

# Rebecca Sitton's APPLESEED



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

## What's Current?

### ELL Issues—How Can Vocabulary-Building Meet the Challenges?

Today there are 36 million foreign-born in the United States. Each year, 1.5 million more are added to this number, many from Third World countries. No nation except ours has ever attempted to assimilate so many, so quickly!

This impacts our big cities significantly. As early as 2010, it is estimated that in regions surrounding Miami, Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Washington, DC, Americans of European descent will have become a minority. In fact, current statewide populations of both California and Texas indicate that Americans of European ancestry are already a minority, and their share of the population is predicted to continue declining.

Most of these immigrants come to America for the same things our ancestors sought—a new start, a more rewarding life, the chance to raise a family in a better place than the one they left behind. Many have served, or are serving, in our armed forces of the United States and love this country as much as any descendant who came over on the Mayflower.

Because we are the only country on Earth that is attempting the assimilation of so many people seeking the benefits America has to offer, America's educators must play a significant role. Teachers are a key vehicle for providing young immigrants, often with parents for whom English is a foreign language, the path to become successful, contributing American citizens. It serves all of us well to ensure that this transition occurs.

Success in America is largely dependent upon literacy. Literacy, we believe, is a necessity for achievement here. So, how well are educators meeting the challenge of assimilation to ensure achievement for immigrants coming to America?

You do not need to look far for a scorecard. Newspapers, magazines, and the realities of just living here in America total the score each day. Funding is always a major issue related to immigrant education, as well as health care, housing, employment—all the elements of life. Politics is rampant with wide differences of opinion. Immigration is an issue. And although there are bright instances of goodness, the overall picture is grim.

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## What's Current? (continued)

So what to do Monday in the classroom? Teachers, let's hold to our beliefs that literacy counts. Literacy requires developing the ability to speak, read, write, and use the English language. The research indicates that the chief difference between immigrants who are successfully assimilating into the patchwork of educated American culture and those who are not is *vocabulary*. More accurately stated, a lack of it results in problems—the kind of problems we don't want to have in our communities.

Knowing about English words and how to use them is the single, most research-supported advantage toward success. So what to do Monday, as well as every school day? Support vocabulary acquisition! Vocabulary development clearly provides the edge for success in America. You cannot pick up an educational journal that does not tell us so, as well as includes the specifics for educating the influx of ELL (English-language learning) students toward this end.

Vocabulary skills were a focus when I wrote the [Sourcebooks for Teaching Spelling and Word Skills](#). I designed them as the scaffolding for a total communications curriculum with extensive opportunities to differentiate for lower and higher achievers among any group of learners. It's a spelling program that teaches how the English language works. It works with ELL students, as well as all other students, to strengthen their command of the language.

More recently, at the urging of teachers privy to the wealth of research supporting the importance of vocabulary, I began to write the mini-course series, [SOME WORDS](#), for students in grade four and above. So far, there are five books in the series, and teachers want more! They love the “no teacher prep time” feature—they're busy people. They love the solid word-skill content. They love the price of just slightly over a dollar for each mini-course book. And I love writing them! Two more mini-courses are on their way!

So, if you're stymied over the challenge you face now more than ever to support literacy among America's people, teach vocabulary. Yes, it will support your ELL students, but will also enhance all your students' opportunities for success. If you don't already have effective materials working for you to meet this challenge, introduce yourself to the language-integrated programs on my [website](#). Let's work together to support America's tradition of literacy.