"GIVE ME A J!"
"J!"
"GIVE ME AN A!"
"A!"
"GIVE ME A K!"
"K!"
"GIVE ME AN E!"
"E!"
"WHAT DOES IT SPELL?"
"JAKE!"

Six-year-old Jake stands before his classmates proudly calling out the letters in his name. Today Jake has been chosen "Leader of the Day" and his name will be added to the Word Wall after the students have had a chance to see, hear, cheer and write it.

Jake's teacher knows the importance of names to her first-graders, and is taking advantage of the opportunity to teach the class about letters, words and other concepts about print in the context of their own names and the names of their classmates.

The Name Wall is only one kind of Word Wall. Word Walls may also focus on such things as alphabet sounds, letter patterns or high frequency words. A Word Wall is more than just wallpaper. It is a valuable tool for spelling and decoding, consisting of a display of carefully selected words which are systematically taught and referred to frequently as a reference for reading and writing.

Word Wall instruction applies a "whole-part-whole" approach to phonics and spelling instruction. The words are carefully selected from classroom reading and writing experiences to represent letters and patterns and words. No more than five words are posted on the wall at a time, and these are taught and reinforced visually, auditorally and kinesthetically. Throughout the rest of the school day, the teacher makes frequent references to the words on the wall to model the application of the words to all of their reading and writing.

Word Wall instruction is motivational, multi-level, and fast-paced, intended to take a maximum of 10-15 minutes a day. It is important to ensure that the daily activities include success and challenge for all students, including those who are advanced. Additional reinforcement may be provided for small groups as needed.
Although there are many types of commercial Word Walls available for purchase, creating a teacher-made Word Wall is quick and economical, and enables the teacher to choose words to meet the needs of her students. Some teacher-tested tips for effective Word Walls include:

- Write the words in **thick black marker** on **coloured construction paper**. Make sure confusable words are on different colours.
- Sometimes it helps to identify words that follow the same pattern, perhaps by putting them on the same coloured paper.
- Try to print the words in the **same size of letters** each time, to facilitate comparing the lengths of the words.
- **Cutting or drawing around the shape of the word** provides another visual cue for students.
- **Picture cues** may be added.
- An unused chalkboard space may be used for a word wall. If you attach words to the wall using **magnetic tape**, they can be easily removed for group activities.
- If possible., try to organize the Word Wall alphabetically in a **line from left to right**, rather than in columns or misaligned.
- The Word wall should be visible to the students from their seats. The letters should be **large and legible** enough to be seen at a distance.
- Use **lower case** letters except in names, when initial capitals are required.

**Name Walls in K-1**

One of our key literacy goals in Kindergarten and First Grade is knowledge of the alphabet letters and their sounds. An Alphabet Wall which begins with the names of the students is an excellent introduction to the letters of the alphabet in a meaningful and motivational context.

Find a wall space that is easily accessible and visible to all students to display each letter of the alphabet in upper and lower case form. This Alphabet Wall will remain in place all year.
Each day, appoint a different person to be the "Leader of the Day." (Some teachers draw names randomly and others make deliberate choices about the sequence of the names.)

Draw attention to the letters of that person's name by:
- pointing to each letter and saying it aloud
- counting the letters
- cheering the letters
- drawing around the shape of the word
- cutting the letters apart and inviting the leader to sort them
- comparing the name to others on the word wall
- posting the name under the appropriate alphabet letter on the word wall

In Grade One and perhaps even in Kindergarten, you may wish to have all the students write the leader's name, letter by letter, on a piece of paper or mini chalkboard.

Each day, use a different student's name and follow the same procedure. If a name lends itself to rhyming, take advantage of the learning opportunity. Play phonemic awareness games with names by changing the first letter. Compare names with others on the wall, noting common letters.

After all of the students' names have been posted on the Word Wall, you probably will have empty spaces for some letters. This is an opportunity to include other names important to the students, such as their school, their town or the principal. Fill in any additional blanks with concept words (such as “fish” for F) that the students will relate to. One word per letter is enough, though you will likely have more than one name for some letters. The point is to give students a reference point for alphabet names, symbols and sounds.
What's the advantage of this strategy over the time-honoured tradition of "letter of the week"? For starters, it presents the alphabet in the context of meaningful words rather than in isolation. Not to mention the fact that you will have covered the entire alphabet by mid-November rather than twenty-six weeks. For the rest of the year, you can reinforce and apply of that alphabet knowledge. It is a good reminder that knowledge of the alphabet and the sounds it represents is a tool for reading and writing, and not an end in itself.

What other activities can be done to reinforce the words on the Word Wall?

