



Developing deeper subject knowledge: Unit 6: How to teach etymology

Teaching activities to try

- Children are fascinated to learn about the origins of words and they should be encouraged to use etymological dictionaries and thesauruses for support.

Prefixes, suffixes, and root words

Revisit or teach knowledge of prefixes and suffixes (see the year 3 and 4 Spelling Appendix 1 in the English programmes of study).

Use a matrix to give a visual explanation of how words are built up.

Ask for examples and emphasise any spelling changes needed before the suffix is added.

Prefix	Root	Affix
mis-		-en
over-	take	-ing
re-		

Possible answers: mistaken, overtake, retake, taking, taken, mistaking, retaking, overtaking.

Invite children to explore the origins of the root word or prefix to gain a solid

understanding and repeat this activity with other prefixes and root words.

Using the word 'act', demonstrate how it can be changed by adding prefixes and suffixes (e.g. actor, action, react, activity, reaction, acted).

Collect words containing the root word 'light' (e.g. delight, delighted, lightening, delightful).

Explain how detecting the root word and looking at the suffixes and prefixes supports accurate spelling of the word.

Word families

Children could be given Latin or Greek roots and asked to create word families from them. For example, you could ask children to complete the rest of the table (and see fig.1 oveleaf).



Fig 1

Root	Meaning	Word 1	Word 2	Word 3
prim- (Latin)	first	primary	primitive	primrose
micro- (Greek)	small	microbiology	microcosm	microscope
port- (Latin)	carry			
sect- (Latin)	cut apart			

Adapted from Support for Spelling, 2009 (second edition)