

*how children learn to*  
**READ**

*by Helen K. Mackintosh*

**Bulletin 1952, No. 7**

---

**FEDERAL SECURITY AGENCY • OSCAR R. EWING, Administrator**  
**Office of Education • EARL JAMES McGRATH, Commissioner**

## FOREWORD

---

**A** LOGICAL FOLLOW-UP to the publication, *The Place of Subjects in the Curriculum*, Office of Education Bulletin 1949, No. 12, is a series of bulletins in brief form. These are designed to discuss in more detail problems of teaching in some of the subject areas; and to analyze situations and illustrate ways in which teachers can help children do a better job of living and working together. Each of these bulletins subscribes to the philosophy of *The Place of Subjects*, but shows more specifically how teaching and learning go on (1) in the fields of reading, arithmetic, written expression, and art; (2) in the area of developing the ability to solve problems; and (3) in organizing the classroom so that children understand their rights as individuals, and the responsibilities that go with these rights. Each discussion is planned to emphasize meaningful, purposeful experiences for children which the teacher can adapt to her situation and her group of children.

This particular bulletin is concerned with how children learn to read. It describes as simply as possible the teacher's part in the reading experiences children have, and the ways parents can help in making the learning-to-read years of the child's life both happy and successful.

Learning to read is not limited to the first grade. During each year a child spends in school, he discovers new ways to use reading for information and for pleasure and as he does so he needs to acquire new and more complex skills. He does not acquire these incidentally but is guided by good teachers who see the importance of reading throughout the lifetime of every individual.

The part of this bulletin that deals with skills in the mechanics of reading is an attempt to explain to parents, especially, why and how methods of teaching beginning reading have changed. Of equal importance to the parent should be the suggestions of ways he can use to determine how well his child is reading.

Teachers and parents may find the point of view developed here one that is suitable for use as a springboard in discussing together the reading program in the individual school. It is there that school and community should evaluate today's reading methods and purposes as objectively as possible.

WAYNE O. REED,  
*Assistant Commissioner, Division of State and Local School Systems.*

GALEN JONES,  
*Director, Instruction, Organization, and Services Branch.*

## CONTENTS

---

	Page
FOREWORD.....	II
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CHILD STARTS TO KINDERGARTEN?.....	1
SUPPOSE A CHILD DOESN'T GO TO KINDERGARTEN?.....	2
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CHILD ENTERS FIRST GRADE?.....	3
WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN WHO ARE SLOW IN "CATCHING ON"?.....	8
WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS IN LEARNING TO READ?.....	9
WHAT ARE THESE BASIC SKILLS IN THE MECHANICS OF READING? .	10
HOW THEN IS A CHILD HELPED TO RECOGNIZE WORDS HE HAS MET BEFORE AND TO TAKE APART THE NEW WORDS THAT HE MEETS FOR THE FIRST TIME?.....	11
WHAT ARE THE LEARNING-TO-READ PROBLEMS OF THE CHILD IN THE INTERMEDIATE GRADES?.....	12
HOW DOES A CHILD LEARN TO READ?.....	16
HOW CAN A PARENT JUDGE WHETHER OR NOT HIS CHILD IS READING UP TO CAPACITY?.....	16

III

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE WASHINGTON : 1952

---

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office  
Washington 25, D. C. . Price 15 cents



*This is our story*

# *How Children Learn To Read*

---

**W**HETHER OR NOT a child learns to read easily and happily depends not only upon the teacher but upon the attitude of the parents toward the child and toward reading. What happens to a child in his preschool years makes a difference in his feelings about reading. Where the child feels secure in being loved by his parents and by other members of the family, and where he has children of his own age to play with who are also interested in books and stories, he is more likely to be socially and emotionally ready for the new experience of school when it comes, and for learning to read.

If his father and mother listen to the stories that he makes up or retells from those he has enjoyed hearing, if he asks questions and his parents give answers that are satisfying, if he is taken on trips and given an opportunity to talk about his experiences, he is increasing his vocabulary as well as becoming a person in his own right.

If the child sees the grown-ups in his home reading books and magazines, and hears them reading aloud, he frequently gets a book or magazine and makes believe that he is reading, too.

If the child has picture books of his own, if his parents read to him, talk to him, play with him, if they tell him stories that he can understand, he will look forward to reading as something exciting.

