

Lesson 15: The Building Blocks of Language

Back to Base: Does a Base Have to Stand Alone?

Lesson at a Glance

Handle	Lesson 15
Guiding Question	Does a base have to stand alone as a word?
Known Handle	A BASE IS SOMETHING WE CAN BUILD ON.
Recovered Discovery	A WORD WE BUILD CAN BECOME THE NEXT BASE.
Opening Investigation	SUNFLOWER
Familiar Stand-Alone Bases	FLOWER, PLAY, HELP, GROUND
Primary New Family	RUPT — ERUPT, DISRUPT, INTERRUPT
Confirmation Families	JECT — EJECT, INJECT, REJECT; STRUCT — CONSTRUCT, INSTRUCT; optional related-family comparison: STRUCTURE
Child-Facing Contrast	CAN STAND ALONE AS A WORD / NEEDS OTHER WORD PARTS OR PIECES WITH IT
Teacher Technical Handle	free base / bound base
Core Discovery	A BASE DOES NOT HAVE TO STAND ALONE AS A WORD. A BASE IS THE PART OR PIECE WE ARE BUILDING ON. WE BUILD WORDS BY ADDING OTHER WORD PARTS OR PIECES.
Question Left Open	Is a BASE always the same thing as a WORD ROOT?

Purpose

Lesson 15 returns to **BASE**, the tool introduced in Lesson 10, and deliberately reopens a question that was left unresolved. Until now, children have mainly worked with bases that look comfortably like ordinary words: **PLAY**, **GROUND**, **HELP**, **FLOWER**, and built words such as **HELPFUL** that can themselves become the next base. That experience allowed the class to learn the functional handle first:

A BASE IS SOMETHING WE CAN BUILD ON.

This lesson tests whether children have accidentally added a rule that was never given:

Does a base have to be a word that can stand alone?

Students investigate families organized around **RUPT**, **JECT**, and **STRUCT**. These forms do not normally function as independent English words, yet they remain meaningful, recurring centers around which words are built. The class discovers that the ability to **stand alone** and the ability to **serve as a base** are not the same thing.

The lesson begins with familiar tools and familiar words, creates a genuine problem, and lets the broader understanding of **BASE** arise from evidence rather than from a definition delivered in advance.

Teacher Background and Instructional Handle

Lesson 10 established that **a base is the form being built on at a particular stage**. Thus **HELP** can be the base in **HELPFUL**, while **HELPFUL** can be the base when **UN-** is added to make **UNHELPFUL**. Lesson 15 deepens that concept in a second direction.

PIECES and WORD PARTS: When we take a word apart, we get pieces. Then we investigate those pieces to find out what kind of word parts they are. A visible piece is not automatically a prefix, suffix, base, or root; investigation earns the stronger label.

Morphologists distinguish bases that can occur independently as English words from bases that cannot. A base that can stand alone is commonly called a **free base**; a base that occurs only with other morphological material is called a **bound base**. Morphology guidance recommends beginning with familiar free bases, then extending the investigation to bound bases after children understand the structural function of a base.

Do not begin the child lesson by defining free base and bound base. Those are teacher terms first. The child-facing language is:

CAN STAND ALONE AS A WORD

NEEDS OTHER WORD PARTS OR PIECES WITH IT

The children should experience and test the distinction before receiving the technical names.

Do not describe a bound base as trapped, supervised, helpless, incomplete, broken, or “not allowed” to be alone. The observation is linguistic: **PLAY** functions as an independent English word; **RUPT** does not normally do so. Both, however, can participate centrally in word building.

The strongest child-facing reasoning routine is:

Can this piece stand alone as a word?

Can we build words with this piece?

What are we building on?

The second and third questions reconnect the new evidence to the known handle. Once children understand the physical meaning of build on, the teacher may shorten the routine naturally to “Can we build on it?” The old definition does not break; it becomes more useful.

Accuracy note: A piece left after breaking or visually isolating a word is not automatically a named word part. Let children call it a piece while the class investigates what it is. Treat displayed families as evidence for recurring meaningful bases, and do not improvise a word sum unless its morphological analysis has been

verified. The lesson does not require children to memorize or independently analyze the historical combining forms that occur before RUPT, JECT, or STRUCT.

