

Education Corner

Helpful hints for spelling, reading

With the development of vaccines for the coronavirus and distribution underway, there may be an end to distance learning just around the corner. This said, there are still many children struggling with their reading and parents assisting their children with schooling. Learning to read is not the same for everyone.



SCOTT SMITH
EDUCATOR

Reading text is a human-created skill and not a natural skill for our brains to process. Therefore, depending on acquisition of a long spectrum of skills, some children have no problems learning to read while others struggle. To add to the confusion, English is a blend of several different languages and rules, making it even harder to understand.

There are those few people in our country who spend their time studying our language and all the rules that apply, yet most of us do not aspire to be linguists. Webster, back in the 1800s, brought us a complete rule book of most of the words and rules behind their spellings. There was a time when teachers were expected to know all those rules prior to starting to teach.

Over the years we have relied on textbook publishers to provide those rules embedded in their curriculum. Many of us do not always pick up on the rules or remember them because the curriculum moves on quickly. When challenged why a word is spelled a certain way we dismiss it and say something like “the English language just has some odd spellings.” In most cases, there is a reason behind that spelling, whether it be from the root of the word or the language the word was adopted from.

Having kids read to adults is always beneficial — well, most of the time. What do we find ourselves saying to a child when they come to a word they do not recognize? The most popular response is “sound the word out.” The only problem is that the only English words that can easily be sounded out are one-syllable, short vowel words. In the English language you have to be able to identify the vowel sounds in words, many of which contain multiple letters, and then you are able to blend the word and hopefully get the sounds close enough that you are able to recognize the word from your auditory vocabulary or lexicon.

No worries — here is some help. This will be enough to get you by without having to become a linguist. There are six basic syllable rules that most English words follow, or at least follow closely enough that you can get an approximation, and then recognize the word. The same six rules also help with spelling.

Here they are — open syllable (go, me), closed syllable (cat, fin), vowel team, “r”-controlled (first, far, or), vowel/consonant/silent “e” (same, case) and consonant “-le” (little, able). Common blends, digraphs and diphthongs can also cause confusion. Blends are connected letters where you can hear all the letter sounds. Digraphs are a cluster of consonants that create a new sound, and diphthongs are a cluster of letters with at least one vowel. These are the most commonly found word parts in elementary texts. The letter “y” is sometimes considered a vowel but there is a reason. English words don’t end in the letter “i” so they use “y” (my, sky, by).

A great activity for students to do is sort single syllable words into each of the above groups. This allows them to work with words along with looking for vowel sounds. This activity only focuses on vowel sounds. The objective is to identify the vowel sound in each word or syllable, and then blend the sounds together to get an approximation close enough that they can recognize the word or are able to spell the word closely enough to be able to recognize it. Happy word discovery.

Scott Smith is a Umatilla County educator with 40-plus years of experience. He taught at McNary Heights Elementary School and then for Eastern Oregon University in its teacher education program at Blue Mountain Community College. He serves on the Decoding Dyslexia Oregon board as its parent/teacher liaison.

Letter

Bentz represented the wishes of his constituents

I applaud the plea for unity and finding common solutions Phil Wright, The Observer editor, published Jan. 9. The column referenced Kevin Frazier’s blog, The Oregon Way, in reminding our

congresspeople to remember all those whom they represent. I was very surprised to see such hateful diatribe in the Jan. 12, Observer, against one of those representatives, Cliff Bentz. Some history is necessary to put Bentz’s actions into perspective.

Starting with George W. Bush’s victory in the 2000 presidential election, Democrats have contested election results after every Republican win. In Jan-

uary 2001, Rep. Alcee Hastings of Florida objected counting electoral votes, and Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas also claimed “inaccurate vote count.” California’s Maxine Waters touted that Florida’s electoral votes were “fraudulent.”

