

WHAT IS READING?

Reading is a thought-getting process of interpreting printed symbols. It is a process of "coupling-up" or relating the symbol (word) with one's experience of what the symbol represents. When the child brings experience to the symbols (words), then he reads with meaning. When he does not, the symbols become rote, parrot learning.

The total interpretative act of reading is made up of the following identifiable components:

1. Word perception, which involves phonics, structural analysis, context clues, and eventual use of dictionary
2. Comprehension, which involves getting the meaning of words perceived
3. Reaction of the reader to the meaning
4. Integration of the above, simultaneously in one action.

These component parts must be taught in relationship. For example, who would be content for children merely to read the words in a story? Should they not also comprehend the meaning of the words? Should they not also react to the meaning in terms of whether an action is good or bad, right or wrong, and the like? Should they not ultimately become skilled in recognizing the words, comprehending their meaning, and reacting as an integral process. When this happens the person is reading.

HOW IS READING TAUGHT?

The basic readers now on the State Adopted List of Textbooks vary, of course, in certain details of content, but the principles of methodology advocated in the teachers' manuals are essentially similar regarding the four identifiable components cited above.

When these component parts are taught in relationship, as advocated in the manuals, the method is more than word recognition, which involves phonetic and structural analysis. By the same reasoning, the phonetic aspect is not a method but merely one part of word recognition which, in turn, is but one of the component parts in the total reading act.

This concept necessitates phonics and structural analysis as essentials to word recognition, but word recognition serves as a means to interpretation rather than as an end of reading instruction. To achieve this, the word recognition phase must be closely integrated with the total reading act and not set apart in separate instructional periods.

Since differences in opinion regarding method usually focus on the word recognition aspect of reading, the question might be asked: "What areas are advocated in our adopted reading series as essential to developing word perception skills and abilities?" The answer is: phonics, context clues, structural clues, and word-form clues.

Gates, Gray, Witty, Durrell, Betts and others agree that phonics is only one of the several approaches in word perception. This agreement is prompted by basic research done in the late 30's and early 40's by Tate, Russell, and others who conclude: phonics is only one method of word recognition and should be related with purposeful reading.

All of the basic reading series on the State Adopted Textbook List include instruction in phonics, but it is functional phonics, and not something superimposed apart from meaningful experience with words. It is also taught in conjunction with structural analysis, context clues, word-form clues, and eventual use of the dictionary.

The basis for this practice rests in the following assumptions:

1. English is a language that follows no set pattern of pronunciation, especially letter by letter, as German or Spanish. Consequently, no single method of word attack can be depended upon. This becomes increasingly obvious as the reader meets more involved words requiring syllabication.
2. Whereas one can sound out simple three- and four-letter words with only a minimum loss of time, one's rate of perception is slowed down considerably as he attempts to use a highly synthetic approach on more involved words.
3. Since meaning is the primary consideration, those devices which give the child clues to meaning as well as to form are of chief value - hence, the importance of context clues, structural analysis (emphasizing root elements, prefixes, suffixes, and inflectional endings), and eventually the dictionary.

An application of the above assumptions through illustrations reveal their validity, and explain why phonics alone cannot be the exclusive approach in teaching reading:

Letters represent a number of sounds and one sound is represented by a number of letters -

<u>sh</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>k</u>
<u>ocean</u>	<u>laugh</u>	<u>ache</u>
<u>anxious</u>	<u>nephew</u>	<u>echo</u>
<u>station</u>	<u>stiff</u>	<u>mark</u>
<u>radish</u>	<u>fitted</u>	<u>counter</u>
<u>sure</u>		<u>sick</u>
<u>machine</u>		<u>chasm</u>

One might wonder what a grotesque combination of letters that spell "ghoti" could mean. By application of the above principles it could turn out to be "fish." For instance:

gh as in cough = f
o as in women = i -- thus "ghoti" becomes "fish"
ti as in action = sh

By further illustration of the above principles, let us say that a teacher spends considerable time in the first grade in drilling on "phonograms" or phonetic "families" such as rap, cap, pap. What will her children do after acquiring an automatic response to this phonogram ap when they are confronted with the ap in

such multisyllable words as capable, maple, and apron? They must unlearn their previous response in sound and learn another. Herein lies the basic reason why the modern reading series do not advocate teaching the alphabet first, with fixed sound, as in former years, nor to teach rotely the phonetic "families" that must be re-learned when children are confronted with syllabication. (If not forced and drilled, and taught with fixed sound, it will not actually harm a child to learn the alphabet. This is often done in song, such as "abc, tumble down d," and other variations. But the question remains, even then, as to what "a" means. What does "c" mean?)

