



DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE RIGHT WORD: Roget And His Thesaurus

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Written by Jen Bryant

Pictures by Melissa Sweet

Eerdmans Books for Young Readers

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With his book in hand, Peter spoke concisely, with clarity and conviction!

About the Book

From an early age, Peter Mark Roget was a lover of words. He made lists of them. Even conversations with his mother and his tutors inspired him to think of the perfect word that would communicate the “just right” meaning. A shy boy, Peter spent many hours absorbed in reading, especially science books. Using his writer’s notebook, he wandered, observed, and made notes. Peter yearned to create a book that people from all walks of life could use to communicate their precise feelings and ideas. Even though he became a doctor, he never stopped working on his lists. He married and became a father who played games and read books with his children – and shared his word lists with them as well. His Thesaurus, first published in 1852, is still in print today.

The award-winning team of Jen Bryant and Melissa Sweet has done it again! They have created a book that can be enjoyed as both a read-aloud and as an independent read, inspiring teachers and students everywhere to become lovers of words, just like Peter Mark Roget.

Unless otherwise noted, references to standards refer to the College and Career Anchor Standards for Reading

Vocabulary

Ask students to keep a vocabulary journal as they read or listen to the book. Invite students to pair and share their notes for the words they are collecting independently and jot down additional ideas they gather by discussing their words with a partner.

(Vocabulary Acquisition and Use #6 Anchor Standards for Language)

Things to Think About Before Reading the Book

Gather a variety of thesauruses and dictionaries that are accessible to students depending on their grade level. Allow students to examine the books and formulate some ideas on their own.

1. What is a thesaurus? Talk in small groups about any experiences you have had with using a thesaurus. Who do you think might need or use one?
2. Compare and contrast a thesaurus with a dictionary. How are they alike and how are they different? When might you use one instead of the other? When might you use both?
3. What is the significance of the title of Jen Bryant's book? What do you think is meant by "the right word?" Older students could talk about an experience they had in school, at home, or in another social context where they needed *just the right word* to make their meaning clear.

Things To Think About After Reading the Book

1. Find places in the text where you as a reader had to make an inference. For example, in the beginning of the story, what can you infer from Mother's black dress and Uncle's sadness? Talk with a partner about what led you to make the inference or draw a conclusion. (Key Ideas and Details Anchor Standard #1)
2. List two or three character traits that describe Peter Roget. Cite evidence using both text and illustrations from the book to support your answer. (Key Ideas and Details Anchor Standard #1)
3. Compare and contrast the time line at the beginning of the book (after the title page) with the time line at the end of the book. (Integration of Knowledge and Ideas #7)
4. In the final time line, why did the author choose these particular world events (in red print) to intersperse throughout events in Roget's life? (Key Ideas and Details #3)
5. Why do you think Peter was so drawn to the world of science and mathematics? How did Peter's interest in words relate to his interest in science? (Key Ideas and Details #3)
6. How are speech bubbles used in this book to support the running text? (Craft and Structure #6)
7. How do the illustrations and page layouts contribute to the understanding of Roget's story? How can you apply this to your own writing? (Integration of Knowledge and Ideas #7)
8. How do the text and illustrations work together to demonstrate the development of Roget's character? Find at least two examples of this. (Key Ideas and Details #3)
9. Return to the book to find words that signal time passing (years later, by this time, at first). How do these transition words and phrases contribute to the organizational structure of the book and your understanding of the text? (Craft and Structure #5)
10. Return to your earlier thinking: Who might need or use a thesaurus? Has your thinking changed? Explain. What is the theme(s) in Bryant's book? (Key Ideas and Details Anchor Standard #2)

Activities

1. Examine the pictorial map in the beginning of the book that depicts Roget's journey from Switzerland to England. What techniques does the illustrator use? Research some aspect of your own family history through interviews, photographs, reference material, and other primary source documents. Think about a short segment that you could depict by creating a pictorial map with labels. (Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity #10)
2. Create a pictorial map using a biography or autobiography and several other print or digital sources. How does the map enhance the reader's understanding of the running text? (Research to Build and Present Knowledge #8 Anchor Standards for Writing).
3. With a partner or small group, make a list of the strong verbs, nouns, or adjectives used by the author (i.e. cluttered, peppered, snuggled, clarity, conviction, shy). Choose one and create a word storm of other words that come to mind from thinking about the word. Try to show the relationship among words (synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, root words with affixes) whenever possible. (Craft and Structure #4; Vocabulary Acquisition and Use #5 Anchor Standards for Language)
4. Choose a simple adjective or adverb from the book (tall, thin, concisely, quickly). Create an array of words on a continuum to show shades of meaning and degrees of intensity. For example – bothered, annoyed, irritated, upset, angry, irate, furious, turbulent. Write your words on post-its or index cards for easy manipulation. Confer with a partner to gain additional ideas or words that do not belong. Illustrate or create sentences for several of the words to aid in the understanding of the subtle differences in meaning. (Craft and Structure #4; Vocabulary Acquisition and Use #5 Anchor Standards for Language)
5. Do some research to discover interesting information about the life of J.M. Barrie. Re-examine his quote on the page following the title page. Explain what you think the quote means. (Research to Build and Present Knowledge #7 Anchor Standards for Writing).
6. Obtain a copy of *A River of Words* by Jen Bryant and Melissa Sweet (Eerdmans, 2008). Compare and contrast the lives of William Carlos Williams and Peter Mark Roget. (Integration of Knowledge and Ideas #9)
7. Examine the punctuation and variation in print used in this book (commentary dash, ellipses, commas, colon). Look through your writer's notebook and drafts to find your own examples. How did you use them? Are there places where you could revise to use another punctuation mark or print variation to make your writing clearer? (Conventions of Standard English #1 & #2 Anchor Standards for Language)

For more information please visit:

Eerdmans.com/YoungReaders; Jen Bryant.com; MelissaSweet.net

This guide was prepared by Rose Cappelli, Independent Literacy Consultant, and Lynne Dorfman, a Co-director of the Pennsylvania Writing and Literature Project. They are co-authors of the Mentor Texts series published by Stenhouse.