

Lesson 6: The Building Blocks of Language

Chapter 2 — Lesson 6

The Case Is Still Open

Today's Word: HABITAT

Closing Detective Word: DOGHOUSE

After the Morning Routine

Begin after the class's established morning routine. Use the classroom routines, song, movement, visual supports, and participation structures that are already working for your class. Then return to the unfinished investigation from Lesson 5.

1. Welcome Back, Word Detectives

Say: **"Welcome back, word detectives."** Write on the board: **HABITAT**. Then say: **"We left a mystery open."** Lesson 5 asked: **WHAT CAN WE FIND?** The class already did that work. Today the question changes: **WHAT DOES WHAT WE FOUND MEAN?**

2. Bring Back the Evidence

Rebuild the evidence from Lesson 5. Write: **HABITAT** and **HAB | I | TAT**. Then bring forward the selected words the class found: **A, I, IT, AT, BIT, HABIT**, and **A BIT**. Do not turn this into another word hunt. These are the words the lesson is carrying forward. The teacher puts them back on the board so everyone can work from the same evidence.

3. Words Have Meaning

Tell the class: **"We found these words inside HABITAT. These words have meanings too."** Explain: **"Something we already understand can sometimes give us a clue about something we are still trying to understand."** Some clues may help a lot, some may help a little, and some may not help at all. Today the class will look at what these words mean and ask whether those meanings can help them think about **HABITAT**.

4. Give the Words Their Meanings

Write the meaning beside each word: **A — one; I — refers to self; IT — refers to a thing; AT — tells us where or at what place; BIT — a small piece; HABIT — something done regularly; A BIT — a piece of something**. These meanings are part of the lesson. Students may know other meanings, and those can be talked about, but keep these meanings visible because these are the meanings the class will use for today's investigation.

5. A Small Language Rule

Pause at **AT**. Tell the class: **“AT belongs to a group of words called prepositions.”** Explain simply: **“A preposition is one of the ways language follows rules and shows relationships between things.”** **AT** can help tell us where something is, as in **at home**, **at school**, or **at the table**. Bring it back down to the handle the children need today: **AT CAN TELL US WHERE**. The class does not need to memorize **preposition** today. They are simply meeting the real name while learning what the word does.

6. Investigate the Meanings

Keep all of the words and meanings visible on the board. Return to **HABITAT** and ask: **WHAT CAN THESE MEANINGS GIVE US?** Use prompts such as: **“A means one. Does that give us anything?”** **“I refers to self. Does that make us think about anything?”** **“AT can tell us where. Could WHERE help us think about HABITAT?”** **“HABIT is something done regularly. Could that give us a clue?”** **“Does BIT help us?”** **“Does A BIT help us?”** Let children make connections. Do not require every clue to work. Keep asking: **“How did you get there?”** and **“What made you think that?”** A clue does not have to solve the whole word to be useful.

7. Build Our Meaning

Do not give the established definition yet. Ask: **“SO WHAT DO WE THINK HABITAT MEANS?”** Let the class give pieces of the answer. Carry those ideas onto the board and help build one working definition under the heading **OUR DEFINITION**. The wording may be different from class to class. It might become something like: **A habitat is where a living thing normally lives and does the things it needs to do**. The important thing is that the class builds its meaning before the answer is checked.

8. Check the Definition

Now give the established definition: **HABITAT — The place or environment where a living thing naturally lives and gets what it needs**. Put it beside **OUR DEFINITION**. Ask: **“What did we get?”** **“What is the same?”** **“What did this definition add?”** **“Did anything we thought need to change?”** **“Which clues helped us?”** The definition is being used to check the investigation. It did not do the investigation for the class.

9. Put HABITAT Back Together

Return once more to the whole word: **HABITAT**. The class started with the whole word, looked at familiar pieces, investigated meanings, made connections, built a prediction, checked their prediction, and now returns to the whole word with more understanding.

10. Final Detective Game — DOGHOUSE

Do not erase the words and meanings already on the board. Go back to the evidence area. Write: **DOGHOUSE**, then **DOG + HOUSE**. Say: **“We already know DOGHOUSE. But now we have some new detective skills.”** Then ask: **“USING WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT HABITAT, WHAT CAN DOGHOUSE TELL US?”** Let the class investigate. There is not one secret answer. Different detectives may make different reasonable connections.

Suggested Teacher Prompts

Use whichever prompts help move the conversation: **“What does DOG tell us?” “What does HOUSE tell us?” “Does a doghouse belong in a dog’s habitat?” “Is the doghouse the whole habitat, or could it be one part of it?” “What kind of habitat might this be?” “Does this sound like a wild animal’s habitat or a pet’s habitat?” “What else might belong in this habitat?” “What does the dog need in this habitat?” “What habits or patterns might we expect?” “Do any of the meanings already on our board help us think?” “What clue made you think that?” “What else could that clue tell us?”**

11. Let the Children Use the Tool

The final detective game can take different forms. The class may talk, draw, write, work at the table, take turns in a speech circle, or combine drawing, writing, and speaking. The form can change. The thinking stays the same. Students are using something familiar to investigate something larger. They do not have to repeat the entire HABITAT lesson independently. The teacher already carried that larger investigation. DOGHOUSE gives them a smaller doorway through which to practice the tool.

Close

End with: **DOG + HOUSE**. The word is still simple, but the children can now do more with it. They can use meaning as a clue. They can ask questions. They can make connections. They can explain how they got there.

FIND WHAT YOU KNOW.

ASK WHAT IT MEANS.

SEE WHAT IT HELPS YOU UNDERSTAND.