

Good Spelling Needs More Emphasis

AMONG the expectations of springtime is the recurring hope that the annual spelling contests will revive correct spelling.

These are times when we old fogies who think there are only one or two right ways to spell a word fear that "creative spellers" may triumph and lead us into utter linguistic confusion.

Handwritten records of the past show that many people have had difficulties with letters and syllables needed to convey their ideas. Folks used to try to develop spelling skills, but now there is a widespread theory that we can learn spelling incidentally.

Publishers and editors used to take pride in publications free of misspelled words and typographical errors. Now you can hardly find a magazine or newspaper without a number of both, plus a sprinkling of misused words.

When a writer says "taut" for "taught" it might be phonetically correct but readers may wonder what he means.

Introduction of computers for

writing and typesetting does not enhance connotation. Words divided at the ends of lines to read dinin-groom, pru-ned, so-mething and teen-aged can obscure meanings and shakeup a lifetime of efforts to acquire language understanding.

Yes, in the olden days public schools not only taught spelling as a basic subject; teachers also insisted upon pupils learning the meanings of words they were called upon to spell, and vice versa.

One of this writer's grade school teachers demanded perfect spelling and definition scores of each pupil each day. Those who missed stayed after school to write words and meanings enough times to impress them firmly upon memories. This teacher never seemed to have any place to go after school, so we learned to spell.

Admittedly, there are some peculiar spellings in the English language, and similar sounds for words of different meanings and different spellings confuse both Americans and foreigners. But changes should be made uniformly or not at all.

Don Ferrell, publisher of the Lincoln County News at Chandler, has been involved in the Oklahoma spelling contests for 13 years, he writes in his Front Page column. He checked records for 70 years and found that today's events are small by comparison. Lincoln County had more than 100 school districts participating in annual spelling events back in those days. Probably other counties did, too.

Ferrell found that in May, 1912, a 13-year old named Pressly Green won the right to represent Lincoln County in the state spelling bee in Oklahoma City. He stood in line and spelled without a miss for 7½ hours, indicating that spelling was an athletic event as well as a lexicographical contest. Green came out fourth in the state because he gave out physically, Ferrell reported.

Some may rely on handy dictionaries to look up spelling of words they may want to use. The catch is that in order to look up a word you must know how to spell it and also know the alphabet!