

Roget's Descriptive Wordfinder:
Subtitle: A Dictionary/Thesaurus of Adjectives
Barbara Ann Kipfer, Ph.D
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Don't Let the Word Thesaurus Discourage You

**Writer's Aid that Works When
Word's Thesaurus Doesn't Cut It**

Reviewed by Carolyn Howard-Johnson, award-winning author of *This is the Place, Harkening: A Collection of Stories Remembered, Tracings* and the How To Do It Frugally Series of books for authors

I have heard fellow writers say, "I never use a thesaurus" so often that I began to wonder if some of them might not want to admit that they get "help" with their writing from a musty old book. That prompted me to ask for more information.

What I heard most was that they simply never found a word they liked better than the one that originally came to them, or that the list of words in their thesaurus did not inspire new patterns of thought.

Barbara Ann Kipfer's book functions better than a thesaurus on both counts. It works to an author's advantage often enough to encourage her to keep picking up her *Roget's Descriptive Wordfinder: A dictionary/Thesaurus of Adjectives*. But then, that might be because this is a different kind of thesaurus.

Kipfer reminds us that her book works much like the human brain, by categorizing. She's right, of course. Because we memorize the alphabet when we are young, we think we are naturally alphabetical animals. We are wrong. We had to learn specific skills for using a dictionary or putting a Rolodex into order, but we group and classify the entire world naturally.

I found that one of the most useful ways to use Kipfer's combination dictionary and thesaurus is to look up a word in my old thesaurus and then cross-reference what I found there to this one. If you look up *receding* in a thesaurus and find *retrogression*, you could go to Kipfer's book and find other entries that were, indeed, in your thesaurus, but you'll also find more oblique possibilities like *crablike*. That certainly suggests a simile better than another Latinate word like *reflex* or *retrograde*. I'd also like to suggest that using prompts of this sort doesn't change the voice of a writer; they only make it better.

I also was in awe of Kipfer's approach to categorizing in her addendum. She calls this addendum a "Quick Word Finder". It uses very broad categories like Appealing-Unappealing. There one finds everything from the mundane (affluent, alluring, yummy) to the really off-beat (fiddle-footed and Circean).

This is a book that should be on every writer's reference shelf—even those who never use their other Thesaurus. You won't find exactly what you need every time and it may not be as complete (that's hard to measure!) as the Thesaurus on your desk, but it will be a help if you use it.

Carolyn Howard-Johnson's first novel, *This is the Place*, has won eight awards. Her book of creative nonfiction, *Harkening: A Collection of Stories Remembered*, has won three. Her writing has been praised for its "literary quality." She admits to using references when she writes, Learn more about her literary writing at www.carolynhoward-johnson.com and more about her how-to books for writers at www.howtodoitfrugally.com.