Color-Coded Language was my way of making the parts of speech fun and learning them as painless as possible for my 6th Grade students. I would take a color sheet from whatever cartoon or TV series that was popular at the time (which I had to use/buy coloring books back in those days, Google images makes this so much easier) and fill in any space with various words, making sure to strategically select words that matched their vocabulary ability levels as well as served as examples for all of the parts of speech. I then created a key giving each part of speech a specific color. The students would use the key, much like a color by number activity page, coloring each word the appropriate color depending on what part of speech it was. Students could work individually, in pairs, or in small groups, so I was able to differentiate easily through grouping, as well as by difficulty of coloring sheet image, vocabulary, and grammatical usage. I also prepared a “cheat sheet” that had the definitions of the parts of speech, as well as examples, that I could differentiate as well (ranging from my SPED groups having many of the exact words from the sheet were included in the examples, to my gifted groups only having 1-2 examples). The students would finish the activity with a self-check (prior to beginning the activity, I would prepare an exemplar of the color sheet that students would use to check/grade their papers); which made grading very easy for me, but also “forced” the students to check their work and identify/correct/discuss/understand mistakes. I often rewarded prizes for those finished first, with least amount needing to be corrected, and so on, which held their attention, encouraged their participation, ensured their understanding of the task, and almost certainly increased their vocabulary knowledge and understanding of parts of speech.

Early in my career, I used this lesson as a simple identification/recall activity to strengthen my student’s ability to identify/label parts of speech. As educational expectations changed and classroom lessons and assignments needed to be more meaningful lessons that extended into the higher order thinking skills and knowledge depths, I had to morph this activity into the preliminary lesson to begin our more in-depth writing units. Beginning with a color sheet of part of speech identification that would lead to a reading passage (that I created to ensure that the same words were represented) using the words in context that they would have to color code, and eventually getting to a writing passage with similar vocabulary that the students would create themselves based on a prompt and color code the entire paper. After having worked through these stages of color coding activities, the students could see visually what their paper was lacking; adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases would be missing in papers that needed descriptive elements. The students would say, “your paper needs more blue, orange, and black.” As the year progressed, we would replace the colors with content area specific vocabulary and remove the scaffolds of the color-coded language activities, and without forcing it or spending tons of class time reviewing, the students would naturally add descriptive elements to their papers. It was almost like magic; because of the color scheme, they were not only being more creative, descriptive, and complete, but their understanding of our language and the rules behind it was developed without having to memorize rules or lists . . . and through it all, they thought they were just coloring!