The Ordinary Parent's Guide to
Teaching Reading

By Jessie Wise and Sara Buffington

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www.peacehillpress.com
info@peacehillpress.net

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Preface

When I was in elementary school, a kid told me, "You can read good because you're so smart." I know now I did well in school, not because I was smart, but because *I could read well.*

A child who reads well possesses a tool to make academic success possible. Reading is a lifetime skill that allows the child to fulfill professional dreams and function in a world of educated people. It can give pleasure and access to worlds beyond his reach both in space and in time.

I advocate teaching reading to the very young when possible. Children can recognize and name hundreds of things. They understand thousands of words. They are excited about learning new grown-up skills. If you can teach your child to read before school-age, he will be ahead in reading for the rest of his education.

But if you have a school-age child who is struggling with reading, don't waste time. The longer a child struggles, the more discouraged he becomes, and this discouragement will affect his overall academic performance.

If you have been told your child has a learning disability, teach him yourself before you give up on him. I have taught many children who had been given a disability label. They all learned to read. I believe that in each case there was a *teaching* disability in the child's educational history—usually a faulty method of teaching reading. I believe that all children who are not suffering from severe mental retardation or severe emotional upset can learn to read. And anyone who can read can teach another to read if provided with a systematic method that is used frequently, patiently, and consistently**.**

You can begin with Lesson 1 right away, or, if you'd like additional guidance on reading readiness, pre-reading, the reading process, managing the reading lesson, remedial reading, or other issues, go to page 346.

Introduction

How I Came to the Conclusion That Ordinary Parents Need to Teach Reading

I've been working on this book for most of my life. When I was in second grade, I wrote a simple phonics reading book for a fellow classmate. His name was Elmore, and he couldn't read. I wrote the reading book in pencil, in a tiny notebook with "Royster Fertilizer Company" printed on the front.

Throughout my school years, I felt sorry for classmates who struggled with reading. I didn't understand why they didn't just sound out the letters. But these children had been taught with the "new method" of the time: memorizing whole words. I had been taught phonics at home.

I was adopted by an elderly couple who had been educated in an isolated, rural one-room schoolhouse. By her eighth and final year of school, Meme had studied algebra, Latin, and the literature excerpts in the old McGuffey's readers. Uncle Luther had stopped school after sixth grade, but he had an aptitude for mathematics and taught himself carpentry and draftsmanship. They lived on a small subsistence farm in Tidewater Virginia.

Meme and Uncle Luther had been taught reading and spelling by sounding out letters, and they began to teach me the same way, forming words with alphabet blocks. Later they taught me to write on a small blackboard—I'm sure their own school experience had included a slate!

The first-grade teacher in the local public school heard that Meme and Uncle Luther were teaching me to read at home using old-fashioned methods. The teacher made a special visit to our home to tell them to stop teaching me. "Reading is not taught this way anymore," she warned. "There are new methods. You will ruin her education if you persist in doing things the old-fashioned way."

Meme and Uncle Luther went right on teaching me as before.

The high-school boy who helped Meme with chores brought us books from the local public school. Soon I was reading the old Elson-Grey readers and other books from the school library—Raggedy Ann, fairy tales, Aesop's fables, and easy history books.

My education wasn't ruined by my early reading lessons; I was placed directly into second grade when I started school. I consistently remained at the top of my class throughout school. I was also the only girl in that small, rural class to graduate from college. I think the foundation that I was given in reading and the encouragement to do well academically were keys to that success.

When I went to college, I knew that I wanted to be a teacher. One of the required courses for teacher certification was "Teaching Reading in the Elementary School." It was a hodge-podge of lists of sight words, boring readers, and curricula planned around the child's interest rather than his academic skills.

When I was face-to-face with my own sixth-grade class that included two boys who had not yet learned to read, I knew I couldn't use the ineffective methods I had been taught in college. I had to rely on the memory of how I had been taught to read. The next year when I taught a second-grade class of thirty-eight children (fifteen of whom didn't yet know their alphabet), I made up phonics cards, again from my memory. I wrote the letter sounds on construction paper and posted them on the walls of my classroom. We drilled these sounds each morning. By the end of the year, every child except one was reading on or above grade level.

Having observed so many children in school who could not read, I remember thinking, "If I ever have a child, he will know how to read *before* he goes to school."

So when my oldest child turned four, I said to him one day, "Bob, would you rather take a nap, or would you like to learn how to read?" He chose reading! I started him on the old-fashioned phonics I'd been taught when I was a child. I'd lie down with him on his little bed after lunch and work on letter sounds. (Since I also had a two-year-old and a thirteen-month-old, I was always glad to lie down.) That year we practiced vowels and consonants and sounded out new words. We called it "doing kindergarten."

The next year, my middle child was three, and she wanted to be included. “My do kindergarten, too,” she said. I held her in my lap and taught her the letter sounds. She learned to read that year!