Objectives

- Reopen and use familiar tools from the language toolbox.
- Use **SUNFLOWER** to distinguish a syllable break from a compound-word break.
- Recover **BASE** as something we can build on.
- Recover that a word already built can become the next base.
- Test whether familiar bases can stand alone as words.
- Investigate RUPT as the primary example of a base that does not normally stand alone.
- Use JECT and STRUCT to confirm that the RUPT pattern is not a one-off case.
- Sort bases using **CAN STAND ALONE AS A WORD** and **NEEDS OTHER WORD PARTS OR PIECES WITH IT**.
- Explain, using a word family, that a piece can serve as the base even when it cannot normally stand alone as a word.
- Encounter, but not be required to memorize, **free base** and **bound base**.
- Recognize that BASE and WORD ROOTS may examine the same form for different reasons without assuming that the terms are always interchangeable.

Materials

- Established **OUR LANGUAGE TOOLBOX** display: **SYLLABLES • COMPOUND WORDS • BASE • PREFIX • SUFFIX • WORD ROOTS**.
- Word cards: **SUNFLOWER, SUN, FLOWER, FLOWERING**.
- Review cards: **PLAY, HELP, GROUND, HELPFUL, UNHELPFUL**.
- Primary investigation cards: **RUPT, ERUPT, DISRUPT, INTERRUPT**.
- Confirmation cards: **JECT, EJECT, INJECT, REJECT; STRUCT, CONSTRUCT, INSTRUCT**. Optional related-family comparison card: **STRUCTURE**.
- Separate cards for prefixes, suffixes, or other recurring elements only where their analysis has been verified.
- Magnets, tape, or Velcro for moving, sorting, isolating, and rebuilding cards.
- Two concealed board headings: **CAN STAND ALONE AS A WORD** and **NEEDS OTHER WORD PARTS OR PIECES WITH IT**.
- Optional student recording sheet for sorting and explaining evidence.

Board Geography

Keep the familiar three-area classroom architecture:

- **OUR LANGUAGE TOOLBOX** on the left.
- **WORKBENCH** in the center.
- **EVIDENCE** on the right.

During the second half of the lesson, allow the EVIDENCE area to develop into two visible columns. Do not preload the examples; the class should build the evidence chart.

CAN STAND ALONE AS A WORD	NEEDS OTHER WORD PARTS OR PIECES WITH IT
FLOWER	RUPT
PLAY	JECT
HELP	STRUCT
GROUND	—

Teaching Sequence

1. Open the Toolbox

Open **OUR LANGUAGE TOOLBOX** and briefly recover the six established tools in the same stable order:

SYLLABLES → COMPOUND WORDS → BASE → PREFIX → SUFFIX → WORD ROOTS

Keep this physical and quick. Ask children to point, name, move, or briefly explain a tool rather than reciting six definitions.

Teacher language: “We have learned a lot about the tools in this box. Today we are going back to one of the tools we met earlier.”

Do not yet identify the tool.

2. Return to SUNFLOWER

Place only **SUNFLOWER** on the workbench.

SEE IT: Look at SUNFLOWER.

SAY IT: Read it together.

CLAP IT: Recover **SUN | FLOW | ER**.

Ask: “What did that tool help us find?” Recover: **SYLLABLES—spoken beats**.

Restore the whole word. Then ask: “Can we break this same word another way for a different reason?”

Recover **SUN + FLOWER** and identify a **COMPOUND WORD**.

Ask: “Did our two tools break SUNFLOWER the same way?” Recover the established principle:

SAME WORD. DIFFERENT TOOL. DIFFERENT INFORMATION.

3. Pull Out BASE

Take **FLOWER** from the compound build and leave it on the workbench.

Ask: “Can FLOWER stand by itself as a word?” Then: “Can we build on FLOWER?” Display or build **FLOWER + ING → FLOWERING**.

Ask: “What were we building on?” Pull the **BASE** card from the toolbox and recover:

A BASE IS SOMETHING WE CAN BUILD ON.

When we build on a base, we add other word parts or pieces to build a word. The base is the part or piece we are building on.

4. Recover the Staged-Base Discovery

Display **HELP + FUL → HELPFUL**. Ask: “What was our base?” Leave **HELPFUL** whole, then display **UN + HELPFUL → UNHELPFUL**.

Ask: “What are we building on this time?” Recover:

A WORD WE BUILD CAN BECOME THE NEXT BASE.

Ask whether HELPFUL is the smallest piece inside UNHELPFUL. When children answer no, confirm that HELPFUL was nevertheless the form being built on when UN- was added.

Teacher handle: “BASE tells us what we are building on at that stage.”

5. Notice Something About the Bases We Know

Place **FLOWER**, **PLAY**, **HELP**, and **GROUND** on the board. For each, ask: “Can this work as a word by itself?” Let children test the words orally if useful: We play. I can help. The flower grew. The ground is wet.

