GENERAL INTEREST SOFTWARE/WEBSITES

WordBuild Elements Level 1

Company: Dynamic Literacy, 908 East Jefferson St., Suite G1, Charlottesville, VA 22902. Phone: (888) 696-8597; Internet: www.dynamicliteracy.com.

★★★★ REPORT CARD

Installation	A
Content/Features	A
Ease of Use	A
Product Support	A

Price: WordBuild Elements Level 1 teacher materials, including one CD-ROM of teacher programs and a single-user copy of WordBuild The Game, are $99 per teacher. A computer lab license for WordBuild The Game is available for a one-time fee of $500. Student activity books are $9.95 per student; volume discounts can bring the price down to $5.95 per student. WordBuild The Game for home use is priced at $39.95.

Audience: 3–12.

Format: WordBuild Elements Level 1 is a spiraling vocabulary curriculum with material in print and on a Mac/Windows CD-ROM. The program comes with a large collection of blackline masters and CD-based programs for developing additional materials.

Minimum System Requirements: The computer requirements are basic and generally standard. A computer with a CD-ROM drive, compatible sound card and speakers, and Adobe Acrobat Reader (free) are required. An internet browser to access the Dynamic Literacy website for additional materials is helpful as well.

Description: The WordBuild program provides a blend of print materials, computer-based programs, and other materials designed to develop vocabulary using what the company calls the "engineering system" behind the English language (the prefixes, suffixes, and roots that are combined to make words).

Each level of the WordBuild Elements Series includes a program manual, individual student activity books, software for creating additional student activities, a single-user copy of WordBuild The Game, and online access to additional student activities. The materials in the manuals are extensive, and they are intended to cover a full year's lessons.

Reviewer Comments:

Installation/Access: The software installation is very easy. Windows users insert the CD-ROM and follow the instructions. Mac users drag the files from the CD-ROM to the desktop. ***Installation/Access Rating: A***

Content/Features: WordBuild offers vocabulary development based on morphics, the minimal grammar or syntax units such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes.

The program uses a teaching framework based on the formula WORD = (PREFIX) + ROOT + (SUFFIX) to help students see the meaningful vocabulary and grammatical clues in words. Students learn that these clues can help them understand new words in an authentic context.

The program helps students learn the specific meanings of commonly used roots and affixes (prefixes and suffixes), reinforcing those meanings through

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repetition. Students practice applying meaning to unknown words through simple 15-minute daily exercises that require little preparation by the teacher.

WordBuild Elements Level I teaches students the 25 most frequently used Latin and Greek roots. Students work with one root a week (5 days), with check-up activities and assessments every 5 weeks. A year-end assessment tests vocabulary and grammar with 75 questions.

Each of the 5 days spent studying a single root word involves a different activity. Day 1 uses Root Squares; the root word being studied appears in the middle of a nine-square box with various prefixes and suffixes surrounding it. Students use these components to practice making as many words as they can.

Day 2 offers a Magic Squares exercise that involves recognizing words from definitions and filling in Magic Square forms.

Day 3 provides the Stair Steps Exercise, a puzzle form with progressively more spaces. The root word of the week is in the appropriate places; students use clues to puzzle the prefix, suffix, or root words needed to fill in the empty squares.

Day 4 uses an activity to find words in authentic context, and Day 5 uses Word Walls to reinforce and expand the week's studies.

All of the activities rely heavily on scripted teacher-led discussion. The teachers' Pacing Guide provides detailed sequence information and lesson plan scripts that can be adapted to each day and week.

The 114-page student activity book provides numerous activities. Teachers can find more activities online and in the blackline masters included with the program notebook.

Teachers can supplement and reinforce the daily lessons with computers in three ways: using additional online material from the Dynamic Literacy website, working with the software included with the WordBuild Elements Level 1 program, and using WordBuild The Game.

The WordBuild Elements Level 1 software helps teachers create additional printable activities such as Root Squares, Concentration, Root or Affix Stair Steps, Bingo, or Magic Squares.

The software's Roots and Affix assessment program allows teacher input to create roots or affix assessments. The roots assessment, for example, asks for nine roots. Section two of the manual serves as a resource for developing these activities.

WordBuild The Game, available for single users or entire schools, provides a supplemental tool designed to help build any English speaker's vocabulary.

The game uses a database of more than 18,000 words, includes humorous audio feedback, and tracks high scores by root. Player word lists and score sheets can be printed. Students can get higher scores by choosing a time option. A total of 16 pieces of background music are available; the music can be turned on or off.

To play the game, students log in and select a root. The players build as many words as they can from the pieces on the screen. They print their word lists and play again, trying to do better. The program includes a high quality video introduction to help students get started. Online instructions are also available.

All in all, WordBuild Elements Level 1 is an excellent systematic treatment of morphemic vocabulary development. The approach and materials are useful and should help teachers at most grade levels produce significant vocabulary development in their students, including ESL students. This program would be the most useful with older students.

Teachers will need to provide much of the motivation for students who aren't self-motivated. The materials are well-designed and the computer game and programs are useful and effective; however, the approach is very straightforward with few frills and no "edutainment" features. Some students will be motivated by the challenge involved or the desire to improve their skills. However, for some students, the limited motivational elements may wear thin over time. **Content/Features Rating: A**

Ease of Use: Getting started with WordBuild Elements Level 1 can be a complicated process, but excellent assistance for getting started is included. The program includes clear directions and a good deal of online help. Most of the materials are intuitive to use. ***Ease of Use Rating: A***

Product Support: All hard copy materials are clearly explained and easy to use. WordBuild The Game and other programs on the CD-ROM are intuitively designed and clearly documented, generally with online help. The program includes an excellent video tutorial with clear illustrations and a pleasant voice. ***Product Support Rating: A***

Recommendation: I'm a firm believer in using morphemes to understand new words in context. Being able to do so helps students at nearly any level, including ESL students, to read better and with improved comprehension.

I highly recommend WordBuild Elements Level 1. This is a comprehensive, systematic program that will help those who stick with it and apply themselves.

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