When I had the children tested by a psychologist two years later, Bob, a second-grader, was reading on a seventh-grade level. Susan, a kindergartner, was reading on a fifth-grade level. The psychologist suggested that I teach the children at home because they were so advanced. In l973, I had never heard of modern homeschooling, but I began that academic journey. I believe early reading instruction played a major role in the academic success of my three children.

I have also taught my three oldest grandchildren to read. I started their formal reading instruction when they were each four years old. By second grade, they were all reading books on or above a fourth-grade level. All three children are exuberant about their accomplishments, love to read, and are happy, playful children.

I began by telling you about Meme and Uncle Luther (the elderly couple who adopted me). Except for driving me to college, they never went more than fifty miles from their subsistence farm. Yet, because of their diligence in my early education, their influence is reaching a *third* generation in my family.

I am sure they would find it unbelievable that through travel, writing, and the internet, their sphere of influence has spread to parts of the world quite distant from their little Virginia farm. So as you work with your child, you cannot know what effect your work will have on the life of your child and on generations to come!

Lesson 5: The Vowel U u

You will need the following: *the cards you previously used, one blank index card, and a pen.*

The **u** vowel sound in this lesson is the sound at the beginning of ***umbrella***. It is the short sound of **u** and is marked in the dictionary as **u** with a breve over it: /ŭ/.

Review

Instructor: Let's begin this lesson by saying the first four verses of the poem "The Five Vowels" together three times.

Together (three times):

A is the first vowel we will say.
/ă/ is the short-vowel sound of **a**.
E is the next vowel, don't you see?
/ĕ/ is the short-vowel sound of **e**.
I is the third vowel that goes by.
/ĭ/ is the short-vowel sound of **i**.
O is the fourth vowel that I know.
/ŏ/ is the short-vowel sound of **o**.

Instructor: Now I will show you the cards from the previous lessons. Together let's point to the **a** card and say the short-**a** vowel sound: /ă/. Now let's point to the **e** card and say the short-**e** vowel sound: /ĕ/. Let's point to the **i** card and say the short-**i** vowel sound: /ĭ/. Let's point to the **o** card and say the short-**o** vowel sound: /ŏ/.

Instructor: Now I am going to ask you some questions about the sounds of the short vowels. What is the short-vowel sound of **a**?

Point to the **a** card. If the child can't remember the answer, say the first part of each verse as a reminder.

Child: */ă/ is the short-vowel sound of **a**.*

Instructor: What is the short-vowel sound of **e**?

Point to the **e** card.

Child: */ĕ/ is the short-vowel sound of **e**.*

Instructor: What is the short-vowel sound of **i**?

Point to the **i** card.

Child: */ĭ/ is the short-vowel sound of **i**.*

Instructor: What is the short-vowel sound of **o**?

Point to the **o** card.

Child: */ŏ/ is the short-vowel sound of **o**.*

New

Instructor: Today we are going to learn the letter **u**. **U** is also a vowel. This is the big **U** and the little **u**.

Point to the letters below.

U u

Instructor: I will write the vowel **u** on a card for you. First I will write the big **U** and then I will write the little **u**.

Write **U** and **u** side-by-side on a card (or show the purchased **U u** card).

Instructor: When you see the letter **u** at the beginning or in the middle of a short word, you usually say this sound: /ŭ/. The letter **u** stands for the sound /ŭ/ in ***umbrella***. The sound /ŭ/ is called the short-**u** vowel sound. I will point to the **u** card and say the short-**u** vowel sound five times: /ŭ/, /ŭ/, /ŭ/, /ŭ/, /ŭ/. Now we will say the sound together.

Together: /ŭ/, /ŭ/, /ŭ/, /ŭ/, /ŭ/.

Instructor: I am going to teach you the last verse of the poem "The Five Vowels":

U is the fifth vowel; that is true.
/ŭ/ is the short-vowel sound of **u**.

Instructor: I will say this to you three more times.

Say the verse slowly three times, taking care to emphasize the sound /ŭ/.

Instructor: Now repeat after me: "**U** is the fifth vowel; that is true."

Child: ***U*** *is the fifth vowel; that is true.*

Instructor: /ŭ/ is the short-vowel sound of **u**.

Child: */ŭ/ is the short-vowel sound of* ***u****.*

Instructor: Now let's say both lines together three times.

Together (three times):
U is the fifth vowel; that is true.
/ŭ/ is the short-vowel sound of **u**.

Instructor: Now let's combine the verses you learned the last four lessons with the verse you learned today. Let's say the entire poem together three times.

Together (three times):

A is the first vowel we will say.
/ă/ is the short-vowel sound of **a**.
E is the next vowel, don't you see?
/ĕ/ is the short-vowel sound of **e**.
I is the third vowel that goes by.
/ĭ/ is the short-vowel sound of **i**.
O is the fourth vowel that I know.
/ŏ/ is the short-vowel sound of **o**.
U is the fifth vowel; that is true.
/ŭ/ is the short-vowel sound of **u**.

Instructor: What is the short-vowel sound of **u**?