Say: “The bases we have been using can all stand alone as words.” Pause, then reveal the guiding question:

DOES A BASE HAVE TO STAND ALONE?

Do not answer it.

6. Put RUPT on the Workbench

Place **RUPT** alone. Let children look, say it, and attempt to use it.

Ask: “Can this piece, RUPT, stand alone as a word the way PLAY does?”

Say: “RUPT does not normally stand alone as an English word. So let us ask our other questions: Can we build words with this piece? What are we building on?”

Present **ERUPT**, **DISRUPT**, and **INTERRUPT**. Have children locate and mark the recurring piece **RUPT**.

Ask:

- “Can RUPT stand alone as a word?”
- “Can we build words with this piece?”
- “Look at ERUPT, DISRUPT, and INTERRUPT. What piece keeps showing up?”
- “What are these words building on?”
- “So RUPT cannot normally stand alone as a word—but can it still be something we build on?”

This is the first major discovery. RUPT is a recognized bound base. The recurring spelling and related meanings across **ERUPT**, **DISRUPT**, and **INTERRUPT** provide the classroom evidence; the historical family’s **BREAK / BURST** connection provides additional teacher support. If useful, connect meanings lightly: a volcano **erupts** or bursts out; something **disrupts** or breaks up what is happening; a person **interrupts** or breaks into an activity or conversation.

Do not turn this into memorization of the surrounding forms. The purpose is to expose the stable base and the related meaning.

7. Build the Two Evidence Categories

Reveal:

CAN STAND ALONE AS A WORD

NEEDS OTHER WORD PARTS OR PIECES WITH IT

Move **PLAY**, **HELP**, **FLOWER**, and **GROUND** under the first heading. Invite a child to place **RUPT**.

Ask again: “Can RUPT stand alone as a word?” “Can we build words with this piece?” “What are we building on?” Then state only the developing idea:

STANDING ALONE AND BEING A BASE ARE NOT THE SAME QUESTION.

8. Confirm with JECT

Place **JECT** on the workbench and repeat the three questions: “Can this piece stand alone as a word?” “Can we build words with this piece?” “What are we building on?”

Present **EJECT**, **INJECT**, and **REJECT**. Children locate the piece that stays and place **JECT** under **NEEDS OTHER WORD PARTS OR PIECES WITH IT**.

JECT is commonly used in morphology instruction as a bound-base example. Its historical family carries the idea **THROW**. If this supports the discussion, the teacher may offer a light meaning clue: eject has a “throw out” history, inject a “throw in” history, and reject a “throw back” history. Treat these as historical meaning connections, not as modern definitions students must memorize.

9. Confirm or Transfer with **STRUCT**

Place **STRUCT** on the workbench. Repeat the same three questions—“Can this piece stand alone as a word?” “Can we build words with this piece?” “What are we building on?”—then present **CONSTRUCT** and **INSTRUCT**. If you also display **STRUCTURE**, treat it as a related-family comparison rather than a word for children to segment independently.

Children locate **STRUCT** in **CONSTRUCT** and **INSTRUCT** and place it under **NEEDS OTHER WORD PARTS OR PIECES WITH IT**. If **STRUCTURE** is displayed, use it only as a related-family comparison. **STRUCT** is a standard instructional example of a bound base and carries a historical building, arranging, or putting-together idea.

Pacing option: If time or cognitive load is becoming heavy, use **STRUCT** as the quick formative check or save it for a brief next-day reopening. **RUPT** should remain the full discovery family; **JECT** should be the main confirmation family.

10. What Makes a Base a Base?

Stand back from the two groups. Ask: “What is different about the two sides?” Then ask: “What is the same?” Bring children toward:

WE CAN BUILD WORDS WITH ALL OF THEM.

Return to:

A BASE IS SOMETHING WE CAN BUILD ON.

A BASE IS THE PART OR PIECE WE ARE BUILDING ON.

WE BUILD WORDS BY ADDING OTHER WORD PARTS OR PIECES.

Ask: “Did our old definition break?” No. It became more useful. It never said that a base must be a whole word by itself.

11. Give the Technical Names—Lightly

Only after the board investigation is complete, say: “Language investigators have names for these two kinds of bases.”

Point to **CAN STAND ALONE AS A WORD**: “A base that can stand alone as a word is called a **free base**.”

Point to **NEEDS OTHER WORD PARTS OR PIECES WITH IT**: “A base that cannot normally stand alone as a word is called a **bound base**. We find it with other word parts or pieces.”

