



What is Raising Literacy?

Raising Literacy is a newsletter produced by the Florida Department of Education's State Regional Literacy Directors (SRLDs). For the 2026-2027 school year, three issues will focus on using morphology to decode and understand words by referencing Heidi Anne Mesmer's book *Big Words for Young Readers*. Consult your district-adopted materials when planning morphology instruction.

FEATURED FOCUS

What do students do when they encounter words like *disagreement*, *transportation* or *unpredictable*? Strong readers analyze meaningful word parts rather than sounding out letters one by one. **Morphology**, the knowledge of meaningful word parts in a language, must be taught explicitly and systematically (B.E.S.T. ELA Standards, pages 206 and 216). According to the science of reading, morphology is an essential literacy skill that serves as a bridge connecting word recognition (decoding) and language comprehension.

In books commonly read by children in first grade, over 40% of words have more than one syllable, and 60-80% of the words students encounter in third grade and beyond are morphologically complex (Mesmer, page 30). Skilled readers use meaningful word parts to decode and pronounce a word and then use those parts to understand a word. This approach aligns with Florida's B.E.S.T. ELA Standards, which emphasize applying phonics and word analysis skills to decode words and using knowledge of morphemes to determine word meaning. "You cannot teach morphology without talking about meaning" (Mesmer, page 19).

As a result of morphology instruction, students strengthen their ability to independently decode unfamiliar words as well as develop their spelling, vocabulary and comprehension skills.

Mesmer, H. (2024) *Big Words for Young Readers: Teaching Kids in Grades K to 5 to Decode—and Understand—Words With Multiple Syllables and Morphemes*. Scholastic.

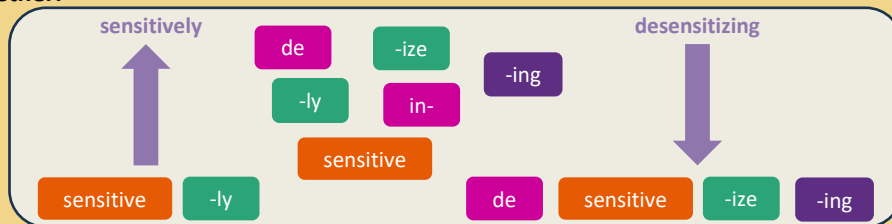
MEANINGFUL MOVES

In Chapter 4 of her book, *Big Words for Young Readers*, Heidi Anne Mesmer provides seven principles to inform morphology instruction.

- 1. Teach Students How Morphemes Work:** Help students understand the meaning and function of word parts.
- 2. Provide Explicit Instruction and Lots of Application Opportunities:** Engage students in applying word part knowledge in reading, writing, discussion and word study activities.
- 3. Teach Students to Find the Base Word:** Start with the base word, then examine how affixes add meaning.
- 4. Teach Students to Think About Spelling and Meaning From the Start:** Prompt students to think about how words are constructed to make meaning.
- 5. Keep Instruction Active and Multifaceted:** Provide students opportunities to build up (encode) and take words apart (decode) to understand how word parts fit together.
- 6. Use a Problem-Solving Approach:** Guide students to look for meaningful parts they already know when reading big words.
- 7. Capitalize on Cognates:** Highlight connections between English and students' home languages when applicable.

In Chapter 4, Mesmer describes "Build It Up, Break It Down," an interactive activity where students construct (encode) and deconstruct (decode) words to learn how they fit together.

1. Review vowel patterns
2. Practice high-frequency affixes
3. Blend word parts
4. Isolate affixes in words, while being timed
5. Write words with affixes
6. Practice fluent reading
7. Practice reading increasingly complex texts



PURPOSEFUL PRACTICE

The Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) offers [#AtHomeWithFCRR](#) videos for families and educators that help students build vocabulary and apply word-part knowledge. Each video includes directions and materials.

- [Build a Word](#): Students use word parts to construct words and identify the meaning of the word.
- [Word Dissect](#): Students segment words into base words and affixes to determine meaning.
- [Root-A-Word](#): Students identify and sort words by common root.

Appendix D (Vocabulary), pages 199-203, of Florida's B.E.S.T. ELA Standards includes reference charts to support morphology instruction.