*Child: /ŭ/ is the short-vowel sound of **u**.*

Game: Short Vowel Pick-Up
Put all the vowel cards on the table. Say one of the short-vowel sounds. The child will then pick up the letter card that he thinks represents that sound. If he picks the right card, he gets the card; if he doesn't, you get the card. Once you have gone through all the vowels, have the child practice the vowel sounds on the cards that you are holding. Then shuffle all the cards and begin the game again.

Follow-Up:
Ask the child to repeat the **u** verse from the poem two more times during the day. If you recorded a tape, record the new verse onto the same tape. Point out the letter **u** to the child whenever you see it (on signs, on food boxes or cans, and in books you read aloud to him). Ask him to recite the verse from this lesson to you.

Lesson 29: Words with the Short-A Vowel Sound
Sight Word: the

You will need the following: *a blank index card and a pen. You will need the magnetic alphabet board if you do the optional activity at the end of the lesson.*

Review

Instructor: Let's review the words you have read the past two lessons. Read these words to me.

Use your finger to uncover letters as the child says each letter sound. Remind the child to sustain his voice and blend the sounds together. Assist the child as necessary to read the words. I suggest placing a sheet of plain, folded paper to cover the line below the one you and the child are reading.

am	an	ad	at
rat	pat	sat	cat
fat	mat	bat	hat

Instructor: Read the following word again as a review.

an

New

Instructor: Now you are going to read a list of words that all start with different letters. These words all contain the letter **a** that stands for the short-**a** vowel sound: /ă/. First I will read each word. Then we will read that same word together. Then you will read that word by yourself.

man	fan	ban	ran
can	van	tan	

Instructor: Now let's read some words that begin with big letters. The first word in a sentence and the names of people always begin with a big letter. First I will read each word. Then we will read that same word together. Then you will read that word by yourself.

Pat	Dan	Fan	Nan

Instructor: The best way to learn to read is to sound out words letter-sound by letter-sound. However, there are a few words that you will need to memorize. You will learn one of those words right now.

Although the rule is that the word ***the*** is pronounced /thuh/ before words beginning with consonants and /thee/ before words beginning with vowels, teach the child to say /thee/ in beginning reading. The child will pick up the standard pronunciations as you read to him and talk to him.

Instructor: The word is ***the***. You do not yet know how to sound out this word, so we will just memorize the word. The word ***the*** is written with a big **T** when it is the first word in a sentence.

The

Instructor: The word ***the*** is written with a little **t** when it is inside a sentence.

the

Instructor: I will write ***The*** and ***the*** on a card for you.

Point to the card. Tell the child the word, and then turn the card over. The child should pick up the card, read the word, and turn the card over again. The child should do this three times. This will be the first card in the stack of sight word cards. Keep this card with your reading materials.

Instructor: Now you are ready to read real sentences. We are going to use the word you just learned, ***the***, in the following story. Each sentence ends with a mark of punctuation. Punctuation marks help make clear the meaning of what is written. The sentences in this story all end with a type of punctuation mark called a *period.* A period is like a stop sign at the end of a sentence. When you see a period, you stop. I will point out the period when you get to the end of each sentence.

The child will begin to read the sentences below. Assist him as necessary. With the exception of the sight word ***the***, cover the words in the following sentences with your finger and reveal the letters one at a time. Continue to use your finger to guide the child's eye movement from left to right until you are absolutely sure he is not reading anything backwards. As the child progresses in his reading, he may use own finger to keep his place. He will stop this practice on his own when he no longer needs the crutch. At any time if the child is having trouble staying on a line, place a folded piece of paper under the line he is reading. Point out the period at the end of each line. Remind the child that the period is like a stop sign—you stop when you see it.

Pat the fat cat.

Nan can pat the fat cat.

Nan can fan the tan cat.

Optional Follow-Up:
Give the child the necessary letters to form the first new word in this lesson. Ask the child to sound out the word as he places the letters that you give him on the magnetic alphabet board. Do this for all of the new words from this lesson. As the child gains confidence in placing letters to make individual words, you may wish to give him letters, one word at a time, to form sentences from the lesson.

Lesson 55: The Digraph SH
The Digraph Blend SHR

You will need the following: *the magnetic alphabet board for the optional activity.*

Do the "Two Review and One New" today.

Instructor: Today we are going to learn about a special letter pair. When you see the letters **s** and **h** side-by-side, you should say /sh/. This is the sound that you would say when you lightly put your finger in front of your lips and whisper, "/Sh/, /sh/, /sh/, don't wake the baby!" Let's say that sentence together.

Together (putting your finger to your lips):
/Sh/, /sh/, /sh/, don't wake the baby!

Instructor: You can hear this /sh/ sound at the beginning of words. We will read a list of words that all begin with the letter pair **sh** which stands for the sound /sh/. First I will read each word to you. Then you will read that same word back to me. Then you will begin the list again and read all of the words by yourself. I will help you if you need it.

Cover each word with your finger. Remember to reveal the **sh** as one letter-sound unit, and then uncover the rest of the letters, letter-sound by letter-sound.

ship	shop	shed	shut	Shem
shall	shack	shell	shelf	

Instructor: Now let's read a sentence about a man at the beach who sells shells and toy ships at his store called the "Shell Shack." This sentence is a real tongue-twister. I will read it slowly to you three times. Then you will read it slowly three times.

