

TEACHER RESOURCE SECTION

A FOCUSED GOAL

The goal of this book is, in the most profound way, to give elementary students the right vocabulary start. We want children to know, from their earliest thinking, that their world is not new and that they did not come from nowhere. The English they speak, though it has a variety of sources, is in great part a linguistic ruin of Latin. Our minds were born, more than we realize, in Rome. It is the Latin-based words that are the nucleus of successful professional English, and it is the Latin-based words that dominate the classic words of English-language literature. These thousands of Latin-based English words, as if by a miracle, are built primarily with a few dozen easily learned stems and reused in myriad combinations, like children's blocks. By learning the stems, students discover a clicking vocabulary construction set that shows them how thousands of words are just recombinations of dozens of stems. And beyond just learning what words mean, students discover that spellings are usually logical and that there is a secret poetry inside English words that is only visible if you know the stems. Stems let students begin their intellectual lives with the intellectual truth. Young children can start out as language insiders. Latin stems are power learning at its most beneficial.

The goal: to ground student vocabulary learning in its historical context of Rome and to introduce ten Latin stems that are fundamental in English vocabulary.

TWO-PART DESIGN

In essence, *Building Language* has two parts: the historical background and the stem lessons. The first provides information about ancient Rome, focusing on Roman architecture and especially the arch, which is beautiful and intellectually enchanting and which serves as a metaphor of how words are made of smaller pieces called stems. The book is even set in Roman type fonts, with Times Roman as the text and Trajan as the headline font, enhancing the aesthetic clarity. This is not, though, a history book, and it does not attempt to provide even a summary of Roman history. It introduces Rome as a backdrop to English vocabulary.

The second part provides ten lessons built around ten important Latin stems. In these lessons, a sense of play is enhanced with poetry and stories, and the lessons extend the interest in Rome and the arch through examples and references.

In the stem lessons, the close language relationship between English and Spanish is especially emphasized; Spanish has never been more important than it is today, and its kinship with English is woefully underappreciated. Since the stems that build English also build Spanish, this is a perfect opportunity to demonstrate the connected greatness of our two modern languages and to provide knowledge that informs the study of both languages simultaneously.

~~AGE GRADED~~ REALISTIC VOCABULARY

Among the example words that appear in this book are some words that seem advanced beyond the level of elementary children. First, this is inevitable in any examination of the Latin stems, since it is precisely the advanced stratum of English diction that stems create. But more importantly, it is imperative to elude the jaws of age-graded vocabulary assumptions. For decades, modern education has sunk, lower each year, under the tyranny of the assumption that students cannot learn and that only by providing the least possible content can any success be achieved. The spiral of dumbing down textbooks has continued to the point that education has become a catastrophic void, a vast pessimism, with only the tiniest morsels of knowledge scattered about the gray topography. It must be the purpose of new educators to refuse these cowering assumptions, and to believe in children again, and to remember that every young child who can pronounce and understand a term like *Tyrannosaurus Rex* can certainly handle a term like *distort*. So if a lesson contains a word that is new to the students, be not afraid. Teach them the word, talk and have fun, and discover how stems turn big words into child's play. Little kids *can* learn big words.

The truth is that children can learn much, much more than they are often asked to. Let's give them a challenging, realistic vocabulary.

📌 A distant sound is just one part of the whole sound; only a piece comes to us, like an arch is just one piece in a ruin, one piece that we see.

The arch was built as a message to posterity.

BOXES AND CIRCLES

The teacher's edition of *Building Language* employs boxes and circles on each page to provide talking points, explanations, suggestions for activities, and background comments to the teacher. The aim is to minimize how much the instructor has to flip to the back of the book to find an assignment or annotation. You have enough to do without having to flip. There is no crucial distinction between a box and a circle; if there was already a box, I put a circle the next time. It's prettier that way, and pretty matters.

THE ARCH

Part of the plan of this book is that if we are going to teach vocabulary, we may as well also use that opportunity to situate the vocabulary in the context of additional wonderful content. If we have to find example words and give example sentences, we may as well teach something important in the process. Fortunately, when it comes to teaching Latin stems, the opportunity is even more compelling; Rome looms dead ahead off the forward bow.

