



Some alternative ideas for

SPELLING HOMEWORK

Lin Meeks

Contents

Introduction	1
Activities	
1. Sort spelling list words by part of speech (nouns and verbs), then give each noun an adjective and each verb an adverb (grammar)	2
2. Find synonyms for two words on the list (vocabulary)	3
3. Find antonyms for two words on the list (vocabulary)	3
4. Report back (verbally) on simple research questions (general knowledge)	4
5. Write each word out and mark it for its spelling structure	4
6. Find multiple meanings for two words on the list. (language)	
7. Create a 'silly sentence' using as many spelling words as possible (later used for dictation)	5
8. Write each word out and explain its morphemic structure (morphemes)	5

Spelling Homework Ideas

Introduction

Homework is often a vexed issue. If students are required to complete written work, then the teacher needs to mark the activities and provide feedback - either a waste of classroom time or a waste of teachers' precious personal and/or family time. Some homework activities require no cognitive input from the student, and many students will find a shortcut to some of the tired, old tasks such as 'look, say, cover, write, check'. These activities are often referred to as 'busywork' because they don't appear to have any educational value!

Is there an alternative approach? There appears to be two major issues with homework: the time spent doing it and the usefulness of the activities. The role of practice in learning has been well researched and, generally, it is agreed that 'little and often' is the best approach for getting information into long term memory. The suggestion here, is that students complete 5-10 minutes of spelling homework EACH NIGHT (Monday to Thursday only) which is then taken back to school the following morning to be used in literacy activities and lessons. Wherever possible, the homework is NOT written down. Instead the students have to remember what they have found out, researched or discussed at home, in order to contribute or use it in activities during the school day.

The main subskills necessary for the comprehension of oral and written language, and the construction of clear and concise communications, include language usage, grammar, vocabulary, word structure, morphemes, synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, etymology, sentence structure and general knowledge. The weekly (or bi-weekly) spelling list is the perfect base for the development of these skills and for homework! The following pages give a sample spelling list and a number of short, daily homework activities that may also be used in the classroom.

If you are interested in the research on homework, Sara Bennett and Nancy Kalish have published a book called *The Case Against Homework* (2006).

Homework Activities based on a Spelling List

Sample Spelling List

cc-v-c		digraph		irregular	
st -		- ai -		wa -	
base list	extensions	base list	extensions	base list	extensions
stag	<i>stagger</i>	tail	<i>tail gate</i>	was	<i>washing (machine)</i>
step	<i>stepladder</i>	jail	<i>jailor</i>	wash	
still	<i>stillness</i>	pail	<i>remain; maintain</i>	want	
stop	<i>bus stop; stopper</i>	main		wand	
stun	<i>stunning</i>	rain	<i>rainwater; raindrop</i>		
		wait	<i>waiter/waitress</i>		

Activities

- Grammar: Sort spelling list words into 'nouns' and 'other'.

Nouns	Other
step	stun
still (alcohol)	still
stag	stop
tail	main
jail	wait
pail	was
rain	wash
was	want
wand	

Sort spelling list words into 'nouns' and 'other'. Provide an adjective for each noun.

Adjectives	Nouns	Other
wide	step	stun
ancient	still (alcohol)	still
magnificent	stag	stop
curly	tail	main
ugly	jail	wait
plastic	pail	was
heavy	rain	wash
large	wash	want
magic	wand	

Sort spelling list words into 'nouns', 'verbs' and 'other'. Provide an adjective for each noun.

Verbs	Adjectives	Nouns	Other
stun	wide	step	still
stop	ancient	still (alcohol)	
	magnificent	stag	main
wait	curly	tail	
	ugly	jail	
was	plastic	pail	
wash	heavy	rain	
want	large	wash	
	magic	wand	

Sort spelling list words into 'nouns', 'verbs' and 'other'.
Provide an adjective for each noun and an adverb for each verb.