Run your finger under the words as you read the sentence aloud. The child should run his finger under the words as he reads the sentence.

Shem shall shelf the ship in the shed and shut the Shell Shack shop.

Once the child can read the sentence and understand its meaning, have him say the sentence as fast as he can. Have fun!

Instructor: Now you will learn to blend the **sh** letter pair with the letter **r**. **Shr** is found in words like ***shrug, shrink, shred***. Let's read some words that contain the blend **shr**. First I will read each word. Then you will repeat that same word back to me. Once we have finished, you will read the entire list by yourself. I will help you if you need it.

Cover each word with your finger. Remember to reveal the **shr** as one letter-sound unit.

shrug	shrink	shrank	shred	shrill
shrimp	shrub	shrunk		

Instructor: Now you will read a story that contains many of the words from the list above.

The crab shrank back in the crack on the rock.
The shrimp swam in the crack.
Smack!
The crab had his shrimp snack in a flash.
Yum!

Optional Follow-Up:
Put **sh** and **shr** on the magnetic alphabet board. Then give the child the additional letters that will make words from this lesson. Help the child pronounce the word as he puts up the letters. He may look at the list from this lesson to help him form the words.

Lesson 75: Long-Vowel Words: CK to KE

You will need the following: *the magnetic alphabet board for the optional activity.*

Instructor: Small, short-vowel words that end in **ck** also have long-vowel partner words. I will read this short-vowel word to you.

back

Instructor: Now I will read the long-vowel partner word.

bake

Instructor: The silent **e** has been added to the end of the word, making the **a** stand for the long-vowel sound: /ā/. Do you notice something else that has changed? The **c** has been dropped! Since **ck** is pronounced /k/, just like **k** is pronounced /k/, the **c** is not needed to correctly pronounce this word. Now let's read a list of words that follow this pattern. First I will read each pair of words. Then you will read each pair back to me. Once we have finished going through the list together, you will go back to the beginning and read the entire list of pairs by yourself. I will help you if you need it.

lack	tack	back	snack	stack
lake	take	bake	snake	stake
sack	shack	Mick	hick	lick
sake	shake	Mike	hike	like

Instructor: Now you will read a story that uses some of the words you just read.

Mack, Mike, and I will go on a trip.
We will live in a shack at the lake.
We will take a hike and spot a grass snake.
Mike will catch the snake and bring it back with us.
The sack will shake.
Will he bake the snake?
Will he make snake cake?
I hope not!
With luck, Mack and I will get a snack of chips and not snake.
I think of the chips and I lick my lips.
I will tell Mike to let the snake go.
I like to camp at the lake with Mack and Mike.

Optional Follow-Up:
Play with the magnetic letter board. The instructor should form the short **ck** word, and then the child reads that word. The child then removes the **c** and adds the silent **e** and reads the long-vowel word. Do this for the words in this lesson.

Section 14

Other Spellings for Short-Vowel Sounds

Lesson 125: The Vowel Pair EA as /ĕ/

Review

Instructor: Let's say the names of the five vowels: **a**, **e**, **i**, **o**, **u**. Say those names with me.

Together: **a**, **e**, **i**, **o**, **u.**

Instructor: Let's say the short sounds of the vowels: /ă/, /ĕ/, /ĭ/, /ŏ/, /ŭ/. Say those sounds with me.

Together: /ă/, /ĕ/, /ĭ/, /ŏ/, /ŭ/.

Instructor: You already know how to read many words with the vowel pair **ea**. In these three words, the vowel pair **ea** stands for the long-**a** vowel sound *(Lesson 87)*. Read these words to me as a review.

great steak break

Instructor: You can also read words in which the vowel pair **ea** stands for the long-**e** vowel sound *(Lesson 90)*. Read these words to me as a review.

meal	pea	beans	leap	scream
flea	please	peach	cream	Bea

Instructor: Now you will read a story that contains the review words you just read.

I sit down to a great meal.
I have steak, peas, and green beans on my plate.
As I lift the spoon to my mouth, I spy a speck with my eye.
"Did that speck just leap?" I ask.
"Eek!" I scream.

A flea is on my pea!
How did I get a flea on my pea?
Could it be that it came off of my dog Bea?
That is so gross!
Take the dog and his fleas out!
May I please have a scoop of peach ice cream to soothe me?

The lesson continues on the following page.

New

Instructor: In this lesson you will read more words that contain the **ea** vowel pair. In the words you are about to read, the **ea** vowel pair stands for the *short*-**e** vowel sound /ĕ/. Let's read this list of words together. First I will read each word. Then you will read each word. Once we have finished going through the list, you will go back to the beginning and read the whole list by yourself.

dead	head	bread	spread	thread
breath	health	wealth	sweat	meant

Instructor: Now you are ready to read a story.