But if, on the other hand, he has no books except the comics or coloring books; if there are few, if any, books and magazines in his home that his parents use themselves; and if he hears no stories that are just for him, reading may be an unhappy experience that is bewildering, especially when his parents assume that he will be able to read in a book within the first few months of school.

## **WHAT HAPPENS, WHEN A CHILD STARTS TO KINDERGARTEN?**

In the kindergarten the child will be a member of the group which hears the teacher both tell and read stories. He himself or the other children tell stories about themselves, fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters; or he retells stories or poems that have been read or told to him or to the group. Together with the teacher, the boys and girls make a big book of stories which individuals or the group have dictated, and the teacher has written down. The teacher may then read from these just as she would from a book.

What are the advantages of these experiences in telling, listening, rehearsing, and perhaps repeating together for fun a story or poem that has been heard many times? Through all these activities, provided they are pleasant and happy, the child is developing a favorable attitude toward books and reading. He is saying to himself, "Reading is fun. You can find out about things in books." To reinforce this interest, children may have opportunities for dramatic play, as they pretend they are various members of the family and carry on conversations as they play. Such experiences help children to develop a vocabulary around home and family living, although they may be playing just for fun.

On a table in one corner of the kindergarten room, there are attractively arranged picture books that may have a few words in print under each picture. A child may sit at the table, share a book with a friend, and acquire ideas from story-telling pictures as they turn the pages together, or the teacher may show the picture book to the group, and read or tell the story. He begins to learn to handle books carefully so that they do not get dirty or torn. He is helped to realize that he has a responsibility for taking care of books whether they belong to him or to someone else.

It is during this time that each child learns to recognize his own name in writing if he has not done so before. He sees it printed on a tag with a sticker of a butterfly or a bird, or a flower to help him further in identifying his book or his wraps. The teacher writes his name on the big drawing that he makes on newsprint paper at the easel. He hears his name spoken and perhaps the teacher writes it on the board to say that he is to join a group of children who are to clean the guinea pig's cage.

When the children with their teacher take a trip to the grocery store, they stop before crossing a street when the STOP sign tells them. The doors of the grocery store are marked "IN" and "OUT". Each can on the shelf has a label—a picture with the name of the fruit or vegetable it contains. Through this experience children get some familiarity with signs and names.

This kindergarten year in the child's life is one in which he accumulates many experiences as a member of the group, and through them meets new words that he hears, that he may use orally, and that the teacher may write down for the group's big story book.

### SUPPOSE A CHILD DOESN'T GO TO KINDERGARTEN?

Not all children have an opportunity for kindergarten in the communities in which they live. It is important that 5-year-old children not be forced into a first-grade situation with more mature children, where reading is introduced before they are ready. Instead, they should have interesting experiences at home. For example, take Charles, whose story

was broadcast on the radio. Charles was a little past 5. He was fortunate in having a home where his parents were interested in books and reading. Near Halloween time Charles said to his mother, "I have a story I want to tell you."

"All right," said his mother, "let me hear it." So Charles told her a story about Shadow, a little ghost, who started out to frighten children, but on the way he became so frightened himself that he ran home to his mother. Charles' mother said that it was a good story. But Charles himself was not willing to stop with merely telling the story. Instead he mentioned the name of a radio commentator who was in the habit of giving book reviews.

He said, "Mother," I want to write my story down in a book and send it to Mr. M."

"Oh," said his mother, "although it's a good story, I don't believe that Mr. M. will want to see it."

But Charles insisted. So as he dictated the story, his mother wrote it down. Then she copied it on large letter-sized sheets of paper, for Charles wanted it made into a book. Next came a cover, on which the name of the story was written together with the name of the author. Then Charles made some pictures for the story and with his mother's help put the pages together.

When the story was ready to be mailed, Charles remarked, "Mother, I think Mr. M. ought to pay about \$35 for this story."

Not all children will have as much initiative as Charles. Not all children will have mothers who cooperate as well. But as a result of this experience, Charles will have an attitude of interest in books and reading that will make the actual process of learning to read easier, provided that no one unthinkingly puts an end to his interest in telling stories.

#### WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CHILD ENTERS FIRST GRADE?

Although the children who enter the first grade in September may be 6 years old or nearly 6; their differences in other respects may be much wider than the narrow range in their ages. Their intelligence, their ability to use language in speaking, their physical health, their home backgrounds, their experiences in playing and working with other children may vary greatly from child to child.

