



POSITION PAPER: Word Origins

Flare Primary Literacy endorses **Word Origins** as a high-quality, evidence-informed program for the explicit teaching of spelling, reading and vocabulary in the middle and upper primary years. The program complements a high-quality structured phonics approach by extending students' understanding of the structure, meaning and history of words, supporting the development of increasingly sophisticated literacy knowledge and skills.

Overview

Word Origins is an evidence-informed program developed by the Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation (DSF) that provides a structured pathway for extending spelling, reading and vocabulary instruction for students in the middle and upper primary years and beyond.

The program recognises that spelling proficiency is a complex process requiring explicit instruction across multiple layers of language and an understanding of how these layers work together. Rather than teaching words in isolation, *Word Origins* develops students' knowledge of the relationships between sounds, spelling patterns, meaningful word parts, grammar, meaning and word origins.

Students investigate words through six interconnected language forms:

- **Phonological form** – sounds and syllables
- **Orthographic form** – spelling patterns
- **Morphological form** – meaningful word parts
- **Semantic form** – word meaning and meaning networks
- **Syntactic form** – grammatical function
- **Etymological form** – word origins and linguistic history

Program Design

Word Origins consists of three sequential levels, with each level designed to be taught over one school year. All students, regardless of year level, commence at **Level 1**, ensuring a common foundation in morphological and etymological knowledge.

Lessons are designed to be delivered in approximately **30–35 minutes**, five days per week, following a consistent instructional routine that incorporates:

- Review of previous learning
- Phonological activities
- Orthographic practice
- Vocabulary and semantic instruction
- Morphological analysis using matrices and word sums
- Syntactic application through sentence writing
- Etymological study
- Application activities
- Lesson review

Each week is organised around a target root (for example, *port*) and concludes with a dedicated review lesson that consolidates learning through sentence dictation, echo, choral and partner reading, word association activities, and cumulative review.

Teacher Support and Resources

A significant strength of *Word Origins* is the comprehensive support it provides for teachers. The program includes both printed manuals and electronic resources designed to promote consistency of implementation while reducing teacher preparation time.

Resources include:

- Detailed lesson plans
- Presentation slides
- Student activity sheets
- Reading passages
- Explicit teacher scripts for explaining complex concepts and irregular spellings

These resources enable teachers to deliver high-quality, explicit instruction with confidence and consistency.

Assessment

The program incorporates a comprehensive assessment schedule to monitor student progress and inform instruction. Assessment opportunities include:

- Beginning and end-of-year curriculum-based measures
- Weekly review activities
- Termly assessments

These assessments provide valuable information about students' growth in spelling, vocabulary and morphological knowledge, allowing teachers to monitor progress and respond to identified learning needs.

Flare Position

DOBCEL Flare Primary Literacy recognises *Word Origins* as a comprehensive and explicit approach to spelling instruction that extends well beyond the memorisation of word lists. Through its emphasis on morphology, etymology and vocabulary development, the program supports students to understand why words are spelled the way they are, strengthening their knowledge of the English language and promoting transfer to both reading and writing.

The program's systematic sequence, explicit instructional routines, high-quality teaching resources and ongoing assessment processes align strongly with evidence-informed approaches to literacy instruction. **As such, DOBCEL Flare Primary Literacy endorses *Word Origins* as a valuable component of an evidence-based literacy program for students in the middle and upper primary years.**

DSF offers regular, free introductory online sessions that provide an overview of the Word Origins program, information about the daily structure, scope and sequence, program design, and materials. The session is aimed at school leaders, teachers, educators and other professionals wanting to know more about the program before signing up to full-day training.