

Words Their Way
Information for Parents
Strawberry Hill Elementary
September 2017

Families of 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade students,

We will be using different instruction for our 2nd, 3rd and 4th graders this year. Here's a quick summary of what it is and why we have made some changes.

What is Words Their Way?

Words Their Way (WTW) is developmental spelling, phonics, and vocabulary program. It was developed by Invernizzi, Johnston, Bear, and Templeton. WTW is an approach to spelling and word knowledge that is based on extensive research literature and includes stages of development and instructional levels that are critical to the way students learn to read. A word study program allows teachers to provide differentiated efficient, effective instruction in phonics, spelling, and vocabulary.

Word study teaches students to examine words to discover the regularities, patterns, and conventions of the English language in order to read, write, and spell. It increases specific knowledge of words--the spelling and meaning of individual words. Literacy is like a braid of interwoven threads: reading, oral language, and writing. Words Their Way demonstrates how exploration of orthographic knowledge can lead to the lengthening and strengthening of the literacy braid.

Why “Word Study” instead of a “Traditional” spelling program?

Research clearly indicates that memorization of lists of “spelling words” does not promote the development of spelling skills. In the past, the traditional approach of “everyone gets the same weekly list and test on Friday”, resulted with many students passing the spelling test then not being able to transfer the knowledge to their writing! Memorizing a list of words and getting 100% on weekly tests does not necessarily mean your child is a good speller. It may just mean they are good at memorizing words for a test.

What about Kindergarten and First Grade?

We will continue with our robust instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics for our younger students.

Principles of Word Sorting

- English spelling is complex but not chaotic, it goes beyond surface level alphabetic representation.
- English spelling is based on patterns, not rules.
- Gaining word knowledge is developmental and conceptual, based on detecting similarities and differences in words.
- Instruction that takes advantage of the brain’s pattern-seeking ability is most likely to support the development of word knowledge. The brain seeks patterns--basic cognitive

learning processes of comparing and contrasting, discovering similarities and differences, generalize beyond isolated words.

- Because word knowledge is gained developmentally, Vygotsky's theories about the social construction of learning indicate collaborative activities will be beneficial.
- Learning is best achieved when it is interesting and engaging.
- Word sorting requires students to focus on the specifics of words and to learn how to examine words.
- The purpose is to gain word knowledge, not to memorize specific words.
- Based on the strong correlations between reading and spelling, word study should facilitate both areas of learning.
- The goal is the transfer of knowledge to facilitate becoming a more proficient reader.

Teaching Strategies

In word study, teachers encourage students to compare and contrast features in words. One common method for doing so is by having students sort words. When sorting, students use their word knowledge to separate examples that go together from those that don't. This allows students to make generalizations about words and transfer this knowledge to new words.

In addition to sorting, students may:

- hunt for words in their reading and writing that "fit the pattern" being studied,
- construct a "word wall" illustrating examples of the different patterns studied,
- keep a "word study notebook" to record the known patterns and their new understandings about words,
- play games and activities to apply their word knowledge (Bear et al., 2000).

Three Layers of Word Study

1. **Alphabet** - learning the relationship between letters and sounds.
2. **Pattern** - learning specific groupings of letters and their sounds.
3. **Meaning** - learning the meaning of groups of letters such as prefixes, suffixes, and roots. Vocabulary increases at this layer.

Brain Research...

...suggests that students gain greater long term memory when they are actively engaged, manipulating ideas and objects, using language to clarify and cement learning, and interacting with peers in directed academic conversations.

...suggest that students gain greater long term memory when they are investigating, testing hypothesis, making predictions, and recording and constructing their own learning.

Words Their Way Language

- **Sorting**
 - Organizing words into groups based on similarities in their patterns or meaning.

- **Oddballs**
 - Words that cannot be grouped into any of the identified categories of a sort. Students should be taught that there are always words that “break the rules” and do not follow the general pattern.
- **Sounds Marks //**
 - Sound marks around a letter or pattern tell the student to focus only on the sound rather than the actual letters. (example: the word gem could be grouped into the /j/ category because it sounds like j at the beginning).
- **Vowel (represented by V)**
 - One of 6 letters causing the mouth to open when vocalized (a, e, i, o, u, and usually y). A single vowel sound is heard in every syllable of a word.
- **Consonants (represented by C)**
 - All letters other than the vowels. Consonant sounds are blocked by the lips, tongue, or teeth during articulation.

References:

Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction
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 Gay Su Pinnell, Irene C. Fountas, Mary Ellen Jacobbe, Arlene C. Fountas

Words Their Way Spelling Inventories: Reliability and Validity Analyses
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Word Study: A New approach to Teaching Spelling
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