Name: _____ Date: _____

The Word Detective Who Writes Dictionaries

Circle group

Some people think a dictionary is a list of rules. Someone just made them up. But that is not true. A dictionary writer is called a lexicographer. The writer acts like a detective. The job is to find out how people use words. Then the writer explains it clearly.

A lexicographer starts by collecting examples. They come from books, newspapers, websites, and talking. Each example shows a word in a sentence. This helps the writer see what the word means. Some words have more than one meaning. The writer sorts the examples into groups.

Then comes the hard part. The writer must write the definition. A good definition is short. It uses plain words. It does not use the word it explains. The writer may add a sample sentence.

Language keeps changing. New words show up. Old words get new meanings. If many people use a new word for a long time, it may go into the dictionary. That is why dictionaries get updated. They do not say what words should mean. They write down what words mean now.

Questions

1. What is a dictionary writer called?

_____

_____

2. Where do the examples of words come from?

_____

_____

3. What does the writer do when a word has more than one meaning?

_____

_____

4. What makes a definition good?

_____

_____

5. When might a new word go into the dictionary?

_____

_____

6. Why is a lexicographer like a detective?

_____

_____

7. Why do dictionaries get updated?

_____

_____

Words to know

lexicographer: a person who writes or edits a dictionary
definition: a statement that tells what a word means
example: one case that shows what something is like
detective: a person who finds out the truth by looking at clues

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Word Detective Who Writes Dictionaries

Triangle group

Many people think a dictionary is a list of rules that someone made up. In fact, a dictionary writer, called a lexicographer, works more like a detective. The job is to find out how people really use words and then explain it clearly.

A lexicographer begins by collecting examples. These come from books, newspapers, websites, and everyday speech. Each example shows a word in a sentence, so the writer can see what the word means in that moment. Some words turn up with several different meanings, and the writer must sort the examples into groups.

Next comes the hard part: writing the definition. A good definition is short and uses plain words. It should be easy to understand, and it should not use the word it is explaining. The writer may add a sample sentence to show how the word works.

Language never stands still. New words appear, and old words slowly pick up new meanings. When many people begin using a new word over a long time, lexicographers may add it to the dictionary. That is why dictionaries get updated. They do not decide what words should mean. They record what words mean today.

Questions

1. What is a dictionary writer called?

_____

_____

2. Where do lexicographers collect examples of words?

_____

_____

3. What must the writer do when a word has several meanings?

_____

_____

4. What makes a good definition?

_____

_____

5. When might a new word be added to a dictionary?

_____

_____

6. Why does the passage compare a lexicographer to a detective?

_____

_____

7. Why do dictionaries need to be updated?

_____

_____

Words to know

lexicographer: a person who writes or edits a dictionary
definition: a statement that tells what a word means
example: one case that shows what something is like
detective: a person who finds out the truth by looking at clues
record: to write something down so it is kept

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Word Detective Who Writes Dictionaries

Square group

Many people assume that a dictionary is a rulebook invented by someone in authority. In reality, a dictionary writer, known as a lexicographer, behaves more like a detective. The task is to discover how people genuinely use words and then to explain those uses with clarity.

A lexicographer begins by gathering examples from books, newspapers, websites, and ordinary conversation. Each example displays a word inside a sentence, which allows the writer to observe what the word means in that particular moment. Certain words appear with several distinct meanings, so the writer has to organize the examples into separate groups.

The most demanding stage is composing the definition. A strong definition is brief and relies on plain language. It should be easy for anyone to grasp, and it must avoid using the very word it is explaining. The writer might also include a sample sentence to demonstrate how the word works.

Language never stands still. New words emerge, and familiar words gradually acquire fresh meanings. When many people adopt a new word over a long period, lexicographers may add it to the dictionary, which is the reason dictionaries are revised. They do not decide what words ought to mean. They record what words mean today.

Questions

1. What is the name for a person who writes dictionaries?

_____

_____

2. Where do lexicographers gather their examples of words?

_____

_____

3. What must the writer do when a word has several distinct meanings?

_____

_____

4. What qualities does a strong definition have?

_____

_____

5. Under what condition might a new word be added to a dictionary?

_____

_____

6. Why does the passage describe a lexicographer as behaving like a detective?

_____

_____

7. Why is it necessary to revise dictionaries from time to time?

_____

_____

Words to know

lexicographer: a person who writes or edits a dictionary
definition: a statement that tells what a word means
example: one case that shows what something is like
detective: a person who finds out the truth by looking at clues
record: to write something down so it is kept

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: The Word Detective Who Writes Dictionaries

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: The Word Detective Who Writes Dictionaries

Easier · 179 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 3.7

1. A lexicographer.
2. Books, newspapers, websites, and talking.
3. Sorts the examples into groups.
4. It is short, uses plain words, and does not use the word it explains.
5. When many people have used it for a long time.
6. The writer looks at clues, the examples, to find out how people use words.
7. Language changes, with new words and new meanings.

Triangle: The Word Detective Who Writes Dictionaries

This passage · 195 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 6.5

1. A lexicographer.
2. From books, newspapers, websites, and everyday speech.
3. Sort the examples into groups.
4. It is short, uses plain words, and does not use the word being explained.
5. When many people have used it over a long time.
6. The writer looks for clues, the examples, to find out how people really use words.
7. Language changes, with new words appearing and old words gaining new meanings.

Square: The Word Detective Who Writes Dictionaries

Harder · 204 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 9.9

1. A lexicographer.
2. From books, newspapers, websites, and ordinary conversation.
3. Organize the examples into separate groups.
4. It is brief, uses plain language, and avoids the word it explains.
5. When many people have adopted it over a long period.
6. The writer studies clues, the examples, to discover how people truly use words.
7. Language keeps changing as new words emerge and old words gain new meanings.