**What is Words Their Way?**

Words Their Way is a research based program for spelling and word knowledge instruction. It consists of taking students from where they are on a continuum of spelling stages and helping students learn the patterns at that stage through different hands-on, group and individual activities.

**How do I know where my child is on this continuum?**

Students are assessed and the results are analyzed in various ways. Specific attention is paid to patterns students are "using and confusing". Students are then assigned to a developmentally appropriate group.

**What does it look like in the classroom?**

Students work with the teacher once a week when she introduces a "sort". Students sort the words in their list by cutting them apart and grouping them. The group discusses the patterns that have been sorted and look for a rule. Groups that are not working with the teacher will practice their sorts, write their sorts, look for the pattern in their reading materials and magazines, play games and practice sorting with a partner.



**FAQ:**

**Why are the words so easy? My child had harder words last year!**

You probably have had the frustration of a child studying words for the test, memorizing them letter by letter and scoring 100% only to misspell the very same word the following week! Many students fail to recognize patterns in words. Somehow, the phonics didn't stick.

Your child is given words that help him/her understand the pattern we are studying. Students can read many of the words they spell incorrectly. A child's spelling list should not be confused with their reading level or vocabulary. The goal is for them to spell correctly the words they use regularly. (Check their writing to see the words they are misspelling).

On the other hand, there is research to support a connection between spelling ability and reading ability. Improving knowledge of patterns in words helps many students become more fluent readers.

**Why sort? Why not just write the words over and over or in sentences?**

Sorting focuses children on the pattern, rather than individual letters. This arms them with strategies for spelling words that were not on their lists. Children develop shortcuts for writing things over and over that defeat the purpose of writing the words. And we all know what happens when they write the word incorrectly 10 times-they learn it that way! Practice makes permanent!

**How can I help my child?**

•Make sure your child practices his/her sort each week. Ask questions about the patterns.

•When writing, encourage your child to use a dictionary to check the spelling of words he/she is unsure of. Don't let your child off the hook by giving the spelling. Also, encourage him/her to think about familiar patterns (e.g. PAGE has a vowel, consonant, silent "e" () pattern that makes the "a" long).

•Encourage your child to edit his/her own writing. Have your child circle in pencil words she is unsure of. Have her check the dictionary for those words. Offer to check the rest "for free" as a reward for working hard on her own writing. Remember, your child may be at the developmental stage where doubling the consonant before adding -ing (for example) is being introduced, so it may not be as clear to her why she's misspelling a word; however kids can usually find their own errors.

•Show your child how you handle words you're not sure of. Do you check by opening Microsoft Word and spell checking on the computer? Do you use a dictionary? Do you write the word a few ways until one "looks right". These are all great strategies and children need to see that adults use them!

•Most importantly, emphasize the importance of good spelling, but don't overdo it. Some places need to be "free zones" where children are free to express themselves without fear of "the red pen". Journals, poems, anything personal should be encouraged, not graded. On the other hand, don't allow letters to relatives, teachers, or other communication get by without a spell check. It emphasizes the importance of spelling when we write for an audience!

Lastly, RELAX. Spelling is important for effective communication, but there are lots of successful people who have to spell check regularly. We want children to spell well on their own, but part of being a good speller is being aware when we don't know how to spell a word and using the tools available to edit ourselves.