In 2005, Sen. Barbara Boxer, California, and Stephanie Jones, Ohio, objected to Ohio’s electoral votes. Rep. Barbara Lee of California and Rep. Jerrold Nadler of

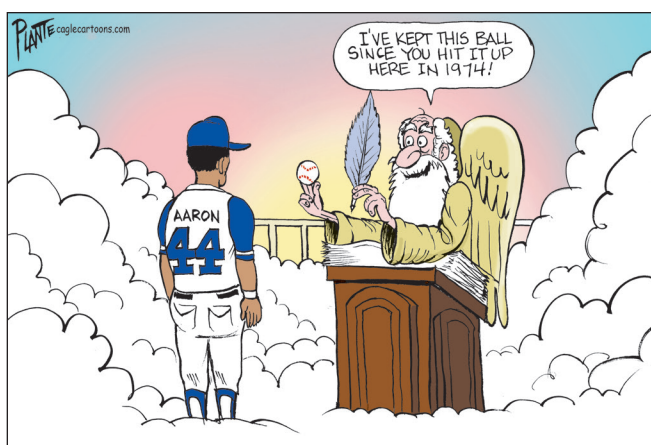
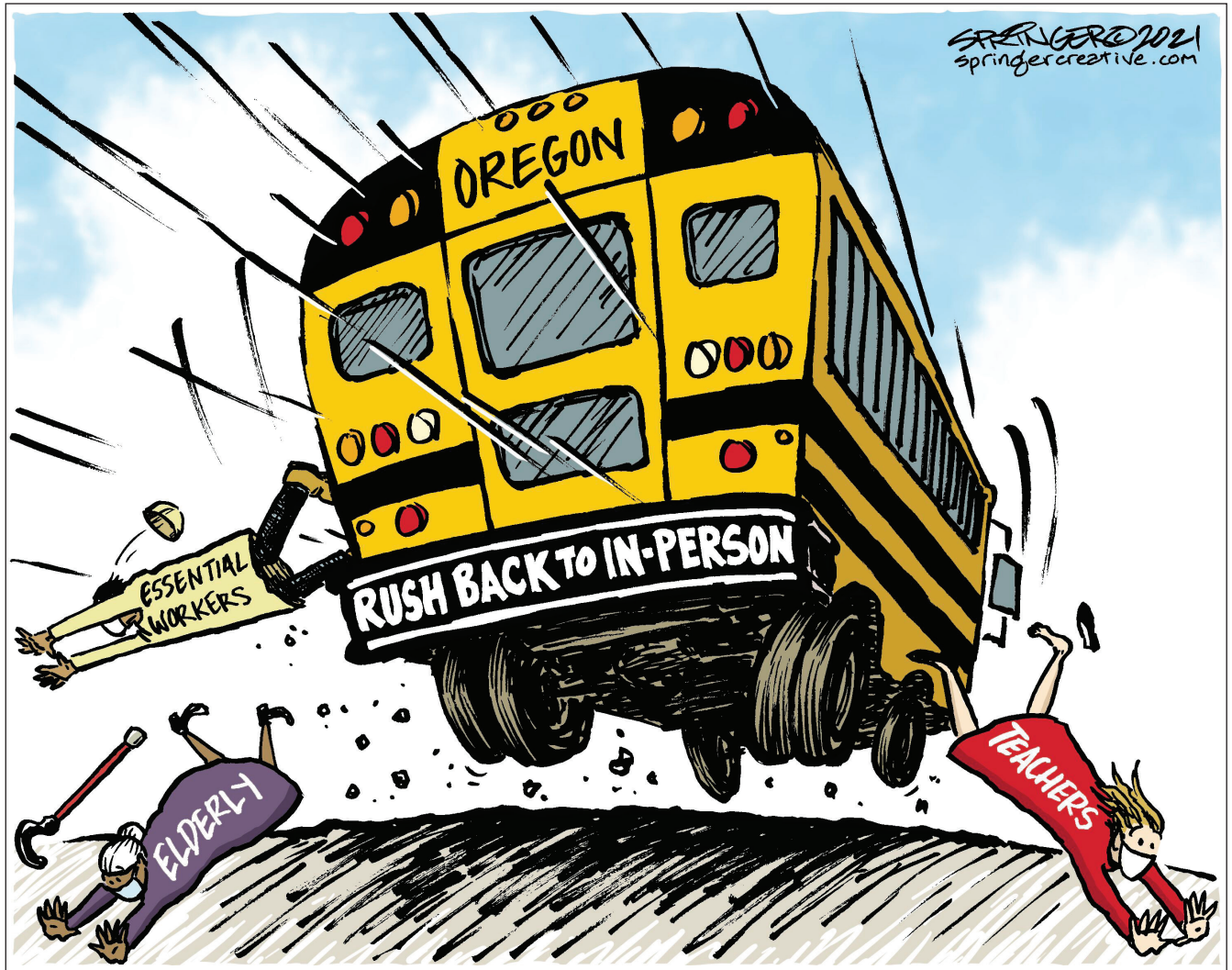
New York objected, stating the right to vote was “stolen.”

