

Grade 7 Humanities / Structured Word Inquiry Assessment at ISKL

The following came to me in a note from Ann Whiting, Grade 7 teacher at the International School of Kuala Lumpur and long-time investigator of words with the help of Real Spelling.

When I saw this account of the work she and her students are doing, I immediately asked for permission to share. What I see here is a teacher modelling the goal I have for this kind of work. Ann's students are clearly transferring their knowledge of the "mechanics" of how spelling carries meaning cues into leverage for deepening their understanding of content area. As much as any other work I can point to, this work illustrates the idea that teaching children to understand spelling is teaching them another way to make sense of the world. Thanks to Anne and her students for sharing!

Note: Ann's words are in *italics*, student writing in Comic Sans

This time of year I always panic somewhat thinking, have I made any impression on the kids at all? What have they learned in my class? I continually feel I could have done a better more systematic job of word study with my classes and always feel overwhelmed by what else we have to cover in the curriculum.

So with trepidation I gave them the following assessment (far from perfect) but I was interested in how well they understood a lot of the vocabulary that had been used throughout our units this year.

I made questions 1 and 3 fairly open as I wanted to go beyond the "write a sentence using the word." I have to say I was pleased by their responses: many of these students are new to morphemic analysis. Below are a few examples. Students are Grade 7 (11/12 year olds) and class composed of varying levels of English proficiency.

Question

WRITE LIKE A LINGUISTICS PROFESSOR

Write about two of the words below. You should use the following terms where appropriate:

root base element bound base element, free base element, related words, synonyms, prefix, suffix, morphemes.

In your discussion make connections to examples, ideas, concepts that have arisen in our year long studies in humanities.

• Impulsive • Refugee • Oppressive • Dissident • Dictatorship

Student response

The word 'dissident' can be divided into three morphemes: dis + sid(e) + ent. <dis-> is a prefix. <side> is the base and <-ent> is the suffix. The base is a bound base element which means the base can't be a word on its own without prefixes and suffixes. At first glance you might think it's a free base element which means the base can be a word on its own. However, <side> has nothing to do with the word dissident or the root. The word dissident comes from the Latin root sedere to sit. synonyms as mentioned previously, are words that share the meaning meaning but have different bases. Synonyms for dissident are rebel, protester and upstander. Related words, words that

have the same root, are president and resident. The root sedere has led to two bases in English <side> and <sed>. Related words for <sed> are sediment and sedated. Antonyms are passive and bystanders.

Dissidents are seen in our daily lives. For example, the dissidents that spoke against Hitler when he was exterminating the Jews. They were killed to prevent rebellions against Hitler. Dissidents can be positive or negative. In the positive sense these are up-standers against oppressive governments and in a negative way, people that have racist thoughts against the government. We hope that there are more positive dissidents than negative dissidents so we can maintain an oppression-free world.

I had no idea how they would handle the question below but interested in what this would show me about their understandings. I was looking for a justification of their ranking rather than a definite right/wrong order.

Question

Explain the degrees of difference between *subjugate, conquest, oppressive, harassment, genocide, ridicule*. Rank in order of intensity from the least to the most extreme. Refer to the roots and their meaning in your explanation and make connections to our units of study in humanities.

Student responses

1. ridicule 2. harassment 3. conquest 4. oppressive 5. subjugate 6. genocide

I believe that all these words describe a state of power and superiority. This is because in all the words and their meanings a person or group is targeting a victim/victims which are usually inferior.

Ridicule is definitely the least extreme word on the list due to the fact that the base element <rid(e)> originates from the Latin root: 'ridere' to laugh and laughing at someone does not impact people as negatively as the other words do as it does not affect them physically.

Harassment, originating from Old French harer to set the dogs on thus bringing panic on a victim. Harassment is the second least extreme because this can also be small repetitive acts of irritation.

I would rank conquest next because the free base element <quest> originates from Latin quaere to seek and therefore when a conquest is performed it does not always mean that they treat others negatively.

Oppressive is the next most extreme. This is because it originates from the Latin root pressare to press. Therefore acts of oppression press people down negatively and bring despair.

Subjugated originates from the latin root jugum yoke. A yoke is something placed around someone's neck. It is a form of control. So when when you subjugate you control and deprive people of their voices, therefore I consider subjugate the second most extreme.

The most extreme of all is definitely genocide as genocide has two base elements from 'genos' originating from Greek meaning people or race and caedere to cut or to kill. Genocide therefore means to target a certain group of people and annihilate them. Therefore, it is by far the most extreme. (Danyal)

Here is XXX's ranking: (thinking this shows evidence of the deep way kids are thinking about words. These explanations were typical for the majority of the class.)

1. ridicule 2. harassment 3. oppressive 4. subjugate 5. conquest 6. genocide

These words are similar as they are all hateful actions and are the steps that lead to genocide. Genocide is by far the most severe action. There are two base elements in this

word <gen> and <cide>. The roots are from Gk genos which means people and the Latin root caedere to kill. Genocide then is the systematic extermination of a group of people or a race. The loss of millions of Jewish lives during World war 2 by the Nazis is an example of genocide.

I ranked ridicule as the least intensive as all it would do is demoralize an individual or group. The root of this word is Latin ridere to laugh. So to ridicule another is to laugh at them.

'Harassment' is ranked the second least severe as it is a step up from 'ridiculing'. The root comes from Old French 'harer':to set the dogs on. Examples of harassment appear in The Blokes by Alan Gibbons, when 'the blokes', a racist gang, repeatedly harassed minorities in the school.

I ranked 'oppression' after 'harassment'. The root comes from Latin 'pressare' to press. An example of this would be the Burmese government inflicting hardships on Burma's civilians.

'Subjugate' is ranked fourth in my list as it means having tight control over another group of people which is approaching genocide. The root is Latin 'jugum' meaning yoke, a piece of equipment traditionally used to hold oxen together by the neck. An example of 'subjugation' would be when Hitler moved the Jews into the slums as when he did he had full control over the Jewish people.

'Conquest' is ranked closest to genocide as conquest of a nation comes from everything ranked below it taking place. The root comes from Latin 'quarere' : to seek.