

52

Quick Activities

for Building
Vocabulary



WORD ROOTS

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Why Study Word Roots?	5
<i>Carpe Diem!</i> Seize the Day... Monday and All Other Days!	5
Research in Practice	7
What Is a Root?	7
Why Teach with a Roots Approach?	7
What Does Research Say about Using a Roots Approach?	10
Digging Deeper	11
How to Use This Book	12
Quick Tips from the Authors	12
Using the Teaching Pages	13
Using the Student Pages	14

Word Roots Activities

January	16
Happy New Year—January 1: Exploring <i>nov</i> Words	16
World Introvert Day—January 2: Exploring <i>vert, vers</i> Words	18
Martin Luther King Jr. Day: Exploring <i>civ, cit, civil</i> Words	20
National No Name-Calling Week: Exploring <i>nomin</i> and <i>onym</i> Words	22
February	24
World Read-Aloud Day: Exploring <i>leg, lig, lect</i> Words	24
Valentine's Day—February 14: Exploring <i>am(i), amor, amat</i> Words and <i>phil</i> Words	26
Presidents Day: Exploring <i>sid, sed, sess</i> Words	28

National Tortilla Chip Day: Exploring <i>tort</i> Words	30
March	32
The Roman God of War, Mars: Exploring <i>bell, bellum</i> Words	32
International Women's Day—March 8: Exploring <i>fem, femi</i> Words and <i>gyn,ynec</i> Words	34
World Contact Day—March 15: Exploring <i>tact, tang</i> Words	36
World Water Day—March 22: Exploring <i>hydr</i> and <i>aqua</i> Words	38
National Doctors Day—March 30: Exploring <i>docere</i> Words	40
April	42
National Walking Week: Exploring <i>ambul</i> Words	42
Happy Cent Day—April 1: Exploring <i>cent</i> Words	44
National Unicorn Day—April 9: Exploring <i>uni, unit</i> Words	46
Earth Day—April 22: Exploring <i>terr, ter</i> Words and <i>ge(o)</i> Words	48
April Showers Bring May Flowers: Exploring <i>flor</i> Words	50
May	52
National Moving Month: Exploring <i>mov, mot, mobil</i> Words	52
National Inventors Month: Exploring <i>ven, vent</i> Words	54
Thinking of Mom This Week: Exploring <i>mater, matr(i)</i> Words	56
Memorial Day: Exploring <i>mem, memor</i> Words	58

Table of Contents *(cont.)*

June	60	The Autumnal Equinox: Exploring <i>equ(i)</i> Words	92
Graduation Day: Exploring <i>grad</i> Words	60	October	94
Saying Farewell: Exploring <i>vale</i> and <i>dic, dict</i> Words	62	World Habitat Day: Exploring <i>habit</i> Words	94
World Bicycle Day—June 3: Exploring <i>bi</i> Words	64	National Dental Hygiene Month: Exploring <i>dent</i> Words	96
Father's Day: Exploring <i>pater, patr(i)</i> Words	66	National Motorcycle Ride Day—October 10: Exploring <i>mov, mot, mobil</i> Words	98
Solstice: "Here Comes the Sun": Exploring <i>sol</i> Words	68	National Dictionary Day—October 16: Exploring <i>dic, dict</i> Words	100
July	70	United Nations Day—October 24: Exploring <i>nat, natur</i> Words	102
It's Vacation Time: Exploring <i>vac</i> Words	70	Halloween: Time for Fear and Fright: Exploring <i>phobe</i> Words	104
How Long Is a Quarantine?: Exploring <i>quadr, quart</i> Words	72	November	106
Independence Day—July 4: Exploring <i>pend, pens</i> Words	74	National Authors Day—November 1: Exploring <i>scrib, script</i> Words	106
August	76	Veterans Day—November 11: Exploring <i>serv, servat</i> Words	108
National Political Convention Time: Exploring <i>ven, vent</i> Words	76	National Play Monopoly Day—November 19: Exploring <i>mono</i> Words	110
International Peace Month: Exploring <i>pac, pax</i> Words	78	Thanksgiving—A Day of Gratitude: Exploring <i>grat, grac</i> Words	112
National Booklovers Day—August 9: Exploring <i>phil</i> Words	80	December	114
I Love My Feet Day—August 17: Exploring <i>ped</i> and <i>pod</i> Words	82	National Rosa Parks Day—December 1: Exploring <i>greg</i> Words	114
National Dog Day—August 26: Exploring <i>fid</i> Words	84	Celebrating December, the 12th (or 10th) Month of the Year: Exploring <i>dec</i> Words	116
September	86	First Flight—December 17: Exploring <i>avi</i> Words	118
Labor Day: Exploring <i>labor</i> Words	86	References	120
Celebrating Teachers: Exploring <i>struct</i> Words	88	Answer Key	122
Constitution Day—September 17: Exploring <i>pre-</i> Words	90	Word Roots Index	128

Why Study Word Roots?

