

# Words Their Way

## Parent Informational Brochure

Coppell Independent School District

*"More Than Just a Spelling Program"*



### What Is Words Their Way?

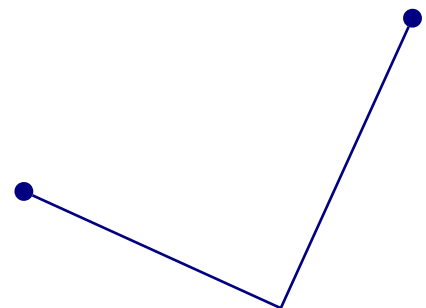
*Words Their Way* (WTW) is a developmental spelling, phonics, and vocabulary program. It was developed by Invernizzi, Johnston, Bear, and Templeton. WTW is an approach to spelling and word knowledge that is based on extensive research literature and includes stages of development and instructional levels that are critical to the way students learn to read. A word study program allows teachers to provide differentiated efficient, effective instruction in phonics, spelling, and vocabulary.

Word study teaches students to examine words to discover the regularities, patterns, and conventions of the English language in order to read, write, and spell. It increases specific knowledge of words – the spelling and meaning of individual words. Literacy is like a braid of interwoven threads: reading, oral language, and writing. Words Their Way demonstrates how exploration of orthographic knowledge can lead to the

lengthening and strengthening of the literacy braid.

#### Why "WORD STUDY" instead of a "TRADITIONAL" spelling program?

Research clearly indicates that memorization of lists of "spelling words" does not promote the development of spelling skills. In the past the traditional approach of "everyone gets the same weekly list and test on Friday", many students who passed the spelling test were not able to transfer the knowledge to their writing! Memorizing a list of words and getting 100% on weekly tests does not necessarily mean your child is a good speller. It may just mean they are good at memorizing words for a test.



# Principles of Word Sorting

- ◆ English spelling is complex but not chaotic, it goes beyond surface level alphabetic representation.
- ◆ English spelling is based on patterns, not rules.
- ◆ Gaining word knowledge is developmental and conceptual, based on detecting similarities and differences in words.
- ◆ Instruction that takes advantage of the brain's pattern-seeking ability is most likely to support the development of word knowledge. The brain seeks patterns—basic cognitive learning processes of comparing and contrasting, discovering similarities and differences, generalize beyond isolated words
- ◆ Because word knowledge is gained developmentally, Vygotsky's theories about the social construction of learning indicate collaborative activities will be beneficial.
- ◆ Learning is best achieved when it is interesting and engaging.
- ◆ Word sorting requires students to focus on the specifics of words and to learn how to examine words.
- ◆ The purpose is to gain word knowledge, not to memorize specific words.
- ◆ Based on the strong correlations between reading and spelling, word study should facilitate both areas of learning.
- ◆ The goal is the transfer of knowledge to facilitate becoming a more proficient reader

## Teaching Strategies

In word study, teachers encourage students to compare and contrast features in words. One common method for doing so is by having students sort words. When sorting, students use their word knowledge to separate examples that go together from those that don't. This allows students to make generalizations about words and transfer this know to new words.

In addition to sorting, students may:

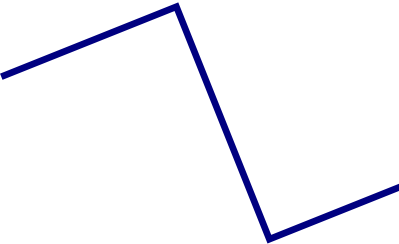
- ◆ hunt for words in their reading and writing that fit the pattern being studied,
- ◆ construct a word wall illustrating examples of the different patterns studied,
- ◆ keep a word study notebook to record the known patterns and their new understandings about words,
- ◆ play games and activities to apply their word knowledge (Bear et al., 2000).



Teachers then assess students' pattern knowledge rather than their ability to memorize single words. For example, a teacher might have students work with twenty words during a word study cycle and then randomly assess students on ten of those words and include additional words on the assessment that follow the pattern even though not on the initial spelling list – this allows the teacher to see if students are able to transfer their knowledge of the pattern to an unknown word .

# What Can You Do to Help?

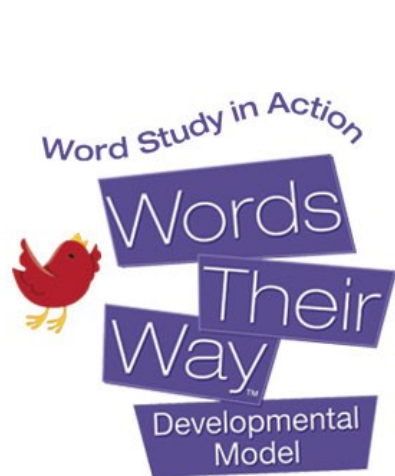
- ◆ Remind your child to sort the words into categories like the ones in school. Your child should read each word aloud during this activity. Ask your child to explain to you why the words are sorted in a particular way - what does the sort tell about spelling in general? Ask your child to sort them a second time as fast as possible.
- ◆ Do a “blind sort” with your child. Lay down a word from each category as a header and then read the rest of the words aloud -one at a time. Encourage your child to spell the word and decide in which category it belongs. The student cannot rely on the visual cues to sort.
- ◆ Do a “buddy sort” with your child. Lay down the pattern headers and read the rest of the words aloud. The child must indicate where the word goes without seeing it and point to the pattern where the word belongs. Add the word to the category the student selected.
- ◆ Assist your child in doing a “word hunt” by looking for words in a familiar book or magazine that have the same sound, pattern, or both. Try to find two or three words for each category.
- ◆ Encourage your child to write complete sentences that incorporate the words from each category and their meaning.
- ◆ Do a “speed sort” with your child. Sort the words into the correct category as fast as you can.
- ◆ Do a “writing sort”. As you call out the words in a random order, your child should write them into the sorted categories. Add some words that fit the patterns but are not in the original sort.



Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember.  
Involve me and I learn.  
– Benjamin Franklin

## 3 Layers of Word Study

- “ **Alphabet** – learning the relationship between letters and sounds
- “ **Pattern** – learning specific groupings of letters and their sounds
- “ **Meaning** – learning the meaning of groups of letters such as prefixes, suffixes, and roots. Vocabulary increases at this layer.



## Words Their Way Language

Brain research suggests that students gain greater long term memory when they are... actively engaged, manipulating ideas and objects, using language to clarify and cement learning, and interacting with peers in directed academic conversations.

Brain research suggests that students gain greater long term memory when they are... investigating, testing hypothesis/making predictions, and recording and constructing their own learning.

**Sorting** - organizing words into groups based on similarities in their patterns or meaning.

**Oddballs** - words that cannot be grouped into any of the identified categories of a sort. Students should be taught that there are always words that "break the rules" and do not follow the general pattern.

**Sound marks / /** - Sound marks around a letter or pattern tell the student to focus only on the sound rather than the actual letters. (example: the word gem could be grouped into the /j/ category because it sounds like j at the beginning).

**Vowel (represented by V)** - one of 6 letters causing the mouth to open when vocalized (a, e, i, o, u, and usually y). A single vowel sound is heard in every syllable of a word.

**Consonants (represented by C)** - all letters other than the vowels. Consonant sounds are blocked by the lips, tongue, or teeth during articulation.

## References:

Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction  
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Gay Su Pinnell, Irene C. Fountas, Mary Ellen Giacobbe, Arene C. Fountas

Words Their Way Spelling Inventories: Reliability and Validity Analyses Center for Research in Educational Policy

Word Study: A New Approach to Teaching Spelling [www.readingrockets.org](http://www.readingrockets.org)