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## How to score the primary spelling inventory

Around here we are big fans of Words Their Way, an assessment-based, differentiated, leveled approach to spelling and word work. Here's a little background on our experience with the Words Their Way program: It's encouraged, not required in our district. Teachers can implement the program however they see fit. Heidi has taken some trainings but most of our know-how is from the book and trial and error. We use the sorts weekly but we do not use the program for spelling. Visit our post about Chunk Spelling to learn more about the approach we use. Hopefully this post will give you some insight and tips if you're looking to learn how to implement and organize Words Their Way in your classroom. **DISCLAIMER:** At this time, we no longer use Words Their Way. We now use Word Play, a word study program that incorporates differentiated word sorting and other elements like chunk spelling. Some of those activities and games would make great companion resources to Words Their Way. But we will always keep this post available to you as a resource! **CLICK HERE TO READ MORE ABOUT WORD PLAY PHONICS** Click here to try a 1 Week Free Sample of Word Play Phonics! To begin using Words Their Way, we recommend that you gather some supplies. The first step in implementing Words Their way is giving the class a (rather lengthy) spelling test. We use the Primary Spelling Inventory (PSI) for 2nd grade. On the Pearson website there are examples of the different tests and run down on scoring them. Grading the assessment can be tedious, but it's so great to see all the data. Each of the words is broken down into key components—beginning sounds, vowel sounds, suffixes, etc. You don't analyze every part of every word, so you need the feature guide to show you what you're looking for. You put the student's test in front of you and start checking off what was written correctly. We made a form for the students to write their answers on. This form allows us to do a little record keeping right on their forms. The feature guide in the book is horizontal but we found it easier to grade quickly with a vertical page so we made our own vertical form. We use the same page all year so it is easy to track student growth. Tip: We use a different color pen each time we give the assessment and color the key at the top of the page accordingly. After checking each word, total the number of checks in each column. The different columns represent different levels of spelling mastery. Each feature is checked in 7 different words. If a student correctly writes the feature (for example, short vowel sounds) 6 or 7 times you know it has been mastered. If a child gets 5 or fewer correct, that's considered the student's instructional level. This is the level the child will benefit most from practicing. Want our spelling test sheet and vertical spelling inventory? Click here to get our **FREE Words Their Way Spelling Inventory & Resources**. Making Groups After testing your students, the next step is to organize them for word study. The simplest thing is to grab a piece of paper and list the levels down one side. Then look through the assessments and see who fits each category. I write the number they got correct in that category on top of their name. Here's an example: The Within Word early group is kind of full. I can see that Diana only got 2 right but the others were much more solid on that level. So I may move Diana down to the previous level. If I have lots of kids on the Syllables and Affixes levels, I might put them all in one group and start them at the beginning of the level. Since the 1st grade at my school doesn't use Words Their Way, the kids may be natural spellers and have no understanding of word patterns. I think it's important for my students to learn the why of spelling as much as the how. Even though they can spell the words, it is beneficial for them to get experience with the rules so they can letter extend them to spell other words. Keep in mind that this isn't an exact science! In a Words Their Way workshop I once heard, "Do what you can!" That's the key. If you can manage 8 different groups with weekly reassessments, go for it. But if you are only ready for 2 groups with word sorts every other week, that's okay too. Make it work for you! What is important is that you're getting at least some differentiation. Planning I decided I could handle 5 groups. I made a little notebook to keep track of the groups. There is a half-sheet form for each week. I cut down a post-it note for each group and added the kids' names. (Tip: Using post-it notes makes it easy to transfer the information to the new sheet each week.) Then I list the sort for each week. Want to our group planning pages? Click here to get our **FREE Words Their Way Resources**. Materials Prep Now to deal with the actual sorts. This is the make-it or break-it point when it comes to using Words Their Way. If you can handle this circus, the rest is easy. At Emily's school, they ordered a ton of copies of each sort and she had a filing cabinet full of sorts at her disposal whenever she needed them. In case you aren't that lucky, here's a method that worked for me. I got some 6 pocket folders from Really Good Stuff, similar to these. I numbered each folder 1-6 and then used a post-it to label the pockets