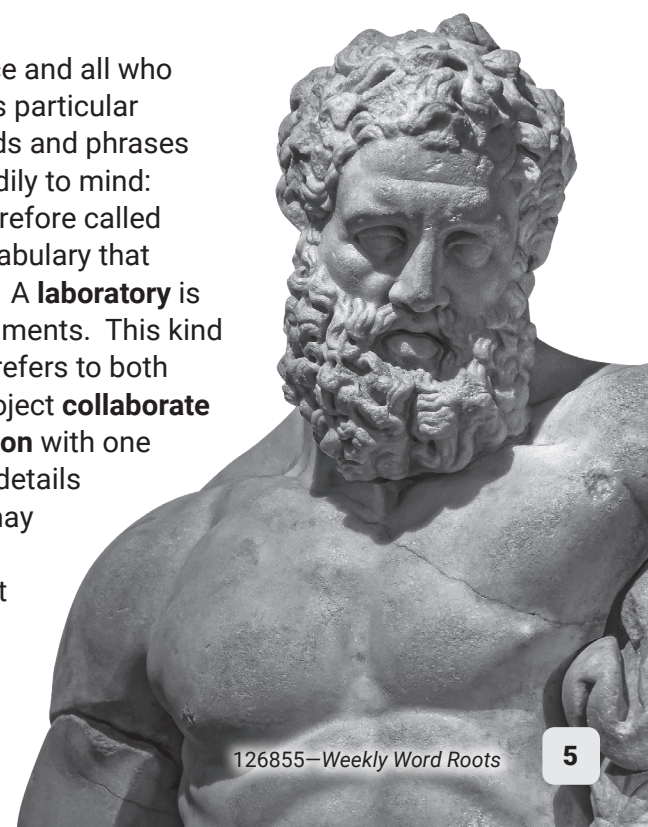
***Carpe Diem!* Seize the Day... Monday and All Other Days!**

Our new book, *Weekly Word Roots*, is a wonderful and easy-to-use resource for teachers in the classroom, families at home, and even college instructors introducing future teachers to the power of word roots. This book is based on our popular *Morphology Mondays* social media posts we created and shared starting in 2020. What a great way to celebrate words all year long!

Nearly every week of the calendar year includes some kind of holiday. Some holidays are well-known, solemn, and marked with a day off from school: Martin Luther King Jr. Day in January, Presidents Day in February, Memorial Day in May, Fourth of July, Labor Day in September, and Thanksgiving Day in November. Other holidays are lesser known and are not typically observed with a break from school: March 1 is Peace Corps Day, March 3 is National Anthem Day, and September 8 is National Literacy Day. Still, other holidays are just fun and even a little wacky: March 10 is “International Day of Awesomeness,” March 14 is “National Pi Day,” September 6 is “Fight Procrastination Day,” November 1 is “National Cook for Your Pets Day,” and November 8 is “Aid and Abet Punsters Day.” Some of these “holidays” extend into an entire month: September is “Happy Cat Month,” November is “Banana Pudding Lovers Month,” and December is “Write a Friend Month” and “Bingo’s Birthday Month.”

These special days provide fun opportunities—teachable moments—to talk about the words we associate with these events and to build word awareness in ourselves and our students. Most of the “holiday words” that mark these celebrations are built on Greek or Latin roots, which give rise to a large number of related words, so-called “cognates.”

