Chapters

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Teaching Spelling is a resource intended for use in primary and secondary schools to help teach children how to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and confidence to become independent spellers.

The resource consists of two books:
> *The Guide*
> and
> *The Resource Book*

The Guide

The Guide contains guidance for the teacher on how to teach spelling. It provides detailed background information on aspects of spelling such as: creating the right environment for teaching spelling; how to set up a spelling programme; ways to improve spelling; and spelling rules.

The Guide also contains a wealth of ideas and activities as well as extremely useful word lists. The activities can be 'dipped into' as and when required or integrated into any spelling programme the teacher may already be using.

The Resource Book

The Resource Book contains a huge collection of photocopiable activities that can be used in conjunction with *The Guide* but is designed to stand alone as a resource in itself.

The most practical feature of this book is the provision of differentiated activities. This enables the teacher to plan for group work for different ability levels. The differentiation can also be used to enable individuals to progress through a particular skill in stages or to provide additional challenges for homework.
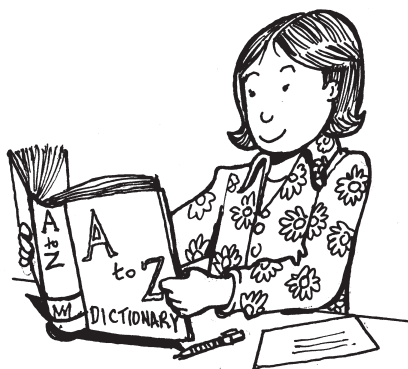
ABOUT THIS BOOK

Teaching Spelling – The Guide aims to:
❑ support teachers by providing detailed background information and practical activities;
❑ provide useful word lists to save teachers time compiling their own;
❑ provide teachers with the confidence needed to teach spelling across a wide age and/or ability range;
❑ provide teachers with stimulating spelling activities that will encourage children to develop enjoyment and curiosity as well as knowledge and understanding.

The Guide is intended to be a reference book – to be 'dipped into' as and when required. However, it would be very beneficial to read Chapters 1 and 2 first because these chapters provide suggestions for good practice in the teaching of spelling and explain how teachers can create the right classroom atmosphere to enable children to build a confident approach to spelling.

Within each chapter there are numerous spelling activity suggestions that relate to the content of the chapter. These are intended to provide the teacher with ideas that can be easily introduced into the classroom as simple games and puzzles to solve. The activities can be adapted to different age/ability levels and can easily form part of any current spelling programme the teacher may already use.

The photocopiable activities in *The Resource Book* also relate to each chapter of *The Guide.* In Chapter 2, for example, *The Guide* explains the term 'mnemonics' and then provides the teacher with lots of examples of the different types of mnemonics, such as grouping words that go together, acronyms, rhymes and chants, identifying difficult letter combinations and using word families. The teacher can use the ideas on these pages to introduce or revise mnemonics with the children and then provide them with follow-up differentiated photocopiable activities from *The Resource Book.*

Learning to spell in the English language is not an easy task for any of us! We hope that the ideas contained in this resource will enable teachers to make the teaching and learning of spelling a fun as well as a purposeful experience. We also hope that the useful hints and 'tricks' suggested will provide the children with useful tools that they can continue to use throughout their lives, thereby making them more confident spellers.

Teaching spelling

Creating the right environment

In essence, spelling is both 'caught' and 'taught'! Children learn to spell best in a literacy-rich environment where they are encouraged to explore and have fun with words and to share their writing and reading with others. They should 'take risks' with their writing as this helps to promote a natural curiosity about our language that enables them to feel confident enough to 'have a go' at reading and writing words that are unfamiliar. But the mastery of spelling skills cannot be acquired merely by exposure to words alone – children also need a complementary structured approach that takes into account their stage of development in literacy skills and understanding.

Children need a mixture of support, encouragement and challenge to ensure that they gain the confidence needed to move forward in their spelling development. Teachers who understand where children are in this development will be able to provide the explicit teaching necessary to move them forward. (Refer to page 6 for details of the stages of development.)

