

Historic School
Orthography (Spelling)
Lesson

He who hears, forgets;
He who sees, remembers;
He who does, learns.

Historic School

Orthography Lesson

Lesson Time: 20 minutes plus afternoon spelling bee.

Objectives: Students will practice spelling and writing words chosen to enrich their vocabulary in preparation for an old fashioned spelling bee.

Background Information

“Americans have much affection for the best-selling textbook of all time” (The Old Blue Back Speller) Over a hundred million copies of Noah Webster’s spelling book have been sold. His lobby efforts resulted in the passage of several state copyright laws, and finally the first national copyright law in 1790. He was motivated by a desire to protect his royalties from the sale of his Speller which was the principle support for him the rest of his life while he worked on, among other things, his dictionary.

Webster wanted to create an American language. He was responsible for our American spellings such as “honor” instead of “honour” and “theater” instead of “theatre.” His rules for pronouncing words created an American Standard.

The title was changed to The Elementary Spelling Book. By 1843, nineteen million copies had been sold. The 1844 edition was priced at 10 cents. Webster died in 1843. McGuffey’s Readers had only recently come onto the American scene, and as yet the Old Blue was supreme in the elementary field.

Sometimes in the rural schools and on the frontier, Webster’s Speller was the only textbook used. There might be

Teacher and passed from pupil to pupil. The teacher would attempt to supplement it with arithmetic, geography, history, and religion from his own knowledge. The Bible was sometimes used as a reader for more advanced students.

In the 1840’s, the speller was published with an appendix of arithmetic lessons so it was generally used as a reader, and for grammar and arithmetic.

Typically, seven pages of instruction to the teacher were followed by the alphabet and two and three-letter syllables and words, then “easy” three syllable words, such as “decipher.” Later poems, fables and moral tales were interspersed with word lists.

Spelling bees, arithmetic contests and debates were held in the schools. The Rock Springs Miner newspaper is quoted in the excellent book, Cowbells Ring Schoolbells, written and published by the Albany county, Wyoming Cow-Belles Club, and tells of an untimely end to one spelling bee when a cowboy rode into the schoolhouse on his horse.

Spelling bees were part of the winter entertainment in the days when there was no radio, no television, and no way to get to town. This was adult recreation and if the children came, they were strictly in the audience.

Historic School Activities—Orthography

1. Students will copy spelling words onto their slates from the board as seat work, while other students are engaged in reading.
2. A "Spelling Bee" will be conducted in the afternoon and a certificate awarded to the best oral speller.

Spelling Bee Procedures:

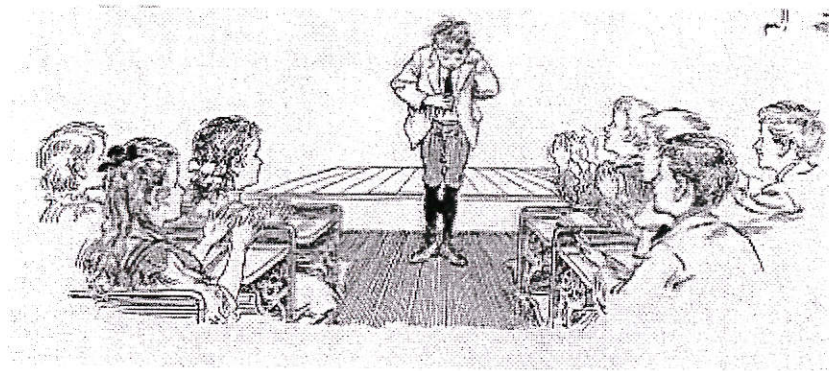
- A) The word is pronounced by the teacher and used in a sentence.
- B) The word is then repeated by the student.
- C) The student spells the word. If a mistake is made, student may upon making the mistake, and for a second try. The same rule applies to starting over.
- D) The student then repeats the word. Once the word is repeated, his turn is complete.
- E) The student who misspells a word must sit down.

The following list is suggested for the Spelling Bee. Proper nouns will not likely be used in the "Bee" but are included to enrich student vocabulary and awareness of area landmarks.

Ashford	Parker	crock	orthography
Banner	Pumpkin Creek	cupboard	pasture
Bay State	Rock Hollow	cylinder	penmanship
Big Horn	Sheep Mountain	days of the week	pickles
Bull Canyon	Signal Butte	dipper	pitcher
Epworth	smokestack	dugout	privy
Freeport	Van	fodder	quills
Gabe Rock	Wildcat Hills	geography	recitation
Gallio	Wright's Gap	gingham	sap
Gary	arrowheads	gooseberries	school
Hackberry	blackberries	gopher	separator
Heath	boiler	grater	shoveling
Hogback	braided	handkerchief	slate
Hole in Rock	brand	hoeing	soddy
Horseshoe Bend	bridle	holidays	spittoon
Hubbard's gap	buttermilk	husking	spoonful
Hull	cellar	lantern	spurs
Kirk	chamber pot	lemonade	squirm
Lawrence fork	chaps	maxims	watermelon
Lone Pine	churn	months of year	Dawes
Long Springs	cobbler	mumps	Soldier Creek
Loraine	cradle	naughty	Chadron
Lover's Leap	crate	ornate	Crow Butte
Goldenrod	bison	Black Hills	pine

Preparatory Activities for Spelling

1. Classroom teachers need only make the spelling list available for student study in free time or in pairs. Since the vocabulary may be unfamiliar dictionaries can be utilized. Words could be posted and definitions or sentences added as students discover meanings.
2. Students could be encouraged to locate these words or others appropriate to the period in readings.
3. Make word lists of 19th century familiar words such as "churn" or "miasma" and 20th century familiar words such as "television" or "inoculations." Classify the words by categories such as tools or recreation activities. Begin a study on the origins of words.



Follow-up Activities for Spelling

1. Demonstrate the use of a spell-checker or other word processing computer program to show students how modern technology is approaching this problem.
2. Spelling may continue to be emphasized throughout the year. Frequent Spelling Bees can be conducted in smaller groups to allow more practice time. Have a contest to determine local entrants to the county spelling contest.
3. All interest to spelling by playing games. One such activity is called "Guessing Written Lesson Words."

Guessing Written Lesson Words: A child is chosen to come forward to write a word in the spelling lesson on a piece of paper which is placed on the teacher's desk. After he writes the word, he calls upon some child to tell him the word he has written. The child says, "Is it carried, c-a-r-r-i-e-d?" The child in the front of the room says, "No, it is not carried, c-a-r-r-i-e-d." Then he calls on another. The second child says, "Is it supper, s-u-p-p-e-r?" If he is correct, the child in front says, "Yes, it is supper, s-u-p-p-e-r." Then the child who guesses correctly goes forward and writes a word on the paper, and the game proceeds as before.