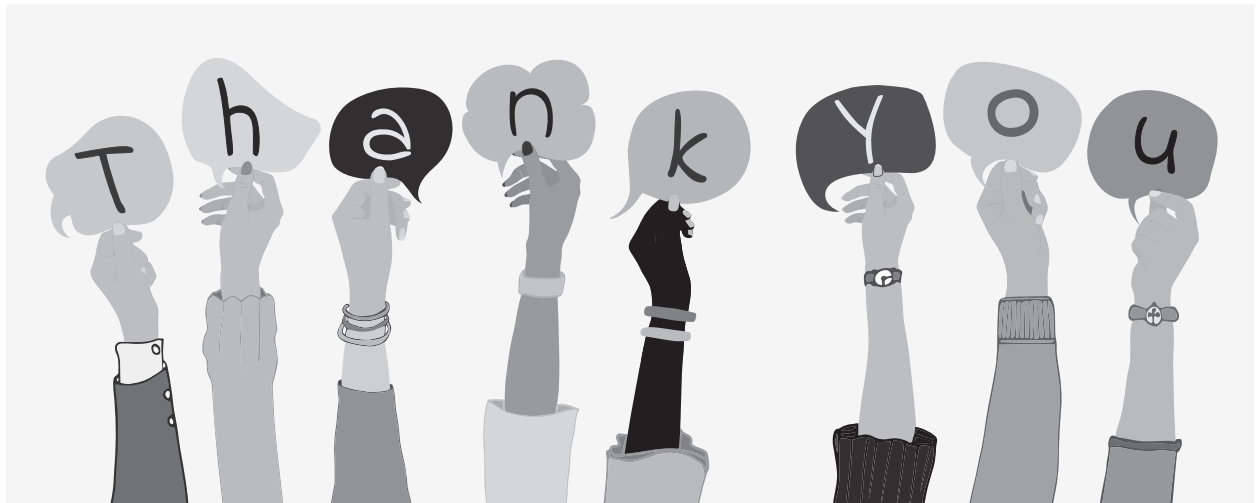
Labor Day, for example, invites us to think about the workforce and all who “labor” to make a living. By dwelling for a few minutes on this particular holiday, we can ask students to think about other “work” words and phrases that contain the Latin root *labor*. Some words may come readily to mind: a labor-intensive assignment requires a lot of work and is therefore called **laborious**. But this everyday word is related to academic vocabulary that students will be encountering throughout their school career. A **laboratory** is a place where scientists conduct specialized work and experiments. This kind of work is not manual, but it is still work, since the root *labor* refers to both literal and figurative work. People who work *together* on a project **collaborate** (Latin prefix *col-* = “with, together”). They work in **collaboration** with one another and are called **collaborators**. When we *work out* the details of a story, we **elaborate** (Latin prefix *e-* = “out”). The result may be an **elaborate** account. When students learn about “The **Labors** of Hercules,” they are impressed by all the hard *work* it took to kill the Nemean Lion with bare hands, slay the nine-headed Hydra, and clean out the filthy Augean stables.



Why Study Word Roots? (cont.)

Carpe Diem! Seize the Day... Monday and All Other Days! (cont.)

Thanksgiving Day, to take another example, asks us to pause and feel **grateful** for our blessings as we express **gratitude** for all the good things in our lives. We give *thanks* and say **grace** before diving into a huge meal. The Latin base *grat/grac* means both “please, pleasing” and “thanks” and gives rise to a wealth of everyday words: a **graceful** dancer is especially *pleasing* to watch, we leave a **gratuity** on the restaurant table to say *thanks* to a good server, and it is always **gratifying** when we hear someone say **congratulations** for a job that *pleases* everyone. An **ungrateful** person, on the other hand, never says *thank you* and displays only **ingratitude**. Nobody likes an **ingrate**! But a generous person who only wants a *thank you* for a job and refuses to take payment works **gratis**, or for free. A veritable cornucopia of everyday and academic words flow forth from this single Latin base we associate with the feast of Thanksgiving.



Weekly Word Roots takes a wide range of holidays and special occasions and uses them as a springboard into building vocabulary. In all instances, the vocabulary ranges from everyday words that come readily to mind to more challenging academic vocabulary that students must master for academic success. The words and their roots arise from something all students, teachers, and adults experience in common: the day itself. So, begin each week by “seizing the day” and building vocabulary!

Research in Practice

Here, we offer a brief rationale for the pedagogy that undergirds the book. We define what a *root* is, explain why focusing on roots makes sense instructionally, and summarize research into the effects of roots instruction on student achievement. (If you are interested in more about any of these topics, see “Digging Deeper” on page 11.)

What Is a Root?

A *root* is a word part that contains meaning (and not merely sound). There are three categories of roots, depending on their placements within a word.

