

Notes on Activities 1, 2 and 3
Lessons by Peter Bowers (2006) based on Real Spelling (Ramsden, 2001)

Lesson 1 introduces children to the word matrix (Ramsden, 2001) and word sums while showing that many words can be built by adding common affixes to a single base. These lessons also make it clear that even if pronunciation shifts, the spelling of those word parts stay the same. (**sign, signal, design, signature**).

Lesson 2 presents the spellings of words in such a way that students discover a fundamental suffixing patterns for when to drop the silent <e>. Students use this lesson to discover “vowel suffixes” and “consonant suffixes”. Few adults know these simple – but rarely taught – categories that are *necessary* for understanding how suffixing works in English spelling. This lesson reveals how the ordered English spelling system can be taught through a structured inquiry approach. This instruction results in children understanding and applying a pattern that reveals the structure of countless words.

Caution! There are “traps” set in these lessons for children to run into. A number of spellings in these activities are chosen precisely because they *appear* to break the rules. Working through and understanding those spellings seal the learning experience, but teachers need to be able to make sense of these patterns to help their students.

Before using these lessons with a class, you need to know why the spellings <agreeing>, <takeaway>, <been>, and <being> are all spellings that follow the patterns for dropping the single, silent <e>. By far the trickiest spelling to understand on this page is <agreed>. To understand this spelling you need to apply a rule that won’t surprise you, because you probably don’t know that you already know it!

Lesson 3 is designed to help students consolidate their understanding of the patterns they have just worked through. Suffix checker flow charts (Ramsden, 2001) like this one clarify how this instruction applies the principle of “guided discovery learning” but not “discovery learning”. The inquiry based process set up in the first two lessons leads the students to understand an explicitly articulated principle that is planned from the outset. Various patterns may be discovered or suggested along the way, but there is always a fundamental principle of the writing system targeted by these lessons. Once students go through the process of developing the evidence of a principle, it is important to practice that principle in a structured way by applying it to a set of words.

The list of words in this lesson reinforce the consistent way consonant suffixes do not affect the stems of words ending in single, silent <e>s, but vowel suffixes do. Along the way the principle that pronunciation of bases can shift but their spelling remains the same is also reinforced (e.g., please/pleasure).

If you have any questions about these lessons, please email Pete at bowersp@kos.net