

STEAL IT SUNDAY: Forbidden Vocabulary

Source: [Tennessee Association for the Gifted – TAG](#), Facebook, September 13, 2026

For this week's Steal It Sunday, try Forbidden Vocabulary. This is another one I use when I push into a content area because I can easily slip it to the students who already understand the concept or have completed the work.

Choose a concept your students already understand. Ask them to explain it, but remove a few of the words they would normally rely on.

For example: Explain photosynthesis without using plant, sun, chlorophyll, or leaf.

A student might say: A living organism captures energy from light and uses that energy to combine water with a gas from the air. The process creates a sugar that stores energy and releases oxygen into the atmosphere.

Same concept. However, now the student can't simply rely on the familiar vocabulary to carry the explanation.

If they can't say chlorophyll, they have to think about what it does. Likewise, if they can't say sun, they have to think about the role of light energy. They have to identify what's essential, find another way to represent it, and communicate that understanding precisely.

That's the challenge.

For gifted learners, this is a simple way to add complexity without adding more work. Instead of giving students who already understand the content five more problems or another worksheet, we're asking them to approach what they know from a different direction.

And it works across content areas.

Math: Explain why $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{6}{8}$ represent the same amount without using equivalent, numerator, denominator, or multiply.

A student might explain: If two identical pizzas are cut into different numbers of equal-sized pieces, three of the four larger pieces cover the same amount as six of the eight smaller pieces.

ELA: Describe a character without using the character's name, physical characteristics, or any adjectives. Can your reader still figure out who you're describing?

Social Studies: Explain a historical event without using the names of the major people or places involved.

The words you forbid should be intentional. Take away the language students are most likely to lean on and see what they understand underneath it.

What are you teaching right now? Which words would you forbid?