

# Rebecca Sitton's APPLESEED



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

## What's Current?

Have you heard? There's an "essentials" reading program you need to know about. The Teaching Parody explains it fully. Read on.

### A Teaching Parody

The "essentials" reading program works like this:

Students get their reading list every Monday. It's a grade-level list of reading words the students need to learn. During the week, there are various drills to ensure that students are fully engaged in these words. On Thursday, students take their reading word list home to study. Most parents help. On Friday, the weekly reading test is given. Scores are recorded. Then a new list emerges on Monday to repeat the cycle. Students' reading grades are based on a composite of their weekly reading scores. This routine is called "teaching reading."

Everyone wants evidence and current research before they become ardent about the idea of using any program. Indeed, research confirms that most students do well on their Friday reading test in this reading program. Scores are good. That's evidence!

Nonetheless, there are malcontent teachers who complain about anything, and they're grumbling that kids in this reading program cannot read books. They note that students can read words on the Friday reading tests, yet there's no carryover of these words to actual reading in books.

Well, that happens. And when it does, a little more drill, a shorter list, and some parental support are necessary. Yet, remember, some people are not really readers.

continued . . .

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## What's Current? (continued)

Could this be why some people are not really spellers?

The humor that can be found in this “essentials” reading program is not truly funny, because it wouldn’t work. You know that. But apply the model to spelling and it clarifies exactly why some students aren’t learning to spell. Oh, they can spell on their Friday spelling test, but there’s no carryover to their everyday writing! That’s unfortunate, because when these young writers begin writing for employers, spelling counts in writing. Employers don’t give Friday spelling tests.

A spelling program is no more a list of words than a reading program is a list of words to memorize just for a test. Reading needs to be taught and practiced in such a way that students can apply what they learn to real-world situations—they can read print-based material in context. Teachers know this, and their reading curriculum reflects it. Skills and strategies are the center-piece of every reading curriculum. It’s time to bring the good sense we use in teaching reading to the spelling curriculum.

Here is an honest-to-goodness e-mail that a parent sent to her child’s third grade teacher on a Friday morning:

*Dear Mrs. Brunner,*

*“Please give Ashley her spelling test first thing this morning. Otherwise, she’ll forget the words. Also, you need to give the words in exactly the same order they were listed. Thank you.”*

You can be absolutely sure that Ashley’s teacher is using one of the many “essential” spelling programs. And, “essentially,” it won’t work any better than its reading program counterparts.

This parallel points out why the Sourcebooks for Teaching

Spelling and Word Skills abandons word-list spelling and Friday spelling tests and, instead, teaches skills and strategies, and expects students to become accountable for spelling in their everyday writing. Oh, there is a spelling list that goes home, and there are spelling tests that are graded. Yet, the old Monday-through-Friday model is supplanted with the good sense we use in every reading curriculum. Moreover, the results show it works!