I will join a health club.
I will run two miles.
I will wipe the sweat off my head and neck.
I will jump rope and get out of breath.
I will swim laps in the pool.
I will have a snack of bread and cheese spread for a break.

Optional Follow-Up:
Read the story above to the child and tell him to act it out (for example, do motions for opening the door to the club, running, swimming, etc…). Then have the child read the story to you or to a sibling for that person to act out.

Lesson 173: Sight Words: where, there, were

You will need the following: *three index cards and a pen.*

Remember to do the "Two Review and One New" today.

Review

Instructor: You know how to read words with all the **r**-changed vowel sounds. Let's do the chant of the **r**-changed vowels together. Remember to do the movements, too!

Together: /är/ in ***car***, (steer the car)
/ôr/ in ***door***, (open a door)
/âr/ in ***hair***, (comb your hair)
and /ûr/ in ***stir***. (stir the soup)

New

Instructor: In this lesson you will learn a new word. You will memorize it. I will write this word on a card for you.

there

Say the word to the child and hand him the card. Have the child practice saying the word and pointing to the word on the card.

Instructor: Now you are going to read some knock-knock jokes. When you read the word ***there***, I want you to pick up the card.

If necessary, explain to the child that he must *spell out* the word ***who*** in the last line of the third joke.

Knock! Knock!
Who is there?
Boo.
Boo who?
Do not cry! It is I!

Knock! Knock!
Who is there?
Hatch.
Hatch who?
I did not mean to make you sneeze!

The lesson continues on the following page.

Knock! Knock!
Who is there?
Spell.
Spell who?
W-H-O. That is how you spell who.

Instructor: Now you will learn two more words. I will write these words on cards for you.

where were

Say each word and pass the cards to the child. Ask the child to say the word on each card as he passes it back to you. Add the ***there*** card. Put all three cards face down; shuffle. Ask the child to pick up a card and read it aloud. If he reads the word correctly, he keeps the card. If he reads it incorrectly, put it back on the table face down. Repeat this practice until the child is comfortable with the words. Keep the three cards in the sight word stack (you will also use these same three cards in the next lesson).

Instructor: Now you will read some questions about the places you have been. After you have read the question, tell me your answer.

After the child reads the question, he should answer himself, "I was…"

Where were you last night?

Where were you born?

Where were you when you ate your best meal?

Where were you when you felt glad?

Where were you when you did hard work?

Lesson 224: The Letter Pair QU as /k/

Do the "Two Review and One New" today.

Instructor: You will begin the lesson by reading words to me.

Mus-lim	wor-ship	pier-ces	wrig-gling	crea-tures
Muslim	worship	pierces	wriggling	creatures

Instructor: Now you will read words that come from the French language. In these words, the letters **qu** stand for the sound /k/. First I will read each word, and you will read each word after me. Once we have read all the words, you will read the list yourself.

plaque	clique	mosque	opaque	pic-tur-esque
				picturesque
gro-tesque	et-i-quette	tur-quoise	con-quer	
grotesque	etiquette	turquoise	conquer	

Instructor: In the next words, **qu** still stands for the sound /k/. However, these words also contain a letter **i** that sounds like the long-**e** vowel sound: /ē/. Let's read this list of words together. First I will read each word. Then you will read each word after me. Once we have finished going through the list together, you will go back to the beginning and read the list yourself.

pique	u-nique	mos-qui-to	an-tique	tech-nique
	unique	mosquito	antique	technique

Instructor: Now you will read sentences and a story that use many of the words you just read.

A mosque is a Muslim place of worship.

It is not good etiquette to form a clique of friends.

The water in the picturesque mountain lake appears opaque and turquoise.

Would it pique your interest to know that only female mosquitoes bite?
Male mosquitoes suck on plant juice, but females suck on blood.
I know it sounds grotesque!
The female mosquito has a unique technique of sucking blood.
She pierces your skin with a long hollow tube in her beak.
She sucks blood to help her eggs mature.
These eggs hatch into tiny, wriggling creatures that turn into mosquitoes.

Lesson 230: Exercise Your Reading Muscles (Reading Multi-Syllable Words)

Instructor: In this lesson you will read some very large words. I want you to try to read each group of words on your own. Then you will read those words in a story.

If the child seems to struggle or become discouraged, pronounce the word for him as you run your finger under each syllable. You can always divide this lesson over two days if the child becomes tired or has trouble.

en-cy-clo-pe-di-a encyclopedia	vet-er-i-nar-i-an veterinarian	de-pend-a-bil-i-ty dependability
in-di-vid-u-al-i-ty individuality	au-to-bi-og-ra-phy autobiography	

I read in the encyclopedia about a famous veterinarian.
The veterinarian was known for his dependability and his individuality.
Later I checked out his autobiography from the library.

ar-che-o-log-i-cal archeological	o-ver-pop-u-la-ted overpopulated	un-co-op-er-a-tive uncooperative

The archeological site was overpopulated with uncooperative, curious people.

pa-le-on-tol-o-gist paleontologist	un-i-den-ti-fi-a-ble unidentifiable	en-thu-si-as-ti-cal-ly enthusiastically
Brach-i-o-sau-rus Brachiosaurus	Gi-gan-to-sau-rus Gigantosaurus	

The paleontologist found a cave full of bones that were unidentifiable.
He enthusiastically brought them out to examine.
He hoped the bones were from a Brachiosaurus or a Gigantosaurus.