What makes a classroom conducive to acquiring spelling skills? In a literacy-rich classroom, the walls are filled with print resources with which the children can interact, the classroom library is well organised and contains a wealth of exciting books on display and there are reference resources that enable them to develop their skills as independent learners. Specifically, the classroom may contain:

1 WORD WALLS

A word wall is an area of the classroom that is devoted to the display and study of words. The wall is designed to be used by all the children and helps to promote group learning. The wall consists of lists of words arranged alphabetically and may include library pockets where the words are written separately on pieces of card.

The word wall should be dynamic and changing – not a static display that remains unchanged for a whole term! The words on the wall could include:

❏ words the children use in their writing and have difficulty spelling
❏ words that relate to the class topic
❏ words with particular beginnings
❏ homophones
❏ contractions
❏ compound words
❏ the children's names
❏ high frequency words

Word walls are most effective when the teacher calls attention to each new word and helps the children understand how that word can be used and how they might remember how to spell it (using techniques such as mnemonics). But more importantly, perhaps, it needs to be the children's word wall. The children should be encouraged to make decisions about which words to put on the wall (and which words to remove).

The wall can be used in a variety of ways:

❏ to reinforce alphabetical order
❏ to play games with
❏ to act as a reference when writing
❏ to reinforce particular spelling patterns or rules
❏ to encourage the discussion, exploration and enjoyment of words
❏ to develop group sharing and learning

2 LABELS

Labels can be very effective tools for literacy learning, especially when they have been chosen and written co-operatively between the teacher and the children. Labels can be used in the following ways:

❏ to indicate where classroom items belong
❏ to provide instructions on how to use classroom items
❏ to stimulate interactive responses to classroom displays
❏ to organise classroom resources such as the class library
❏ to act as word banks

As with the word wall, labels need to be dynamic and interactive. The teacher needs to repeatedly draw the children's attention to the words on the labels in different ways – by using the words in games, by using the words as examples when reinforcing a spelling pattern or rule and by encouraging the children to use the words as a reference source in their reading and writing.
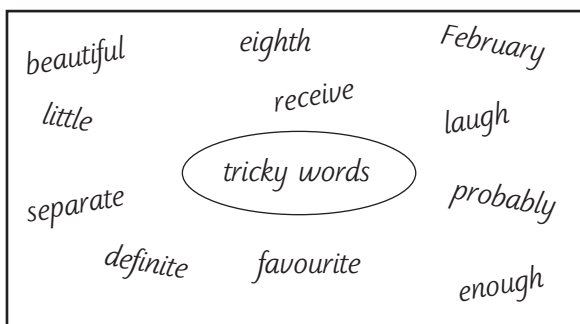
calves knives shelves
halves lives
wives hooves wolves
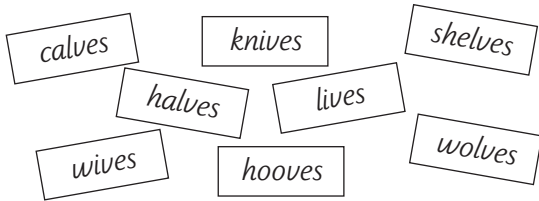
3 WORD CHARTS

Charts can be very useful learning tools for literacy, both when they are being created (such as in a shared or guided writing activity using a flip-chart) and when they are put up on display. Charts that relate to spelling can include:

- words in a particular spelling family
- palindromes
- words with specific letter sounds
- words grouped into number of syllables
- compound words
- silent letter words
- words that rhyme
- double letter words
- plurals
- tricky spellings

As with word walls and labels, the word charts work best if they are used in an interactive way as part of everyday lessons – to avoid them becoming just decorative wallpaper!

beautiful eighth February
little receive laugh
(tricky words)
separate probably
definite favourite enough

4 REFERENCE RESOURCES AREA

A literacy-rich classroom will have an abundance of resources available that will encourage the children to become independent learners. It is the teacher's role to teach the children the value of these resources and this includes *when* as well as *how* to use them. A child who constantly looks up words in a dictionary as she writes, for example, will not develop the expertise and confidence of a writer who has learned to check and edit her work *after* it has been written.

