

## INTRODUCTION

The GirlSMART Literacy Program was revamped in 2022. ***Words Their Way* used to be a required program component, but it is no longer required.** Instead, GirlSMART organizations are **required to implement phonics instruction** a minimum of four days a week, but they may choose to use a program (or combination of programs) other than *Words Their Way*.

The GirlSMART Literacy Program was created to assist girls who are identified as reading below grade level. Even though struggling readers are actively recruited to the program, girls' rate of acquiring reading skills varies drastically. As early as 3 months after kindergarten girls have been in GirlSMART, a wide range of literacy skills can be observed. These differences are very apparent during center time, which is reported to be one the of most engaging literacy activities of the program; many students report that center time is their favorite time. Due to the popularity of the centers and the wide variation of literacy skills, site coordinators and teachers requested assistance in creating centers that better meet the needs of all girls.

GirlSMART wants each and every girl to reach her full potential, which requires differentiation, or the creation and implementation of activities that vary in difficulty. GirlSMART adopted *Words Their Way*, a differentiated word study program that focuses on phonics, vocabulary and spelling instruction to assist teachers in providing girls with engaging activities that are appropriate for their developmental spelling level.

The purpose of *Words Their Way* is to allow students to actively discover the regularities, patterns and conventions of English orthography they need to read and spell. *Words Their Way* authors Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, and Johnston (2007), outline the rationale for teaching *Words Their Way* as follows:

The exploration of orthographic knowledge can lead to the strengthening of students' reading, writing and oral language. Becoming fully literate is absolutely dependent on fast, accurate recognition of words in texts, and fast, accurate production of words in writing so that readers and writers can focus their attention on making meaning. (p. 4)

They additionally explain the reason why the *Words Their Way* program places so much emphasis on active learning (mainly through word study and games):

The best way to increase students' orthographic knowledge is through hands-on activities that mimic basic cognitive learning processes; comparing and contrasting categories of word features and discovering similarities and differences within and between categories. During word study, students are

---

required to examine, discriminate, and make critical judgments about speech sounds, word structures, spelling patterns and meanings. (p. 2)

## DEVELOPMENTAL SPELLING STAGES

*Words Their Way* is a differentiated spelling program that provides students activities that are appropriate for their current spelling level or stage. *Words Their Way* identifies the following developmental spelling stages: **Emergent**, **Letter-Name Alphabetic**, **Within Word Pattern**, **Syllables and Affixes**, and **Derivational**. The **Emergent Stage** usually generally occurs from preschool through kindergarten, the **Letter-Name Alphabetic Stage** usually occurs from kindergarten through the middle of second grade, **Within Word Pattern Stage** occurs somewhere between first and the middle of fourth grade, **Syllables and Affixes Stage** is most often from third through approximately eighth grade and **Derivational Relations Stage** usually occurs in individuals somewhere between fifth and twelfth grade. These time spans indicate roughly when these stages occur. It does not mean that students remain in these stages for the time spans indicated. For example, an advanced child who arrives at kindergarten at the letter name alphabetic stage (k-middle of second grade) and may progress to the within word pattern stage by first grade and is well into the syllables and affixes stage by third grade. On the other hand, a student could enter kindergarten in the emergent stage and could not progress to the letter name alphabetic stage until well into to first grade and remain at this stage well into third grade. The majority of girls in GirlSMART will be at the emergent to within word pattern stage. There may be a few third graders at the syllables and affixes stage as well. Teachers should keep this in mind as they navigate the book. To learn more about the spelling patterns taught at each stage refer to Appendix J: Scope and Sequence.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Each GirlSMART site should have a copy of *Words Their Way*. People who are not familiar with the structure of *Words Their Way* may find the book very intimidating. The book is composed of four main sections: rationale and theory behind the program, diagnostic assessment, chapters dedicated to each developmental spelling level, and word sort activities. Teachers should familiarize themselves with the developmental spelling stages and then focus on the directions to administer the diagnostic test.

Once the test has been administered, teachers will need to identify no more than **3 - 4** different development spelling groups. (There are 3 sublevels within each stage.) This assessment will be administered to girls in first through third grades at the beginning of the year. This assessment will also be administered to kindergartners, but not until January or February. Since many of GirlSMART kindergarten girls come to school with minimal literacy experiences, it more beneficial to administer to test for the first time

when teachers are confident that the majority of their kindergarteners will have some success. All the assessments are located at the back of the book. The **Primary Spelling Inventory** is the assessment that will be administered. Directions on how to administer the assessment are at the back of the book and can also be found in Appendix K. Since girls are learning about orthography during the school day, teachers should administer the test every 9 -10 weeks and adjust activities according to assessment results. Although *Words Their Way* has an assessment and is listed in the assessment section, this separate chapter has been created for *Words Their Way* because it is also a curriculum.

After the assessments have been scored, teachers should group girls according to their developmental spelling stages. Once groups are established, teachers should pick spelling patterns and activities that are at the appropriate developmental stage for each group. Since *Words Their Way* is a differentiated spelling program, girls will need to be able to work independently during word study time. It is important to train girls in how to work independently. This includes being explicit about expectations; rules should be stated clearly and posted. Routines for center time and specifically for word study should be established and practiced.

Teachers should start the year with more whole group instruction and sort activities that last for 5 to 10 minutes. As students become more independent, the word study time can be increased. Older students (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade) have longer attention spans and should be used to independent work during the school day, so they should be able to progress quickly to longer word work activities lasting 15 minutes to 30 minutes.