The lesson continues on the following page.

Pre-reading:
Preparing a Young Child to be a Reader

"Reading readiness" is not something that just happens. You prepare a child for reading by engaging in four elements of reading instruction. You should:

- Have the child frequently hear adult spoken language.
- Read aloud to the child.
- Teach the child to recognize the alphabet letters.
- Teach the child the sounds these letters represent.

Have the child frequently hear adult spoken language

A child first learns to understand language by being talked to and sung to when you feed, bathe, dress, and play with him. This constant, pleasant chatter lays the foundation for his language development. As you go about your daily activities, use adult language to talk to your child about what you are doing. Look for opportunities for your child to hear you *repeat the same things over and over*—nursery rhymes, poetry, songs, simple stories, Bible verses, catechism, etc…. Children love the repetition. At first babies learn just to understand what you are saying, but with continued repetition, they learn to say words. A child who is just beginning to talk hears a word hundreds of times before it becomes part of his active vocabulary. If he hears a variety of words, he is better able to express his thoughts. This is language development at its best. Additional tips are given below:

- When a child speaks to you in incomplete sentences or uses incorrect grammar, repeat what he has just said using correct grammar in a complete sentence. Say this with the vocal inflection of a question. The child will often correct himself and repeat what you have said. For example:
  Child: Train go fast.
  Parent: The train goes fast?
  Child: Yes, the train goes fast.
  Some children will naturally repeat the corrected phrase after you because they want to please and get it right. If the child will not repeat after you, continue to engage in this ear training. Meanwhile, try to discern if you are dealing with an issue of understanding or an issue of disobedience.
- When you are reading aloud to a child, have the child repeat long or unusual words found in stories (such as *rhinoceros*). Repeat them over and over—have fun with it.
- Start a story for the child (example: "One day I was walking down the road and I saw…"). The child finishes the sentence with whatever strikes his imagination. Continue to prompt the child's imagination with phrases like "and then…" "until he saw a…" and "suddenly, a giant…."
- Play games in which the child thinks of rhyming words. In the beginning, you may have to supply the rhymes for the child to repeat. The more you play these games with the child, the better his rhyming skills become. For example:
  1. Say to the child, "I am going on a trip and I am going to take a *hat* and a…" The child supplies a rhyming word for *hat* (example: *cat, bat,* or *rat*).
  2. Say to the child, "Did you ever see a *pig* …." The child makes up an ending that gives an action that rhymes with *pig* (example: "dance a *jig*?" or "try on a *wig*?").

3. Play "Milly-mee, Mally-mee, Moo[1]." To start the game chant with the child: "Milly-mee, mally-mee, moo; a giant cow sat on you. Milly-mee, mally-mee, mus; a giant cow sat on us." Then prompt the child with "Milly-mee, mally-mee, ***mog***; a giant cow sat on a…." The child will supply the rhyming word to ***mog*** (ex. *frog*, *dog*, *hog*, or *log*). Repeat this with other rhyming words, including:
   Milly-mee, mally-mee, ***mug***; a giant cow sat on a (*rug, bug, jug*).
   Milly-mee, mally-mee, ***man***; a giant cow sat on a (*van, fan, man, can*).
   Milly-mee, mally-mee, ***mop***; a giant cow sat on a (*top, mop, shop*).

- Play games in which the child thinks of words that begin with the same sound. At first you may have to coach the child. Walk around the house and find words that start with the same sound (regardless of letter). For example:
  Soap, sink, sofa, cereal, socks.
  Table, toy, truck, tool, television.
  Dish, dog, door, desk, deck, dime.
  Book, basket, ball, bag, bed, box.
- Play games in which the child practices hearing the individual sounds in words. For example, to play "Smush the Sounds," start with the word *pat.* Say the separate sounds of the word *pat*: /p/, /ă/, /t/. Increase the speed at which you say the sounds until you gradually blend the sounds to make the real word. The goal is for the child to guess the word as early as possible. Here are some other words you can use for this game:

sat	bed	fit	fox	gum
cat	red	zip	mop	hug
van	ten	wig	job	nut
can	pet	kid	log	rub
tap	met	lip	sob	cup

Read aloud to the child

Literacy starts *before* formal schooling. Prepare your child for reading instruction by reading *to* him as much as possible. Let the child sit in your lap or snuggle next to you. Start bedtime preparations early so you have time to read before saying good-night. Read on rainy days. Read to a sick child. Read after lunch before rest time. Help your child associate reading with pleasure.

