

Word Ladders in My Second Grade Classroom: Ten Minutes of Engaging and Productive Word Study Every Day

Jackie Cleven

I have always enjoyed challenging and enriching my second grade students with word work since becoming a teacher in 2003. During my second year of teaching *2005 Daily Word Ladders* were brand new and I instantly fell in love with them. The routine became part of my bell ringer work. I always knew the transfer into daily writing was evident and continued to make this important daily work a priority. I would simply give students 5 minutes to work on them in groups on the carpet then we would discuss the ladder after I took attendance. I always marveled at the soft whispers of groups wanting to be the ones to know the solution to all the clues. I bragged about this transfer to my peers and told them they were missing out on a daily 8-10 minute activity, one that would profoundly impact writing outcome.

It was not until I had the chance to listen to Dr. Rasinski speak, that I began to follow him on Facebook. During COVID he was creating a word ladder every day. It became the glue, for my class, that held engagement together during that time between March and the end of the 2020 school year. My students had completely finished the second grade word ladder bundle for the school year so imagine how excited and grateful we all were when Dr. Tim Rasinski started to create daily Word Ladders to help students continue to embrace engagement right to the end. My colleagues were complaining they were unable to keep students engaged and they would ask me what I was doing. I would say "I am telling you friends... Word Ladders are the key." If I had to say I sounded like a broken record that may be an understatement. I am a team lead for my grade level, so I had many opportunities to give this opinion.

The month of May was really exciting because the students wanted to create their own word ladders. The single most amazing event happened when I allowed a student to teach their

word ladders to the class and then it was really like a Pandora's box of sorts. All students in both second grade classes wanted to create and teach a word ladder.

Each day a handmade word ladder was created by a student and that student taught it to the class. This was not only engaging for the students but also the parents at home. Each student had to have a correct answer key and clues in order to be the word ladder teacher for the day. The children loved this opportunity and they excelled!!! It was a consistent daily activity, and it made the glaring fact that we could not be together a bit more bearable.

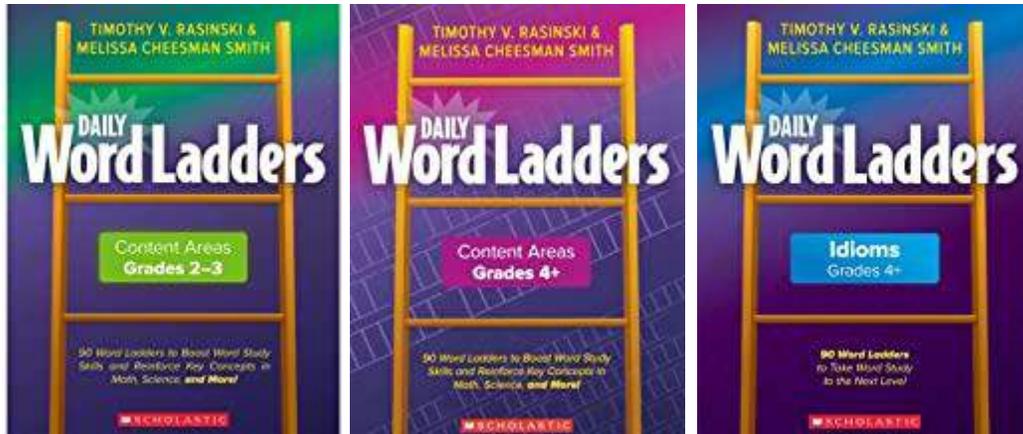
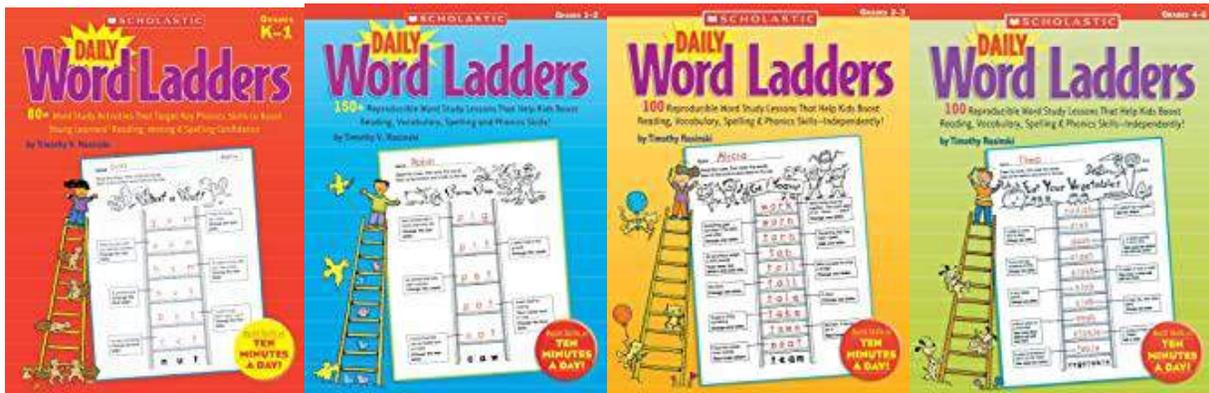
So...knowing the real value of this daily activity coupled with the knowledge that we would start our 2020-2021 school year remote made it easy for me to prepare the books ahead of time to go home with the students. I also created a folder in the second grade teacher classroom to send any new word ladders to my team as Dr. Rasinski created them and posted them on Twitter and Facebook. I remember a teacher saying to me "is Dr. Rasinski making a Dr. Seuss word ladder?" I said, "just wait for it. I am sure it will come."

