

"Five Questions Parents Ask Most
About Their Children's Spelling.....Answered!"
taken from the new book
MY KID CAN'T SPELL!
Understanding and Assisting
Your Child's Literary Development
by J. Richard Gentry
(Heinemann, 1997)

1. My child's teacher doesn't teach spelling or phonics. Is spelling important for a child who is just learning to read?

Spelling opens the gateway to literacy by helping your child meet two requirements for beginning readers: breaking the code of the alphabet and learning about sounds in words. These tools should be acquired early on to ensure your child's progress toward literacy. The student's first experiences with spelling provide a foundation for his or her future reading education.

2. How can I tell if my child's spelling is at the right level?

In "My Kid Can't Spell!" I provide guidelines for you to "measure" your child's spelling level. A parent should be aware of which words are appropriate for a child to tackle. For instance, "me" is a first grade word, "unknown" is a fifth grade word. The given tests for determining your child's grade levels are to be used as indicators. The results are useful and accurate, however, they are not an exact measure of the students' reading skills. You should keep in mind that your child's spelling consciousness and writing skills are more important than being at a certain grade level.

3. What are the basic spelling rules my child should know?

There are five basic spelling rules that a child needs to know in order to be a successful speller. The first two are simple enough for a first grader to master. Your child should know that "Q" should always be followed by "u," with a few exceptions, such as Iraq. Rule two can be taught simply by asking the child to pick out the vowel(s) in one and two syllable words. Once the child knows that in each syllable there must be a vowel, his or her spelling will improve.

The Silent "E" Rule involves the dropping of the e when adding endings beginning with a vowel, such as "have" to "having." It gets tricky when the child must remember to keep the e when adding endings beginning with a consonant. For instance "late" to "lately." Rule three is developmentally appropriate for children around grade two.

Rule four looks at making words plural. It asks the student to change the "y" to "i" and add "es" when the singular form ends with consonant + y. An example of this is "baby" to

"babies." When the singular form ends with a vowel + y, add "s" (boy, boys). Third and fourth graders are advanced enough to learn this rule.

Rule five, as in most spelling rules, must be learned simply by repeating the phrase over and over. "Write 'i' before 'e' except after 'c' or when sounded like 'a' as in 'neighbor' and 'weigh.' 'Weird' and 'neither' aren't the same 'either.'" This one sort of rhymes and that makes it a bit easier. But it is not learned until fifth grade because of the difficulty of the words it affects as well as the many exceptions to the rule. Exceptions include: caffeine, codeine, Fahrenheit, etc.

4. What should my child be learning about spelling in school?

In school, children should learn the importance of spelling. Teachers should stress that "creative spellers" should ultimately develop good spelling habits and correctness. I decided to devote an entire section to the identification of "bad spelling lessons." With the use of this guide, you can determine the appropriateness of your child's spelling instruction. Learning how to appraise the content of their child's assignments and tests will better equip you to evaluate your child's education.

5. Why do some people struggle with spelling their entire lives?

Chapter five of my book explores the reason why spelling may always be a struggle for some people. The possibility of a "spelling gene" may give some people the power to visualize the spellings of words. This enables people to see in their mind's eye how words should look. Therefore, a person who has trouble spelling carrot, karat, carat, and caret cannot "see" in his or her mind's eye the spelling. And because the words all sound the same it is difficult for these people to learn to spell them. Just as a music teacher should never discourage a student because he or she isn't as talented as other students, a parent or teacher must understand that a student who lacks the natural ability to spell correctly with ease should be encouraged to work toward his or her own potential. Expert spelling may be a genetic accident.

ABOUT THE BOOK

MY KID CAN'T SPELL!
Understanding and Assisting
Your Child's Literary Development
by J. Richard Gentry
(Heinemann, ISBN 0-435-08135-7, \$13.95)

Spelling impacts virtually every aspect of reading and writing and is the key to unlocking literacy. But spelling can be confusing for parents who want to help their children. When is the right time to correct misspelled words? How can parents help their child move to the next level of

development? What are the important underlying concepts to reinforce? Are there any resources you can recommend to assist them?

In "My Kid Can't Spell!," spelling expert J. Richard Gentry offers timely and practical solutions to many of the problems facing parents of students (K-8). This readable and accessible handbook is packed with easy-to-use tools, guidelines, and strategies, including:

- * developmental guideposts to track children's literacy
- * tips for helping children progress through early spelling stages
- * a test to determine a child's spelling level
- * strategies to help children visualize words
- * ways to identify poor spelling instruction at school
- * ways to recognize if a child has a spelling disability

There's no better book to recommend for parents who want to play an active role in their children's spelling education.

"My Kid Can't Spell!" is available by special order at bookstores online and off, or you can purchase it directly >from the publisher (1-800-793-2154). You can get more information about Heinemann's full line of instructional books for parents and teachers at the Heinemann web site:

<http://www.heinemann.com>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As a youth, J. Richard Gentry memorized 1600 words, won third place in the county spelling bee, and then promptly forgot how to spell most of those words. This lifelong struggling speller was confronted in college by a professor who could not understand how a smart student could spell so horribly. Gentry later earned a Ph.D. in education at the University of Virginia and became an internationally respected expert on spelling education. His mission: to better understand spelling and to help other struggling spellers.

A former elementary school teacher, university professor, and director of a reading center for children with reading problems, Gentry's clarity on literacy issues comes first hand from a career-long synthesis of research and from personal experiences with hundreds of children and parents.

A best-selling author of many books for teachers on spelling, Gentry has traveled across North America and in South America, Australia, and Europe to share information with

teachers about literacy development. "My Kid Can't Spell!" brings together Gentry's expertise and the personal stories of real parents he has encountered who struggle with and celebrate their children's literacy development.

Originally from rural North Carolina, Gentry currently resides in Chicago.

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