



How to use etymology to help students spell high frequency words – with Fiona Hamilton and Rebecca Loveless

Reach All Readers Podcast #235

Anna Geiger: Welcome, Rebecca and Fiona.

Rebecca Loveless: Thank you so much, Anna.

Fiona Hamilton: Yes, thank you. We're excited to be here today.

Anna Geiger: I'm excited to talk to both of you. I've purchased both of your courses and learned a lot from both of you about how words work. And today we're going to talk about etymology, the history of words. But before we do that could you introduce yourself, Rebecca, tell us about you and your work?

Rebecca Loveless: Thanks, Anna. Yes, I started my career as a classroom teacher working in early primary schools and have always had a passion for early literacy. I, in fact, had an undergrad degree in linguistics and so language has always been a passion of mine. And after my career in the classroom, I encountered the work of structured word inquiry and started learning about our English orthography and became so fascinated.

I just took a deep dive into that work and ever since I have been working in a variety of ways, one-on-one with students. I work with other teachers who are wanting to learn more about orthography and implementing that work in their schools and their classrooms. And I also provide literacy coaching at a school near me in California halftime.

And then Fiona and I encountered each other about five years ago and discovered that many of our practices or philosophies are really aligned in terms of helping teachers in the classroom gain the understanding and the practical tools that they need to best serve their students. So we started collaborating.

And through that we've been now into our second edition talking about high frequency words with *The High Frequency Word Project*.

Anna Geiger: Thank you. And Fiona, you've been on here before, but could you remind us who you are and what you do?

Fiona Hamilton: Sure. Yes. It's my pleasure to be back again. So, I'm originally from Australia, but I live in Asia, in Thailand, and have worked for the better part of my career in international schools.

Those are schools, English medium schools, set up for students who are not generally not the nationals of their country. So that's been the better part of my career, teaching from early years through right

through elementary as an administrator, you know, assistant principal, principal, literacy coach, literacy coordinator.

And finally I just think it's so, so powerful when we really learn about our orthography and how words work, the interrelationship – between the influencers on our spelling system that I decided to do this full time. So now I work with schools around the world helping them to tighten up their literacy practices.

Anna Geiger: So the two of you have written *The High Frequency Word Project*, and we're going to talk today about high frequency words; in particular, how understanding the history of those words can help with reading and spelling them. Before we do that, let's talk about what high frequency words are, how would you define that?

And then we're going to talk a little bit about how their spelling is typically misunderstood and mistaught.

Fiona Hamilton: So high frequency words are just that: words that come up with the highest frequency. So not sight words as they're sometimes called or still called, because we hope that all or nearly all of the words are added to our bank of sight words.

You know, as we learn to read words with automaticity, they become sight words. But high frequency words, those words that occur with high frequency, as you well know, Anna, often have spellings that don't match the sounds that we expect. And so teachers and parents often think that they just need to be memorized by sight. Hence the how that term came about: sight words.

But, you know, memorization is not a great strategy for many students. I think beyond that, it gives false information about the system. It gives this sort of idea that irregular words, words that don't fit the simple letter sound correspondences, that students first learn, the idea that they can only be learned by memorization.

So in essence, what you're saying is that English should have very consistent letter-sound links, and when it doesn't, this is wrong. And that's really not the case.

Rebecca Loveless: I think, yeah, absolutely. We can teach our students that phonemes, the sounds of our language, can be written in more than one way.

And the graphemes that we have to write can also represent more than one sound. And that's just a very important feature of our system that I believe our children, our students, need to learn, quite early on. And fortunately now people are realizing that we can map many of these phoneme grapheme relationships in high frequency words, even if they are the more unexpected ones, but often what I see out in the world is people still get stuck with, well, this one little part of the word still needs to be hearted or memorized. And that's where we came together. Knowing that the tale or the history of the word can be really helpful. All words have stories from where they came from, and it's these stories that often actually help explain the spelling, particularly those parts that seem like they need to be memorized.

Anna Geiger: Where do most of our highest frequency words come from?

Rebecca Loveless: You know, most of our highest frequency words go all the way back to old English, meaning they've been in the language for over a thousand years. And some of them are even spelled

exactly the same way. We know that English is complex and it has a lot of influences from Latin and Greek and such, but these are the sort of the foundational grammatical words that we use.

So it makes a lot of sense that they've been in English in its various forms since the beginning.

Anna Geiger: So what's the difference between function words and content words?

Fiona Hamilton: Well, function words are grammatical words. the little words that fill in, the words that hold the stronger meaning. So our nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs hold the content of the sentence. They're the sort of most important ones. But without the function words, the little grammatical words, we don't have sentences. So I think the thing that is interesting and helpful to know about function words is that they often follow their own spelling conventions.

