

11 Reduplicative words

Activity A

A number of words use repetition of sounds to help convey their meaning.

Guess the meaning of the words below, then check in the dictionary.

1 airy-fairy

- a not clear or practical
- b used to say that an idea or suggestion seems reasonable

2 chit-chat

- a waste paper
- b conversation about things that are not important

3 dilly-dally

- a stupid or embarrassing
- b to take too long to do something

4 higgledy-piggledy

- a in an untidy way that lacks any order
- b pale and ill-looking

5 mumbo jumbo

- a extremely large
- b language or a ceremony that seems complicated and important but is actually without real sense or meaning; nonsense

6 mishmash

- a a confused mixture of different kinds of things, styles, etc.
- b a combination of people who are not suitable for each other

7 nitty-gritty

- a very rude and offensive
- b the basic or most important details of an issue or a situation

8 teeny-weeny

- a very small
- b cheap and of poor quality

9 tittle-tattle

- a unimportant talk, usually not true, about other people and their lives
- b problems and difficulties that are annoying

10 wishy-washy

- a (of objectives, dreams, etc.) impossible to achieve
- b not having clear or firm ideas or beliefs

Activity B

Complete the sentences with the words above. In a couple of cases, more than one answer is possible.

- 1 The magazine tries to please too many people, and ends up as a _____ of serious and humorous articles that don't satisfy anyone.
- 2 He's got all these _____ ideas about travelling the world, and yet he rarely leaves his home town.
- 3 I like to start a meeting with a bit of social _____ before getting down to the _____.
- 4 We can't afford to _____, because our train is in fifteen minutes – so let's go!
- 5 Politicians should be judged on their actions rather than on silly _____ about their private lives.
- 6 The Prime Minister's ideas on the economy seem a bit _____ – it's hard to know what his position is.
- 7 The _____ portions in the restaurant don't satisfy an adult's hunger.
- 8 I like the way the houses are all _____ on the hillside, not arranged in neat rows.