

## ***Bee a Speller***

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Six-year-old Alex listens attentively. His spelling bee coach clearly enunciates Alex's next word. "Misspell: verb; to spell incorrectly. If you misspell a word in the spelling bee, you will be disqualified."

Alex considers what he knows about 'misspell'. The word has six sounds: m-i-s-p-e-l. Alex pictures these six sounds as letters in his mind. The image doesn't match his visual memory. Are some of the consonants doubled? Words combine sounds, but they also combine meanings. If 'misspell' is broken into its morphemes (smallest units of meaning) there are only two – 'mis' (meaning 'wrongly') and 'spell' (meaning to name letters that form words in the correct order.) Joining these two morphemes would suggest there is more than one letter 's'. Alex applies one more strategy before responding. The word 'misspell' contains the smaller word 'miss'. Alex remembers smiling when he first found this mnemonic, imagining an unmarried woman who could only speak by spelling.

"M-I-S-S-P-E-L-L" Alex's voice rings out confidently.

"Correct."

Learning to spell is not easy. We have only 26 alphabet letters to represent 44 different sounds in the English language. Over time English has borrowed words and spellings from other languages. Any parent of teenagers, co-worker of computer geeks or student of Shakespeare also knows that language is not static. New words, meanings and pronunciations are evolving all the time.

Good spellers rely on a variety of strategies. Adults can help children by encouraging them to:

- Look closely at correctly spelled words. Finger-trace words. Look for smaller words nestled inside bigger words. Visual attentiveness helps children develop a mental picture about whether their spelling looks right.
- Pay attention to sounds in words. Tap or clap beats in words. Slowly sound out letters they read or write. Play word games in the car or grocery line: Take turns listing words that begin or end with a specific sound. Allow each player 10 seconds to shout out a new word. Can't think of a new word? You drop out of the game.
- Learn about morphemes. Talk about prefixes, suffixes or words that combine to make compound words, like 'bread' and 'box' in 'breadbox'. Explore spelling strategies using morphemes through WordWorks Literacy Centre at [www.wordworkskingston.com](http://www.wordworkskingston.com)
- Play visual games such as Scrabble, Bananagrams, Hangman, and Word Searches.
- Read for pleasure. The Spelling Bee of Canada 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Ontario Finals magazine lists the 2008 regional spelling bee winners. Regardless of age, almost all winners state that a favourite pastime is reading.
- For children between 6 and 14 years, consider entering the **Spelling Bee of Canada**. Many regional competitions will be held in April with winners competing at the finals on May 24, 2009. Kingston region's president is Francois Chan [francoischan@hotmail.com](mailto:francoischan@hotmail.com) (613-547-7954). For Belleville region email [info@spellingbeeofcanada.ca](mailto:info@spellingbeeofcanada.ca) (1-866-244-0244)

Show children that spelling can be fun by entering an adult team in the **Grate Groan-Up Spelling Bee** on May 7<sup>th</sup> in Kingston. This entertaining fund-raiser supports family literacy programming through Kingston Literacy. Or, for support materials to offer your own spelling bee, contact Allison or Irene at 613-547-2012. [www.kingstonliteracy.com](http://www.kingstonliteracy.com)