And people don't know this, so then they believe them to be exceptions. So, for example we teach our young children about the FLOSS rule, you know, when we double F, L, S, and Z at the end of a base, and then we encounter words like is, you know, IS it's like "oh, they're exceptions." But actually when we learn that function words will take a shorter spelling where possible, then we can see why they don't follow the conventions for content words.

So for example, if you take which, which witch is which, you know, W-H-I-C-H, it doesn't use the TCH trigraph that the magical witch uses in its spelling. It's taking the shorter spelling.

So not all of our function words are really short, but many of them are, because we don't need them to stand out on the page.

We really need to see the content words.

Anna Geiger: Oh, that's an interesting way to think about it. So, you've been talking a lot about orthography and I know when I was new to learning about the science of reading, it took me a while to get all those words straight. Mm-hmm. But that's just spelling, the English spelling system.

And we know that many things contribute to English spelling and not just phonology, which is the sound, which you alluded to at the beginning. I think when we call words irregular, it's often because it's phonologically irregular. So the letters don't perfectly match the spelling, but then you learn that English isn't supposed to work like that, it's a morphophonemic language; so therefore spelling communicates more than phonology, more than sounds. It also communicates meaning. Anything else to share about what contributes to English spelling?

Rebecca Loveless: Yeah, I think you've said that very well, is knowing that orthography, our spelling system really is an interrelation of these domains.

So like you said, it's morphophonemic. So we're looking at both the pronunciation representation as well as the morphology, the meaning-based elements of words, those building blocks that build our word bases, prefixes and suffixes. But there is a third element of this interrelation between morphology, phonology, and also etymology. So we have the sounds in the words. We have the meaning-based blocks, but we also have the history of the word and the word's evolution and how that word came to travel through time to arrive in the English that we are speaking today. And it's often in that etymology piece where mysteries are kind of revealed of why, why does it have this vowel, or why is that silent letter in this word?

So knowing that etymology and definitely the language of origin actually play these important roles in small and practical ways that we can tap into – that can really help us understand. So taking these three interrelated domains and considering each of them, but studying each of those pieces, morphology, phonology, and etymology in isolation doesn't fully explain the spellings of words. So knowing that there are these three domains, and then looking to see and learning to see how we can think about words and their interrelationships to help explain spellings from whichever angle is most appropriate for understanding that particular word.

Anna Geiger: Now, one thing that's kind of confusing to me sometimes is that it seems like etymology overlaps some of those other contributors. Would you say that's true? Like morphology and etymology overlap sometimes when you look about the history of the word, that also has to do with like where the morpheme came from.

Does that make sense?

Rebecca Loveless: I think so, yeah. Definitely. I think what you're saying is that we can either think about what grapheme, like why does this word have a certain digraph? Oh, because it's from a Greek origin, or why does it have this certain prefix and not this prefix? Which kind of mean the same thing because of the etymology, because of the language that it came from or the evolution.

So etymology is maybe this overlay or perhaps an underlay that can help explain the spelling that we see in the word today.

Anna Geiger: So I think, you know, as teachers learn more about the histories of words, some people really love that and can get very detailed.

How do teachers decide what's the appropriate amount of information to give about a word?

How do you decide how deep to get into the history and have you, like, maybe you could give us some personal examples. Have you found that it's ever overwhelming to a child or is it enlightening?

Fiona Hamilton: Well, I think. Yeah, I think that is sort of really getting to the core of, of what is etymology and why is it important?

Because a lot of people feel overwhelmed when As Rebecca said, when you don't know the stories, then it can be like, well, why should I tell it anyways? Is it just nice to know? So I think understanding that etymology is the study of the word's evolution. Then we wouldn't want to say, so why does knowing about this history help us?

So I think one thing, as Rebecca just said, if you know that some graphemes have a Greek origin, that it can help you with the pronunciation of a word. So for example, learning that pH. if it's within the base, we'll make this /f/ sound or ch, you know, making that /k/ sound They're strong clues of a Greek origin word, and often those words are higher technical register.

You know, so when we have words that have ch making that /k/ sound, they're often kind of fancier words. So I think when we tell our students, oh, try this sound, you know, in a word like technology, for example, try the ch, making the /k/ sound. That will help them to be able to, to work out the pronunciation of that word and if they know it, obviously the meaning.

Another example I think is, we have different suffixes that indicate that are now agent nouns, you know, that indicate the person or the thing that does something. And er is obviously our, our most commonly

used one, but then we have, or as a suffix that we sometimes use and it's confusing. How do I know when I'm using or when I'm using er?