For these reasons, the teacher recognizes that each child must be treated as an individual; that there are early "starters" and slow "starters" in learning to read. She recognizes that learning to read is not accidental; that she as a teacher must be able to recognize when each child is sufficiently ready to start the reading process from books. She is no magician, and must therefore observe, talk with parents, and possibly use readiness tests to determine when the time is "right."

The good teacher keeps informal records that tell when an individual child asks what certain words say, shows that he is interested in looking at books, reads a story by interpreting what the pictures say, tries to tell stories, and wants to have books that are his own.

But regardless of these records, the teacher herself is probably the most important factor of all. If she is relaxed, if she is patient, if she takes time to learn to know each child as an individual, if she creates a classroom environment which makes a child desire to read, the result in terms of what happens to a boy or girl will be quite different from what would happen if she were another type of person. If she is nervous, if she is concerned about having every child learn to read at the same time, if she is pressured by parents into forcing children to read before they are ready, her attitudes will be reflected in the way children feel and act.

Jersild<sup>1</sup> in his book *Child Development and the Curriculum* defines readiness as "the timeliness of what we wish to teach in the light of the child's ability to take it." The child needs to be "ready" from the standpoint of (1) his language and speech habits; (2) his mental maturity; (3) his physical development—such as vision and motor skills; (4) the breadth and nature of his experiences, especially in relation to his interests in books and reading; and (5) his emotional and social background.

Ruth Strickland<sup>2</sup> says that the average child as he enters first grade has a vocabulary of several thousand words. These may be words that he recognizes when he hears them or words that he himself can use in speaking. They may not all be part of a vocabulary that he understands. Later on he will acquire a reading vocabulary and a writing vocabulary, in addition to the speaking and hearing vocabularies that he first learns. Some parents keep an informal record of the new words which their children use, as they use them. The child who speaks clearly and distinctly has an advantage over another who talks baby talk. The latter will have difficulty in learning to read until he gets rid of his poor speech habits.

From what we know as a result of scientific studies, the typical child is probably more likely to succeed if he is at least 6 years and 3 months of age before he starts to read from books. Others state that the child who is of average mentality may well be 6 years and 6 months. Case histories of children with reading difficulties often show that they were forced into reading at some time between 5 and 6 years of age.

The child's physical development has an important part to play in his success in reading, particularly in regard to his vision and hearing. Scientific studies show that a child will be more likely to succeed in reading if he can detect likenesses and differences in the appearance of words, can get his clues from beginnings and endings and from the length

<sup>1</sup> Jersild, Arthur, and associates. *Child Development and the Curriculum*. p. 31. New York. Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1946. 279 p.

<sup>2</sup> Strickland, Ruth. *The Language Arts in the Elementary School*. p. 58. Boston. D. C. Heath & Company, 1951. 370 p.

and shape of the word. Such ability comes with maturity of the organs of vision. Similarly, the child must be able to distinguish between sounds. He needs to be able to match beginning and ending sounds of words with known key words; to select the one word that is different in a list of four or five; and to identify the written symbol of a letter with its sound in a word. Such abilities are dependent upon the quality of the child's hearing, and upon his ability to observe carefully. The teacher can encourage observation by careful questioning.

The breadth of the child's experience with books, and the attitudes that have been cultivated toward books and reading in his home before he comes to school, have a great deal to do with a child's readiness for reading. The same factors that have been discussed in relation to the kindergarten child apply here. If a child is slow to express interest, parents should stimulate it by means of experiences.

Whether or not the child is socially and emotionally well adjusted makes a difference, too. If he is happy in his group, not too much smaller or larger physically than the other children, is as well cared for as the others, leaves a happy home to go off to school in the morning, and returns to it at the end of the day—these factors also have to be considered as important. If parents do not get along together, if parents are separated, if parents praise some of the children in the family and scold one, he will be emotionally insecure, and the chances are that he will be more likely to have reading difficulties.

If a teacher is concerned only with the mechanics of reading, with a process designed to make it possible for children to pronounce words glibly, rather than to get meaning from a printed page, she will not take account of these other factors that really determine in the long run, how well the child will be able to read for many purposes throughout the remainder of his life.