* Sorting pictures and/or plastic letters in a literacy centre
* Practising letter formation on mini whiteboards, magnetic boards, sandboxes
* Creating words with magnetic letters, letter tiles, or plastic letters on an overhead projector
* Highlighting "words around the room" beginning with those sounds, using Wikki Stix or highlighting tape
* Drawing attention to the words on the Word Wall as an aid for writing and reading during Shared Reading and Modeled Writing activities.
* Masking words during Shared Reading and inviting students to predict the hidden word
* Matching "key word" cards with words on a poster or chart
* Writing a poem on sentence strips or word cards that students can mix up and put back in order
* Giving the students their own copies of a shared reading poem for rereading at home.
High Frequency Word Walls

High frequency words are often difficult for young writers to spell. Most of the words are functional and abstract and do not follow familiar spelling patterns. Besides the often confused of, for and from, and the reversible words on/no and was/saw, beginners often confuse the "th" and "w" words, such as there, them, then, than, their and what, want, with, went, were. But because they are the “glue” that holds writing together, they should be recognized automatically, in other words, “sight” words.

It is important to introduce these words in context (such as a poem or morning message), then provide plenty of practice with them so they become automatic. Not all children are visual learners, so there must be some activities to activate other modes of learning. Patricia Cunningham (1995) suggests that students see the words, say the words, chant the letters, write the words and trace around them. Chanting, writing and tracing the letters provide children with auditory and kinesthetic routes to learning and remembering. If new words are introduced on a Monday, the rest of the week may be spent reviewing previously-studied words on the wall.

These lessons should be interesting and fast-paced, taking no more than 10-15 minutes per day. The teacher will also make frequent references to the Word Wall throughout the day as she models, demonstrates and guides her students in reading and writing activities. Additional review may be provided for small groups who need it.

Here is a fine example of a word wall from Melissa Smith’s website, www.smithsroom.com.
Introducing New Words ...

1. Start with the shared reading and discussion of a poem, chart or nursery rhyme. Always focus on the meaning of the text first. After the students have had a chance to enjoy and respond to the text, invite them to draw attention to words, letters and other aspects of print that they recognize, using word frames, highlighters, Wikki Stix or highlighting tape.

2. Choose three to five words from the text to add to the Word Wall. Write these words on cards and focus on each word by:
   a) showing the word and having students "glue" their eyes to it. This establishes a visual cue.
   b) having the students call out the whole word and its individual letters. They may cheer, chant, snap, stamp or bob as they spell the letters, to add a rhythmical component to the auditory cue.
   c) inviting the students to write the word on paper or on mini chalkboards, letter by letter, as the teacher demonstrates on a chart or overhead projector. This is a good opportunity to teach correct letter formation in context and provides a kinesthetic cue.
   d) showing students how to draw a shape around the word to emphasize the configuration.

3. Add these words to the Word Wall, comparing the letters, length and other features to words already on the wall. Using coloured paper and cutting around the configuration of the words provide additional cues to remembering these words.

Once words are on the Word Wall, they are "no excuse" words! They should be spelled correctly in all subsequent writing.

Reviewing Word Wall Words

After new words are introduced, the rest of the week may be spent reviewing words already on the wall. This element of the lesson may be enriched for advanced students by allowing them to develop and lead the review activities on occasion.

Some review activities may include:

- **Word Wall Riddles** - The students must find and write the five words that match with the clues given by the teacher, such as:
  * rhyming clues
  * meaning clues
* initial or final letter clues
* "sound-alike" clues
* opposite clues

- **Word Endings** - Practice adding endings to word wall words. For example, have them find, clap, chant and/or write the word help. Then have them add the ending "s" to make helps. Then add "ed" to make helped, then "ing" to make helping and finally "er" to make helper.

- **Mind Readers** - The teacher thinks of a word on the Word Wall and gives five clues to that word. The students number their papers 1-5, and after each clue, guess a word. By the fifth clue, they should all know the word. If successive clues confirm a student's earlier guess, he can just write the word again.

- **Word-O** - This is a variation of Bingo. Provide each student with a blank grid of 9, 16 or 25 blocks. Invite students to fill the blanks with words from the Word Wall. With younger students, you may want to direct this portion of the activity, telling them what words to write, but allowing them to write the words in the squares of their choice. Older students may choose any words they wish (or just two syllable words, or just words with blends, etc.) The teacher may "call" the words, or students may take turns calling words from their card.

- **Guess The Covered Word** - In a passage on the overhead, have some words covered. Students try to guess the word wall word as the letters are revealed one at a time.

- **Wheel of Fortune** - The teacher or a child picks a word from the wall and draws lines on the board or overhead for each letter in the word. Children take turns guessing vowels or consonants. Correct letters are written in the lines and incorrect ones are listed in the "used letter box". They MUST guess all the letters before saying the word.

- **Hink Pinks** - Children love to make up and solve riddles for which the answers are rhyming pairs, or "hink-pinks". They are fun to make as illustrated books, such as riddle flip books.