And so knowing a little bit about the history of this suffix helps. So this suffix comes from Latin, whereas our er suffix is Germanic you know, from old English. and top tip, if you can make a related word with ION, you'll probably be taking, or because ION is a Latin suffix as well, so director/direction, inventor/invention.

It doesn't work 100% of the time because we've started to morph a few spellings into ER that were or, but it works really frequently, like actor/action then you can see this connection. I think that's one of the ways that it's really helpful.

Anna Geiger: I did not know that, right?

Fiona Hamilton: Try, try it. It's a great tip.

Rebecca Loveless: One of my fourth grade students, and these are students who have the opportunity of learning through this interrelation from their early grades. I, you know, I come into fourth grade and ask them, so why do we study words this way?

Why do we need to look up the story, the history of a word anyway, and one student was really able to articulate that. Etymology also helps us understand the meaning of our current present day English words more deeply. And so when you know that the words like motion and move both come from the same Latin root MOVERE/MOTUS. You can understand more deeply why something that sparks a lot of emotion we say is moving. They both have this connection to that Latin root that's, that had that original sense of move. So, you know, the thinking a little bit more deeply about words and understanding where they came from. It just sort of, for me, it feels like that meaning just resonates throughout all of the words that are related.

Another one is the base of VISE. So when we ask kids to revise their work, revise their writing. They can actually understand. It literally means to look back at it or look at it again. The VISE comes from a Latin root "to see," so what are we doing? We're not just fixing our punctuation, but can you look back and make the meaning clearer?

Can you organize it differently? You really need to look at your writing through the eyes of someone else. So taking this deeper sense and meaning that etymology offers when we study words and their relatives altogether, I think is another really important aspect of why we should care about etymology at all.

Anna Geiger: Well, we're going to talk a little bit about some of the examples in your book, and those are for high frequency words, but you know, a lot of the words we've been talking about now aren't high frequency words like invention or visor or revise. When would you recommend that teachers intentionally teach the history of a word? Like, is this just something that as it comes up, are they consciously thinking about this as they introduce new vocabulary words or during their phonics lessons? How do they decide when to tuck this in?

Rebecca Loveless: That's a great question.

Fiona Hamilton: Yeah. It's a really great question because I think that people do get quite stressed because they're like, I don't know any stories. How am I going to tell a story of a word now? Have I got to look something up?

And what if I get it wrong? So I mean, I think that we both say, if you don't know the story of the word, don't worry that the story of the word will help. But sometimes, as Rebecca was saying, it's going to help the children better understand the meaning of the word. And we know that having strong vocabulary is such an important contributor to comprehension.

So we are working on building or strengthening students' vocabulary all the time. So if we can give them another anchor point that helps them to more deeply understand their words that they're learning, then that will be beneficial for them. You know? But, but if we, we wander too far, if we go too deep, you know, some people just love etymology and then I agree then they're sort of telling stories for the sake of the story, and it goes over the children's head. So our point is actually to try and reduce cognitive load by sharing a few details that are relevant to the spelling of the word.

So if we go back to that MOTE that Rebecca just mentioned, and we are saying to the children, these words are connected. Let's think about how they might be connected in meaning: motorbike, remote control, emotion.

Like we're getting a little more abstract as we go. But then we are building and strengthening that understanding of words like emotion. We are starting with something like motion/move. Both mean to move, what does a motorbike have to do with moving and so, or a motor, and so that's more concrete.

And then we can move through to more abstract words that if we link them, you know, words such as a emotion, then it's useful for the children because kids have big emotions and then it's helpful that they can start to understand those feelings that are moving through and making your stomach churn.

You can feel those emotions. And then of course we go to see a performance and we say, I was so moved by it because that connection between emotions and movement.

Anna Geiger: So for example, like if somebody was spelling motion, MOSH, you know, EN or whatever, then you could, then that would be a really good time where you could say, actually it comes from MOTE.

And look at these other words that are connected. And look, we keep that MOT, even though the spelling, the pronunciation is changing. These words all go together. So a lot of it comes from the teacher. Kind of having this in their brain somewhere so they can pull it out. How do, how can teachers build up that knowledge so that when the teachable moments come, they know what to say?

Rebecca Loveless: I think there are a couple of ways that I would recommend, because of course there are some people who just love etymology and have resources that they seem to understand. But I think more people don't have a lot of experience with etymology. So they're intimidated, and they're left wondering like, where do I go?

What do I do with this and how do I learn it? So we are talking about our *High Frequency Word Project*, and that's one place that we're recommending for people to start, because what we've done is gone into the etymology and simplified it, kept it accurate, but written stories at this developmentally appropriate level that can be shared with even younger students.