Reference resources may include:

- internet access
- dictionaries – different kinds, to include picture, school and rhyming dictionaries
- thesauruses
- glossaries
- word play books such as riddles
- encyclopaedias
- word books made by the children

A classroom environment that encourages children to get into the habit of referring to such references without being directed will help the children to become competent 'problem solvers' enabling them to become increasingly independent.

5 WRITING AREA

Having a special area set aside to assist the children in their writing encourages them to explore and experiment with making words. This area can include magnetic letters, letter and word tiles and materials for making letters in classes for younger children, as well as stamps, special writing paper and pens, alphabet charts, handwriting resources and word games.

Understanding an entry

When you buy or use a new dictionary it makes good sense to spend a little time reading the first few pages which explain how the dictionary is set out and what the symbols and abbreviations mean. There are often several pages of useful information at the end of dictionaries too, such as measurement conversion tables, foreign currencies, lists and abbreviations.

AN EXAMPLE OF A DICTIONARY ENTRY

this explains how to pronounce the word (usually using the IPA – International Phonetic Alphabet)

a pronunciation key is provided at the beginning of the dictionary

this explains what part of speech it is – in this case, a verb

a key to abbreviations and symbols used is provided at the front of the dictionary

the number ^{1} means that there is more than one entry for this word

entry word is presented in bold to make it stand out on the page

different definitions of the word are separated by numbers

informal and slang expressions associated with the word are given together with an example demonstrating how the phrase might be used

a second entry for the word is given

some dictionaries give you the spelling of the word when endings are added

two different meanings of the same phrase are presented as 'a' and 'b'

hop^1 (hɒp) *vb.* **hopping, hopped.   1.** to jump forwards or upwards on one foot. **2.** (of frogs, birds etc.) to move forwards in short jumps. **3.** to jump over something. **4.** *Informal.* to move quickly (in, on, out of, etc.): *hop on a bus.* **5. hop it.** *Brit. slang.* to go away. ~ *n.* **6.** an instance of hopping. **7.** *Informal.* an informal dance. **8.** *Informal.* a short journey, usually in an aircraft. **9. on the hop.** *Informal.* **a.** active or busy: *he keeps me on the hop.* **b.** *Brit.* unawares or unprepared: *you've caught me on the hop.*
hop^2 (hɒp) *n.* a climbing plant with green conelike flowers. See also **hops.**

(from *Collins Paperback English Dictionary - Exclusive Edition*, 1994, HarperCollins Publishers)

Bigger dictionaries usually also provide the origin of the word (its root and the language from which it originated) at the end of the entry. For example, for 'hop':

Middle English *hoppen* from Old English *hoppian*; probably akin to Old English *hype*, hip. Date: before 12th century.
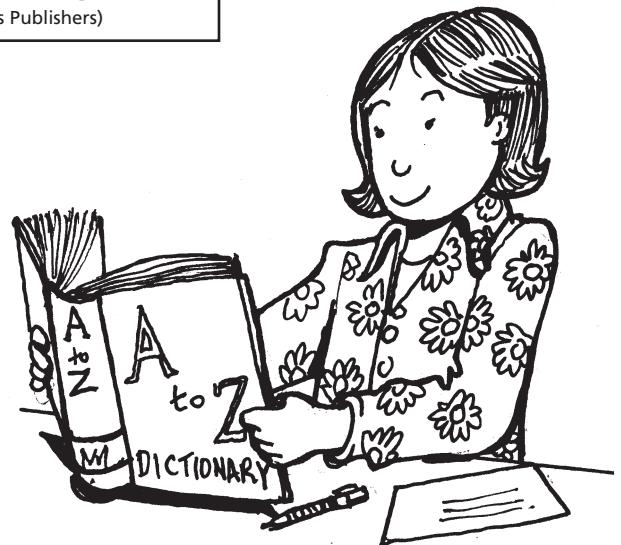
Finding a word

What we need to remember about the English language is that it developed from at least four other languages – Old English (Germanic), Latin, French and Greek. English words developed phonetically until the eighteenth century when an attempt was made to standardise spelling. The decision to base this on etymology rather than phonetics has presented us all with problems ever since – so we need not feel too bad about finding spelling difficult!