Root Category	Definition	Example
Prefix	a root at the beginning of a word	In the word <i>retraction</i> , the initial <i>re-</i> is a prefix, meaning “back or again.”
Base	the core root which provides a word with its basic meaning	In the word <i>retraction</i> , the base is <i>tract</i> , which means “pull, draw, drag.”
Suffix	a root that ends a word	In the word <i>retraction</i> , the final <i>-ion</i> is a suffix, meaning “act of, state of.”

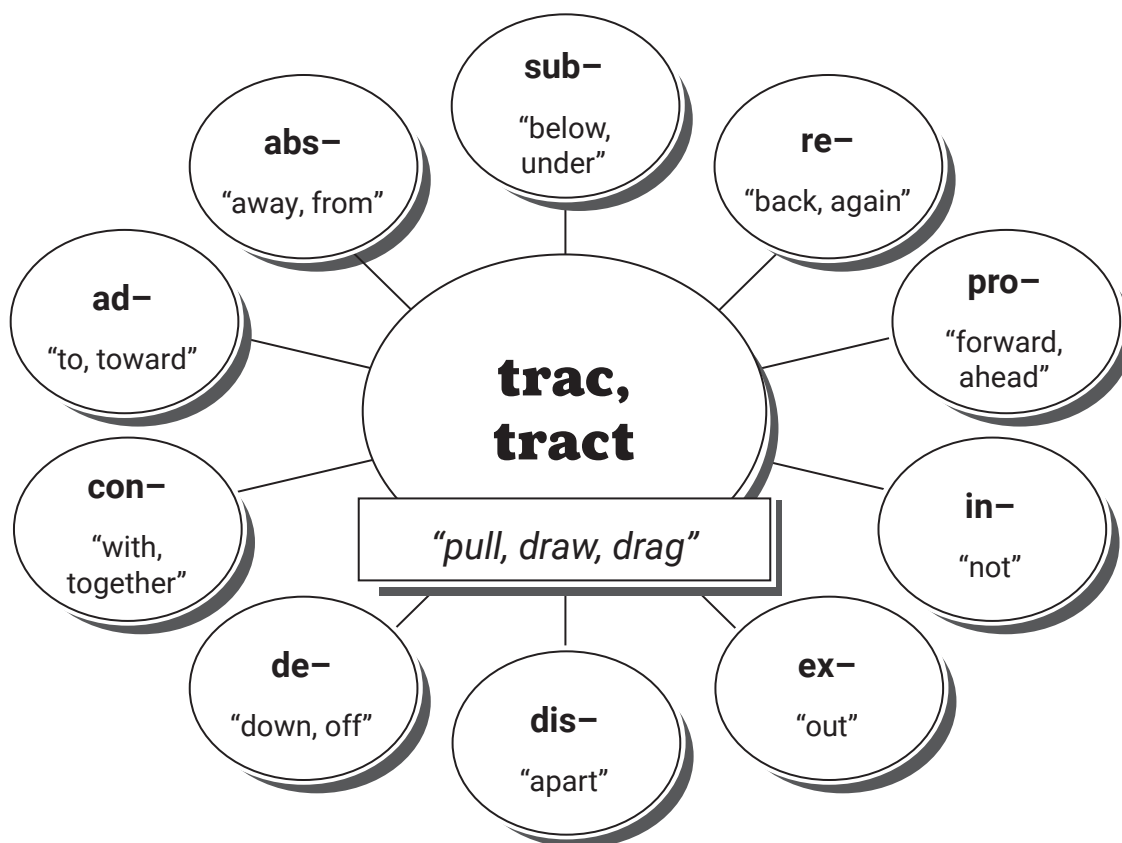
Why Teach with a Roots Approach?

The English language has approximately two million words! According to Graves and Fitzgerald (2006), school texts and reading materials include more than 180,000 different words. That’s the bad news. But there is good news: Over 60 percent of the words students encounter in their reading have recognizable word parts (Nagy, Anderson, Schommer, Scott, and Stallman 1989). Moreover, academic and content-area vocabulary is largely of Latin and Greek origin (Harmon, Hedrick, and Wood 2005). In fact, 90 percent of English words with more than one syllable are Latin based. Most of the remaining 10 percent are Greek based (Brunner 2004). Focusing on roots rather than individual words is an efficient instructional strategy.