But it gives teachers and students sort of, you know, a place to feel like your hand is being held, to be able to walk through and read the story ahead of time, kind of get a sense of it yourself, and then

practice sharing it. You can just read it verbatim from our book and see, oh, okay, now I'm starting to understand how the history of this word is really playing into the spelling.

And then once you start to kind of get a taste of that, there are some resources that we can point people to in your show notes and things. There's paper etymology dictionaries, the John Ayto *Dictionary of Word Origins*. And there's a school version of that book where again, the etymologies are written very simply, but also very accurately.

And then once you really want to start diving in, if you have access to the *Oxford English Dictionary* or our favorite site that we love, going to the online etymology dictionary, etymonline.com, that's when you start to get an even deeper dive and you know there are places you can go to learn a little bit about, well, how do I wade through this information to find the part that will really be useful?

Anna Geiger: Thank you for walking through that. So it sounds like start simple with the handholding and then gradually dive. I think a lot of people say to go to [etymonline](http://etymonline.com) right away, and I'm still learning how to use that website. I don't think it's very easy or intuitive.

Fiona Hamilton: Oh, it's complex.

Anna Geiger: Yeah. So, and so we can get to your book now.

So *The High Frequency Word Project*, the edition that I have, tells the tale of 130 words. And these are high frequency words that are often misspelled. Can you maybe give us some examples of some stories in your book?

Rebecca Loveless: Sure we would love to, we were thinking about the word one, the number one ONE, and of course that's a word that doesn't you know, use what we might expect in terms of spelling and in terms of matching its pronunciation with ONE.

And this word is fun because it has some relatives. So speaking of history, the words only and once and even the word alone are relatives of this word, and there's a great story we'll tell about alone and how it was misanalyzed, and then that word lone just got cut off. And kids love to hear these stories about how over time, humans using language made mistakes and, and created things that don't quite fit.

Yeah. So we have, yeah, go ahead, Fiona.

Fiona Hamilton: Well, I was just going to say, so, so just to come back to that, you know, that's a, that's a lot of research and as you were saying, Anna, it's hard to read [etymonline](http://etymonline.com). It's hard to work all of this out. So, you know, we spent a few years really working through these words and looking at the history of these words.

So we've written the tale, so you can actually just read it until you know it well, and then want to make it your own and tell it a little differently. But just to show you that we have tried to write them in a voice that is great for children. Rebecca, why don't you read us the entry for one.

Rebecca Loveless: Here is the entry for one.

The word one comes from old English. It was spelled a n, just like our word AN, which also means one, like AN apple. The word one was pronounced own, like it still is in the words alone and only. And over time,

the pronunciation of that O phoneme at the beginning of the word shifted towards /w/.. Those two phonemes, they're very close.

Try saying, oh, and feel what your lips do. Oh. Feel how they're rounded at the start. Now try pronouncing /w/. Now see how your lips are also rounded with /w/? So now we can see why the pronunciation changed, but we kept the spelling as it was to show the meaning connections with its related words. And the word LONE is related to the word one because of a misunderstanding.

And we have a little bit more of a tale in some additional notes for some of our words that, that go into a fun story. It turns out that alone was all one. And that's its connection to one. If you're just all one, you are alone.

Anna Geiger: Hmm. Interesting.

Rebecca Loveless: Yeah, and over time people just started kind of clipping that off and it's a lone tree or something and they took the all part and actually split it in half accidentally, just because it was easy to say that way.

So now we have another base, LONE, lone. We have lonely, which are cousins, but it's funny how they were misanalyzed in that story through time. So it's just a fun addition in terms of really bridging vocabulary to a group of words that are related through history and do have some spelling connections and that can help us anchor the spelling of all of these words. So if we know how to spell ALONE and we feel that long o or LONE and we remember its connection to one ONE, then it's, we're building that sort of orthographic mapping using etymology as an anchor point. Mm-hmm.

Fiona Hamilton: It is actually really rare in our language that you can identify a phoneme and not find a grapheme to spell it.

We have very few words where we actually make a sound, a phoneme, and there isn't a grapheme. So I, you know, what we would say is that we can reliably expect that if you can identify a phoneme in a word, it will map to a grapheme, a one, two, or three letter unit. And if it doesn't, I think it's really important that we don't just call this an exception.

I, you know, I like to say, we like to say that we need an explanation. So rather than having exceptions. We need an explanation. And in this case we have a phonological explanation for the change in the pronunciation, but the spelling is still linked to the history. So phonics is just so much more than we realize on the surface.

And it is exactly as you were saying before, Anna, that they seem to be so interconnected The history is overlapping with the morphology, with the phonology, which is really a point that we want to make over and over again is the interrelationship between these influences. We can't just study phonics and then later on do a morphology lesson and then just tell a story about a word for a little bit of interest.

