

Lesson ideas shared by Aviva Wasserman

Word study activities for kindergarteners:

Singing the vowels: I never hesitate to take existing songs and plug in more pedagogically useful lyrics. I know there are other “vowel songs” based on the song *Bingo*, but perhaps none that involve Michel’s ingenious vowel hand. So, substitute lyrics similar to these for “There was a farmer had a dog and Bingo was its name-o...”:

There are some letters called the vowels, and here are their name-os { name-oes?}

A-E-I-O-U

A-E-I-O-U

A-E-I-O-U

And sometimes y.

As the letters are sung, the students touch the corresponding finger of the vowel hand; at the end, they trace the letter <y> in the appropriate place on their palm. Alternatively, affix stickers with the vowel letters on their fingers prior to singing the song to cue them. The stickers-on-fingers can then be used in activities that involve inserting a missing vowel into an incomplete word. If the word in question is written/typed on a laminated surface, the vowel sticker will be removable and reusable.

Slipping in new vocabulary: I have also learned from Pete that extensive explanations of concepts are not always necessary in order to begin using the vocabulary of real spelling. Sometimes, the strategically repeated use of a term is enough. After an in-depth explanation of vowels, mentioning that any letter that is not a vowel is called a consonant (and casual queries like “what’s the name of the consonant on this card?”) are sufficient to anchor the concept. My “struggling” kindergarteners now routinely identify, and spontaneously comment on, vowels and consonants.

The base + suffixes chant: Chants are even better than songs, because you only need a rhythm, rather than a melody. I came up with this chant to highlight the connection between a set of words constructed from a common base, in this case, a verb. You can fill in your verb of choice, which may relate to a unit of study, a story, or even a phoneme. For example, bake:

I can bake.

I’m a baker.

I am baking right now.

Yesterday I baked all day.

Let me show you how. (Everyone pantomimes the verb).

As we do the chant, I model using Pete's fist (representing the base) and two fingers (representing the suffix) as I say each of the target words (a fist for “bake,” fist and suffix fingers for “baker,” etc.). Initially, I didn't offer an explanation for the gestures, but simply inserted them into our repertoire, with the kids following suit. Now that we are starting to spell base words (see below), I've begun to explain their significance. The chant also contains cues for identifying a verb (I can ___), as well as for some of the senses of the affixes (e.g., *yesterday*, *right now*). And of course, the kids love acting out the "action word" at the end of each round. (If this seems appealing, I will try to make and send a video of the kids doing this, as it's very endearing!).

Cats and Dogs: This activity supports the concept that most graphemes represent more than one phoneme, as well as introducing students to the concept of the plural. One lesson sequence we have used starts with a read-aloud of a picture book called *Max Had Two Sticks* by J. Brian Pinkney. The story is crawling with plurals, but any plural-laden story or poem will do. After a first reading during which the kids can focus on the story and illustrations, we do a second reading, with the goal of listening for plurals. As part of that exercise, the kids note whether they hear a final /s/ or /z/ in the words that are representing more than one object. We discuss how we write plurals by adding <s> to a base, and that <s> can sound like /s/ or /z/.

One follow-up activity we use is a home-made game called "Cats and Dogs" (see attached photo). The deck consists of cards representing singular or plural nouns. You can use pictures if the students are not yet reading, and word cards if they are. If a student draws a singular noun, she moves to the next available space on the board with a number 1 on it. If the noun is plural, the student decides if the plural <s> represents /s/ or /z/, and moves to the appropriately marked space on the board.

An even simpler version is a game we call “One or More.” You can use any downloadable blank game board. Each child picks a card (either a picture or a word) that is a singular or plural noun, identifies the word, and decides if it means one or more than one thing. If singular, move your game piece one space along the board. If plural, either move the game piece two spaces--or, roll a die or spin a spinner to determine how many spaces to move. This has the added advantages of more excitement, and also reinforcing the idea that <s> can mean anything from 2 to infinity.

The base word box: In kindergarten, we often use magnetic alphabet tiles to build words. I have made a simple but (I hope) significant modification to the board. I added a 4 x 2 inch piece of white magnetic label (the type you cut from a sheet). It is our base box. Whenever we build a base word, we put it inside the box. If we are adding a suffix, we have a separate suffix tile that we add to the right of the box. This is just one more way to concretize the concept of a base with something fixed to it. (I can send a picture if it would be useful).

Catching words to spell them: One old Orton-Gillingham “technique” is to pantomime throwing a word to a child, who “catches” it with a closed fist, then opens the fist to “tap out” the phonemes in the word. Suspending any disbelief you may have about the value of tapping out phonemes, I have used this model in the service of attending to word structure as well as grapheme-phoneme correspondence. It struck me that the fist that is used to “catch” the word is the same multisensory representation of a base that Pete has used with younger students. So now, when I “throw” words to students, they do a “one-handed catch” for just a base word, then we open up the base to see what “taps” are inside (I have not used the words “phonemes” and “graphemes” with the young’uns, and am often guilty of using the vague word “sounds,” but it’s a hard habit to break!). When I throw them a word with an <s> suffix (the only one we’ve studied), it’s a two-handed catch: a fist for the base, and 2 fingers for the suffix (also taken from Pete’s demos). We then isolate and spell the base, and fix the <s> on.

(I really like to try to come up gestures that symbolize/concretize orthographic concepts. My 2nd graders and I stumbled on one for “single silent e” the other day: we hold out one index finger for “single,” bring it to our lips for “silent,” and then turn the hand into an American Sign Language “e.”)