The good first-grade teacher observes all the evidences of readiness for reading in each child in her group. At the same time she works to broaden the experiences and the interests of all the children. Some of the ways that she uses include sharing toys and games; observing pets or looking at growing things in an aquarium or terrarium; taking trips and excursions; looking at still pictures, slides, and filmstrips; preparing a simple food; painting and drawing; building and constructing with blocks and other materials; using simple tools; hearing poetry, telling stories, singing songs, and responding to rhythm; reading labels and signs; and using picture books in the school library and in the classroom.

Children get acquainted with each other, with the teacher, the principal, the custodian, with their building, with their own room, with the fact that there are names on the door to help you find your way. Some names are long and some are short. You do some guessing and you let the length and shape of the word help you in deciding what it is.

From the child's point of view, there are picture books to look at. There are interesting things to do and see—an aquarium or a pet (rabbit, hen, canary, hamster, guinea pig, duck). Children learn to play games, to sing, to take a walk in the park, to see the policeman on the corner, to visit the firehouse; or they have a party in their room. At the same time that the teacher is using sights, sounds, smells, tasting, touching, and feeling in many different situations, she is helping children to see that they can talk about their experiences and then write about them.

The teacher may write or print a simple summary of two or three sentences on the board as the children talk; for writing, spelling, and written language expression are closely related to the reading process. Perhaps the story is copied on a chart and is read to them the next day, or some day following when a child who has been absent returns to school.

The teacher waits for the children to accumulate a number of such experiences. Then some day a child remarks, "I know what *that* word says," or "I can read what you wrote," or "I told my mother a story and she wrote it down," or "This is the story I wrote" (it may be a mass of scribbles on paper). Children are becoming accustomed to the sounds of words that they hear over and over again and they know something of how the words look. This is the time when the teacher will probably say, "Can you find the words that tell where we went? Who went with us? What we saw in the park?" The answers will come in the form of



Books are fun! Books are exciting!

sentences that the children recognize as they frame them by placing their hands around them, and then reading aloud. When enough of the words and sentences have been identified, an individual child may read the whole story.

There may be children in the group whose readiness is such that they can read their stories aloud with very little help. The teacher may read and reread these stories as children request them. In the early stages of working with such experience stories the material may be copied on a large chart which can be kept permanently for the children's own use.

How fast or how slow the teacher proceeds, depends upon the needs and abilities of the individual children. Ruth Strickland<sup>3</sup> points out that children may look without seeing and see without comprehending unless they have a background of knowledge and experience, and a teacher who can help them use such experience.

The teacher will find situations in which children can read the chart stories to an audience—a mother, the principal, a visitor, other children in the school. The children themselves may make pictures to illustrate such stories, and thus help to clinch meanings. As they work, their speaking vocabulary will keep ahead of their reading vocabulary, and this is as it should be.

When some children have not fewer than a hundred "sight" words, words that they can recognize when they see them in print, by matching them with the actual object or a picture or an action, the teacher will start with this group in a preprimer. Here the child will meet some words that are already familiar to him. The vocabularies of the various preprimers are more alike than different since they are based upon studies that have been made of children's word usage, and the frequency of occurrence of words in preprimers now available. One of the real jobs which the teacher has at this point is to help children make the shift from print or manuscript done by hand to printed words in a book. It is because of the likeness between manuscript writing and printing that many teachers prefer this form of writing to the cursive.

Other children will still be working with experiences and the stories that grow out of them. As other small groups are ready for reading they are introduced to the preprimer, and so the process of forming groups goes on. Such groups are kept flexible so that a child can move from one to another depending upon his own individual progress. There should be no predetermined number of groups. There may be three, or four, or five, depending upon the needs of the children. The number of children in each of such groups will vary, and may be as few as two or three.

As soon as there are three or more groups the teacher has a problem in knowing how to keep every child at work without resorting to "busy

<sup>3</sup> Strickland, Ruth. *Ibid.*

work." However, she can manage if the group is not larger than 20-25 children, if she does some planning with the children, and if she provides things to do that children are able to do by themselves.

