

# Tools for Instruction

## Understand Word Roots

More than half of all English words contain Latin or Greek roots, and many of these roots are shared with Spanish and other languages. These word roots are central to a word's meaning. Students who become familiar with word roots and recognize them in unknown words are better equipped to accurately determine word meanings as they read. Understanding word roots not only helps students comprehend literature but also helps them learn key vocabulary terms in science, social studies, and math texts, where students typically struggle with the volume of unknown words.

### Step by Step 30–45 minutes

#### 1 Explain and model interpreting word roots.

- Display the following words. Underline the shared root *scope*.

telescope    microscope    periscope

- Say, *Many English words contain word parts that they share in common with other languages, both ancient and modern. These parts are called word roots. And just like the roots of a plant, word roots make up the base of the whole word's meaning.*
- Use a think-aloud to help students understand how to infer the meaning of a root. Say, *All of these words have the same root, scope, and each of these words has something to do with seeing. So maybe scope means seeing?*
- Display **Word Roots Chart** (page 3), and record your thinking.

Word	Word Meaning	Word Root	Word Root Meaning
telescope	an instrument that allows people to see or examine something that is far away	scope	to see or examine
microscope	an instrument that allows humans to see or examine something very small	scope	to see or examine
periscope	an instrument that allows humans to see or examine something that would otherwise be out of sight	scope	to see or examine

#### 2 Guide practice interpreting word roots and word meanings.

- Display a group of familiar words with a shared root, and distribute copies of the word roots chart to pairs or groups of students.

calligraphy    autograph    biography

- Have students in each pair or group tell each word's meaning in their own words. Then have them discuss how the words are related in meaning. Encourage students to use a dictionary to confirm or revise ideas and to share words in other languages that have the same root.

- Record students' ideas in the word roots chart.

Word	Word Meaning	Word Root	Word Root Meaning
calligraphy	a fancy style of handwriting	graph	to write
autograph	to write one's signature	graph	to write
biography	a story written about someone's life	graph	to write

- Encourage students to name other words containing the word root *graph*. (geography, paragraph, photograph)

### 3 Provide practice with interpreting word roots and word meanings.

- Display groups of familiar words that contain the same word root. See below for examples.

devoid	portable	rupture
avoid	transport	interrupt
unavoidable	import	abrupt
voided	export	disrupt

- Assign a group of words to small groups of students, and have them share known meanings and look up unfamiliar words. Have students identify the word root and determine its meaning. Then have them discuss how each word's meaning is related to the meaning of the word root.
- Direct students to record their work on the word roots chart, and encourage them to keep their charts in a notebook for future reference.

### 4 Provide practice in writing words with common roots.

**Connect to Writing** Students build their vocabularies by using words repeatedly and in multiple contexts. To develop deep understanding, have students apply their knowledge of word roots to their writing. As students write, guide them in making choices about when and how to use specific words containing a root.

- Direct students to choose a group of at least four words containing the same root. These words can be from the lesson, or for additional challenge, have students brainstorm a new list.
- Have students use their chosen words as they write creatively about a self-selected topic. Students may choose to write poetry, prose, or even comic strips.

## Check for Understanding

If you observe...	Then try...
confusion about words with the same root but different spellings	explaining that sometimes spellings change slightly to accommodate prefixes, suffixes, or other roots, as in <i>proper/propriety</i> . Remind students to think about whether the meanings are related if the spelling is close but not the same.
trouble seeing how words with the same root are related	supporting students in exploring the etymology of a word. Explain that some words evolve and change over time, and sometimes the meaning of the root is deeply embedded in a word's history.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Word Roots Chart

Word	Word Meaning	Word Root	Word Root Meaning