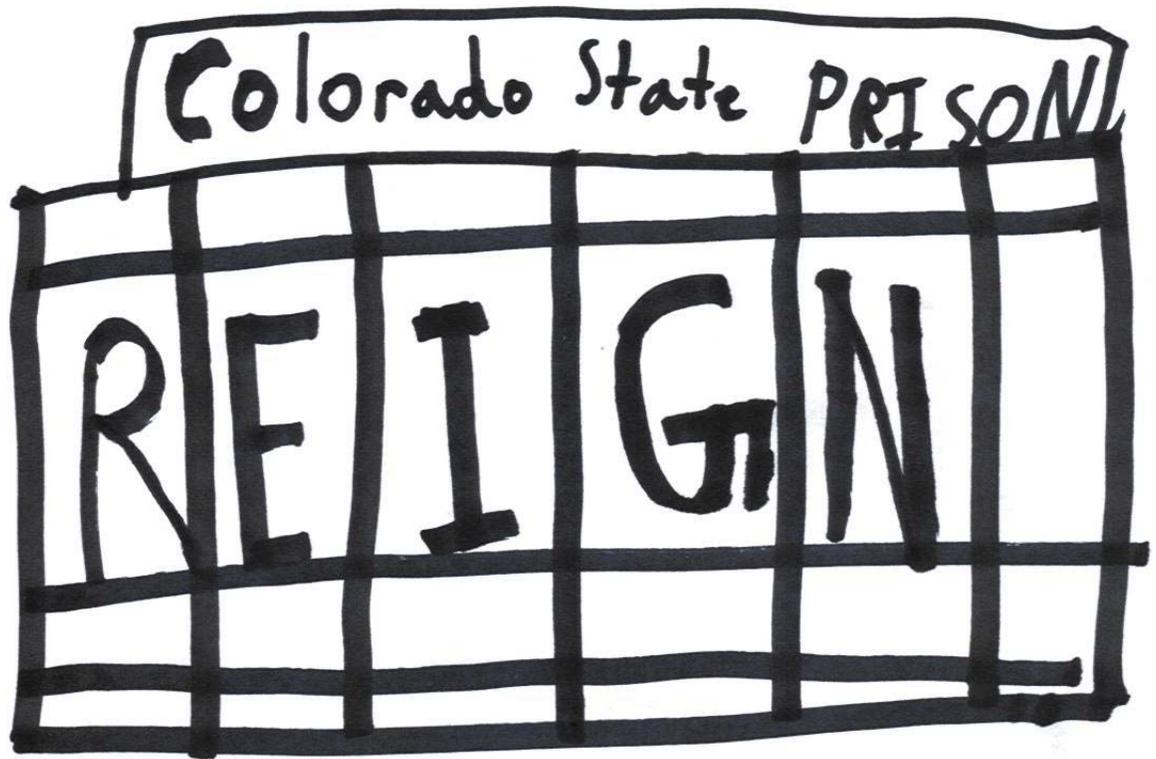


Visual-Spatial Learners and the Challenge of Spelling

Alexandra Shires Golon

Spelling seems to be universally challenging for visual-spatial children and adults. Thank goodness for spell checkers. For those who think in images, not words, it can be very difficult to create pictures that incorporate letters, particularly pictures that will live on as memorable images in the visual learner's mind. Color is a great tool for accomplishing this. Taking the "IE" in FRIEND and making them a different color, even larger type, helps to secure the rule, or for them the image, that, in this instance, the I precedes the E. This is an effective trick for nearly all spelling words, particularly those with unusual or rule-breaking spelling. My children once had a teacher who taught her students to actually place "rule-breaking" spelling words in jail, behind bars. The image of the word having been imprisoned for breaking the rules would stick in their memory. Here's one my youngest did for the word, "reign" because the "g" is a rule breaker, serving little purpose in the spelling of the word:



However, if color or jail bars don't secure the image, try adding characters around the letters and creating a whole silly story around the word itself. Remember, humor will engage the right hemisphere; color and size will help it to be retained. For example, consider the word, "MOUNTAIN." There are several opportunities for creating actual mountains out of the letters M, N and A. Using a full piece of paper, write the spelling word using pictures of what the word represents. Perhaps our "MOUNTAIN" has climbers on the O or the I. A whole story can be created about the climbers ascending certain letters. Use any trick that will help the spelling of this word to stay in the child's visual memory. Enlist students' help in creating silly stories and drawings – this will make the images easier for them to remember. Don't place any boundaries on what their stories include – they need to create it, store it and be able to recall them, so let them use what works for them. My oldest son made up this silly story to remember how to spell, "friend" correctly:

FRIEND

“These FRiEs from FRIday’s sure taste good at the day’s end!”

“You’re right, FRiend!”

If your visual-spatial children have successfully created an image of the word in their minds, they will be able to spell that word forward and backward. To test whether the image your children have created has a permanent, retrievable place in their memory (or file cabinet, as my son would say), ask your children to spell the word in reverse. If they can’t do it, they need to work on some other technique (color, humor, size, etc.) to secure their image of the word until they are able to spell it correctly forward and backward.

A Visualization Approach to Spelling

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1. Write the spelling word in large print in bright-colored ink on a card.
2. Hold the card at arm's length.
3. Study the word, then close your eyes and picture the word in your mind.
4. Do something wild to the word in your imagination.
5. Place the word somewhere in space, in front of you or above your head.
6. Spell your word backward with your eyes closed.
7. Spell the word forward with your eyes closed.
8. Open your eyes and write the word **once**.

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