

Early Elementary Caregiver Letter

Dear Caregivers,

Word study is no longer the rote spelling we may remember from when we were in school! Today, word study aims to build communication skills by providing greater access to and interest in words. In word study, students focus on the sounds, letters, spelling patterns, and meanings of words. Students learn the *why* behind how words work, and the emphasis is on examining and manipulating words. This shift is light-years beyond the memorizing once emphasized, which often didn't "stick" long term or transfer beyond a weekly spelling test. By learning the *how* and *why* inherent in the ways words work, students not only learn to spell, but they are also more likely to transfer this knowledge as they read, write, speak, and listen. The end goal is to become proficient readers and writers that apply knowledge of the inner working of words to all that's done—both in and out of school. Today's word study is not only research-supported, but it is also designed to increase curiosity, confidence, and capability.

At home, you can support these efforts by having fun talking, playing, and reading with your child. No "formal" work is necessary. The following are a few suggestions that may seem intuitive, but yield extremely fruitful results:

- Talk with your child. Don't shy away from using new and interesting words in your conversations. Explain the meaning of new words using child-friendly language and share different times and places where this word might be used.
- Provide access to all kinds of books and texts. Make frequent trips to the library. Read to, with, and beside your child as frequently as possible.
- Encourage your child to write, even if she or he does not yet spell conventionally. Shopping lists, cards, letters, stories, notes . . . it all has a positive impact! There is no need to correct spelling, but do encourage him or her to use what is known about letters and sounds for assistance! Mistakes are parts of the learning process, and it is important that we encourage effort and risk taking.
- Play games together—"word-themed" games bring an added bonus! A few favorites include Zingo, Story Cubes, Tall Tales, Sequence Letters, Charades, Spot It! Alphabet, Headbands, Heads Up, What's Gnu?, and so on.

In those little moments here and there (while driving in the car, waiting for a bus, waiting at a sibling's practice or in a doctor's office, cooking a meal, etc.), try the following suggestions that are "just right" for early-elementary students:

- Chant rhymes and poems in different silly voices and sing songs together.
- Create a challenge: How many words can we think of that rhyme, start with the same sound or letter, or end with the same sound or letter? For instance, "How many words can we think of and say that rhyme with *mug*? How many words can we think of and say that start with the /p/ sound? How many words can we think of and say that end with the /t/ sound?"
- Stretch out and separate the sounds of words you see around you—for example, "cat; cccaaattt; c - a - t; cat."
- Read environmental print (street signs, store names, etc.).

- Play “I Spy!” Look for—and when appropriate, highlight or cut out—specific letters or words (that start with __, that end with __, that sound like __, that have two sounds/three sounds, etc.) in newspapers, magazines, circulars, catalogs, and junk mail.
- Make letters, build words, or write words with something fun! For example, depending on availability, preferences, and/or allergies, a few options include sidewalk chalk, shaving cream, whipped cream, sand bins, magnetic letters, toy building bricks, cereal—the options are infinite!
- Play “I’m Thinking of a Word” and provide sound, letter, and meaning clues to guess the answer to each other’s riddles—for example, “I’m thinking of a word that starts with the __ sound and ends with the __ sound. I see this/do this when __. It means __. What’s my word?”
- Get physical: Sing the alphabet song, spell out words, or separate the sounds in words while hopping, doing jumping jacks, running in place, hula hooping, jump roping, bouncing a ball, throwing and catching a ball, hitting or shaking a homemade instrument—whatever seems fun!
- Play “Sound Switcharoo”—for example, “If I know **HAT**, I also know **C__** and **P__**” (cat and pat), **OR** “If I take the /h/ off **HAT** and change it to /m/, I now have __” (mat), **OR** “The **CAT** slept on a m — (mat). His name was P — (Pat).”

Partnering together, we can support your child as she or he becomes a more confident and competent communicator. Thank you for all you do. Please reach out with any questions or concerns.

Warmly,

- Read environmental print (street signs, store names, etc.).

Elementary Caregiver Letter

Dear Caregivers,

Word study is no longer the more rote spelling we may remember from when we were in school! Today, word study aims to help students build their communication skills by providing greater access to and interest in words. In word study, students focus on the sounds, letters, spelling patterns, and meanings of words. Students learn the *why* behind how words work, and the emphasis is on examining and manipulating words. This shift is light-years beyond the memorizing that was once emphasized, which often didn't "stick" long term or transfer beyond a weekly spelling test. By learning the *how* and *why* inherent in the ways words work, students learn not only how to spell, but they also are more likely to transfer this knowledge as they read, write, speak, and listen. The end goal is to become proficient readers and writers and apply knowledge of the inner working of words in all that's done—both in and out of school. Today's word study is not only research supported, but it is also designed to increase curiosity, confidence, and capability.

At home, you can support these efforts by having fun while talking, playing, and reading with your child. No "formal" work is necessary. Below are a few suggestions that may seem simple, but yield extremely fruitful results:

- Talk with your child. Don't shy away from using new and interesting words in your conversations. Explain the meaning of new words using child-friendly language and share different times and places where this word might be used.
- Provide access to all kinds of books and texts. Make frequent trips to the library. Subscribe to a magazine. Read to, with, and beside your child. Kids at this age still need and love to be read to!
- Encourage your child to write regularly. Shopping lists, cards, letters, stories, poems, comics, digital storytelling . . . it all has a positive impact! There is no need to correct spelling, but do encourage your child to use what he or she knows about letters and words for assistance! Mistakes are parts of the learning process, and it is important that we encourage efforts and risk taking.
- Play games together—"word-themed" games bring an added bonus! A few favorites include Apples to Apples, Scrabble and Scrabble Jr., Upwards, Bananagrams, Boggle and Boggle Jr., Read My List, Hangman, Headbands, Heads Up, Mad Libs, and so on.