- **Spelling Rhyming Words** - Say to the students, "One of your word wall words today was eat. I am going to say some sentences that have words that rhyme with eat. Listen for the rhyming word and then we will decided together how to spell that word." Then give sentences with beat, heat, neat, treat, and cheat.

- **Review Cross and Check Word Wall Words** - To review cross-checking, tell the students that they will have to decide which word wall word makes sense and begins correctly. For each word, write the first letter of the word on the board. Then say a sentence, leaving out a word wall word that begins with that letter. Students will decide which word makes sense in your sentence and write that word.

*Lori Jamison*
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Always try to help the students make associations between new words and words they already know

By introducing five words a week, your students will have a repertoire of over 100 words by spring. You may wish to spend the remainder of the year reviewing these words to ensure that the students know them automatically and focusing on opportunities to use the words in their writing.

**Chunk Charts (Pattern Walls)**

"Brain research suggests that the brain is a pattern detector, not a rule applier, and when we look at letters, we see them as clusters of letters. This supports the idea that decoding and spelling are not accomplished by sounding out words letter-by-letter or by rules. Rather, children learn from the beginning how to use patterns in words they know to decode and spell hundreds of other words." - Patricia Cunningham, 1995

Word Family, or "Chunking" Walls consist of key words that contain common spelling patterns. These patterns help students read and write unknown words by making analogies to known words and letter combinations. Patterns may consist of rimes such as "ink", "at", "oke" or "unk". For older students, you may want to look at prefixes, suffixes and derivatives (root words from other languages).

Use the same procedure for creating "Word Family" Walls as with other Word Walls. Always "harvest" the key words from classroom reading and writing experiences. You may want your students to help you select the words for the wall. When you have selected a pattern, orally generate other words with the same pattern and model writing.
them with the students, but only post one key word for that pattern on the word wall. The Word Wall becomes too cumbersome otherwise.

Spend lots of time practising the words to develop automaticity with the letter patterns and make analogies to other words.

**Practice Activities**

- **Chant and Check** - Hold up the key word. Students write the word on scrap paper, chant the letters and check the spelling. The teacher can dictate words that begin with the same pattern or each group can work together to come up with two or three pattern words.

- **Word Ladders** - Working independently, in groups, or as a class, students generate lists of words containing designated patterns.

- **Making Words** - Students are given a set of letter cards to create words, then sort them by pattern.

- **Silly Rhymes** - Use words with the same pattern to create rhyming couplets - the sillier the better!

- **Pattern Posters** - As students discover pattern words in their own reading and writing, they may add them to the pattern poster - in fancy, coloured letters.

**Word Walls for Upper Grades**

If your students are struggling with spelling high frequency, irregular words, such as *they, could, where, again, because, said, were*, then a Word Wall can help them make these connections.

You may display the Word Wall in the classroom for everyone's use, or provide individual students with "portable" Word Walls in a file folder, as needed.

The Word Wall should contain:
· frequently misspelled words and commonly confused homophones
· common contractions
· examples of suffixes and prefixes

This is a good opportunity to draw students' attention to words which do not follow common patterns. Choose 5-10 words. As you put up each word, have the students tell you what is illogical about it. For example, "because" sounds like it should be spelled *becuz* but it makes sense if you remember that it has the word *cause* in it".
Give the students strategies for remembering these irregular spellings, such as saying them rhythmically or in a chant. Better yet, have the students create their own mnemonics for remembering the “tricky parts” of familiar words.

Have the students write the words with careful attention to the sequence of the letters. This should be a focused, not automatic activity. If you make it a riddle or game, they will be more inclined to focus on the words. For example,

- Write the only word with three letters.
- write the word in which "ey" makes a "long a" sound

After students have written all of the words, have them check their own lists by chanting the letters aloud, underlining each letter as they say it.

In addition to learning high-frequency, frequently-misspelled words, students in Grade 3 and up should develop the following skills:

* Decoding words that they've never seen before
* Spelling words that may have more than one possible spelling
* Decoding and spelling multi-syllable words

It should be remembered that a word wall is not a vocabulary wall, but more of a reference tool for reading and writing. “Word banks” are collections of vocabulary words harvested from literature or content area themes. I want my students to know words like constellation or community, but I may not require students to be able to spell them. I’m more inclined to save my spelling battles for words like they, its and said.

Word Walls are an economical and effective way not only to teach letter and word concepts in a meaningful context, but also to transfer to independent reading and writing. Give them a try. They may keep you from climbing the wall!
Important Resources

http://www.teachers.net/4blocks/


Cunningham, Patricia M & Hall, Dorothy P. (various dates)
Month-by-Month Reading and Writing for Kindergarten
Month-by-Month Phonics for First Grade
Month-by-Month Phonics for Second Grade
Month-by-Month Phonics for Third Grade
Month-by-Month Phonics for Upper Grade
Carson-Dellosa

Wagstaff, Janiel M. (1998) Teaching Reading and Writing with Word Walls
Scholastic Professional Books