Sorting is an active part of word study. Here are tips to consider as you develop your word study program.

**Getting Started**

- Make a copy of the sort for each student or pair. Increase the size of the copy to rid the page of the margin; this leaves less for students to cut.
- Students scribble distinctively on the back so that they recognize their chips.
- During independent work time, at their seats or in a station, students cut up the sort and place the chips in an envelope or plastic bag. Students can write their names on the fronts of the bags. Do not use instructional time for cutting up the word or picture sort.
- After cutting up the sort, students try it out; this is an “open sort.” Observe how students sort before instruction to guide your pacing. Ask students to sort the words into several columns and to set aside unknown words.

**Instruction**

Introduce the sort in small group. A few minutes of small group reading time is used for word study. This word study time is an opportunity to integrate phonics, spelling, and vocabulary.

Incorporate the following activities over several days. Spend just 10–15 minutes at any one time and pick up where you left off during the next small group lesson.

- For each sort, use several key words to head the sorting categories. Also include an Oddball column for words or pictures that do not fit.

1) **Check that students can read the words of the sort.** Students must be able to read most of the words in the sort. Three or four unknown words are acceptable and are learned over the week. Choose an easier list and sort if too many words are unknown. Explain to students that you want them to read through the sort to make sure they can read the words or name the pictures.

When first sorting, model for students how to read through the words. Read the word cards in an “I know it; I don’t know it” fashion. Put the known words in a pile in front of you; place the unknown words to the right. Show them how to count to three, and if they do not know the word, they place the unknown word card in, hopefully, a small pile to the right.

Ask students if they know the meaning of the words. You can teach several of the meanings over the week. If there are several unknown words, take the time to use them in a concept sort in which students sort the words into meaning categories, such as words that relate to animals, the landscape, and so on. Ask students to point to words that fit a category.

2) **Teach four-step sorting in small group.** When you show students how to sort, begin with an easier sort and teach students the four steps that they will follow with each sort.1

- **Demonstrate.** Show students how to sort by using the key words or pictures. Sort deliberately, and talk about what

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