind of joy. Then I turned to look at the boy who had started the school year with a shockingly foul mouth but had calmed and buckled down in recent weeks. He had won the most “BINGO” games and was going home with \$1.75 and three Reese’s Cups. He wasn’t bouncing around like his classmates. He sat quietly, looked up, and then as a wide grin spread across his face solemnly declared, “This is the happiest day of my life.”

The teacher, Joshua, and I were amazed. It was clear that all children want so badly to win at *something* in life. A small thing such as winning some quarters and candy seems to have gone a long way towards giving them the sense that maybe, just maybe, they could be winners.

I share these stories only to emphasize how a little recreation can go a long way toward building great relationships with children - and positively impact their desire to learn.