Immediately return to the two child-facing questions. Students do not need to memorize the technical labels today.

12. Bring Back the Built Base

Return briefly to **HELP** → **HELPFUL** → **UNHELPFUL**. Ask: “What kind of base was **HELPFUL** when we added **UN-**?” Do not require free base as an answer. The important reasoning is that **HELPFUL** could stand alone and was the form being built on.

Compare with **RUPT**:

- **HELPFUL** can stand alone.
- **RUPT** cannot normally stand alone.

- Both can function as something we build on.

This completes the two-part BASE architecture carried forward from Lesson 10:

A BUILT WORD CAN BECOME THE NEXT BASE.

A BASE DOES NOT HAVE TO STAND ALONE AS A WORD.

13. BASE and WORD ROOTS—Open the Next Question

Place the cards **BASE** and **WORD ROOTS** beside each other. Point to RUPT.

Say: “We used BASE to ask, ‘What are we building on?’ WORD ROOTS helps us investigate meaning and history.”

Ask: “Are BASE and WORD ROOTS always exactly the same thing?” Do not force an answer. Preserve the distinction:

BASE → What are we building on?

WORD ROOTS → What meaning and history can we follow?

Leave the deeper relationship open. This is a boundary for future investigation, not unfinished teaching.

14. Rebuild and Return

Return to one RUPT-family word. Display **DISRUPT**, visually isolate the piece **RUPT**, and ask: “Can RUPT stand alone as a word?” Then restore the whole word and ask: “Can we build words with this piece?” “What are we building on?”

Return RUPT and BASE to the toolbox. Close with:

SOME BASES CAN STAND ALONE AS WORDS.

SOME BASES CANNOT STAND ALONE AS WORDS AND ARE FOUND WITH OTHER WORD PARTS OR PIECES.

BOTH CAN STILL BE SOMETHING WE BUILD ON.

Recover the older statement:

A WORD WE BUILD CAN BECOME THE NEXT BASE.

End with the larger chapter payoff:

OUR TOOLS HELP US ASK DIFFERENT QUESTIONS ABOUT WORDS.

Quick Formative Check

Give individual students one card at a time: **PLAY, RUPT, HELPFUL, JECT, GROUND, STRUCT.**

For each, ask only:

- “Can this piece stand alone as a word?”
- “Can we build words with this piece?”
- “What are we building on?”

Then give a child one family:

- **EJECT / INJECT / REJECT**, or
- **ERUPT / DISRUPT / INTERRUPT.**

Ask: “What piece stayed? What evidence tells us that piece is doing the work of a base?”

The child does not need to produce the term bound base. A successful explanation may be:

“JECT does not stand alone as a word, but we can build words with it. JECT is the piece we are building on.”

Look for: the child treats standing alone and serving as a base as separate questions, identifies the recurring piece across a word family, and uses structural and meaning evidence to explain why that piece can serve as the base rather than guessing from a repeated letter string alone.

Teacher Notes

- **Do not teach “base = smallest piece.”** HELPFUL can serve as the base for UNHELPFUL.
- **Do not teach “base = whole word.”** This lesson corrects that accidental overgeneralization.
- **Do distinguish PIECES from WORD PARTS.** Taking a word apart produces visible pieces; evidence is needed before a piece is named as a prefix, suffix, base, or root.
- **Do not require FREE BASE and BOUND BASE.** Introduce them lightly only after the experience.
- **Do not call RUPT, JECT, or STRUCT incomplete words.** They are meaningful bases that do not independently function as ordinary English words.
- **Do not make the lesson primarily about Latin roots.** Meaning and history support the structural investigation.
- **Do not turn the families into giant vocabulary lists.** Three words from each family are sufficient.
- **Do not require children to memorize the meanings of surrounding elements.** Those forms help expose the recurring base.
- **Do not assume every repeated letter string is a base.** Investigators need evidence of structure, meaning, and family relationship.
- **Do preserve uncertainty.** A child’s question about whether every non-standalone form is a bound base is an excellent future investigation.
- **Verify word sums before displaying plus signs.** Visual isolation of a recurring base is sufficient for this lesson when the full morphological analysis is not part of the objective.

Participation Handle

Children may come to the board, hold word cards, remove surrounding parts, circle or box what stays, sort bases between the two headings, build a real word around RUPT, JECT, or STRUCT, explain why a card belongs in a category, disagree with a placement, move a card after new evidence appears, or supply a spoken sentence to test whether a form works independently. Keep the room physical. The lesson should feel like the class is **testing bases**, not receiving a vocabulary lecture.