- Read rhymes, especially traditional nursery rhymes. Rhymes help children listen for individual sounds in words. Read books with lots of repetition. In picture books, point to objects as you name them.
- When you begin to read to your child, run your finger under the words as you read. This lets him know that:
  1. We read books right-side up.
  2. We read *printed words* and not just pictures.
  3. We turn pages right to left as we go through a book.
  4. We read sentences from left to right.
- Reading aloud to a child develops his vocabulary. Exposure to language in books is also important because the language is more complex and more formal than in conversation. The child then hears a better-organized sentence and paragraph structure than he hears in conversational dialogue. When you read aloud to a child, the child becomes familiar with words, language patterns, and the structure of stories. He also acquires background knowledge that will aid him when he actually starts to read.
- Make sure your child has a quiet afternoon rest time. Never let the toddler know that giving up the afternoon nap is an option. Even if your child doesn't sleep, the quiet time refreshes him and gives

[1] This exercise is based on the poem "Willoughby Wallaby Woo" by Dennis Lee from *Alligator Pie* (MacMillan Company of Canada, 1974).

you a much-needed uninterrupted time to relax or finish tasks. You should plan to keep this period of the child's day just for rest, looking at books, and eventually reading. This habit of quiet rest for the child is a forerunner of the habit of quiet afternoon reading. Here are some ideas for the child's rest time:

1. Read a few books to the young child in his crib at the beginning of naptime and bedtime. You will find that in order to delay your leaving, he will ask for more. Then leave the books in the crib or bed so that the child may look at the pictures of things about which you have just read.
2. Give the child books in the crib. Start with plastic and cloth, move on to board books, and finally transition to paper books (once you have taught him not to tear pages). Don't worry if you lose a few pages to the toddler who thinks he is a puppy and chews on them!
3. During rest time, let the child listen to classic books on tape. Most public libraries have shelves of books on tape in the children's sections. Children can listen to and enjoy books that are far, far above their vocabulary level. In one year, my three-year-old and five-year-old grandchildren listened to all of Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories* and the original *Jungle Book*, Edith Nesbit's series *The Railway Children,* C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* and *The Trumpet of the Swan*, Frances Hodgson Burnette's *A Little Princess*, the unabridged *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, and the Bible.
4. Get a baby-proof tape recorder. Make your own tapes as you read, sing, talk, tell stories, and recite poems. At times, record your reading to your child along with his comments. He can listen to these tapes during his quiet time or when you are busy.

- Talk with the child about the books you read together. This expands oral vocabulary, background knowledge, and communication skills.

Teach the child to recognize the alphabet letters

Before a child can learn to read, he must learn his letters. Children can learn to name and recognize their letters very early. When you hold up a cookie and the child can say, "cookie," he is ready for you to show him a three-dimensional wooden or plastic **A** and learn its name. Let the child play with each three-dimensional letter, to feel it as well as see it. When he knows "little **a**" you can hold up "big **A**," and then "little **b**" and "big **B**."

Systematically teach the child to recognize and name the big (also called *capital* or *uppercase*) and little (also called *lowercase*) form of each letter. Teach the big and little letters together. Here are some activities that will help your child learn the names and shapes of the letters:

- Frequently sing and then say the alphabet until the child can say the alphabet in order. You can record yourself singing or saying the alphabet song and play it often for your young child.
- Put an alphabet chart (with both big and little letters) where the child can see it.
- Play naming the letters with a wooden alphabet puzzle, saying the letter as the child puts it into place.
- Have the child play with magnetic plastic letters on the refrigerator while you are working in the kitchen.
- Read alphabet books—the same ones over and over to make alphabet sounds second nature. Favorites of my children and grandchildren have been *Dr. Seuss's A B C* and *Curious George Learns the Alphabet,* by H. A. Rey.
- Have the child find certain letters when a lot of letters are laid out. Start with a small group of letters and gradually increase the number until all twenty-six letters are laid out.
- Have the child match big and little three-dimensional letters.
- Have the child practice putting the alphabet in sequence, and naming the letters as he puts them in sequence.

- Help the child trace the letters in corn meal or grits in a cookie sheet with sides. If sand is available outside, draw the letters with a finger or a stick. In the beginning, guide his hand to form the letters.
- Help the child to form letters out of clay. This helps the child see the letters in three dimensions. Many children see letters this way before they can visualize them flat on paper.
- Put letters on 3 x 5 cards (one letter to a card). Show the child each card and have him name the letter. If the child says the right letter name, he gets the card. If he misses it, the card goes on the bottom of the pile. Start with two or three cards, and then work up to the whole alphabet. When the very young child is learning the letters, you should teach them in alphabetical order.
- Put paper letters of the alphabet under a clear plastic tablecloth in the kitchen. When you are working in the kitchen, have your child identify as many letters as he can. Start with a few letters, and add others one at a time.
- Help the child find letters in magazines and advertisements. Clip them out and paste them into a notebook. There should be twenty-six pages in the notebook, one for each letter of the alphabet. Each page will have one letter of the alphabet written at the top—the big and little letters written side-by-side. Write on the cover "My Alphabet Book" and let the child draw or glue pictures on it.
- Make your child aware of letters all around him—at home, at the grocery, on boxes, on signs, and on books and magazines. **M** (M & M's and McDonald's) and **z** (on a pizza box) are the first letters many children learn.
- Play with alphabet blocks.
- Play "Feed the Hungry Animal": Make a "bunny box" (or kitty, or puppy, or lion) that likes to eat letters! Cover a shoebox and its top separately with plain brown or white paper. On the end of the lid, draw eyes and paste on ears. Put the lid back on the box and then draw a nose, whiskers and a mouth large enough to "eat" letters. Cut out the mouth so the child can push letters into the mouth. Print letters on pieces of paper small enough to fit through the mouth of the animal. Put these in a container (bag, envelope, or box). *The game:* When a child first begins to play this game, put only a few letters in the container to insure success. Take out a letter from the container. If the child reads the letter correctly, he gets to "feed" the animal. If he doesn't read it correctly, it goes back into the container with the other letters to be fed later. Once these letters have been mastered, add two or three new letters to the container. The hungry animal box can be used later with words printed on pieces of paper.