inside with the group level and number of kids. Each folder holds one week's worth of sorts and each group has its own pocket in that week's folder. The next step took me awhile, but now that it's done I'll never have to do it again! I went through the different sort books (for 2nd grade that's Letter-Name Alphabetic, Within Word Patterns, Syllable & Affixes) and copied each sort on yellow paper. I did them double sided to fit in one binder. Now, every 6 weeks or so, I take my folders, binder, and record notebook to the work room. I figure out what each group needs for the next 6 weeks and put the copies in the correct pocket. This is when having the master in yellow comes in handy- I never mix it with the copies! I can copy and organize 6 weeks worth of sorts in less than 30 minutes! Supplies The only other supplies you need are a spiral bound notebook for each student to do their daily sorting, a zipper pocket for each student to hold the weekly sort (we reuse these for a couple of years until they are too beat up), and highlighters for introducing the sorts on Day 1. With Words Their Way, the focus of the program is sorting the words. It's a great way for children to learn but it can be tedious to do it day after day. The book has lots of different sort suggestions and I've tried most of them. Over the years, my weekly system has evolved, but this is how it looks most recently. On Fridays, I give each child their sort. They cut the words apart and label the back with initials (so simple, but so handy when you find random words on the floor!), and store the cards in a little zipper pocket. (Tip: We share an even easier way to do this in another post!) While they're working, I call each group back to the table one at a time. We discuss the sort and they highlight an exemplar for each category. That helps them to remember what features they're sorting for. I like to have them start sorting the words while they're still at the table. If it's an easy sort or an advanced group, I might only need to see them sort a few words before I know they've "got it." If it's a trickier sort or a struggling group, I may want them to finish the entire sort with me right then so I can offer guidance and address questions. Depends on the group and it depends on how much time I have at the moment! Since starting the Daily 5 a few years ago, word sorts are the first thing my students do when they go to the Work on Words station. Sorting Routine On Monday, they sort and write. Tuesday is the favorite: speed sort. I got some sand timers for them to use for speed sorting. Wednesday they sort and graph. Thursday they sort and glue the words into their notebooks. And on Friday we start with the new sort. They can do each sort in less than 5 minutes. There is no one right way to do this. Find what works for you! I like to use visual sort instructions to remind the class how to do each type of sort. Small Group Lessons Now that I'm doing Daily 5, I have much more free time for working with small groups (Hooray!!). If I can't meet with a group on Friday, I use one of my Daily 5 rotations on Monday to catch them up. I also try to meet with every group once during the week to play a game that relates to their sorts. We have mentioned some of these in previous posts. We have some phonics games in our store that you can use with Words Their Way (but were designed to correlate with our Word Play Phonics curriculum.) Assessment Because I don't use Words Their Way for spelling words, I don't do a "spelling test" of their sorts every week though it would be easy to do a quick 4-6 word check of a few words with each group at the end of the week. However, I do repeat the PSI assessment (mentioned at the beginning of this post) every quarter. After assessments I will rearrange the groups as necessary. The Words Their Way level sort books provide periodic assessments that I have great intentions of using, but don't always (okay, very rarely) get time to use. I've found they provide helpful, but not crucial information, so don't beat yourself up if you can't fit them in to your schedule. Doing the PSI a few times a year is really a good measure of where my kids are and they don't typically change so much in a quarter that you need weekly assessments. Words Their Way is so thorough in scope and sequence that most of my students progress from one sort to the next in order. Occasionally (especially with my ELL students), there will be a big jump in acquired skills, but most students will go step-by-step. The PSI assessments are still important, though, so you can make sure they are actually progressing and that students are still working at their instructional levels. It sounds like a lot to take on, but once you establish your organized system, the whole thing will run like a well-oiled machine. And the growth you see in your students will be worth all the hassle of setting it up. In the years I've been diligent with the program, my kids were much more confident in their understanding of spelling patterns. In the years when I've let it slide, I may have some really good natural spellers, but they don't understand why words follow certain patterns. If we want to shape good little spellers, it just makes sense to teach them how to think about words. Click here to get our **FREE Words Their Way Resources**.  
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