

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #14: Spelling Investigations

For some reason, middle school students think they have outgrown the need for spelling/word study; however, their writing certainly indicates they still need these skills. Many of you have copies of lessons that a group of Hanshew teachers developed over 6 years ago. These lessons were intended to reinforce five spelling rules that seem to be effective over 80% of the time making them worthwhile to teach.

The elementary teachers are using the following sequence for teaching which works for middle school students, too: 1) investigating, 2) searching for a pattern, 3) sorting, and 4) making a hypothesis. Below is a lesson plan which teaches students about making words plural (one of the 5 spelling rules that we do teach).

1. Investigating

Challenge students to investigate the "es" endings on words using a visual sort as a strategy. Devote a few minutes each day for several days in a row for this inquiry.

2. Searching for a pattern

Surround the students with books that the students have already read. Bring in recreational reading books, textbooks, magazines, trade books from the bookroom, etc. The reason for providing books and selections students have previously read is to

insure that comprehension does not interfere with the spelling activity. Ask the students to locate words that end in "es" and to record them on notebook paper. Do this for a short amount of time over a period of a few days. This is what my list looked like from browsing through the first chapter of a novel: mosquitoes, poppies, nagoonberries, miles, races, uses, ladies, lives, does, wolves, puppies, etc.

3. Sorting

Create a class chart of all the words found. When students call out a word that ends in "es", make sure they spell it aloud. Then ask students to analyze the class list in order to pick out anchor words. An anchor word is a word under which other words could be categorized and fit its pattern. From my list above, an anchor word could be puppies. Then ask students for other words from the class chart that would fit underneath it like poppies, nagoonberries, etc. When the sorting is done, ask for another anchor word such as miles. In this case, students should categorize looking for words from the class chart where an "s" is added to a base word ending in "e." Continue with anchor words and sorting until the class list has been exhausted. It is very likely



you will have leftover words that don't fit any pattern like the word does. Ah, these would be exceptions to the rules!

4. **Hypothesizing**

By insisting that the students synthesize the information and develop a hypothesis, you will insure that the spelling pattern goes into long term memory. Have them look at a particular anchor word and the words beneath it. Ask them to create a hypothesis based on those words. For example, "I think the words under puppies are all words that end in a base word with a "y," so the "y" gets changed to an "i" and an "es" is then added to make it plural."

suggestion, Egyptian, ocean, commission... Go through the sorting steps with anchor words and ask kids to make hypotheses for each anchor word. The anchor word Egyptian might have words like mathematician and magician underneath it. Help students hypothesize that these words are spelled with "ian" because they refer back to a person.

Source

ASD 5th grade literacy training day (Ella Brown, John Napier, and Kevin Spink), December 16, 2002

Closing thoughts

There are over 600,000 words in dictionaries today. Choosing only certain words to learn to spell is a futile effort. Instead we need to give kids time to dig deeper by looking for patterns which they can apply to new words in new situations. Otherwise we will continue to have kids who learn the 20 words for Friday's spelling test and then forget them weeks (or even days) later. One thing we can all do immediately is teach spelling at a higher level on Bloom's taxonomy so the learning goes into long term memory.

Adaptation

Try an auditory sort, too. Read aloud from text that the students have already heard. Tell them to listen for a particular pattern but resist showing them the pattern visually. For example, ask students to listen for words that end with the "shun" sound. Stop and record the words the students hear as you are reading aloud. A list might look like this: invention,