Verbs	Adverbs	Adjectives	Nouns	Other
stun	quickly	wide	step	still
stop	suddenly	ancient	still (alcohol)	main
wait	patiently	magnificent	stag	
was	carefully desperately	curly	tail	
wash		ugly	jail	
want		plastic	pail	
		heavy	rain	
		large	wash	
		magic	wand	

2. Vocabulary - synonyms

Write the spelling list words into column 1 and provide a synonym for each word in column 2.

Spelling Words	Synonyms
step	pace, stride, tread, move, stair, rung
still	unmoving, silent, quiet, static, stagnant calm, quieten, calm down, even now, however, yet
stag	deer
stun	shock, daze, astonish, knock out
stop	end, discontinue, prevent, hinder, ban, finish, cease, halt, break, rest, stay, pause, interrupt, block, plug, obstruct, conclusion, follow, trail, chase, track
jail	prison, confinement imprison, lock up, incarcerate, confine, detain
pail	bucket, container
main	major, chief, key, focal, central
rain	drizzle, shower, fall, sprinkle, drop, volley, hail, stream, torrent, flood, deluge
wait	stay, remain, linger, stop, delay, put off, pause, delay, interval
was	be
wash	clean, bathe, rinse, cleanse, launder, shower, bath
want	desire, fancy, crave, require
wand	baton, stick, rod

Vocabulary - antonyms

Write the spelling list words into column 1 and provide an antonym for as many words as possible in column 2.

Spelling Words	Antonyms
still	moving
stop	start, begin
tail	head, lead
jail	free
main	minor
wait	depart, begin

Vocabulary – homophones

Write the spelling list words into column 1 and provide a homophone for as many words as possible in column 2.

Spelling Words	Homophones
tail	tale
jail	gaol
pail	pale
main	mane
rain	rein, reign
wait	weight

3. General Knowledge – research questions

Choose one of the following questions. Find out some interesting information, REMEMBER the information, and present your findings (verbally) to the class. (You may make up your own question, if you prefer.)

Spelling Words	Questions
step	What is the 'goose' step?
still	Describe a situation where you would have to keep very still.
still (alcohol)	How does a still work?
stag	What is special about a stag's antlers?
stun	What is a stun gun, and how does it work?
stop	Who designed the stop sign?
tail	Choose an animal or bird and find out what it uses its tail for.
jail	Why do we need jails? Find about a modern jail. Find about an old-fashioned jail.
pail	What are buckets useful for?
main	What is a 'main course' at a restaurant?
rain	How do we measure rainfall? Find out about one of the various types of cloud.
wait	What is the difference between a waiter and a waitress? What is a 'dumb' waiter? Where would you find a 'dumb' waiter?
wash	What is a scrubbing board? What is a 'twin tub'?
wand	Who uses a wand?

4. Spelling – Write the spelling words out and mark them for their structure.

s t ě p	t <u>ai</u> l	m <u>ai</u> n	w a s
s t ĩ ll	j <u>ai</u> l	r <u>ai</u> n	w a <u>sh</u>
s t ä g	p <u>ai</u> l	w <u>ai</u> t	w a n t
s t ũ n			w a n d
s t ö p			

5. Silly Sentences – use as many of your spelling words as possible in one sentence. (These sentences may be used for dictation practice every day.)

I still want you to stop stepping into the pail that is full of rain.
Look at the stunning tail on that stag as it waits in the rain.
He was washing the wand in a pail of rain so that the main work was done.
Do you want to go to jail for stepping on the tail of that stag?

6. Find a saying, expression, colloquialism or proverb that contains one of the words in the list and explain what it means.

- to step out of line
- a stag party
- to pull out all the stops
- the tail is wagging the dog
- to twist the lion's tail
- with his tail between his legs
- a jail bird
- to be beyond the pail
- as right as rain
- raining cats and dogs
- come rain or shine
- it never rains but it pours
- to put something away for a rainy day
- to take a rain check
- time and tide waits for no man
- it will all come out in the wash
- that story won't wash
- to wash one's dirty linen in public
- to wash one's hands of something
- a wash-out
- to want for nowt
- If I had a magic wand ...

7. Senior Grades

- morphemes
- etymology