For example, one first-grade teacher has a large chart made of oak tag on which are listed 10 or more things a child can do if he finishes reading the story in his reader, or if he has a free choosing time while she is working with a group. The items on the chart are changed from time to time with the children's help. He may read at the library table; he may watch the turtle so that he can help make a story about him; or practice writing his name; or play in the playhouse in one corner of the room where furniture and objects are labeled; or may play with a fist puppet and make it talk; or operate the simple movie-on-a-roll made by last year's first-grade children which has brief titles for each picture. Or he may draw pictures to illustrate a chart story. Some teachers set up centers within the room where each of these activities can be carried on because the materials are there. Signs or labels mark each table so that children know where to look for each activity.

The wise teacher helps children to decide in advance what their choices are going to be so that in the course of a week or more they will have had a variety of experiences. It is the teacher's responsibility, too, to help children judge or evaluate these experiences to see what their learning value was. All of the experiences described can contribute to reading in some way.

Throughout these experiences the teacher will emphasize reading for a purpose, and interpreting the meaning of what is read through making pictures, through dramatic play, and by other means interesting and important to the children themselves.

### WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN WHO ARE SLOW IN CATCHING ON?

If reading seems to be a slow process for some children, the teacher or parent should remember how *he* felt in trying to learn a foreign language, and recall that perhaps he never succeeded in making a good translation although he may have been able to read aloud fluently. Because the teacher knows what children are like, that they have a short attention span, that they need a great deal of practice with easy material, that they need to be successful, that they need to be interested in what they are doing, she will find many ways to give variety to the job of learning to read.

One teacher interested in photography took pictures of the children engaged in various activities. The pictures were then "blown up" to a size of approximately 12 by 15 inches. Each picture was used as a basis

for talking with the children who then dictated their story to the teacher. The picture was made the center of the chart story that every child delighted to reread, since practically no story is more fascinating to either young or old than the story about one's self.

Another teacher may use a large sheet of oak tag or of newsprint paper, or of brown paper that is headed "OUR NEWSPAPER." During the week on this newspaper sheet the teacher prints in manuscript the two- or three-sentence items that individual children dictate to her. The name of each child is attached to his story. Some of these newspapers may be mimeographed or duplicated and sent home to parents, so that they may keep up with what is happening to their children day by day in the classroom. Each child will then have the opportunity to read to Father and Mother what he himself has written.

Given time and being made to feel secure, the child who is a slow "starter" can be just as successful as any other in learning to read provided that he is helped to see that he is making improvement. Such improvement must be real and must be evident to the child himself.

#### WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS IN LEARNING TO READ?

From a preprimer book to other preprimers to first readers are the next steps in the reading process as carried on in the typical classroom in the United States. There are on record in the form of magazine articles,<sup>4</sup> reports by certain individual teachers to show that some groups of children have been taught to read without the use of reading textbooks. Instead, the teacher has used interesting story books. Where parents are willing, and teachers have imagination and good ideas, further experiments may well be carried on to find new and better ways of teaching children to read.

Whether a child gets as far as reading from a primer while he is in first grade, or whether he is reading easily from several first readers by the end of the year is a highly individual matter. Some children may not be ready for first readers before the second grade. Neither they, nor their teachers, nor the parents should be critical of a child who is a slow starter, if he has made his best effort. Oftentimes the difficulty is with the adults rather than the child. The typical child should make a spurt in growth in the second year or third year of school so that he has acquired the basic skills needed in getting thought from the printed page by the time he is 9 years old.

In the typical school, teachers are helping children individually and

<sup>4</sup> Harris, Melva. *Beginning Reading Without Readers*. *Childhood Education*, 26: 164-167, December, 1949.

in groups to gain skill in reading silently and orally for meaning. No matter how well a child can pronounce words, he has not learned to read unless he can talk intelligently about what he has read. To summarize the story by retelling is not enough. By means of guiding questions such as, "Read far enough to tell who stole the box, or where Tom was going, or what was in the basket; or read the words that tell what Bill's dog was like." The teacher helps children to think, to interpret, and to give reasons for their answers. In order to be able to do these jobs, children must have skill in the mechanics of reading.

### WHAT ARE THESE BASIC SKILLS IN THE MECHANICS OF READING?

In order to be a good reader a child who grows up in the United States: (1) Needs to learn to read from left to right; (2) needs to train his eyes so that they move easily back from the end of one line to the beginning of the next; (3) needs to read silently without moving his lips; (4) needs to see words in thought groups of two, three, four, or five rather than singly; (5) needs to recognize familiar words; and (6) needs to have a method for attacking new words.

