

50 REVIEW GAMES GAME 18

Guess My Word

Everything except the word itself

Guess My Word asks students to describe a vocabulary concept without signing it, fingerspelling it, or mouthing the English. With the direct route closed off, they have to reach for classifiers, comparisons, examples, and related vocabulary — which is exactly the skill real conversation demands.

TIME NEEDED

15–25 minutes

GROUP SIZE

Pairs, groups, or whole class

GRADE LEVELS

Middle, High, College

01 Purpose & Objective

Strengthen descriptive language, vocabulary recall, and conversational skills through concept-based communication. Students practice explaining an idea rather than retrieving a label, which is the difference between knowing a sign and being able to use the language.

Students accurately describe mystery vocabulary so classmates can identify the correct word using ASL only.

02 Materials & Skills

Materials

- Vocabulary cards from current or previous lessons
- Timer (optional)
- Score sheet (optional)

ASL Skills Practiced

- Expressive ASL
- Receptive ASL
- Descriptive language
- Classifiers
- Critical thinking

03 Setup

1. **Prepare vocabulary cards.** Concrete nouns are easiest to describe; abstract words and emotions are the real test.
2. **Divide students into pairs or teams.** Pairs give everyone the most turns; teams make the guessing livelier.
3. **Review the rules before beginning.** The three prohibitions on the next page are the whole game – go over them until everyone can repeat them back.

Before You Start

Take the first card yourself and describe it while the class watches. Students who have seen one round played well understand immediately what a good description sounds like; students who have only heard the rules tend to freeze on their first card.

04 Game Rules

NEVER

- Sign the target vocabulary word.
- Fingerspell the answer.
- Mouth the English word.

ALWAYS FAIR GAME

- Descriptions and comparisons.
- Classifiers and role shift.
- Examples and related vocabulary.

05 Sample Vocabulary Cards

Ten words to start with. Print and cut, then build the rest from your current unit.

APPLE	HOSPITAL	TEACHER	DOG	BICYCLE
LIBRARY	HAPPY	RAIN	BREAKFAST	AIRPLANE

ALSO SEE

Game #13: Hot Seat uses these same three rules in a different shape — the guesser sits facing away and the whole class gives clues. Run them in the same week and students feel the difference.

Choosing Good Words

The best cards are words students can approach from several directions. BICYCLE has a shape, a use, and a place it belongs; HAPPY has none of those, which is what makes it the harder card.

06 Directions

1. One student draws a vocabulary card.
2. Using only ASL, they describe the concept without breaking the rules.
3. Teammates guess the vocabulary word.
4. Award one point for a correct answer.
5. Rotate clue-givers until everyone has had a turn.

Challenge Mode

Set a thirty to forty-five second timer, or require students to describe two mystery words in a single turn. Both push describers past their first idea and into a second way of explaining the same thing.

07 Variations

Beginning

Familiar vocabulary, with picture support allowed after one minute.

Intermediate

Complete ASL sentences and at least three descriptive clues.

Advanced

Classifiers and role shift required, with no repeated clue types.

08 Assessment Ideas

Observe students for:

- ☐ Vocabulary knowledge
- ☐ Descriptive skills
- ☐ Use of classifiers
- ☐ Creativity when the first clue fails
- ☐ Receptive understanding as a guesser
- ☐ Participation in both roles

A describer who runs out of ideas after one clue and a describer who finds three different angles may know the same vocabulary. The second one can use it.

Paul's Best Practice

When students get stuck, point them at the four questions below. Reaching for a strategy instead of the sign is the whole skill, and students who learn these four routes stop freezing on unfamiliar words.

The goal is not to find the word. It is to build the picture.

FOUR WAYS INTO A WORD

What does it do?

Its function, or what happens when you use it.

Where is it found?

The place, setting, or situation it belongs to.

Who uses it?

The people connected to it, and why.

What does it look like?

Shape, size, and color — classifier territory.

Why It Works

Students stop relying on direct translation and begin thinking conceptually, which is an important step toward ASL fluency. Closing off the target sign forces a detour, and the detour is where the learning happens — to describe BICYCLE without signing it, a student has to know its shape, its use, and the vocabulary around it. That web of connections is what makes a word stay, and it is also exactly what a signer relies on in real conversation when the perfect sign does not come.

Quick Tips

- ✓ Mix old and new vocabulary in the same stack.
- ✓ Encourage several different descriptions of the same concept.
- ✓ Celebrate creative explanations, not just fast guesses.
- ✓ Keep turns short so the describer role comes around often.
- ✓ Save abstract words for later, once students trust the strategies.

Continue Exploring

Next in the collection:

▶ **Game #19: Alphabet Race**

▶ **Game #20: Sign Simon Says**

▶ **Game #21: Category Challenge**

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Extend the Activity

Play a round where the describer must give three clues before anyone may guess. It removes the reward for the one lucky clue and makes students build a full description, which is the habit worth keeping.