Research in Practice *(cont.)*

Why Teach with a Roots Approach? *(cont.)*

Let's build on the example of *trac/tract*, which means "pull, draw, drag," to see just how efficient roots are. This diagram shows the base *trac/tract* in a center circle. Since the base serves as the semantic centerpiece of a word, all *trac/tract* words carry the basic meaning of "pull, draw, drag." Radiating around the base are a number of prefixes.



By combining these prefixes with the base, we start to grow vocabulary. The prefix *con-*, for example, means "with, together." By adding this prefix to the base, we come up with the words **contract** and **contraction**. Through identifying word parts that carry meaning, we readily see that a muscle **contracts** when it *pulls together* and flexes. That is called a muscular **contraction**.

But the meaning and uses of these words do not stop there. The roots provide an opportunity for teachable moments in which we can talk about these words (and not merely define them) according to their parts. Business partners can get *together* and *draw up* a formal **contract**. That's called a **contractual** agreement. Someone who performs a job based on a **contract** is called a **contractor**. This is why a lawyer says, "I will *draw up* the papers." These words appear in the classroom as well. When we write the **contraction** *don't* instead of *do not*, we use an apostrophe at the point where the *n* and *t* *pull together* to mark the place from which the *o* dropped out. Students who identify roots inside words begin to see connections within a vocabulary list that may have previously seemed random or confusing.

Research in Practice *(cont.)*

Why Teach with a Roots Approach? *(cont.)*

The efficiency of a “roots approach” becomes even more impressive when we take a look at the many cognates in the *trac/tract* family. There are 25+ “relatives” in this family!

The *trac/tract* Family

(“pull, draw, drag”)

- tractor, traction, trace
- attract, attraction, attractive
- contract, contraction, contractor
- detract, detraction
- distract, distraction
- extract, extraction, intractable
- protract, protracted, protractor
- retract, retraction, retrace
- subtract, subtraction

Approaching the words in this family from the roots can be fascinating! A **tractor** *pulls* machinery on a farm. A **tracing** is a *drawing* that we make by *dragging* a pencil or crayon over an image. We **extract** a splinter by *pulling* it out with tweezers, while vanilla **extract** is *drawn* out from a vanilla bean. We feel *drawn to, toward* ideas or people that are **attractive**, while magnetic **attraction** is the physical *pull* of objects *toward* each other in a magnetic field. When we **subtract** in math class, we make a column of numbers and *draw* the lower one out from under the higher one. That is the function of **subtraction**. A teacher might occasionally opt to **protract** a lesson by *drawing* the time period *forward* and lengthening it. Noises in the hallway can be **distracting** because they *draw* students’ attention *apart* from the lesson at hand. In an **abstract** painting, an artist begins with a simple physical object and then *pulls* a general idea away from it.

The list goes on, as it does for every word root family. You are free to choose which and how many of these derivatives to present to students, depending on students’ grade level, interest, and ability. Regardless of how many cognates are explained or formally taught, students quickly begin to feel empowered. The realization that such words as **contraction**, **retraction**, **subtraction**, and **attraction** are related can expand their interest and curiosity. The connection they make between a journalist’s **retraction** and a cat’s **retractable** claws stimulates them to think about both the literal and figurative meanings of “pull, draw, drag.” The very efficiency of word roots can give rise to a fascination with words themselves.

Research in Practice *(cont.)*

Why Teach with a Roots Approach? *(cont.)*

Our brains are pattern detectors (Cunningham 1998). Young readers' word instruction is often characterized by a study of word patterns called *rimes*, *phonograms*, or *word families*. Because Latin and Greek word roots are linguistic patterns that can help students with the meaning, sound, and spelling of English words, a Latin-Greek roots approach is the next logical and developmental (Bear et al. 2000) step in word learning.

Root study also promotes independent word learning (Carlisle 2010). Students learn to make connections among words that are semantically related (Nagy and Scott 2000). Because of this, roots are word multipliers. In fact, knowledge of one root can help students determine the meaning, pronunciation, and spelling of 10, 20, or more English words.

Many English learners speak first languages that are linguistically related to Latin. More than 75 percent of the words in Spanish come from Latin (Chandler and Schwartz 1961/1991). In fact, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Catalan, Italian, and Romanian are all classified as Romance Languages because they derived from Latin, the language of ancient Romans who controlled those areas as part of the vast Roman Empire. Heightening awareness of this linguistic connection can accelerate vocabulary growth (Blachowicz et al. 2006). For example, the Latin base *sent/sens* means "think, feel," giving rise to such English academic vocabulary words as **assent**, **consent**, **consensus**, **dissent**, **dissension**, **multisensory**, and **resent**. These words have readily recognizable counterparts in such everyday Spanish words as *asentir*, *consentir*, *consenso*, *disensio*, *multisensorial*, *resentir*, and *resentimiento*. A roots approach to vocabulary can inspire many multilingual learners to draw from their home languages and make cognate connections with the English vocabulary that lies at the core of academic success.