Here are a few additional suggestions that are "just right" for elementary students:

- Think of as many words as you can that rhyme, have the same vowel sound, have a shared "part," or follow a particular pattern.
- Hunt for words with a particular part or pattern. This can be done in books (or any print text), conversations, TV shows, and the like.
- Build or write words with something fun. Depending on availability, preferences, and/or allergies, a few options include sidewalk chalk, shaving cream, whipped cream, sand bins, magnetic letters, dry erase markers, shower doors, Legos, cereal—the options are infinite!
- Create riddles. Provide sound, letter, or meaning clues and try to guess the answer to each other's riddles! For example, "I'm thinking of a word that sounds like *skin* at the start and *car* at the end. It is

one syllable and a noun that means ‘a mark that remains after a deep cut.’ It was also the name of a character in a famous Disney movie. What’s my word?”

- Get physical: Spell out words while clapping, stomping, hopping, doing jumping jacks, running in place, hula hooping, jump roping, bouncing a ball, throwing and catching a ball—whatever seems fun!
- Create a challenge: Share a word that is new and intriguing. Talk about it, and then try to use the word (appropriately) as many times as possible before breakfast, while at the dinner table, when in the car commuting to and from practices, and so on.
- Make each other laugh by creating puns with homophones and multiple-meaning words.

We look forward to continuing to partner together to support your child in becoming a more confident and competent communicator. Thank you for the continued support. Please reach out with any questions or concerns.

Warmly,

Middle Grade Caregiver Letter

Dear Caregivers,

Word study is no longer the rote spelling we may remember from when we were in school! Today, word study aims to help students build their communication skills by providing greater access to and interest in words. In word study, students focus on the sounds, letters, spelling patterns, and meanings of words. Students learn the *why* behind how words work, and the emphasis is on examining and manipulating words. This shift is light-years beyond the memorizing that was once emphasized, which often didn't "stick" long term or transfer beyond a weekly spelling test. By learning the *how* and *why* inherent in the ways words work, students learn not only how to spell, but they also are more likely to transfer this knowledge as they read, write, speak, and listen. The end goal is to become proficient readers and writers and apply knowledge of the inner working of words in all that's done—both in and out of school. Today's word study is not only research supported, but it is also designed to increase curiosity, confidence, and capability.

At home, you can support these efforts by having fun talking, playing, and reading with your child. No "formal" work is necessary. Below are a few suggestions that may seem intuitive, but yield extremely fruitful results:

- Talk with your child. Make efforts to use new and interesting "academic" words in your conversations. Explain the meaning of new words using age-appropriate language and share different times and places where this word might be used.
- Provide access to all kinds of books and texts. Make frequent trips to the library. Read to, with, and beside your child. Subscribe to a periodical. Many families enjoy having a "family book club" or a family read-aloud a few times a year. Take turns rotating who gets to choose the book. Believe it or not, big kids and tweens still love being read to!
- Encourage your child to write! Keeping a journal, making lists, writing cards and letters, blogging and creating (parent-approved) digital media . . . they all have a positive impact! There is no need to correct spelling, but do encourage your child to use what is known to write conventionally. Mistakes are parts of the learning process, and it is important that we encourage efforts and risk taking. At this age, it is important that students go back to reread, specifically checking their spelling.
- Play games together—"word-themed" games bring an added bonus! A few favorites include Say Anything, Scrabble, Bananagrams, Boggle, Hangman, Headbands, Heads Up, Mad Libs, Taboo, Scattergories, Pictionary, Balderdash, 5 Second Rule, and so on.

Here are a few additional suggestions that are "just right" for middle-grade students:

- Read to a younger sibling, cousin, or neighbor.
- Help a younger sibling, cousin, or neighbor with her or his reading, writing, or word study.
- Chant, build, and make words: Depending on what is available, safe, and interesting, students can practice spelling while running, jumping, shooting baskets, pirouetting, playing certain instruments, or even playing with sidewalk chalk, slime, or Legos. The opportunities are endless.
- Play a word-themed version of "Keep-It-Up" while driving in the car, commuting to an appointment or practice, or dinner table challenge with a word version of keep-it-up: How many words can we think of

that ___ (e.g., have an apostrophe, start with a particular prefix, have a specific root, are examples of homophones, have multiple meanings, end with a particular suffix, etc.)?

- Find out what they are learning in school and the “lingo” of that content area—for example, “What have you learned about the American Revolution?” or “How many words can you think of that are related to economics?”
- Nudge kids to say more about a topic/conversation point: “Can you tell me more about that? How does that connect with ___? Is that like ___? Can you explain that a little more? Why did that happen? Why do you think that?”

We look forward to continuing to partner together to support your child to become a more confident and competent communicator. Thank you for the continued support. Please reach out with any questions or concerns.

Warmly,