Building Your Vocabulary

The American Heritage Dictionary defines **vocabulary** as "the sum of words used by a particular person or group." One of the hallmarks of an educated person is a healthy vocabulary—that is, a large collection of words at their disposal. In order for a word to effectively enter your vocabulary, you must be able to recognize it, spell it, and use it in a variety of contexts. I believe the best way to build a healthy vocabulary is what some people call the "organic" approach: you stop to notice unfamiliar words in your reading, look them up in the dictionary, and attempt to make them a natural part of your vocabulary by using the words in a variety of settings.

To cultivate this habit, we will use J. R. R. Tolkien's novel *The Hobbit* to add words to our vocabulary. Tolkien has the reputation of being one of the best English language writers of the 20th century; there is much we can learn from him. I'd like you to begin building your vocabulary by applying the following method for each chapter of *The Hobbit* that you read:

First, identify ***one*** word from the chapter that you would like to learn. There may be more than one word per chapter that you'd like to know, but for the purposes of this exercise, limit yourself to just one. Choose a word that you think might be useful part of your vocabulary. For each word that you choose, **write the word** into your Journal. Then, **copy the complete sentence** that the word appears in and **<u>underline</u> the word**. Next, **look up the word** in your *American Heritage Dictionary* and write out its complete definition. Finally, considering the original context of the word (what it means in the sentence you found it in), its correct spelling and pronunciation, **write a new, original sentence** using the word in another context (one more familiar to you). **<u>Underline</u> the word** in *your* sentence. By going through this practice every time you read a chapter from *The Hobbit,* you will build a rich collection of words in English that will be at your disposal in reading, in speaking, and in writing.

Perhaps the word *context* is unfamiliar to you. If so, it might serve as a good model for this assignment. Use the following format as a guide for your own vocabulary words in your Journal:

Word: context
Original Sentence: "In order for a word to effectively enter your vocabulary, you must be able to recognize it, spell it, and use it in a variety of <u>contexts</u>."
Dictionary Definition: con-text *n*. **1**. The part of a text or statement that surrounds a particular word or passage and determines its meaning. **2**. The circumstances in which an event occurs.
My Sentence: Reading a book within the <u>context</u> of an English class is a little bit different than reading a book on your own.