What Does Research Say about Using a Roots Approach?

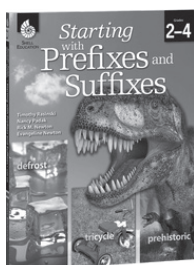
The size and depth of elementary students' vocabulary is associated with proficiency in reading comprehension. Effective vocabulary instruction results in higher levels of reading comprehension (Baumann et al. 2002; Beck, Perfetti, and McKeown 1982; Kame'enui, Carnine, and Freschi 1982; Stahl and Fairbanks, 1986).

Morphological analysis (e.g., via a roots approach) is important because it is generative and allows students to make connections among meaning-related words or word families (Nagy and Scott 2000). This is an integral component of word learning for young children (Biemiller and Slonim 2001). Over the past decade or so, researchers have found that roots instruction fosters literacy achievement for learners of all ages, especially those who are less able readers. Research in content area (disciplinary) vocabulary has shown the effectiveness of teaching Greek and Latin word roots, especially for struggling readers. (See the references list for more information about these studies.) So, whether we think about the logic and efficiency behind the "roots approach" or think about what researchers have discovered, focusing on roots to teach vocabulary is a very good idea.

Research in Practice *(cont.)*

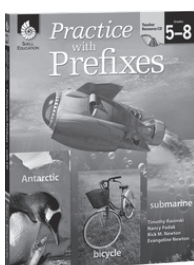
Digging Deeper

Our hope is that this slim volume will spark interest in word roots—what they are, why it's helpful to know them, and how many words in English come from just one root. We also hope that you and your child or students will want more. If so, check out the products we've created together to allow you to dig deeper into word roots.



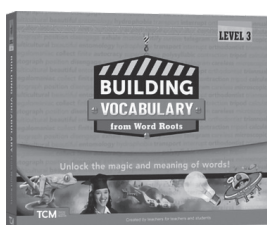
Starting with Prefixes and Suffixes (Levels 2–4)

- Introduce common Latin and Greek word parts in ways that are easy to understand.
- Find more information here: go.tcmpub.com/prefixes



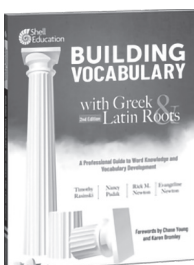
Practice with Prefixes (Levels 5–8)

- Provide activities to improve learners' word knowledge and academic vocabulary.
- Find more information here: go.tcmpub.com/practice-prefixes



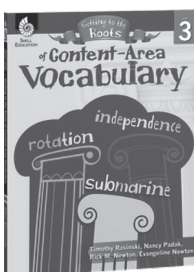
Building Vocabulary

- Build academic vocabulary in as little as 20 minutes a day.
- Find more information here: go.tcmpub.com/bv-97



Building Vocabulary with Greek and Latin Roots: A Professional Guide to Word Knowledge and Vocabulary Development

- This resource is filled with strategies for improving comprehension, planning instructional routines, and building a word-rich learning environment.
- Find more information here: go.tcmpub.com/111733



Getting to the Roots of Content-Area Vocabulary (Levels 3–5)

- Deepen students' knowledge of content-area vocabulary through word roots!
- Find more information here: go.tcmpub.com/roots-187

How to Use This Book

Quick Tips from the Authors

These ideas will help you manage your weekly word root focus throughout the year:

- Use one lesson per week. (Do not be concerned if you skip a week or more. These lessons stand alone). No more than 10 minutes a few times each week is necessary to dive into the word root of the week.
- Read the short text to and then with your students. Talk briefly about the holiday and how it relates to the root of focus. You can also research the holiday further, if interest warrants.
- Select some or all the additional activities on the student pages. You can offer guidance, or the activities can be completed independently. Be sure to ask your students to provide reasons for their answers.
- If interest warrants, challenge your students to find other words containing the root of focus each week. They can search in books or ask others to search with them.
- Challenge students to invent new words using their growing knowledge of word roots and their meanings.

