Suffixes -ful and -less: Building Opposite Adjectives in Year 2 Writing

A simple guide to help your child understand how adding '-ful' and '-less' to words can change their meaning and create opposites.

What are suffixes?

In Year 2 (children aged 6 to 7), pupils learn about suffixes. A suffix is a group of letters added to the end of a root word to change its meaning. In this lesson, children look at how adding '-ful' or '-less' to a noun—a naming word for a person, place, or thing—turns it into an adjective, which is a word used to describe something. For example, if we start with the noun 'care', we can add a suffix to describe someone as 'careful' or 'careless'.

How it works: Build it and flip it

Children learn a 'build it, flip it' approach to these words. First, they build a word by adding '-ful' to show that something has a certain quality (like 'helpful'). Then, they 'flip' it by swapping '-ful' for '-less' to show that the quality is missing (like 'helpless'). They practice this by sorting words into groups and writing their own sentences. This helps them see that these two suffixes often create opposite meanings, making them a great tool for adding detail to their writing.

What this means for your child

This activity follows the National Curriculum (the official guide for what is taught in English schools) for Year 2 spelling and vocabulary. Your child is learning to recognise patterns in English. One important thing they will learn is that while the word 'full' has two 'l's, the suffix '-ful' only has one. This is a common mistake, and the school will help them spot this 'double-l trap' as they practice their writing.

Simple ways to help at home

You can support your child with short, playful games during the day. While shopping or reading together, try to spot '-ful' or '-less' words. You could ask, 'I see a colourful box, what would we call it if it had no colour?' and see if they can 'flip' it to 'colourless'. There is no need for drilling or formal lessons; just chatting about these words in everyday life helps them feel confident. If your child has SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) or is learning English as an additional language, focusing on the pictures and the 'opposite' meaning is a great way to start.

Common questions

Parents often ask if children need to memorise long lists of these words. The goal is for children to understand the pattern so they can apply it to new words they encounter. You might also wonder if every word ending in '-ful' has a '-less' opposite; while many do, some do not. If you are unsure about a specific word your child is using, or want to know how they are getting on, your child's class teacher is the best person to ask for guidance.

Sources

- Department for Education: National curriculum in England: English programmes of study