Then, in January 2017, Democrats once again challenged the outcome of an election. Again, Barbara Lee wanted Michigan’s electoral votes to be thrown out. This time because of “malfunction of 87 voting machines” and Russian interference, Rep. Jim McGovern of Massachusetts also challenged the outcome because of “the Russians.” There were

objections against the votes in nine states.

Then, as now, members of Congress are within their constitutional rights to make an objection. Bentz felt he was obligated to represent the wishes of those he represents. To malign his integrity is a vicious disservice. We used to value our right to have and voice different beliefs.

Jackie Bingner
La Grande



My Voice

What you believe is not necessarily the truth



MICHAEL SASSER
WALLOWA COUNTY

The truth? Just what exactly is the truth? Yes, Americans deserve the truth but it seems everyone has their own idea of what the truth is. People tend to believe what they want to believe. Facts are ignored, everyone has their own facts or alternate facts.

How do we get the truth if we no longer believe in our news institutions? The free press has always been the backbone of our democracy. When we lose faith in these institutions then we lose a vital role in protecting our democracy.

The press and news organizations have to take some responsibility in the mistrust of our free press. What passes for journalism these days is sometimes nothing more than tabloid sensationalism. We have propaganda outlets that inflame and feed the misinformation and prejudices that divide us all. This misinformation is rampant and people tend to migrate to the media that reinforces their beliefs.

There is a lot at stake here. The answers aren’t easy but I believe in the future of my country. We are a

democracy in trouble. We cannot look for a demigod politician to save us from ourselves. We the people still have a say in our government, but a democracy cannot survive if we aren’t an educated electorate.

We cannot survive if we don’t recognize and deal with the institutional racism that is rampant in our society. We cannot condone violence in any form. We cannot put on a red hat, carry an American flag and call ourselves a patriot while invading our capitol building. We cannot repair the racism and unjust treatment of our Black countrymen when we have the burning and destruction of our inner cities.

We cannot ask for the truth and then promote untrue conspiracy theories. We cannot promote truth by electing legislators who believe in these crazy theories. We cannot elect demigod presidents who promote extreme right wing beliefs that inflame a mob to try to overthrow an election.

Truth: We have not lost the freedom of religion in this country. That freedom does not give us a right to keep people from practicing a religion that you don’t believe in.

Truth: No one has taken gun rights from anyone.

Truth: What you believe is not

necessarily the truth. Conspiracy theories, what you read on Facebook or what you watched on YouTube is probably not the truth.

Truth: Donald Trump lost his bid for a second term. Every court in the nation found no election fraud. This fraud is only a figment of Donald Trump’s imagination. Do not put your allegiance to just one man. That is not what democracy is all about. No one is above the law.

We cannot be a divided country. We are all Americans. We are a country of many different ethnic people, but we really all want the same things. Open your mind and your heart. Believe in our democracy, believe in our history of freedom and our love of our country. Remember our veterans, many who gave their lives for their country.

Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream. Let’s make this dream a reality for all Americans.

Michael Sasser was born in Enterprise almost 73 years ago and returned to Wallowa County about 15 years ago. He was a member of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 15 for 32 years.

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THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896

www.lagrandeobserver.com

Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801
Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays
(except postal holidays) by EO Media Group,
911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850
(USPS 299-260)

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