

Winter Wonders



Bethesda Elementary School
Reading and Writing Corner

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WONDERING ABOUT WORDS THEIR WAY?!

In November, many parents attended parent-teacher conferences where teachers reported on student progress and parents had the opportunity to ask questions about the curriculum. One topic often on the minds of parents is spelling. Spelling instruction looks very different today than it did when most parents were in elementary school. Today, spelling focuses on word study, not memorization. Using Donald Bear's *Words Their Way* program, teachers guide students in **examining**, **manipulating**, and **categorizing** words. Teachers turn student attention toward critical features of words that are related to sound, pattern, and meaning.



I see and I forget. I hear and I remember. I do and I understand.

So, you may wonder...*What does spelling look like in my child's classroom?* In a kindergarten class, you might see children sorting pictures by beginning sounds. In a first grade class, you may see students using white boards to create words with the "at" chunk. Moving on to second grade, children are searching the room for words with the **long a** vowel sound. To a casual observer, it may seem rather hit or miss. The big question is...*do kids really apply what they're learning about words to their writing?* The answer is YES!

In September students are assessed to determine their stage of spelling development. There are five stages:

- Emergent
- Letter Name
- Within Word
- Syllables & Affixes
- Derivational

Within each stage are word features and one feature overlaps into the next stage. For example, in the Emergent stage children learn about initial/final consonants and short vowels. Short vowels are a feature of the Letter Name stage, too. When students are proficient in all features of a particular stage, they move to the next stage. The time a student spends in one stage varies from student to student.

In evaluating student spelling, teachers look for growth in student assessments—beginning to midyear and

midyear to end-of-year. Teachers also want to see application of features in student writing. Finally, they want to know that students are internalizing general rules and patterns in spelling. For example:

- C-V-C pattern (consonant-vowel-consonant) means the vowel is short.
- C-V-Ce pattern (C-V-C, plus silent e) means the vowel is long.
- C-V-V-C pattern means the vowel is long and the first vowel says its name.

As students advance, knowing when to apply particular patterns becomes the new focus. For example, the **long a** sound can be spelled many ways—wait, say, take, weigh, label, hey, yea. Given the number of patterns for the **long a** sound, students must learn to spell an unfamiliar word based on what they know about **long a** and the most common spelling patterns.

Finally, there are always exceptions to rules. Primary teachers often give homework related to high-frequency or word wall words. These “wild words” or “oddballs” don’t always follow sound or spelling patterns. They must be memorized. Overall, teachers work to provide a multisensory approach to spelling. Confucius said it best when he said, *I see and I forget. I hear and I remember. I do and I understand.*

WONDERFUL WRITING

Winter is a time of celebrations, vacations, and often snow days. It’s also the perfect opportunity for creative writing. How many times have your children asked on a long car trip, “*Are we there yet?*” It’s an age-old question,

but maybe you can provide a new answer. B.E. staff is working hard this year to enhance its writing program through direct instruction, writer’s notebooks, and writing centers. Parents can promote writing as well especially during down times when children might otherwise turn to the computer or TV.

Here are some ideas that parents can use to get kids writing. If you’re going on a long car or plane trip, get your child a blank book or soft composition journal and have them keep a trip journal. They can write an itinerary for each day, record entries about the day’s events, and paste in memorabilia from their journey. A slightly different trip journal might be a Q & A journal in which students write questions they have about the day’s events in the morning and then answers to their questions in the evening. For example, “*Will Grandpa take me to my favorite restaurant in Boston?*” “*Today we went to _____. It was a blast. I got to _____.*”

Students can also try their hand at creative writing. Poems and short stories can be a fun way to spend a snowy afternoon with hot chocolate—after the sledding, of course. Moms and Dads that listen to kid compositions can be powerful motivators and a source of inspiration. Some parents like to be co-authors as well. So parents, get children to pick up the pen and put down the remote. You’ll create something wonderful together!

