

Word Ladders for the Win

By Alaina Weatherford

I teach ELA in a small, rural K-8 building in Illinois in a departmentalized setting with a partner teacher who teaches math, science, and social studies. We switch two grades between us throughout the day. The last two years we taught third and fourth grades. This year, due to a retirement, we moved up to teach fourth and fifth grades. Therefore, I have been teaching my current fifth graders for three consecutive years.

When these students were in third grade, I decided to begin using Dr. Rasinski's word ladders. I wanted a quick and simple, but effective way to incorporate vocabulary instruction, and most importantly, I wanted it to be fun. We completed a word ladder every day and eventually finished our first book, *Daily Word Ladders: Grades 2-3*. The students begged me for more, so we moved into *Daily Word Ladders: Grades 4-6*. We ended up finishing that book in the middle of their fourth-grade year. I did not realize that Dr. Rasinski had written any more books and told the students that unfortunately, that was our last word ladder book. They were devastated and begged me to please find more. It was then that I searched online and found out there were in fact more books that I did not know about. I bought *Daily Word Ladders: Idioms* and we began to make our way through that book.

At the end of their fourth-grade year, I found out I would be moving up and teaching them for their fifth-grade year. Of course, they wanted to continue completing a word ladder per day! We finished the book on idioms, and I asked the kids if they were now finally sick of word ladders. They replied with a resounding, "No!" So, we have now moved on to *Daily Word Ladders Content Areas*.

I am now into my final two months with these students, and we have only a few pages to go in our last word ladder book. I have promised to find enough word ladders through Dr. Rasinski's resources to finish our last year together. It is amazing to me that we have completed a word ladder every day for almost three school years straight and they are still excited about them.

Not only are word ladders fun, but I have seen a huge increase in my students' overall interest level concerning words. If there is a word on the ladder they do not know, they are genuinely curious about what the word means. We take the time to discuss the word, look up the definition, and pull up images online. Because of this, the number of words they have in their vocabulary has increased exponentially. Knowing more words positively impacts the students when they are reading novels on their own. They are also more aware when they encounter a word they do not know. They are more interested to employ strategies to figure out the meaning of that particular word.

Word ladders truly are the easiest way to add some fun and excitement into your vocabulary instruction! Thank you, Dr. Rasinski, for creating these wonderful resources for students and teachers!

