



Transcript

By *Houghton Mifflin Spelling and Vocabulary Authors*
Dr. Shane Templeton and Dr. Donald Bear

Spelling and Meaning

Dr. Templeton:

Words are all about meaning. In each lesson of *Houghton Mifflin Spelling and Vocabulary*, students make connections to meaning and in this process, words and ideas come alive as students compare and contrast words.

Dr. Bear:

In the primary grades, students make the meaning connection as they think through their categories for sorting.

They sort objects by color, size, and shape. They sort pictures of foods, furniture, vehicles, clothing, trees, animals into different categories and subcategories. After a concept sort, English language learners are often ready to talk about their sorts.

Once the concepts for sorting are established, students add concepts in picture hunts through magazines.

Later, students in the within-word pattern phase make the meaning connection with homophones as in *wring* and *ring* and *peak* and *peek*.

They write these homophone pairs in their word-study notebooks and hunt for others.

Dr. Templeton:

In the intermediate grades, spelling and vocabulary become more closely related, both in students' learning and in our instruction. The key understanding students develop at this level is what we call the spelling-meaning connection: They learn that words that are related in meaning are often related in spelling as well, despite changes in sound.

For example, the "silent" *g* in *sign* – as in "I sign my name" makes sense when related to the "sounded" *g* in *signature*. This spelling-meaning connection supports students as they develop their understanding of the single most powerful strategy for growing their vocabulary: understanding how meaningful parts of words combine—prefixes, suffixes, base words, and word roots. Teachers walk through this process with students, and engage them in thinking about and discussing how word parts combine to create the meaning of words.

Once students understand how base words and affixes combine, we extend this understanding to Greek and Latin word roots, as for example in the word *inspection*. We show students how this level of word knowledge extends to concepts and new terms across the academic areas of science, social studies, mathematics, and so forth.



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Transfer to Writing

Dr. Bear:

How can we assess and support students' transfer of spelling knowledge to their writing?

Dr. Templeton:

Teachers want to establish that fine balance between supporting and reinforcing students' application of spelling knowledge and other conventions of writing while not inadvertently discouraging their creativity through written expression.

It is important to keep in mind that, when students write for real purposes and about subjects that interest them – regardless of the genre – they are also “exercising” their word and spelling knowledge, and this cannot help but advance this knowledge.

For beginning readers and writers, whose spelling knowledge is characterized as alphabetic or letter name, it is important that we look for their transfer of the spelling features that they are learning. We encourage them to write and to apply their knowledge of spelling-sound correspondences, but we also know that most of the words they wish to use may not be spelled conventionally.

When students move into the transitional phase of reading and writing and beyond, we do observe more and more words being spelled conventionally, and, for words that are misspelled, we look to see that they are applying their knowledge of spelling features in appropriate contexts.

For example, if a student writes *prowd* for *proud*, it is clear that the student is applying his developing knowledge of the spelling of the /ow/ sound.

From the transitional, within-word phase on, teachers compare their students' performance on qualitative assessments of spelling knowledge with their application of that knowledge in writing. This informs teachers what their students truly know about the spelling of words and the degree to which their students, with appropriate word-study instruction, are applying that knowledge.

Importantly, teachers help their students develop a “spelling conscience” by encouraging them to spell correctly, even in first draft, those words that the students in fact know how to spell. This spelling conscience will also help students when they edit and proofread their own writing.



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Word Sorts

Dr. Bear:

Word sorts give students practice in how to examine words, and this leads to generalizations about how words are spelled and what they mean.

At the beginning of the year, teach students how to sort. While you study the Qualitative Spelling Inventories, meet with students to show them how to sort and how to make entries into their word-study notebooks.

Here are a few of the steps that are included in *Houghton Mifflin Spelling and Vocabulary*. We have students learn to say the words as they sort, sort the words into columns, check their sorts, and then talk about their sorts, explaining why they sorted the way they did. Finally there is continued practice sorting and using the words.

Dr. Templeton:

In small-group sorting, we often have students sort with a partner. Students support each other and have conversations about the sorts.

A common question we are asked is, when do we know that students are ready to move to the next list?

Dr. Bear:

Yes, great question. When students sort accurately and fluently, have them hunt for more words that fit the patterns.



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Vocabulary

Dr. Templeton:

Teachers are often faced with the challenge of determining what vocabulary to teach. As we've already pointed out, we should teach the processes according to which meaningful parts of words combine—prefixes, suffixes, bases, and, beginning in the intermediate school years, Greek and Latin word roots. Students' understanding of these processes is critical for the advancement of vocabulary knowledge.

In addition, we should teach two levels of vocabulary words: first, words that occur frequently across all areas of the curriculum and are critical for comprehending texts in all the academic domains, and second, words that occur primarily within specific academic domains and which represent critical concepts in those specific domains.

Dr. Bear:

Vocabulary study in the upper grades involves students hunting through their reading materials for words to add to their word-study notebooks.

Students can also be asked to complete concept sorts with the vocabulary lists. Students sort content-based words into categories. You will find vocabulary lists related to many content areas like oceans, periods in history, and types of animals.

Dr. Templeton:

Sorting by concepts is intellectual, thoughtful work that builds vocabulary and encourages discussions. By engaging our students in meaningful and motivating explorations of words, we are also helping them develop a favorable attitude toward and appreciation of words and their use.

This perspective on words and word learning will powerfully support their reading comprehension and their writing.