We are telling the story to help understand the spelling and to help understand those phoneme grapheme connections and to help understand the meaning of the word. So we would love to offer your listeners a copy of those lessons about one and, and, and the story of ALONE and how we ended up with this new base LONE.

If, if that's possible, can we share that?

Anna Geiger: Absolutely. That'd be wonderful. And a question about the word one. So, you know, a lot of teachers are doing sound mapping, which I think is excellent for helping kids, especially beginning readers with the process of orthographic mapping. But the word one, like you said, there's a sound in there that doesn't map onto anything. Do you recommend that teachers just skip sound mapping for that word? Or, you know, what, what, what would you say if they want to map that word, but they're kind of stuck as to what goes where.

Rebecca Loveless: We chose this one purposely because it is a little bit of an outlier and it's all fine and dandy when you pick things that are easy to follow. And I watched one of my teachers teach this lesson recently, and in my perspective, I think having a conversation with the students is one of the most powerful things we could do.

So we can talk about the phonological change that happened in this, and we can all feel with our mouths. And maybe even talk about the homophone winning and WON. But in terms of mapping, you know, what do you do? Do you add an extra box? Do you put a w outside in the end?

To me, it's about the conversation and honoring students' intellect to show them that this word has a really special story, that it's taken and it's doing something that. Would be very rare to find in any other words. And maybe we create our own notation together about it. So it's not about doing it right or wrong or which box does everything fit into, but calling out, when we do come across something unexpected, which happens often in our high frequency words, that we talk about it with children, I think that conversation can be the piece that really helps them understand and then go forward with really practicing and learning the spelling and being able to read it.

Fiona Hamilton: And I think that we can so we've got /w/ /u/ /n/, and so the O is making that short u sound, and I think that we can notice that and we can talk about other words where mm-hmm.

OO also makes that sound. because that's a common pronunciation for the letter O. So we, we can see the connection with the O and the N with the pronunciation and then. Yeah, maybe you make your own special little symbol to say there was a sound at the beginning and there is no grapheme to represent that sound, and that's really unusual.

And then of course we have that marker E at the end.

Anna Geiger: Yeah. And a good reminder for teachers who are just getting started with sound mapping is the point, like you said, is not to get this right or wrong answer, but to understand the word and use that process to help you map it. And if the traditional way isn't working because the word is unusual, then we need to dig deeper and figure out something else.

I really appreciated some of the stories in your book, especially about the UGH words. I don't know if you've ever seen the if you've ever seen the I Love Lucy show. There's like a, a classic clip where she's with her husband well, Ricky Ricardo's the character and there, and he's from Cuba and they're having this conversation about all the UGH words and he's trying to pronounce them and they're all different. It's very funny. Yeah. And that trips up so many kids who struggle with spelling. So I'm curious if you could, you could talk to us a little bit about the UGH words, because in reading your book, those were things I hadn't heard before.

And also I'd like to know, have you found that these stories, particularly for words like the UGH, which I just think are extra hard, are helpful for kids with dyslexia who already struggle with, you know, keeping things together in their mind?

Rebecca Loveless: I'll start with that second part of your question. I do think that many students who struggle and students with dyslexia do benefit from hearing these stories.

Oftentimes the students with that sort of way of thinking and learning in the world are big picture thinkers. And when they hear something like a story that explains, how did this word come to be? And again, it anchors sort of just the bigger picture of language, I do believe it helps them, if nothing else, feel like there is an explanation for why our language is the way it is.

And it's not just a system riddled with exceptions that they have to now memorize another rule and yet another rule for this small subset of words with this sound. And they're just memorizing rule after rule and rule to the exception of the rule. Knowing that our English orthography is very logical and systematic when we look through the interrelation of morphology and phonology and bringing etymology, even if it still takes them a while to practice and map these words to become automatic, they can do so, remembering, oh yeah, there is a reason that friend has an I. It's related to Friday. You know, and we can go back to that story, and perhaps for some children it helps. Then make a different kind of mental picture that does anchor something in a new way. But for me, I think it's just that matter of we can trust the system; even if it is complex, there is a reason.

So - agree; the words with UGHs are real tricky for a lot of people and we were excited to take a lot of them on in this edition, and we've learned some really interesting things. We actually collaborated with a Dutch linguist who has a lot of background in this to really get clear about this story.

We brought out the word thought for today. Thought is really interesting because in my pronunciation that O is like a short o, thought. For some people it's a little more /aw/, thought, but it's still in that realm and a lot of people want to or programs call this an OUGH. When we do that, we're introducing what might be called a quadgraph.