All entries in a dictionary are arranged in alphabetical order with each letter having its own section. Within these sections the words are also arranged alphabetically. To use a dictionary competently, then, you need to have a good knowledge of alphabetical order. For children who struggle with this, it is a good idea to make book-marks that have the 26 letters written in order.

The letter sections can be further grouped into quarters to help you decide roughly where a word will be:

> A – E = 1st quarter
> F – M = 2nd quarter
> N – S = 3rd quarter
> T – Z = 4th quarter

At the top of each page or double page there are **guide words**. The guide word on the left-hand side of the page is the first word on that page and the guide word on the right-hand side is the last word on that page. Using the guide words can help you find a word more quickly.
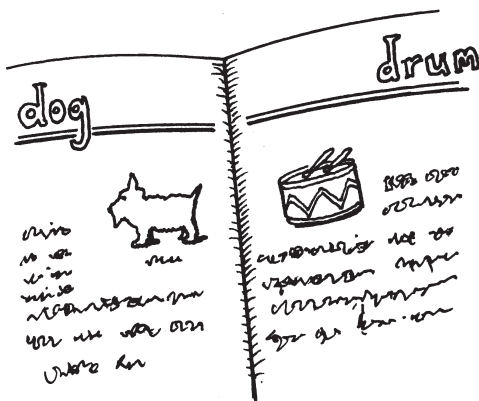
Once the correct page is found it is necessary to scan the page to find the word. Children need to be given lots of practice in scanning to prevent them from laboriously reading every word on the page.

When the word has been located, it is important to read the definition to make sure it is the word you are looking for. Some words can be spelled and pronounced the same but have different meanings (homonyms) so it is important to read the whole entry to make sure it is the word you are looking for.

Some dictionaries helpfully provide the word(s) in a sentence so that they can be seen in context.

Problems can occur when looking for a word that has a suffix added; for example, verb endings such as in the word 'omitted'. The child may not find the word because the page only lists 'omit' as an entry but the verb endings may be included in the body of the definition.

But, of course, all of this only works if you know how a word begins! Would 'ceiling' be found under 's' or 'c'?; 'chaos' sounds as if it begins with a 'k'; 'knitting' sounds as if it might begin with 'n'. Words that begin with a vowel can also cause problems if the initial sound of the word is not stressed – so if a word sounds as if it begins with a vowel and you cannot find it under one vowel, look under another. Knowing which combinations of letters can make a particular sound will help you to look up the word using various alternatives. (See below.)

consonant sound	letter(s) used
f	f (fresh); ph (physical)
g	g (goat); gh (ghost); gu (guard)
j	j (jug); g (general)
k	k (king); c (cabbage); ch (chaos)
n	n (new); kn (know); gn (gnaw); pn (pneumatic); mn (mnemonic)
r	r (run); rh (rhyme)
s	s (sun); c (ceiling); sc (scissors); ps (psychic)
sh	sh (sheen); sch (schedule); ch (chateau)
sk	sk (skill); sch (school); sc (scary)
t	t (tap); Th (Thomas) pt (pterodactyl)
w	w (wet); wh (whether)
z	z (zebra); x (xylophone) cz (czar)

Important, too, is the speed at which a word can be located. If a word cannot be found quickly the user can become easily frustrated and less likely to want to use the dictionary again.

A dictionary user, therefore, needs lots of practice in these things:

❑ locating the correct quarter of the dictionary
❑ finding the letter
❑ following the guide words
❑ finding the correct page
❑ scanning the page for the word.