

Concept Ladders Based on Morphological and Etymological Understandings

I first stumbled onto the 'concept ladder' in Janet Allen's book, *Inside Words* (2007, Stenhouse Publishers, Portland) The work you see in the videos on my blog and the examples below are my adaptations of the organizer. As I explained in my blog post [Listophobia to Listophilia](#), I include the morphological and etymological aspects in this framework. The framework can be used in a variety of ways- students can write essays (see [Yijai's essay](#) that sprang from [this frame](#) or listen to [Danyal's](#) discussion without it). I can discuss this organizer with a student (see my conversations with Nina, blog post [Listophobia to Listophilia](#) and Vistar, [Portals to Discovery](#)). On the other hand students can simply record independently of me - [Portals to Discovery](#).

The framework brings together many skills and shows in a way that other quizzes, such as multiple-choice and even written justifications do not, what is understood and what is only thinly grasped. Students have used a variety of resources to locate information, read and understand the etymological information to identify the root, used [word searcher](#) or searched using the root in the [Online Etymology Dictionary](#). They have used [mini-matrix maker](#) to construct matrixes to show how the base element relates to other words. Discussing the ladder forces synthesis. In many cases those that have understood the morphology and etymology more deeply, or are more secure in their knowledge are able to chat rather than read. They are not here speaking as they are thinking rather they have had time to process their thinking through their research and the notes they have made in the graphic organizer.

I frequently find graphic organizers confining and restricting but for many students it can help to provide an order and structure for their thinking. Can this be adapted? Absolutely. I began with the more concrete explorations of the words at the bottom of the ladder then worked upwards to the more generalized where students apply the word to literature, history and the present day then more broadly again into more philosophical reflection with the questions as to the effects and causes of the concept being explored. However, I have noticed in the discussion that some students have chosen to begin at the top with the generalization then work their way down to the more specific and concrete- neither is more correct than any other way. This organizer really is only a suggestion to help some students make connections and shouldn't become formulaic. It may help teachers ask students questions. I worry that the boxes limits thinking or that some students will be confined by the boxes (even if they can grow) and won't put in as much as if given a blank sheet and open ended questions so.. take all this into consideration, consider each individual student and use judiciously.

As always with word study my aim is to make connections be it to literature, history, art, movies... words do not exist in a vacuum waiting for us to dish them up to students to analyze. I

want students to develop a love of and a joyousness in reading, writing and uttering words. I want students to be in the 'spell' of words.

References:

Allen, Janet. *Inside Words*. Portland: Stenhouse, 2007. Print.

Danyal's Dissident Discussion: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twOiaCDjv4c>

Word Nerds at <http://wordsavviness.wordpress.com/>

[Online Etymology Dictionary](http://www.etymonline.com)

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Concept:
Causes of:
Effects of:
Modern Day Examples:
Examples from History (our history units):
Fictional Examples:
Synonyms:
Related Words:
Morphemes:
Other base elements in Present Day English connected to the root (if any):
Root :
Denotation and connotation: