

## WORD WALL TIPS

- ▶ The word wall is an alphabetical listing of words that we hope our children are coming to know how to spell with automaticity.
- ▶ Early on, children's names will probably go on the word wall (with their photos).
- ▶ When children write, if they come to a word that they recall is on the word wall, they should try to spell that word on their own and then compare their best guess with the actual spelling. "What part of my spelling is right? What is wrong?" Then, to correct the spelling, children look at the word on the wall. "What do I notice?" the child asks. The child tries to affix the spelling in his or her brain. The child closes his or her eyes and spells out the word. The child checks against the correct spelling. Then the child looks down at the paper and spells as best he or she can (without copying) and then double-checks that approximation.
- ▶ If you teach went on Monday, don't teach want a day (or week) later. Let your children own a word solidly before bringing out one that's apt to confuse them.
- ▶ The word wall shouldn't be so vast that it overwhelms your struggling readers. You should be able to take one of these youngsters to the word wall and ask him or her to find specific words. For example, "If I say very, can you point to it?" It's a step harder to ask, "Can you read me these words?" but ideally children can also do that.
- ▶ Although it might seem wise for the first words on the word wall to be high utility, such as the or and, it's easier in fact for a child to learn concrete nouns (Mom, me). Children will also enjoy learning words from favorite books (as in tub from Joy Cowley's beloved Mrs. Wishy-Washy).
- ▶ Once children know a word with automaticity, the word needn't remain on the word wall. Any child who knows a word that is on the word wall should be encouraged to spell the word without reference to the word wall. The children can then use the word wall as a way to check on spellings they question.
- ▶ When we add a word to the word wall, it is wise to ask children not only to say it slowly and record its sounds but also to study the word. "What do you notice?" We hope they'll see that once has one in it, that love includes a silent e. We hope they'll pay attention to the way the word looks, to its visual features. Many teachers ask children to look at the word, to close their eyes and try to see it still, to spell it with their eyes closed, to write it quickly, to check their version against the correct one, or then to listen to a sentence containing the word and write it again. Finally, children can discuss, "If we know play [for example], what other words do we know?" "Remember that if children know play, they now have word power not only over the rhyming words but also over playmate, players, replay, and so on."
- ▶ Putting words on the word wall and helping children become familiar with those words is only half the battle. We also want to help children access those words when they write and read. So we may give children copies of the word wall and say something like, "If it is rainy and you want to write, 'We have to stay in for recess,' which word will day help you with? Listen again: 'We have to stay in for recess.'" We can progress to asking, "If you know day, how will that help you write, 'While there is still daylight, I'm making my clay rabbit?'"
- ▶ If you have an extra five minutes and want children to practice using word wall words, you can set the timer and say, "You have five minutes to work with a partner and try writing silly sentences using as many of these words as possible."
- ▶ At some Teachers College Reading and Writing Project schools, every child in the school has a red homework folder that always goes home on Mondays with assignments for the week. In the left pocket of the homework folder, children may keep copies of tools they can refer to while doing the homework. In every grade except for early kindergarten, a new, updated word wall is put into this pocket each week with the three to five newly added words highlighted, and children are reminded that whenever they write anything, they're expected to take an extra minute to spell the words on the word wall correctly. Obviously, words are omitted (as they become automatic) as well as added to the word wall.