## WORD STUDY PROCEDURES

Word study time, which is conducted mostly in centers, will only be successful if girls are well trained in word study procedures. These procedures include: word sorts, word study notebooks, games, and spelling tests. The words study notebooks, games and spelling tests all support the main pedagogic tool of this program, which are the word sorts. Detailed steps on how to introduce word study are below:

### HOW TO INTRODUCE WORD STUDY

#### Day 1: Introduce Concept Sort (whole group)

1. Start with a concept sort using pictures that everyone can do (winter vs. summer clothes, beach vs. snow items, water vs. land animals, land vs. water vs. sky, types of transportation, birds vs. humans, cats vs. dogs). If words are used, make sure that students can read the words accurately.

2. Model sorting the pictures in two categories only: those that fit and those that don't. Talk through the sort as the students watch. Be interactive; ask them where they think the pictures go. Ask if they know why you are sorting the way you are.
3. Discuss categories and why each picture fits.

### **Day 2: Repeat Concept Sort (whole group)**

1. Students come up to front to sort at teacher's request.
2. Sort the same picture words with a different category.
3. Talk through the thinking process.
4. Model a written explanation of the sort with a picture or in two or three sentences.

### **Day 3: Open Concept Sort in Small Groups (3-5 students)**

*An open sort allows students to place items or words into categories that they create.*

1. Give groups a box with objects for a concept sort (buttons, colored geometric shapes, smooth and rough rocks, blocks, plastic animals, shells, different erasers).
2. Have each group choose one person to explain their sort.
3. Allow 5 minutes for each group to sort words.
4. Share the results with whole class.
5. Give groups a box with objects for a concept sort (buttons, colored geometric shapes, smooth and rough rocks, blocks, plastic animals, shells, different erasers).

### **Day 4: Introduce Closed Sort**

*In a closed sort, the teacher gives students the categories they are to use to sort items/pictures/words.*

1. Review the steps to sorting. What did we do? What were we looking for?

2. Give criteria for new sort to the whole class (picture sort with categories for K/1, word sort with consonants for 2/3). Make single contrasts within these pictures and objects. After students sort and talk about their sorts, they can think of other ways to sort and conceptualize these pictures and objects.
3. Second and third grade: each group copies sort onto chart paper. Students may write one or two sentences explaining their sorts. Kinder/first grade: must explain to a partner, teacher, or different group why they sorted the way did.

## FOUR STEPS OF A LESSON

After teachers feel confident that their girls can work independently and that they understand the purpose and ideas behind sorting, teachers should begin choosing sorts that are appropriate for students at different spelling stages. They should create activities using the *Words Their Way* four step lesson plan below. Please note that for the demonstrate phase, the teacher will need to introduce the spelling concepts to each group. In most cases, teachers will have no more than 3 different groups.

### FOUR STEP LESSON

Demonstrate	Introduce sort. Use key words or pictures to show concept, sound, or pattern.
Sort and Check	Students sort individually or with a partner.
Reflect	Declare, compare, or contrast: “Why did you put these words here?” “What is different about the words in this column?” “Tell me about how you sorted.”

<p>Extend</p>	<p>Introduce and assign activities to complete independently:</p> <p><b><u>Sorts:</u></b></p> <p><b><i>Open Sort:</i></b> students can sort words in any way and then justify their sort.</p> <p><b><i>Closed Sort:</i></b> students sort with teacher-provided criteria.</p> <p><b><i>Speed Sort:</i></b> students sort words as fast as they can individually or with a partner. They must read words out loud as they sort them.</p> <p><b><i>Blind Sorts:</i></b> Partners: A reads word while B sorts by writing words in notebook, then A checks to see if B sorted correctly.</p> <p><b><i>Writing Sort:</i></b> Students sort then write words in notebooks.</p> <p><b><u>Games:</u></b></p> <p><b><i>Word Hunt:</i></b> students sort then find words that match concept/sound/pattern in books or magazines. For pictures students can cut and paste from magazines in notebooks. Students can copy words into notebooks.</p> <p><b><i>Upper grades:</i></b> students can look up definitions for their words and write in notebook.</p>
---------------	--

## FOUR STEP LESSON BY DEVELOPMENTAL SPELLING STAGE

*Words Their Way* provides educators with words lists and pictures to facilitate the creation of developmentally appropriate sorts. An entire chapter is devoted to each developmental stage and a CD-Rom (or link and passcode to a website) is provided with word lists and pictures to make photocopying easier. Below is an example of a developmentally appropriate lesson plan and word sort for the Letter-Name Alphabetic Stage. Please refer to Appendix L for examples of lesson plans and word sorts for Emergent and Within Word Pattern Stages.

## LETTER-NAME ALPHABETIC

Pattern Sort: Short -a Families: -at & -ad

Demonstrate	Use both picture and word cards. Introduce headers: cat/bag. Ask students what sound they hear at the end of “cat”. Say word “c-at, cat. Repeat for “bag.” Give students a turn to sort remaining pictures. Stop to explain that these are examples of word families. Since they all sound the same at the end, they all belong to the same family. Then ask students to match words.
Sort and Check	Give students sorting pages. Have them color with crayon on the back, cut, and complete the sort. Each student should read completed sort aloud (one column at a time) to check that all sounds match.
Reflect	Ask: What is similar about all the words in this column? What makes the words in one column different than the other? What do you notice about the ends of words in a word family?
Extend	Have students take sorts to their table. With a partner, complete sort, speed sort, and written sort in notebooks.