

Word Detective

From the practice of Elliott McCray, Ed.S., The McCray Learning Lab

What this builds (transformative SEL): Curiosity (“I wonder”) with a thread of Agency (“I can do it”).

Use this as a short SEL and early-literacy activity. Kids may pass, point, draw, or answer out loud. Deja’s one library moment gives every detective move a story to hang on, and two of the taps (sounding out the clues in Part 4, using the words around a tricky word in Part 5) are real reading practice.

15-minute mini-lesson

1. Read the Hero panel so kids know Deja’s goal, then let Bloom introduce the three Word Power words.
2. Open **Part 1: The Page That Won**. Ask what “the Can’t” sounds like when reading gets hard.
3. Do **Flip It with YET** as a group and talk through what the word changes.
4. Try **Words Are Clues** together: sound the parts, then blend them.
5. Close with one voluntary “say it” out loud.

Trauma-sensitive facilitation

Don’t require reading aloud or personal sharing. Let kids pass. Validate the “too hard” feeling before pushing positivity. Never frame a struggling reader as a character flaw: a child who still finds a word hard has still won by staying curious.

This is a practice tool for rehearsing skills, not therapy, counseling, or a clinical service.

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