And this would be a sort of new level of grapheme into our system of orthography. We are about teaching the logic of the system, and we want to do that in the simplest way possible. But when we add something like O-U-G-H / A-U-G-H, now students have to learn many different sounds for the OUGH. Just like in the I Love Lucy episode when o on its own already spells those same phonemes.

So let's talk about O and what O does in words, just like we were talking about with the word one. And then let's talk about the UGH. So the UGH has a fascinating history. These words also came from old English, thought/through/though/enough - all of those. And they were either written with a G or an H originally.

And that G or H pronounced a sound that we don't have anymore in English. Kind of a rough sound, a /hock/ kind of sound in the back of the throat. In middle English, the French scribes came along and they were not really interested in this sound, and they didn't know what to do with the spelling, so they just started spelling all of the words that had that with both GH.

So sometimes people think about this as GH as well. Well, where did we get the U? So, you know, we're going through tho or something like that to go from the vowel pronunciation to that rougher sound in the back of the throat. This /oo/ came in as kind of a stepping stone for pronunciation. So instead of tho-kkt it was tho-oot or something like that, my old English pronunciation is not exact, so apologies to anyone who's an expert out there.

Mm-hmm. But this, this u this ooh, came into help the pronunciation, then it came in in the spelling. Now we've got a U and A GH and the original O, and then we've just got so many letters going on. Of course, over time, this kind of pronunciation, it's kind of a lot of energy in the mouth and naturally pronunciations change over time in languages, in all languages.

And that sound fell away, but we're left again still with the spelling. So we had this U stepping stone, this GH, and now we can think about those that don't represent pronunciation in words like thought and through and though as a functional unit. They're there because they're marking a connection to this long kind of twisting history from old English, and we no longer pronounce them, but they show us that the words came from old English and through this study, mapping them together as a functional unit, UGH, I have personally seen and over time seen two things.

One, it just helps maintain this, this little unit in the system of orthography and two. When students practice announcing UGH as a unit, they're no longer confusing, is it HG? I see things like UGTH because they're so familiar with the TH. Mm-hmm. And maybe there's the T at the end of, they don't know what order the letters are in anymore.

But if we think about thought, it starts with a TH, that O simple O spelling /o/. Then we have UGH. Why? Because it's from old English. What's at the end of thought? Oh and a T. T-H-O-UGH-T. And then we can start to map that spelling and use that functional unit as something that children can call up in their memory.

And I have seen so much confusion disappear just by students being able to identify UGH.

Anna Geiger: What about in a word like the word tough?

Rebecca Loveless: Yeah. So this is fun. So when we were talking with the linguist, we learned that in some parts of England, that rough sound just fell away and became silent. So we have words with UGH that are silent.

But we also have words with the UGH that's pronounced like an F and those were words in a different part of the country. And interestingly, that that rough sound in the back just kind of moved to the front. You could try this yourself at home. And it's, it's kind of interesting to think that a /kkk/ could just become a /fff/, like an F, from back to front.

So that's why enough tough, rough that UGH is spelling that unvoiced /f/ phoneme. And in those other words it became silent. It was just two sort of geographical differences. And here we are. English is so wonderfully complex, but knowing the story again, at least it's an explanation. And now we can go forward in practice.

And we're also really big proponents of practicing. You don't just tell the story and students automatically have all their words spelled correctly, but we take that into our practice with us too.

Anna Geiger: When I think about a structured word inquiry and the idea of like tap arm tap spelling, like right where you, yeah, like, like you were talking about how you say out the grapheme, right?

So like, if you're doing play, it's PLAY, how would you recommend doing through, like when you say that UGH, are you actually tapping on your arm because it's not spelling anything. Right? Right. How, how would you do it?

Rebecca Loveless: So I could, would do it one of two ways. I might tap on my arm to show that it is a grapheme even though it's not representing any pronunciation.

It's such an important thing to know that some of our graphemes are not there for pronunciation. They're there for something else like marking history. But sometimes instead of the tap that hits the arm,

you can might rest your hand above the arm just to show a little difference. So I would still tap for the word through T-H-R-O-UGH.

And I just held my hand above my arm to show in that word, the UGH is not there for pronunciation, it's there for something else. Whereas in tough, I could tap T-O-UGH and I could fully tap that UGH that has that pronunciation. Very interesting.

Fiona Hamilton: And what we tend to do is to just rest our hand, like what I tend to do with my teachers is to tap and then rest our hand like this to say it's still an important grapheme, but it's not making a sound. And so for graphemes that are silent, I think the, the important, a really important part to us is going between sounding, spelling, sounding, spelling.

And so we know that to, to map words for that orthographic mapping. We need that, match between the phonemes, the grapheme, and the meanings of the words. And so I think when we are practicing spelling by still only sounding out, you are just relying on your eyes to really map what the spellings are.