Teach the child the sounds these letters represent

The words we speak are made up of *individual speech sounds.* Written words are made up of letters that are symbols for these sounds. Your ultimate goal is for the child to see printed letters and say the sounds they represent. Lessons 1-26 teach this systematically, but it is easier and more enjoyable for the child if he is familiar with this skill before he begins formal lessons. Here are some activities that will help him learn:

- Run your finger under the print as you read and sing nursery rhymes from books.
- When you are out shopping, point out and read the print on products and signs.
- Point to the vowels **a, e, i, o, u** and then teach the child that these letters are called *vowels* and that all other letters are called *consonants*. Practice saying the names of the vowels.
- Chant the *sounds* of the short vowels in order. At first, let him chant with you. When he can do this easily, have the child say them alone. Do this chant daily until he learns the sounds; then review them about once a week thereafter. The sounds of the short vowels are the sounds of:

  a in ***apple***.
  e in ***elephant***.
  i in ***igloo***.
  o in ***octopus***.
  u in ***umbrella***.

- To help children hear the difference between the sounds of the vowels (especially **e** and **i**), demonstrate and exaggerate the movements of the mouth. The mouth is open for all the vowels but the shape of the mouth is different. Let the child look at himself in a mirror as he exaggerates saying the vowels.
- To help the child learn the sounds of consonants, let the child look in the mirror as he practices saying each sound. As you model each consonant sound for the child, show him that:
  1. The consonant sound is produced with your voice (*voiced*) or with just air (*unvoiced*).
  2. The sound or flow of air is stopped by the lips or tongue (against the teeth, roof of the mouth, or throat).
- Lay out three letter tiles (or plastic or paper letters) in random order that spell a three-letter word. Say the word very slowly, letter-sound by letter-sound, (example: /k/, /ă/, /t/), and have the child find each individual sound as you say it. Give him any help he needs. After he can successfully do this activity with three letter tiles, put out a variety of letters, some of which are not in the word you say. If he picks up a letter that is *not* in the word you say, tell him, "You picked up the letter **l**, but that letter is not in this word. Listen again: /k/, /ă/, /t/." When all the letters in the word are laid out in order, have the child run his finger under the letters as you blend the sounds together into the whole word. Use words from the lists in Lessons 27 through 43.
- Review the short sounds of the five vowels before you play this game. Put letters on 3 x 5 cards (one letter to a card). Show the child each card and have him say the sound that letter represents. If the child says the right sound, he gets the card. If he misses it, the card goes on the bottom of the pile. Start with two or three cards, and then work up to the whole alphabet.

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Key to Phonetic Symbols

/ă/ in **a**pple
/ĕ/ in **e**lephant
/ĭ/ in **i**gloo
/ŏ/ in **o**ctopus
/ŭ/ in **u**mbrella
/ā/ in **a**corn
/ē/ in **e**qual
/ī/ in **i**ce
/ō/ in **o**pen
/ū/ in **u**se
/ʃ/ in **oo**ze
/ů/ in b**oo**k
/ô/ in j**aw**
/ou/ in **ou**t, c**ow**
/oi/ in b**oy**, **oi**nk
/är/ in c**ar**
/ôr/ in d**oor**
/âr/ in h**air**
/ûr/ in st**ir**,
/ə/ in **a**bout, bac**o**n, **A**meric**a**

/b/ in **b**at
/d/ in **d**eep
/f/ in **f**un, **ph**one
/g/ in **g**um
/h/ in **h**at
/j/ in **j**ump, **g**em
/k/ in **k**ite, **c**ut
/l/ in **l**ate
/m/ in **m**ove
/n/ in **n**et
/p/ in **p**an
/kw/ in **q**uit
/r/ in **r**ed
/s/ in **s**it
/t/ in **t**ip
/v/ in **v**an
/w/ in **w**et
/ks/ in bo**x**
/y/ in **y**es
/z/ in **z**ip, i**s**

/sh/ in **sh**ip
/th/ in **th**in
/<u>th</u>/ in **th**at
/zh/ in vi**si**on
/ch/ in **ch**oose
/ng/ in ha**ng**
/hw/ in **wh**ale