Since the techniques which the teacher uses to help the child meet the first four needs are somewhat technical and are discussed in textbooks or in articles on reading, they are not analyzed here. But because the skills which the child needs to have—(1) in recognizing words that should be familiar, and (2) in attacking new words—are so widely discussed and often misunderstood, an attempt is made to examine them carefully.

To many mothers and fathers and grandparents the answer to the problems involved in teaching a child to read can be answered by the one word, PHONICS. Phonics is defined as a system by means of which a child learns sets of phonograms—word endings by "families" such as *at* in the words *cat, fat, mat, rat*; word beginnings and vowel sounds so that he can apply them to the words he encounters in reading. Such a system presupposes that a child learns his letters first, next puts them together to form words, and lastly hitches the words together in order to make sentences and paragraphs. If such a method really worked, good teachers would be using it today.

As a matter of fact, too much attention to single letters, to the mechanics of word formation, to the sounds of letters hinders rather than helps a child in the long run if the teacher's purpose is to help him get meaning from the printed page. Such attention to details slows down the act of reading and makes the child so conscious of mechanics that he fails to think of what the words are trying to tell him. The teacher sees to it that there is a proper balance between mechanics and meaning.

### HOW THEN IS A CHILD HELPED TO RECOGNIZE WORDS HE HAS MET BEFORE AND TO TAKE APART THE NEW WORDS THAT HE MEETS FOR THE FIRST TIME?

Before he begins to read from books he has acquired a vocabulary of not fewer than one hundred sight words, words that have been developed through real experiences and that he recognizes when he sees them. He is taught to look carefully at the way the word begins, and the way it ends, as, for example, in the word "tell." Many of the words he learns first are one-syllable words. He therefore looks at the vowel that comes between the beginning and the end of the word. However, he is encouraged to do this without "sounding out" the letters. If he hesitates, the teacher may say, "How does the word begin? With what letter? Can you find a word on the chart we have made that begins like this one? Say that word. (In this case it is the word 'take'.) Now try the one you are working on." If this help is not enough, she may ask the child to look at the last letter or letters in the word, and if necessary to get help from a key word on the chart. (In this case it is the word "bell".)

Such a chart may be made on a sheet of heavy paper with letters arranged in alphabetical order. After each letter, but filled in only as children actually meet the words and work with them may be four or five key words useful to the child in identifying new words. Teachers may refer to such a method of working and to the use of such a chart as functional phonics—phonics which is developed and used as needed in relation to the words that actually occur in the child's reading. Moreover, this chart will help children to know the letters of the alphabet certainly by the end of the first grade.

But the good teacher will not depend upon functional phonics alone, nor will she put it first in her list of helps for the child. First of all she tries to choose material in which the child will meet only a few unfamiliar words. She will encourage the child to look through the whole sentence in which a difficult word occurs, to try to get the meaning from the context; that is, in relation to the words that he does know. She will also encourage the child who has difficulty to look at the pictures as a way of learning what the story is about. And she will certainly help the child to make a best guess as to what the word is from its configuration or length + beginning + ending + appearance of letters above and below the line, as *t*, *d*, *b*, or *f*, *g*, *y*. Or she may tell the child the word and then have him place it in a list for further study.

The big problem for both child and teacher is to relate sound to printed symbols and to meaning. The teacher may play a game with children in which she pronounces very distinctly a series of words such as bell, tell, sell, wall, fell, well, and asks children to raise their hands as soon as they hear a word that doesn't belong. The list of words may then be written down so that children can see them as well as hear them. The job is made

easy or more difficult, if the words are ones they know or words they have not met before.

As children meet words of more than one syllable in grades two and three, the teacher helps them to recognize syllables using a simple rule such as, "Every syllable must contain a vowel, or a letter that stands for a vowel. If two consonants (letters other than vowels) come together, one goes with the first syllable, the other with the second." Children are given practice with words that have caused them difficulty, by marking the syllables. This is best done not by rewriting and leaving a space between, or by drawing a vertical line between syllables, but rather by drawing a line beneath each syllable so as not to slow up the eyes in taking in the word. Prefixes, suffixes, double vowels all need special attention, too.

