

# Rebecca Sitton's APPLESEED



PLANT THE SEEDS TO GROW SPELLING AND WORD-SKILL LITERACY.

## Ask Rebecca

Rebecca,

What is the source of Spelling Words in your program, and how do students *study* and *learn* them?

Joseph Tamburrino  
6th grade

Dear Joseph,

Students have differentiated Spelling Words in the Sourcebook Series, and there are extensive provisions for differentiated study and practice to master them. Here is how it works.

The Core Words in the Series are the top 1,200 high-use writing words, a cross-referenced list derived from high-frequency word studies from primary through adult writers. The words are introduced in frequency of use order. Tests in each unit assess selected Core Words from earlier levels and units, as well as those in the current unit. Students do not prestudy the

test words in preparation for tests—this would invalidate the results by indicating that some words are mastered when the learning was short-term, just for the test.

The Spelling Tests are group tests given to an entire class at one time. The tests are in context, not list form, with two formats provided. One is a blackline master Cloze Story Word Test for which students are read a story, with them writing the omitted story words. If students are overly challenged by this test, minor modifications are made. The other format is a more challenging Sentence Dictation Test.

Students' Spelling Words are the words they miss on a unit's Cloze Story Word Test or Sentence Dictation Test, differentiated to their needs. The words are targeted for study at home and at school in preparation for systematic, unannounced retestings of the words, again in context, that occur automatically on subsequent Cloze Story Word Tests and Sentence Dictation Tests.

Students study their Spelling Words using strategies they learn over time in the instructional part of every unit, Build Skills and Word Experiences. Teachers select, from a menu, skill-based activities that vary in content and difficulty to meet students' needs. The purpose of the activities is to create hundreds of word experiences to form a language foundation that teaches students how words work. Here students learn to observe words with informed eyes and thoughtful minds. Then when they're studying Spelling Words, these insights provide an alternative to memorization.

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## Ask Rebecca (continued)

For example, students learn to observe words' properties and characteristics, such as silent letters, suffixes, roots, and/or vowel sounds and spellings. They're guided to ask questions such as, "Is this how I'd expect a word to be spelled, and if not, what is its idiosyncrasy? Is the word a homophone, so that its meaning needs attention?"

This word-skill foundation is complemented by practice using the research-based Independent Word Study Procedure (read, spell, cover, print, proofread). Students are further afforded ongoing exposure of words within the program's testing. You know that words are recycled extensively for retesting, but this recycling provides another format for ongoing practice. Once the most difficult set of words to spell and use in the English language is introduced in Level 2, every test in the Series includes at least one example to ensure learning. The words? The homophones: there, their, they're; and later, there's and theirs.

I believe that practice must also include authentic application. Toward this end, students are expected to demonstrate their spelling skills in writing. As students grow as writers, expectations for spelling are increased in small increments to provide a spelling curriculum that reflects the true measure of spelling ability—the competence to spell and proofread in everyday writing. This expectation provides proofreading practice every time a student writes across the curriculum.

Spelling mastery is ensured for every child using this strong combination of instruction and discovery of word-study strategies, ongoing practice and testing of the 1,200 Core Words, and spelling expectations in writing. However, the Series, according to teachers, "is far more than Spelling Words—it teaches students how to spell and proofread, and how to use words for all the communication skills."

Rebecca



Do you have a question? Call me at home or toll free at the office, send me an e-mail, or set up a complimentary conference call for a group of colleagues who have questions.

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