Students in my class know and call Dr. Rasinski by name. They have powerful things to say about his wonderful contributions to word play. I am going to share just a few. Aneasha told me that she was so excited when she was able to be an expert in front of her Grandma. She said, "my Grandma didn't even know the first word, but I did." One of my favorite quotes came from Sam. He said, "they are fun. Dr. Rasinski works really hard on them, and they make me super smart." Brooke told me that the rhyming is what gets her. Amelia said, "it becomes exciting when the words are hard to figure out and I love that sometimes the words are numbers." Isaac said, "I am inspired." My last quote is from Max. He said, "they are all unique and different from each other. Vocabulary ladders help us with longer bigger words."

Imagine the sheer happiness we all felt the day Dr. Rasinski came to us virtually with a word ladder he had created just for our South Prairie Second Graders. They are still talking about this day. During a year when we were not allowed to go on field trips, have parties, or

have helpers in the room; a year where 6 feet apart with masks on was the norm for 8 year olds, we had a unique opportunity with a special “Doctor of Words”, and we will never forget this.

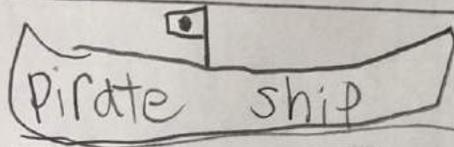
If you want to know the real value of a thing you are doing, just ask a second grader. They will tell you – And they did! (See below for examples of students’ own word



Name Max. G

Read the clues, then write the words.
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.

Super Effort



Left side clues:

- an air or water vehicle → s h i p
- change one letter → a nickname ~~xxxx~~ with pip → p i p
- a weapon change two letters and add one → w h i p
- something that sounds like your mouth change one letter → l i p
- when a fruit or vegetable are done they are → r i p e
- rearrange the letters and take away two → P i r a t e

Right side clues:

- a food change one letter then add one → c h i p
- above the legs take away one letter → n i p
- to make something change one letter → t i p
- to something such as paper take away one letter → l i p

Name Ryenn

Read the clues, then write the words.
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.

Animals  

A pet
change one letter

dog

Super
fun!!

dot

I like to
draw pokas
change one letter

a small
child
change one
letter

tot

rot

to go
bad
change one
letter

A rodent
change one
letter

rat

cat

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