Fourth Grade Language Skills Notes

By Janet Langley and Patti Connolly

First things, first: spelling and vocabulary are two different subjects and should not be combined!

Vocabulary study is used to enrich your students' ability to speak and write as it opens up the vast descriptive power of the English language. It also increases their ability to comprehend what they are reading as assigned literature and texts gets more and more sophisticated.

Use block related words for your vocabulary curriculum. This can include words from the poems or songs you will be teaching as well as terms that you will be using during your curriculum presentations. Another source of vocabulary words are those unfamiliar terms that will be coming up in the book you are reading aloud to them. This way, when the students hear you read a passage with these words, they will be delighted that they know what the word/s mean. (Don't tell them that the book was the source for the words...see how long it takes them to figure it out!)

The vocabulary curriculum will also provide the students with a wellspring of words to draw upon when composing their own work about the subject being studied. Be sure that your presentations are rich with descriptive vocabulary so that when they write on the theme, their work will also be rich.

One activity that is fun is the creation of a vocabulary story. First you would model how to write a paragraph story that included all or most of the week's vocabulary words. Then have the students work with a partner to write one together. Perhaps some of these stories could be published, if fine–tuned, in the school update... or something???

Once you have introduced the dictionary (Part of the 4th grade curriculum is to introduce this skill.), let each student look up one of the vocabulary words. Each student should record the following for her assigned word:

1. The word's origin
2. Pronunciation using syllabication and phonetic symbols (as recognized)
3. Part of speech
4. Definition and a synonym(s)
5. Write a sentence using the word in context.

Note: give those students who need a challenge, the words that have more than one meaning and ask them to do #3–#5 for each use of the word.
Once the students have completed this work, have them share their research with the others. Each student should correctly write each word in their study journal along with the word's synonym. (In the case of a word that has more than one meaning, use the

meaning that is associated with the subject of study or the first (most common) definition.

Spelling is the study of how words are spelled and the phonics rules that govern the spelling of many of them. (Those that are irregular, require memorization.) Spelling, unlike vocabulary which can be subject–driven, is best taught utilizing a well–organized, comprehensive spelling program. Although you could spend a lot of time designing a spelling program for your class, there are many programs such as *Zaner–Bloser, Words Their Way*, and *Spelling Plus* that already provide a solid basis for grade appropriate spelling. Also, for a step by step process of how to use a special type of dictation to assess the efficacy of your spelling program, refer to *The Roadmap to Literacy* chapter 3.9. (This process can be used for any grade-not just 1-3.)

Besides the ongoing spelling curriculum that every student will be learning, we encourage you to be on the lookout for those words that individual students continually misspell in their rough drafts/compositions. These words should make up a special 'individual' spelling list that the student is tasked to learn. Be sure that the student learns any associated phonics rule that might be associated with the word and how it is spelled.

Spelling Games:
Word Scramble or Misspell: Teacher or student scrambles or misspells some of the words on the BB list before ML. Students correct on slates, volunteer comes to BB to correct with others' help.

Oops: Teacher or student erases some letters of some of the words before ML. Students write correct words on slates, volunteer comes to BB to add the letters with others' help.

Team race: Teacher says word, one player from each team run to spell on BB

Hangman: Teacher covers list and chooses a spelling word for the game. We don't hang a man (too gruesome), rather we choose a seasonal theme (grow a flower, create a jack o' lantern, etc.)

Team Spelling: Create a few teams. Give one team a spelling word. Each team member gives one letter of the word. If correct, they receive a point. If incorrect, the next team gets a try. Great game to help them learn to be cooperative and supportive.

Partner Work: Partners test each other. They could use slates or sidewalk or sand to spell.

Other Opportunities To Learn:
When dismissing for recess or going home, each student has to spell one of the words to

be dismissed.

Transition minute: Spell words as a group. Whisper, shout, clap and spell, write in the air or on partner's back.

When teaching **punctuation**, remember that these friends not only instruct the reader how to pace the reading of the text, but it also stands in for the author's voice. A sentence ending with an exclamation point and one ending in a period, will sound very differently when spoken by a person- thus you can "hear" the author speak (e.g., "We won." versus "We won!").