But in developing the concept of the book, we also saw the exciting chance to use Roman ruins as an opportunity to introduce architecture and then the arch as a metaphor for how words are made of stems. This also presented a chance to make the book beautiful and to use beautiful images to attract children to their own further study of Rome and of architecture. We should remember that beauty is intellectually important; it is a part of the central current of high intellectual life. Other reflections about the arch include:

- The arch is an amazingly flexible element. Here it makes an arcade, there a doorway, there a bridge, and there an aqueduct. It is eternally turning up in new locations and is wonderful proof of the human inventive power.
- The arch is a prototype for how smaller things make bigger things. This concept can be extended and explored with benefit. What are other examples of small things combining?

THE ROMANCE OF ETYMOLOGY

One of the goals of this program is to encourage the use of the dictionary, not only to look up the meaning of any word here, but to discover a path to the ancient origins of our modern words. It is important that students have access to a good dictionary that provides not just definitions and parts of speech but also the Latin, Greek, or other origin of each word.

The challenge then falls upon us as educators to bring the adventure of etymology to light and to bring a feeling of drama and exploration to each entry. This word comes from Rome! This word comes from the ancient Greeks! This word comes from an American Indian civilization! This word comes from Spanish, and before that from Rome! Each time we look up a word in a good dictionary, we find a story, and if we don't read too fast, the story will speak up.

For students who have dictionaries, there are lots of opportunities for activities that will enhance this text:

- Look up the meaning of an example word.
- Look up lots of example words for a given stem.
- Look at all of the examples in the whole dictionary of words beginning with a stem.
- Find your favorite stem word from the pages of the dictionary.

THE IMAGES

The images in this book are intended to give children a first exposure to what the Romans achieved with stone. The soaring grace of the Segovia aqueduct or the stately solidity of the Coliseum leaves us dizzy with admiration. The Romans were the only people in the ancient world who understood concrete and who developed it to a high degree of sophistication.

Because the Romans combined the arch with the use of concrete, they were able to build on a scale that far exceeded others in the ancient world. The Coliseum in Rome had a capacity three times greater than the largest Greek amphitheaters; the Parthenon could fit on the floor of the Coliseum with enough room left over to hold a chariot race around it.



A SENSE OF TIME

Any look at the Roman Empire, including our examination of the Roman fragments in English words, inevitably opens up our sense of time. In the United States, 200 years seems like a long time; it extends almost to the founding of the nation in 1776. We forget that two individuals—each one living to be 100 years old and the second one born on the day the first one died—would have lived through most of American history. Using this 100-year lifespan as our unit of measure, we realize that five individuals could have lived through the entire history of the New World, from Columbus’s discovery on.

Rome presents a different timescale entirely. It would take ten American histories to get back to the peak of the Roman Empire. Columbus wasn’t even born until 1451, a thousand years after Rome *fell*.

When we see these images of Roman ruins and speak these fragments of Roman words, we are traveling in time in a manner for which American history offers no equivalent. So one of the tacit concepts of this text is the concept of *time*.

As you move through the book, ask students subtle questions aimed at their sense of time: How long would it take for a building to become this ruin? What could have caused these walls to fall? Why are the parts that still stand standing?

STEM REVIEW

stem	definition	a variety of example words
de	down	descend, deposit, debris, decay, decide, decrease, define, describe
ex	out	exit, extend, expand, extinct, extract, explode, explore, export
re	again	repeat, return, reverse, review, revise, reflect, recall, redo, respect
spec	look	inspect, respect, spectacle, spectacular, spectrum, spectre
sub	under	subtract, subscribe, submit, submarine, suburb, subsoil, subway
super	over	superb, superior, superstition, superficial, supervise
pre	before	predict, preview, prevent, preschool, precede, prepare
post	after	postpone, post meridiem, postscript, postseason, posterity, post-test
port	carry	export, transport, import, porter, portable, report
dis	away	disagree, distract, dispute, dismiss, distort, disappear, distant
in	in	income, inscribe, inspect, include, indent, invade
duct	lead	conduct, introduction, product, reduction
urb	city	suburb, urban, urbane, urbanologist, urbanite
dict	say	predict, dictionary, dictate, dictator, malediction, contradict
scrib	write	prescribe, inscribe, scribe, scribble
aqua	water	aqueduct, aquarium, aquamarine
vis	look	vision, visor, revise, supervise
cede	go	precede, proceed, precedent, secede, antecedent, recede, intercede
pon	put	postpone (a variation of <i>pos</i> , put: position, deposit, impose, repose)
trans	across	transport, transfer, translate, transfusion, transcend
tract	pull	tractor, distract, retract, subtract, extract