

Rebecca Sitton's APPLESEED



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

What's Current?

Constructing Meaning Through Reading and Writing—at the Same Time!

Reading instruction—simplistically—teaches students to do two things. It guides students to understand and apply the alphabetic principles of our language so that they can decode words. Decoding can be summed up as a process by which a reader looks at symbols, or letters, and learns the sounds they stand for to read words. We call it phonics. But every teacher knows that reading does not stop there—word recognition is not really reading. Reading instruction must guide students to think while they're reading, engaging in strategies that allow them to understand the meaning of what they're reading so that the words read are *useful*. We call it comprehension. Real reading is the act of *constructing meaning from words*.

A modest description of spelling instruction is the converse of this unadorned definition of reading. For spelling, students learn the process by which a writer hears the sounds in words and learns the symbols, or letters, they stand for to write words. It is, again, the application of the alphabetic principle, but in this case initiated by the sounds of our language rather than the symbols. But spelling does not stop there. For spelling to be *useful*, it must be an element within writing. Writing is the act of *constructing meaning from words*.

We've become accustomed to thinking about reading as the twofold system of decoding and comprehension. They're different, but only together do they make a reader. Yet, we're still learning to think of spelling and writing as a twofold combination of skills as closely affiliated as decoding and comprehension. What good is one without the other? Constructing meaning for reading and constructing meaning for writing are skill groups that are so closely aligned they can reinforce each other if properly taught. I see it no other way.

But don't misunderstand. Spelling—aligned with reading—is *not* taking the words out of a story and asking students to study them for an upcoming word test. That's back to regarding spelling as a word list, as addressed in the Teaching Parody (March 2006 *Appleseed*, What's Current? Using a Reading Curriculum Model to Teach Spelling). Don't waste your time. The Teaching Parody humorously guides us to understand that spelling, like reading, needs to focus on skills. A predetermined word list won't succeed for teaching either one. Why is it that we know this to be true for reading, but still need "research" to prove that it applies to spelling, as well?

In the Sourcebook approach to spelling and word skills, every element of decoding is recycled within the encoding process. The symbiotic relationship reinforces both processes. Students see the connections. The benefit is this—understanding, so that meaning can be constructed as students engage in both disciplines of literacy. Another ah-ha!