

Word Detectives Activity: Finding Word Families

Word families are words related in spelling structure and meaning to a common base.

1) Finding a family of words related to <imagine> with the Word Searcher.

To find the Word Searcher:

- Type the words Neil Ramsden Word Searcher into Google
- Click on the first hit "Word Searcher"
- You're there!

Background for Finding the Family: Testing for *structure* and *meaning*

The Word Searcher does not know about bases, prefixes and suffixes. If we are looking for words in the same word family as <imagine>, we first have to analyze this word to see if it is a simple base word (one morpheme word) or a complex word (a base with at least one other morpheme).

One hypothesis is that <imagine> has the base <image> and the suffix <ine> with this word sum:

image/ + ine → imagine

To be confident this hypothesized analysis is correct, we test the word sum to make sure it makes sense in terms of **meaning** and **spelling structure**. (See confirmation of that analysis in box below.)

Warning about Word Searcher searchers!

Typing the letters <image> in the "Search Pattern" field will not bring up the word <imagine> because the Word Searcher just picks words with the same letter sequence. The word <imagine> uses the base word spelled <image>, but it does not have the letter sequence <image>.

To get a list of words that are likely related to the base <image>, we need to type the letter sequence <imag>.

Starting the Search...

Step 1: Finding potential family members

Type the letters <imag> in the "search pattern" field and press the "go" button.

You should get 20 matches.

Step 2: Refining the list to the <image> family

Look for connections of **structure** and **meaning**.

Some of the words in this list might not use the base <image>. Copy and paste the words that you think are built on <image> into a word processing document.

With a partner, try to make word sums that could use the base <image> and which have a connection in meaning to that word.

Step 3: Building the <image> matrix

Use the prefixes and suffixes from the word sums that work to build the matrix that is started for you. The suffixes you need to build <imagine> and some other words are already included. See what else you can get in this matrix for the word family of <imagine>!

Testing Meaning and Spelling Structure

Meaning Test: The hypothesis of a meaning connection between <image> and <imagine> is reasonable. To "imagine" something is to create an "image" of it in our mind. We can confirm this connection by looking at the origin of both of these words. [Etymonline](#) cites the Latin root **imago** for "copy, statue, picture, idea, appearance". We have evidence to conclude <image> and <imagine> are really related in meaning.

Spelling Structure Test: We have already demonstrated that there is a base spelled <image>. To be sure the word sum works, we have to test

Is <-ine> a suffix? A quick check of a dictionary shows a number of uses of the <-ine> suffix. One entry in my Oxford gives this citation: a suffix forming chiefly abstract nouns and diminutives such as *doctrine, medicine, figurine*. A can see the structure <medic + ine> and <figure/ + ine>. I'm curious about <doctr + ine> but can leave that for the moment.

Does <-ine> replace final, single, silent <e>s?
Yes! We need to learn how vowel and consonant suffixes operate so that we can do this kind of analysis. Note that this worked for **figure/ + ine → figurine** also. See Real Spelling Theme ID "The effect of suffixes on the single, silent <e>" or the lessons in WordWorks' "Teaching How the Written Word Works" for ideas for teaching and learning about this suffixing pattern.

Finish the Word Matrix!

	image		
		ine	ably
	ate		

After you've identified which of the 20 words below do use the base <image>, build word sums to find affixes needed to build the <image> matrix.

Search Results for "imag" ***(20 matches)***

image	imagined
imagery	imagines
images	imaging
imaginable	imagining
imaginary	imaginings
imagination	pilgrimage
imaginations	pilgrimages
imaginative	unimaginable
imaginatively	unimaginably
imagine	unimaginative

2) Use the same process and tools to find a family of words that links these words <bankruptcy>, <disruption> and <eruption>! Can you build a matrix on your own?

Questions & discoveries sparked by investigating <imagine>!	Some of the “Big Ideas” developed and reinforced through these investigations:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🧐 Is there an <-ation> suffix like the dictionary says or is it an <-ate> suffix followed by an <-ion> suffix? 🧐 I can't seem to make <imagination> work with the <-tion> suffix. 🧐 When stuck making a word fit into a word matrix, make sure to use a word sum to carefully look at the structure of that word. 🧐 Does <imagery> use an <-ery> suffix or a <-ry> suffix? 🧐 Is there such a thing as a <-cy> suffix? It looks like I need one for the word <bankruptcy>. 🧐 Why is there a <tr> in <bankruptcy> when I don't pronounce it? 🧐 Can there be a base <rupt> even though there is no word <rupt>? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🧐 Scientists search for the most elegant solution. A principle of scientific inquiry is to look for the deepest structure that explains the largest number of cases. 🧐 Effective learners are critical thinkers who know to question even authoritative sources with evidence. They look to more than one reference before drawing strong conclusions. 🧐 Effective learners have strategies they know to use when they get stuck on a problem. 🧐 Effective learners are skilled at identifying and testing hypotheses. 🧐 Effective learners are comfortable working with questions that have ambiguous answers. The learning through the process of an investigation is often more valuable than a specific answer. 🧐 English spelling is an ordered system that prime function it to represent meaning. It can be investigated and understood through careful problem solving.

Answer Key (Other organizations of the same morphemes are possible)

un	image	ry <i>(Why not <-ery>?)</i>	
		es	
		ed	
		ing	
		ine	
		ary	
		able	
		ably	
		s	
		ing	s
		ate	
		ion	s
		ive	ly