The fact that reading skills have been discussed in detail does not mean that the teacher should attempt to teach them by a drill method. Children should be encouraged to read in a situation in which all the factors are as nearly right as they can be made. If children meet with difficulties, then the teacher must use a variety of methods to help each one solve his own problems, because reading is a highly individual matter. Once the suitable method is found, the child needs enough practice so that the skill is mastered.

Every teacher has a major responsibility in seeing to it that a child's first experience with reading is so satisfying that difficulties are prevented from ever developing. If a child can be successful, especially in the early stages of reading, he is less likely to need remedial help later on. For this reason it is important to see that he reads a great deal of familiar material, but with new purposes set up for each reading. It is equally important that he be prepared for each new step before he attempts it. Children who do not respond to ordinary methods and who have reached these school years without having acquired the basic skills, may need a more dramatic approach to learning. Experiments with the typewriter have shown that children may have more eagerness for reading if the stories they dictate are typed, and if they have the use of the typewriter. Use of a printing outfit for recording their stories may also stimulate interest. Special care should be given to seating children with handicaps of vision or hearing that cannot be remedied, so that they may have every advantage in seeing and hearing.

### WHAT ARE THE LEARNING-TO-READ PROBLEMS OF THE CHILD IN THE INTERMEDIATE GRADES?

Teachers may assume that a child who enters fourth grade has acquired the basic reading skills needed to comprehend or to get thought from the printed page. But it is almost bound to be true that there will be weak children, ones who need encouragement and help, who are reading on a

second- or third-grade level. The teacher must begin with them where they are with easy material, and must offer the same type of help as the primary teacher gives.

Since the intermediate grades in school have been labeled "the period of wide reading," the teacher needs to use the school library, or if there is none, to provide in the classroom a great variety of books of all types which children are encouraged and stimulated to read. Children aged 9 to 11 need to develop skill in selecting good books independently and in reading for themselves. The teacher with ingenuity will find many ways to help children locate, select, read, evaluate, and share with others their best-liked books. In this situation children will be applying some of the new skills to be learned during these years.

Important among these new skills are: (1) The ability to locate information involving a knowledge of sources; (2) the ability to select material and evaluate it in terms of a purpose; (3) the ability to organize material around a topic or a problem; and (4) the ability to recall. Children may have made some use of these skills in simple form in primary grades.

This is the time when children are using more and more books as sources of information for activities and projects. The teacher may make a simple beginning with a new group of fourth-grade children who are looking at a new set of readers for the first time. She suggests that they look at the title, the author, the name of the artist who illustrated the book, at the publisher, and at the year when the book was published. As children locate each of these items there is discussion. Perhaps they turn to some of the pictures when they talk about the illustrator.

Next they turn to the table of contents—what does contents mean? Contents of a desk, contents of a pocket—what it contains. They see that the stories are divided into sections, each with a heading. They count the headings, and they read them aloud, suggesting what they think the stories may be like. They locate the title of the first story and then see who can first find the page on which it begins. The next step is to see a sectional heading written on the board and use it to locate a story which the teacher names. Just for fun, the teacher says, perhaps the children would like to try to locate a story when they do not know the title, but do know what the story is about—a brave girl. Several children find the title—"When Hannah Saved the Day."

Next they look at the index. What is an index? Index means "to point out." The words are arranged in alphabetical order as in a dictionary or a telephone directory. Some meanings are given, together with the pages on which the words are found. Discussion brings out the fact that not all words can be listed here, just the most important ones. Again the children turn to the first story, each one chooses a word and checks to see whether it is in the index. Finally, the children take a

simple check test to see whether they know and can use the various parts of a book.

The skills developed in using a reading book are similar to those used in a geography, science, health, history, or other textbook, or in an encyclopedia. Some of the skills are more complex (such as topical and marginal guides and cross references), but the teacher would use a similar technique in helping children to understand these skills, use them, judge their success, practice skills that need improvement, and use them again in situations related to classroom activities.

When children are reading to find material that will help in answering a question or solving a problem, they may locate information in a number of places in the same book, or in different books. The child must ask himself, "Which part of this material answers my question? Does it entirely answer the question? Is it a good answer? If there are figures involved, do they come from a book that was published recently? What do I decide when books do not agree? What shall I report back to the class?" Each of these questions calls for discussion, and perhaps requires that skills be analyzed and practiced in connection with a specific problem.