But if we actually practice the spellings in their graphemes, in their graphemic groups, then we are really reinforcing the link between the phonemes and the graphemes and reinforcing the spelling.

Anna Geiger: Just for those who are listening. When Fiona was doing the arm tapping, she was using like her fingers like an extended hand for those taps, but for the pronunciation or the grapheme that's not pronounced, her hands were curved and it was like the tip of her fingers on her arm.

So I always say when I'm... Often when I present about things like morphology, I'll say, if I ever have a second edition of my book, I'm going to change a number of things – but particularly the definition of grapheme in the back, right? Because I wrote a grapheme is a letter or letters that spell a sound, but now I know it's, it can be, it may spell a sound.

Right? And, and there's a lot of examples of graphemes that don't spell anything. And that was a kind of an eye-opener for me that I had a little bit too late. Mm-hmm. So we talked a little bit about how, if, you know, if, if some letters don't map easily, like we just talked about, we may need to think of something different to do with them when doing sound mapping.

And, you know, there's not... Teachers don't have to feel like there's a right or wrong way of doing this. The important thing is that we're helping kids understand those spellings and map them onto the sounds that are there.

Is there anything else you'd like to share anything else about etymology or something in particular about your book or just something you want teachers to know when it comes to teaching unusual spellings?

Fiona Hamilton: Well, I think as we've talked about, it's the explanation that can be really helpful. So instead of trying to, to map every letter or grapheme in the word, putting them into chunks to always sort of like put them into groups. So that they map exactly to the sound. I think it's what we are trying to do through the tale of words is to help you understand the spellings.

And in many cases, if a letter is silent, then it is the tale. It helps you to understand it. So, you know, words like would, could, should. You know, they, they trip a lot of people up. And in some phonics programs you'll see OUL as a group, sometimes LD because of this idea that we have to put all of the letters in to map to a sound.

But I think by simply looking at the letter that's silent, the L and telling the tale of Y, then that can stick and resonate more deeply with children. So the L in would is there because it has a connection to will. So back in the olden days, you know, would was the past tense. We use it a little differently now, but will/would and shall/should.

We can see that connection. Oh, I see. Why the L is there. And then the fun part is what we would sometimes say, oh, the adults made a mistake with one of the spellings. Or we can call them a copycat word. Trying to be like the others, but ... The word could. C-O-U-L-D has the L in there and there is no matching partner that has an L in it because we have, can, could, and so therefore we see this as a copycat word.

And you know, kids love that story. So I think for us that the important part is purpose. If the tale helps us to understand the spelling of a word, I think that's going to resonate well. We know that that resonates with children to help the spelling stick once they keep practicing it. More so than just trying to group all the letters together to explain your way into a spelling.

Anna Geiger: Excellent. Anything else, Rebecca?

Rebecca Loveless: I think that's really well said. It just this idea that we can explain surprising letters as markers of history. So, for me as well, Anna, when I learned that not all graphemes represent phonemes, it's a really important shift. That just allows words to fall into place.

And so along with the tap spelling we have students on their written work circling the graphemes or dotting underneath and making sure that they also attend to that letter that is silent or a marker of history or something else. If they leave it out, you know, and it doesn't get a box or a circle, then children forget about it.

So focusing in on those graphemes and giving them all that attention. So that they remember and can bring them into their practice.

Fiona Hamilton: I think that when you use something like Elkonin boxes that people love to use, which are really sound-based, then it's like, I can't use it for this word because it has a silent letter, but you can have a box for that.

But we would just advocate dotting around it. So you know, if you're not circling them, then you could still dot and say, oh, the LW because I've got /w/ /oo/ /d/. So the W is in one box, the OU is in another, or as we would say, to circle it. And then dot circle, put like a little dotted line around the L to show it's an important grapheme, but it's not pronounced in this word.

And then you can have the D as well, of course in the, in another box or another circle for it. And I think to us, we are really working to, where possible, reduce cognitive load. So we want the smallest number of graphemes that we can use that explain the language. So, you know, some programs have, you know, like 150 graphemes that children are sort of expected to remember.

These functional units that we put together to build words, to build bases, we think with around 80. Or we, we advocate that, you know, there are about 80 graphemes that students are going to be interacting with and learning, which is the fewest number that we can possibly have that explain the language is important.

Anna Geiger: I just want to talk real briefly about a page in your book. So you're going to be offering a free sample. People will be able to see it, but I'm looking at the word would right now. And you have, you have the word at the top of the page, sample sentences and sample phrases that a teacher could prepare for kids to read or the teacher could read to the students.

And then you have the tale, where the word came from, and you gave an example earlier. Then you have Find the Family. So you have words that are in the same family. In this case, we have would and wouldn't, Connect to the Cousins, and Foils. Could you talk about those two sections?

