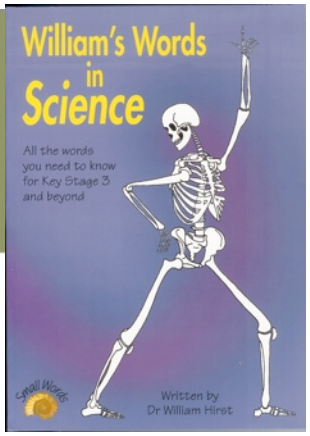

William's Words in Science

Author: William Hirst
SmallWords
ISBN: 978-0-9555207-0-9
RRP: £14.00 (£12.00 for order of six copies or more)

This, very solid, 420-page volume is quite hard to categorise. It is well produced and seems scientifically accurate but, at the same time, quite personal and idiosyncratic in places. It is more than a dictionary of science words, but it is not exactly an encyclopaedia or a science data/reference book either. So, what is it? – it is *William's Words!* The author (the eponymous William – a secondary science teacher) has trawled textbooks and test materials used at Key Stage 3 (age 11-14), along with his own experience, to compile a selection of over 13,000 words relevant to the learning of science in the 11-14 age range and beyond. William's view is that science is a foreign language that needs clear explanation if children's learning is to be effective and few would argue with that assertion. Many science laboratories will have word lists and posters on the walls, but this book goes much further.

Over 350 of the pages form a straightforward dictionary, with clear definitions of a wide range of words, mostly clearly 'scientific', but others such as 'sisters' and 'sitar' (selected at random) that might conceivably be used in science lessons. The dictionary not only covers key concepts, but also includes a selection of scientists with short biographies and information about their contributions to scientific knowledge. There are a few surprises – I was not aware that a 'spermist' is *'a person who believed that the tiny person (homunculus) was to be found in the sperm, but needed the womb in order to develop'* (neither was I aware that this was in the Key Stage 3 curriculum!). Although this section might not strictly meet the criteria used by lexicographers in compiling a dictionary, there are some nice touches that would help a student with confusion over words – thus, 'fret' not only means *'a marker on the fingerboard of a guitar'* but can also mean *'to worry'*. There is also a list of homophones earlier on in the book, which might also be useful in sorting out confusions – 'maize' and 'maze' or 'lava' and 'larva' (but 'ohm' and 'home'?!). The main dictionary section is not illustrated, but there are some nice illustrations in the 40-page reference section (or 'micropaedia') at the end of the book, which provides *'a brief overview of fifty of the important concepts in science'*, from 'Apparatus' to 'Waves'. But there is more … abbreviations, body organs, chemical formulae, periodic table, etc., and the linked website www.smallwords.co.uk (contains a variety of free resources (Cloze exercises, crosswords, Sci-dokus (!) and diagrams).

The book is aimed at teachers, parents and students. Although the context is National Curriculum science, the book will be relevant 'north of the border' and further afield, as there is much common ground in curriculum coverage for this age range. At £12-14, perhaps parents might be hesitant when there are cheaper alternative science dictionaries around but, as I have tried to suggest, this is more than a dictionary and, although aimed mainly at the 11-14 age range, would be very useful into GCSE and beyond. Every science laboratory and library should have at least one copy for reference by students. Teachers might also benefit from using the book to think about the ways in which words may be understood – or misunderstood – by their learners. It will certainly go on the booklist for our PGCE trainees.

So, overall, a very useful addition to the bookshelf, plus the opportunity, which I never thought to have within a review, to use two of my own favourite words – 'idiosyncratic' and 'eponymous'!!

Available from ASE Bookshop,
Bertrams Library Services,
William's Words (01223 234 934)