

# Rebecca Sitton's APPLESEED



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

## Ask Rebecca

Rebecca,

I have students who are failing the Word Tests. When report cards come out, I'm afraid parents will be mad. Can I give my students the words to study before the test so they have a chance?

Marcia Cabot  
5th Grade Teacher

Dear Marcia,

This is a problem. Can you solve the problem by giving your students the test words to study for the test? Let's see. If you give out the test words prior to the test, students will score better on the test. Their spelling grades will improve. Their report card grade will increase. And parents won't be mad. Problem solved? Probably not. It depends upon what you called "solved."

What is your goal? If your goal is to teach students to spell words life-long so that writing is easier for them, the problem will not be solved. If your goal is to keep parents

at bay, it may work. But, when parents determine that their child can only spell on a test and not in writing, and that it's beginning to negatively influence the child's written work and writing test scores, parents will still be discontent. And they should be. Students are not learning to spell if they can only spell on their weekly spelling test.

Your students may be "failing" because they are accustomed to a word-list test for which they had the words to study the night before the test. This test, then, assessed what students recalled from their previous night's study—which is usually far more than they can recall much later. The grade is given on Friday, the new list appears on Monday, and the cycle continues. No transfer! Why? Because students only learned the words for the test, not long term for writing.

The Sourcebook assesses words on each unit's Word Test from the previous grades as well as those that occur in the current grade. Students have access to the entire bank of words that are tested, but they are not told exactly which words are on any one test. The words they miss become their Spelling Words. Your students may have many misspelled words on their Word Test this year because they really never learned words long term in their old spelling program. They will begin to learn these words now through the Sourcebook program's recycling system, but this may take a little time.

This is what I suggest you do. I believe it will solve your problem with students, with parents, with grades, and with spelling mastery. This solution does four things. It:

continued . . .



## Ask Rebecca (continued)

- makes the tests easier for your students so they do not feel like failures,
- helps parents understand what is happening and lets them know how you're strategizing for their child's benefit,
- ensures that students' report cards do not have failing grades, *and*
- teaches students to spell long term for writing.

First, read Appleseed, January 2007 on my website, [www.sittonspelling.com](http://www.sittonspelling.com). Review how to effectively give a Word Test. Then read Appleseed, November 2006 to learn how to easily modify your tests so that students do not miss so many words, particularly when they are new to the program. More information on modification is in each Sourcebook in the section titled, Students with Spelling Challenges.

Next, inform parents by giving them the benefit of the CD-ROM program, [Tutor Me](#). Use the fifteen minute *Introduction for Parents*. You can learn more about it on my website.

When it's time for grades, have empathy for students who—by no fault of their own—were previously getting acceptable grades by learning words just for the test, and now must learn words long term. In fact, some schools new to the program begin grading spelling on the report card in the second term, not first term, for this reason. By the second term, students' performance on the Word Tests improves because of the systematic recycling of words. Practice counts.

Finally, have the confidence to know that you are teaching students to spell words forever, not just for a test. This is a change for you, for students, and for parents, and change is not always easy. Yet, time and experience will prove you're on the right track. You're helping your students become forever spellers, not just Friday Spellers.

Good luck to you. Let me know how it goes. Let's continue to work together to support literacy.

Rebecca

Give students a chance!  
Yes, teach them to spell words long term, not just on a test—a rehearsal for spelling in the real world.



Do you have a question? Call me at home or toll free at the office, send me an email, or set up a complimentary conference call for a group of colleagues who have questions. • email: [rsitton@sittonspelling.com](mailto:rsitton@sittonspelling.com)  
• home phone: 480-473-7277 • office phone: toll free at 888-WE-SPELL (937-7355) or 480-596-5100