Lesson 2.2 Verb Morphology

What are some ways to find verbs, if we can't rely on a meaning-based definition like a verb is an action word? Well, only verbs can mark **tense**. In English, we indicate past tense and present tense on verbs, but since there's no much present tense marking left in English (I'll come back to that), let's stick with past tense for now.

The -*ed* is a past tense suffix that can then attach to a verb. (It's called an inflectional affix, distinct from derivational affixes. Wikipedia has a decent overview of the difference between the two, , and here's a bit more technical one by Tom Payne, but you don't need to get into this now, if you don't want to.)

Test for Verbs: Can take -*ed* to indicate past tense.

She walk**ed** to school.
She blerk**ed** the zongot.
She ambl**ed** down the lane.

There are other ways of marking past tense: *catch-caught, read-read,* and so on.

Activity: Have your students come up with more irregular past tense verbs. Are there patterns? Groups of words that take the same kind of irregular past tense? Make up some words. What are their past tense forms? Think of some slang or other newish words. What are their past tense forms? (So all of the new words will take the –*ed*. The other forms, which we now think of as irregular, were members of larger groups of words that formed their past tense in different ways in older forms of English.)

So the test for verbs is that they can indicate past tense, typically by -*ed*, but sometimes in other ways.

This could be a good time to start a wall chart for verbs, with the test on it.

There are plenty of other affixes that turn words into verbs (or attach to verbs to make a verb with a different meaning). Here are just a few. (These are all derivational affixes, distinct from the tense-marking inflectional affixes.)

dis- disappear
re- rediscover

-ate activate
-ize regularize, maximize, realize
-en tighten, deepen, thicken

Then the past tense –*ed* can attach to any of them (always at the end, after the other affixes) to mark tense.