Rebecca Loveless: Sure. This is another element that the etymology offers.

One thing that makes these little high frequency words and function words difficult is that if you're thinking about morphology, a lot of them don't have close morphological relatives. So we can look at play playing player, but what do you do with would? You know, it's just would or wouldn't. So understanding. That there can be words that are a little bit more distantly related, but do have a true linguistic connection, can help anchor the spelling of those words and as well as their meaning and their usage. So we play this little meaning game and we offer students, you know, this chance after they hear the stories and get the information that they need to be able to play this game.

To be able to identify words that have a meaningful connection. They maybe don't have very many morphological connections, but in this instance, we had would and wouldn't, but we would also put up the words will, like Fiona just talked about, and the word won't. I will, I won't. That has an etymological connection. And Foils are the contrasting words that we put in there, that they share some kind of spelling connection, but usually we make them pretty obvious so that if students are really thinking about meaning, they know that they don't belong.

And this is, you know, we do advocate for spending an important amount of time on the phonology, on the phonics. But we need to remember that words represent meaning, and that's what we need to come back to. Why is a word spelled the way it is? Think about meaning. And once we move beyond CVC. We've got to engage with meaning.

So with our foils, we put the homophone wood, like from a tree, and we put the word shoulder that has that OULD. So students have this opportunity to see words in print and to notice. The structures and their spellings, but really to consider their meanings and then to have this bank of words going back to one and once, which is another word that's difficult, but if they know how to spell one, they can learn about once, then they can learn about only, and it's going to hopefully, from our perspective, help reengage their understanding of that spelling and support that understanding.

Anna Geiger: And then at the bottom of the page there's, it's called Look into the Letters, and that's where you have the word and you talk more specifically about the graphemes. And I think as Fiona was talking about before the graphemes are circled, but in the word would you have a dotted circle around the L because it's a grapheme that's not spelling anything.

So really useful for teachers to, like you said, basically a handholding introduction to etymology with the words that we're going to be teaching the most anyway with our, with our young kids, learning to spell and older kids who are struggling with spelling. And then the back, you have extra resources, games and quite an appendix with a lot back here for teachers.

So just a really great resource. Excited to share that with teachers and we'll get links in the show notes where they can find that. But also if you could talk to us a little bit about some other work that you do.

Like I said, I've, I bought courses from both of you and enjoyed learning from you. If you could talk a little bit about what you offer teachers, we can start with you, Rebecca.

Rebecca Loveless: Sure. People can find me at illuminatewords.com because I love to illuminate these stories about words. And I have a lot of online courses based in structured word inquiry. I have a course talking about how to do this kind of work with young, early readers. I have a new course that's based around morphology and I also do have one online class about using etymonline and investigating words using etymonline.

So if people are very interested in having a little deeper dive in some etymology, that might be a place that they, they would really enjoy going.

Anna Geiger: Thank you. Fiona?

Fiona Hamilton: Yes, you can find me at Word Torque, and I think we talked about this last time, Anna, the T-O-R-Q-U-E of my brand. My is because of, you know, that's that twisting force, that power, so word power the twists and turns of words.

And of course, in my accent, it's a homophone with T-A-L-K, with we're talking words. So you can find me there. And yes, I have workshops that you can take asynchronously online. I have other products that you can buy. You know, I work with a lot of schools and the, the thing that I've really been working on a lot in the last few years is a, is an online subscription model.

Really, a word study platform for schools to use for all of their word study with lessons and materials and explanations. So that has been taking up a lot of my time. And that's a, that's for schools. But I do want to come back to a companion that we made for *The High Frequency Word Project*.

So we have our book that we've published, but we also have study booklets for busy teachers. So the information is all in the book here. But we also produce PDFs that you can buy individually or licensed for use within a school. And we have six different study sets and those study booklets.

The meaning game that we were talking has the information in there in terms of the look into the letters and the tale to read. And the latest one we did because in this book we added another whole set of words for older readers and writers get confused with like the ones that we've talked about in terms of through and thorough and, you know, the words like definitely and so on.

Usually we have this new study set that has four pages of different activities for each word. That really will help to anchor that spelling, to map that spelling. So not to be done in one setting, but to come back to again and again. So, you can find those also on our website, *The High Frequency Word Project*.

So that's another website that we share. We have our own websites and then we share one, the high frequency word project where you can find information about those study booklets.

Anna Geiger: Well, thank you so much. I'm looking forward to sharing all that with everyone who's listening. Thanks for coming on to talk today.

Fiona Hamilton: Wonderful. We always like to talk words.

Rebecca Loveless: Absolutely.