

## Personal Dictionaries



Artwork by Angelina Uchima

The personal dictionary project gives students the chance to focus on a specific set of vocabulary that is important to them and to share their linguistic “funds of knowledge” with others. What are some of their favorite words and why? Image and text work together in this project to convey meaning, and this project can allow students to explore a range of artistic media and techniques. As these dictionaries are short and relatively easy to construct, you might have students create several with a different focus for each. One might be a dictionary of favorite foods or their favorite places or their favorite adjectives.

There are a few ways that these books can be used to showcase the languages found in your classroom and the broader community:

- For students who speak a language other than English at home, ask them to think of words in their home language that hold particular personal meaning. These could be words that are connected to family traditions or stories or other important aspects of their home lives.
- Students can communicate the meaning of the word by simply pairing the written word with a picture (as seen in the image above).
- Or students can include a short description in English that helps to elaborate on the meaning of the word or explain why the word is significant to them.
- Students who only speak English could interview a parent, other relative or friend who speaks another language, asking their interviewee to teach them how to pronounce and write each word, and to explain the meaning. In this way, the personal dictionary project encourages student curiosity about the languages that surround them and supports peer and intergenerational learning.