

# Rebecca Sitton's APPLESEED



PLANT THE SEEDS TO GROW SPELLING AND WORD SKILL LITERACY.

## What's current?

At the top of the list is teaching to the narrowly stated curriculum standards and trying to "cover it all!" How? Here's how mini-lessons can help you.



My district writing standards state my students must:

- use correct capitalization
- have subject-verb agreement
- write a complete sentence
- use vivid language and descriptive details

—there's a whole, long list! How do I fit it all in?

You can quickly exhaust your time and energy trying to cover everything required. Although a state's or district's curriculum standards document is lengthy, specific, and often intimidating, you can

achieve mastery of all these skills with your students in easy ways that teach many of them at the same time. Let me explain.

If you try to focus on any one of the skills listed above to achieve its mastery, experience says you'll fail. Instead, research indicates that significant gains will be made through meaningful teaching that encompasses several skills at one time. For example, subject-verb agreement is best taught not in isolation, but within the context of writing good sentences. Of course, everyday writing for various purposes is essential toward this end, but try this: quick mini-lessons! They combine several elements on any curriculum standards document, and they produce results!

A mini-lesson is explicit teaching. It may be extemporaneous or planned. It's focused. It's brief. For example, to polish the skills listed above, a mini-lesson works well. One example of a mini-lesson that helps to accomplish mastery of these skills is Stretch It in the Exercise Express on the opening page of every Sourcebook unit. Here is how it might work:

Have students work in small groups to stretch the bare bones sentence you've written on the chalkboard. First, they look at the sentence to be stretched and create a situation to make the writing more authentic—students devise a "purpose" and an "audience." Then they start their stretching. One student can be chosen to be the recorder. You may wish to have this student write the group's sentence on a transparency. Then, as always, there is the proofreading. Students check for capitals, punctuation, spelling, subject-verb agreement, use of exciting language—they apply their editing skills.

Next, each group selects a delegate to share the group's stretched sentence with the class. Then the class reacts. Discussion may lead to further additions to the sentence or revision. The endpoint is a sentence to celebrate!

In this mini-lesson, learning each of the stated skills above takes place through cooperation, interaction, discussion, and analysis within the context of writing. Not just one skill but many are integrated. This format supports writing research. Further, research validates that the quality of learning increases with group engagement. It's a winner!

Follow up these mini-lessons with multiple opportunities for students to read, pausing to reflect on examples of well-constructed, interesting sentences. Then provide opportunities for students to write for a variety of purposes, reminding them to apply what they've learned and observed about good writing in their mini-lessons as they do. It may seem to you to be a leap of faith to think that multi-skill mini-lessons paired with ongoing occasions for authentic writing will result in "coverage" of the extensive list of specifics on your curriculum standards document—but it will happen.

The Sourcebook is designed to be your source for creating spelling and word-skill study to complement any communications curriculum—and to support any curriculum standards document. Identify the activities in your Sourcebook that lend themselves to mini-lessons that support your goals. Any of the Exercise Express activities are good sources toward this end, as well as the Build Skillful Writers lessons. In fact, most of the Sourcebook activities accommodate mini-lesson formats. Enjoy!