

Section 4: Chapter 26:

Misspellings of a Scatological Word by 15-year-olds

When I was teaching remedial reading at the Regional Detention Center in Flint, Michigan, I had the unique experience of collecting misspellings of a word that we all assume every kid can spell. All of the following misspellings are of the same word! Actually one of them is a correct spelling, but I included it as a misspelling because the student was very surprised that he got it right after struggling and erasing about ten earlier versions of the word.

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| 1. chit | 10. hitse | 19. sith |
| 2. chite | 11. hsti | 20. sithe |
| 3. chitter | 12. sheet | 21. sitter |
| 4. ciet | 13. sheit | 22. snit |
| 5. cit | 14. shet | 23. suit |
| 6. cite | 15. shiet | 24. suot |
| 7. citter | 16. shit | 25. swit |
| 8. cwhi | 17. shite | 26. thcsie |
| 9. hits | 18. sit | 27. this |

How did I manage to collect these? Simple. When each new student was brought to my room, I told him I had to give him a test. I gave him a sheet of paper and a pencil. I then asked him if he could write his name. Then I asked him to try to write the following sentence, "In this class we're going to get our (scatological word) together." If he missed that word (and many of them did), we started right there. The first thing I taught was the word *it* and the words that you can make with it by adding letters to the front of *it*, starting with the *sh* digraph.

Obviously, this technique can't and shouldn't be used in an elementary classroom. But in a prison situation with students who were at the bottom of the pile, it seemed appropriate. It worked. It got their attention quickly and helped them overcome their own resistance to learning.

Nearly all teachers assume their students can at least read and spell this simple four-letter word. Don't assume. Remember how we spell assume. When you assume you make an ass out of u and me.