At the same time as he selects and evaluates, the child is recording in some way the ideas that he wants to use in reporting to his group or his class. Some children copy out whole sentences and read them.



Reading to find out

But such practice does not involve interpretation and does not help the child to improve his oral language expression. Children need help in taking notes in running form or simple outline form for purposes of reporting. They may need to have experience with outlining as a skill, making a composite outline from familiar material; filling in the topics for the Roman numerals in an outline, for which the subpoints are given (again using familiar material); or, in reverse, filling in items for letters and numbered subpoints when the Roman numeral items are given; or filling in all the points in a skeleton outline.

Organizing ability calls for skill in deciding what are the important points? The less important points? What question does this paragraph answer? How can I summarize this paragraph in one sentence? Here again practice is needed, but in relation to a problem on which children are working. Some children in upper grades have taken as their responsibility the organizing of current materials in children's newspapers and in current magazines in the form of a file available to the whole school. Such a job requires reading with comprehension, selecting, evaluating, clipping, pasting, classifying, labeling, and alphabetizing. This work goes on throughout the school year, and may be placed in a regular file or one made from an orange crate. Or children may develop an alphabetized card file of new words related to a unit of experience. Before entering a word, the child checks to see that it is not already included. When he does list it, he also copies the sentence from which it came and perhaps makes some comment of his own. Such a file gives children an idea of the nature and extent of new words they have learned. An ingenious teacher will find ways to help children organize the cards as a game so that they will have continuing use.

The ability to recall information or to remember a poem does not come about incidentally. One needs to have some scheme or plan for using key words, or remembering the source, or making a time line chart for historical events, or a pictorial chart, or planning other means of recording facts.

Memorization of poetry should not be forced. It grows out of a liking for poetry, out of hearing a poem many times in different situations, out of reading one's favorite poems to one's classmates, out of participating in choral speaking, or out of reading a poem to make a tape recording that can be played back. Poems so learned have been learned by the "whole" method and the child is much more likely to remember them for that reason. In the course of the elementary years the child can build up a treasury of many poems that he knows if memorizing has not been made a matter of drudgery.

The elementary-school child who moves on to upper grades or to junior high school takes with him those skills that he has acquired, but will develop new ones suited to the new situations in which he will be reading.

**HOW DOES A CHILD LEARN TO READ?**

The child learns to read by a series of related steps that are geared to his needs and interests. The teacher creates a classroom environment which interests him in reading, and encourages him to keep on once he has started. There are many attractive books that are ready for use: there are interesting purposes for which reading may be done: there are exciting ways of sharing and recording one's reading. If a child encounters difficulties, it is not a reflection on him or his parents. There are ways to help him so that he and his teacher can work out the problem together. There is no denying that reading is a complicated process, but if teacher, pupil, and parents have some common understandings about it, there are few children who cannot learn to read.

**HOW CAN A PARENT JUDGE WHETHER OR NOT HIS CHILD IS READING UP TO CAPACITY?**

Such judgment cannot be made on the basis of whether or not the child can read the book that grandpa gave him for Christmas, or whether or not he knows the alphabet. There are a few simple means which the parent can use to get some idea of how well the boy or girl can read. Can Sue reread aloud at home a story that she first prepared and read at school? Can she read the child's newspaper for which she subscribes at school? Can she read and understand directions for setting up a cardboard playhouse for her dolls? Can she read and use a simple recipe from a child's cookbook for the making of applesauce? Can she read street signs? Does she have a library card and does she bring home books? Does she reread the books that belong to her? Can she find the name and telephone number of a relative in the phone book? These skills range from the simple to the more complex. But these and many others are the kinds of activities that a child will normally carry on at some time during the elementary-school period.

Parents should make an opportunity to visit in the child's classroom. They can see there the kinds of reading experiences he is having, the kinds of methods that are used, and the wide range of purposes for which children read today. These purposes are not limited to the covers of one book at a time, but extend throughout the school day to many situations.

It is important, too, to talk with the child's teacher in order to learn what things a parent can do at home that will help rather than hinder a child's reading progress. The school, the teacher, the parents, and the child himself are all equally interested in having him learn to read comfortably and successfully.

\*     \*     \*

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Public Schools  
of Grand Rapids, Mich., and of Montgomery County,  
Md., for the pictures used in this bulletin.

