
 Book Review

Word Games in English

by Mark James

WORD GAMES IN ENGLISH. Dwight Spenser. New York: Regents, 1976. pp. 232. \$3.95.

Word Games in English by Dwight Spenser is just one of the many "game" books which have recently besieged the ESL and foreign language teaching market in an effort to satisfy the growing demand for new and creative materials for the language classroom.

This current trend concerns me somewhat. Educators from the humanist school of thought have long sought to make the learning process more fun, individualistic, creative, and more student-oriented. However, it appears that this new "genre" of publications will only serve to fuel the fires of those critics who blame the current failures in the U.S. public school systems on the humanistic approach.

In his introduction, Spenser indicates that this book, "offers students an opportunity to add hundreds of useful and interesting words to their English vocabularies. . ." and "although a large vocabulary and prior knowledge of the words are helpful, they are not required." Somehow, the latter sentence comes considerably nearer

the truth. It seems to me that it is quite impossible to hunt for hidden or scrambled words which one does not already know. It would be like hunting for an animal which you had never seen before.

Spenser claims, however, that most of the answers can be gotten from a good dictionary. But how can this possibly help—unless the student is randomly selecting sequences of letters and checking the dictionary for their possible existence? In any case, the activity is neither a learning one, nor a time-efficient one.

It is possible that one day research will prove that anagrams and scrambled words may be valid instruments as placement tests of students' reading and vocabulary levels, but I doubt that it will ever be shown that these kinds of games result in any measurable amount of learning.

For the teacher who finds himself with five minutes left at the end of class, the text could be made considerably more useful if the numerous "inside word" sections were cut out, and the remainder published in spirit master form, thus eliminating the need for the huge answer section also.