In view of the reasons given for the development of many ways of word attack by equipping the child with skills, abilities, and understandings in several methods of word perception, the question arises as to how this shall be done.

Shall one begin by teaching the sounds of the elements, leading eventually into the synthesis of the word whole from known components,

or

Shall one begin with sight words, reserving until later the teaching of analytical procedures?

Those who appreciate the potential of motivation in learning agree that the initial contact with reading be through meaningful words, perceived as wholes, not as parts. Because the child's concern is with the meaningful unit, he comes to find that reading is a pleasurable experience. This is in keeping with a belief that the most important thing a teacher can do with beginning children is to develop a favorable attitude toward reading.

On the other side, there is a point of view to the effect that children should learn early that learning to read is a matter of "blood, sweat, and tears." From this viewpoint, it is necessary to establish sounds of m, b, st, and other phonetic and visual components, and actually climb "phonetic ladders," disassociated from any meaningful experience, on the assumption that the meaningful experience will be automatic later. Under this practice, it is not necessary for the child to see early that reading is an avenue to new and exciting experiences to which he may turn in free time and as a source of information. In summary, "theirs is not to question why, but to do or die." The net result of this point of view in actual practice has been observed by teachers to be one reason for children failing to read because they have seen no point or purpose in an uninteresting activity.

The conclusion, as pointed out repeatedly in previous sections of this statement, is not exclusively "either-or" of the above approaches. There is a necessary place for phonics as well as other procedures of word perception, but they should not take precedence over the primary purpose of reading which is to create meaning. They should, therefore, be introduced after a basic stock of sight words has been established, and these derive naturally from the talking or auditory vocabularies of children's experiences when they first come to school. This is a readiness period in which phonics apply quite conspicuously in an auditory manner to those things represented by their talking vocabulary experience. The basic stock of sight words serves two purposes:

First, that of developing desirable attitudes toward reading, and

Second, that of providing the stock-in-trade for the psychological development of generalizations about sounds, endings, prefixes, and similar and dissimilar elements. After these principles have been developed from the basic stock of sight words they may then be applied to new words, and the child is on his own in reading.

Parents want their children to be able to read on their own. Independence in reading is attained when the child can with dispatch and confidence unlock any word he meets on his own terms, be it short or long, simple or complex. The method advocated in our teachers' manuals enable good teachers, under reasonably proper conditions, to realize notable success in teaching children to read.

There are certain guiding principles that emanate from the manuals which good teachers follow in teaching a story. These are summarized as follows:

1. Preparation of the class.

During this time the teacher discusses stories or interesting events in the experience of the children that have led to the day's lesson or story. She picks out the new and more difficult words, and writes them on the blackboard. The children discuss these words until they know the meaning of them. The teacher motivates interest by telling the class that the story is about "two boys who have different ideas, or plans."

2. Guided reading

Silent reading with purpose:

The teacher asks the children to read silently and discover the plan or idea of each boy.

Discussion:

The children close their books and they enjoy an informal discussion of the story.

Oral reading with purpose:

When one of the children tells something specific about the story, he is asked to turn to that part of the story and read aloud in support of his point.

3. Extended skills and abilities

Word recognition (perception) skills:

The teacher asks questions, such as "Why do you think the boys had different plans?" She unobtrusively leads the class to focus on words that she writes on the board. For instance, if the word is "craft," she will ask the children to name other words having an "a" with the same pronunciation. This leads into words having long "a" and short "a."

4. Extending interests

The teacher then lists some other books having related stories, and discusses related matters of interest growing out of the story just read. This results in many students doing independent reading in supplementary readers, and certain art activities, and sometimes dramatizations.

In reviewing these abbreviated guiding principles in teaching a story, one recognizes the four component parts of reading in operation: word recognition, comprehension, reaction, and integration.

The method described in this statement is the dominant one, with minor variations, advocated in our teacher-training institutions. It is supported by the research departments of reputable publishing companies, and by widely-recognized authors of basic readers regardless of the company with which they may be affiliated.