

WordVoyage

An adventure in language

The Roots Have Arrived!

Why do 4th and 5th graders need to study word roots? Well, to begin with, most multisyllabic words in English have them. Secondly, as [explained](#) by linguist Dr. Abigail Konopasky, exposure to root words increases exponentially during grades 4 and 5. From a linguistic standpoint, these students are *taking on a new language within English*, moving from the Germanic word family to the Romance word family. For example, a student reading [Charlotte's Web](#) must navigate perspiration, commotion, endure, approximate, salutations, gullible, exertion, and many others highly descriptive root words. A student reading [Number the Stars](#), commonly taught in grade 5, must make sense of exasperated, imperious, belligerent, impassive, residential, intricate, designate, and many others. *The root words have arrived!*

In the K-3 years, there is a large emphasis on memorizing spelling patterns, spelling rules, and irregular words. In addition, meanings are often easily deciphered from context clues. Root words change the game: the meanings are more intricate and diverse. Context clues can help, but they are often not enough. The students must *look inside the language for the key clues that unpack meanings! Memorizing must give way to [analyzing](#).*

Word Voyage provides extensive practice with a word-attack strategy we call **Slow Down, Break It Down**. Rather than shy away from strange words, our students learn to go after them, pick apart the roots, relate known words to unfamiliar ones, and in the process, *become far more careful readers!*