Student Packet Direction

The packet should support the same discovery rather than reveal the technical distinction at the top.

Begin by recovering:

SUNFLOWER → SUN | FLOW | ER

SUNFLOWER → SUN + FLOWER

Then recover a familiar base such as FLOWER or PLAY and repeat:

CAN THIS PIECE STAND ALONE AS A WORD?

CAN WE BUILD WORDS WITH THIS PIECE?

WHAT ARE WE BUILDING ON?

Use RUPT as the main investigation. Use JECT and STRUCT as shorter confirmation or transfer families. Provide space for sorting, locating the recurring piece, comparing meanings across the family, building, and explaining evidence.

Use the child-facing headings **CAN STAND ALONE AS A WORD** and **NEEDS OTHER WORD PARTS OR PIECES WITH IT**. If **FREE BASE** / **BOUND BASE** appears, place the terms after the investigation as optional labels, not definitions to memorize.

The paper should support the live inquiry rather than overtake it.

Lesson Stop Point

Students should leave Lesson 15 knowing:

A BASE IS SOMETHING WE CAN BUILD ON.

- A base may be a word that can stand alone.
- A base may not stand alone as a word and may be found with other word parts or pieces.
- A base is the part or piece we are building on.
- We build words by adding other word parts or pieces.
- A word already built can become the next base.

Therefore:

A BASE DOES NOT HAVE TO STAND ALONE AS A WORD.

A BASE IS THE PART OR PIECE WE ARE BUILDING ON.

WE BUILD WORDS BY ADDING OTHER WORD PARTS OR PIECES.

Students may have heard **free base** and **bound base**, but mastery of those labels is not the goal.

They should **not** leave believing that every recognizable chunk is a base, that **BASE** and **WORD ROOTS** always mean the same thing, or that a base must be the smallest or simplest part of a word.

Sources and Teacher Accuracy

Teacher source links: Reading Rockets morphology overview —

<https://www.readingrockets.org/blogs/shanahan-on-literacy/what-should-morphology-instruction-look;>

Morphology Matters webinar PDF —

https://www.readingrockets.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/Van%20Cleave_Morphology%20Matters.pdf;

Language Foundations Handbook —

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/languagefoundationshandbook/chapter/vocabulary-prefixes/>; Building Literacy **STRUCT** lesson —

<https://buildingliteracy.org/monday-morpheme-lesson-5-struct-ion-tion-sion-the-great-molasses-flood/>.

Reading Rockets, “What Should Morphology Instruction Look Like?” Explains that morphemes may or may not stand independently and emphasizes learning through word families and problem-solving rather than isolated memorization.

William Van Cleave, “Morphology Matters: Using Bases and Affixes to Develop Vocabulary in Students of All Ages” (Reading Rockets/PaTTAN webinar materials). Defines a free base as a standalone word and a bound base as a base that appears only as part of a larger word; uses **STRUCT** as a sample bound base.

Reading Rockets, “Root Words, Suffixes, and Prefixes.” Provides teacher-facing meaning handles commonly associated with **RUPT—break**, **JECT—throw**, and **STRUCT—build**; use these as historical supports for family investigation rather than as complete modern definitions.

Peter N. Bowers, “Structured Word Inquiry: Critical Thinking and Word Learning through Studying Spelling” (Vocabulogic). Models inquiry through word families, word sums, and evidence-based hypotheses rather than memorized word-part lists.

McQuirter and Venema, Language Foundations Handbook (eCampusOntario). Provides teacher-facing morphology guidance and examples of bound bases, including **JECT**-family words.

Mississippi Department of Education, “Manipulating Morphemes.” Summarizes research and instructional routines supporting explicit morphological study, word-family connections, and vocabulary growth.

Building Literacy, “Monday Morpheme Lesson 5: struct, -ion.” Presents STRUCT as a bound base meaning “build or put together” and illustrates its participation in a morphological family.

Online Etymology Dictionary entries for disrupt, interrupt, eject, and inject. Support the historical meaning links from Latin rumpere, “break,” and iacere, “throw.”

The instructional conclusion is intentionally narrower than the full linguistic background: children are not being asked to master Latin morphology. They are using visible, meaningful family evidence to discover that **independence is not a requirement for basehood**.

This gives Chapter 3 a clean ending: BASE was introduced simply, used repeatedly, and then revisited after children had enough experience to discover that the original definition was broader than it first appeared