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# Reading: A Preprimer for Parents

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THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA

READING: A PREPRIMER FOR PARENTS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

Much recent attention has been focused on the teaching of "basic skills" in our public school systems. This emphasis, particularly in the area of reading, has been created by the publishing of test score data in newspapers, the implementing of literacy tests in the schools, and popular accounts which suggest that students are deficient in the areas of reading and writing. As a result of the general public's increased awareness and concern, many parents want to become more actively involved in their children's learning so as to help their children achieve a higher level of competence in these skills than at present.

Teachers are often asked by parents, "How can I help my child in reading?" Many parents want to help their children, but they generally say they need guidance. Many teachers would like assistance in helping parents with this crucial area of learning, but they are unsure of just how to answer this question for parents. They ask, "Do parents really have enough time to make a difference?" "What facets of the reading program are suitable for at-home learning?"

The purpose of this project is to plan a booklet for parents which will provide them with some background information on the reading process and methods and approaches to reading instruction, along with some specific suggestions of ways they

can help their children learn to read. Also included is a teacher's supplement for directions and suggested implementation. The booklet is designed for parents of students in the primary grades who are beginning readers. It is intended to be used in conjunction with a parent-teacher conference or a small group meeting of parents and teacher. It is hoped that the meeting would provide for clarification of any questions, serve as a motivator to parents, and allow them to exchange ideas and suggestions for utilizing this booklet. More personal situations concerning students would be discussed at follow-up parent-teacher conferences.

It is often difficult for the teacher to devote adequate individual attention to each and every child in the classroom. Parents, with their own information concerning the child, can help fill this gap. The home learning environment with parent as teacher is the scene of the very first acts of learning. It is here where the child learns to walk, to express his thoughts and feelings, to communicate with others, and to listen. On the basis of this earlier learning, one could suggest that children could also develop skill in learning how to read while at home.

In many ways, one of the most important aspects of a child's education, his attitudes and values on learning, takes place in the home. He learns that work is honorable or finds it unappealing. He learns to appreciate good books or develops a dislike for them. He learns to use his time wisely, or to squander it on immediate pleasures. He acquires either sloppy

or organized methods which are often modeled after those in the home. When he comes to school he will have established many of the qualities which will contribute to his success or failure in the classroom.

Due to this influence, it seems crucial that the teacher work in partnership with parents for effective learning. If parents know what is expected of their child, and have been given some background information concerning how to work with them, then they can offer more constructive help and can follow-through with the teacher's specific suggestions.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Basic Skills:** Those academic skills traditionally thought to be of prime importance in public schools- reading, writing, and math.

**Booklet:** A pamphlet

**Parent Involvement:** The interaction and inclusion of parents in the education of their children which results in cooperative home-school relationships for the benefit of children. Often includes frequent communication between parent and teacher with action by parents guided by the teacher on matters pertaining to the child's learning.

**Reading Process:** The system used by the reader to construct meaning from language represented by letters which are systematically arranged.

**Sight Words:** Words recognized as a whole rather than through the analysis of their parts. In most cases, they are frequently used words and many are not easily "sounded out."

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parent involvement has received much support in current research. According to Lopate et al. in their review of literature pertaining to parental involvement and community participation:

Educational research indicates that when parents of school children are involved in the process of education, their children are likely to achieve better. This heightened achievement may be due to the lessening of distance between the goals of the school and goals of the home and to the positive changes in teachers' attitudes resulting from the greater sense of accountability when parents of their students are visible in the schools. The child may also achieve better because he has an increased sense of control over his own destiny when he sees his parents actively engaged in decision making in the school. <sup>1</sup>

There are similar trends favoring parental involvement in the areas of special education, in speech pathology, and in mental retardation. While some involvement has been in the form of teacher-parent counseling, there have also been home-school interactions. Parents have also been successfully involved in remedial instruction of their learning disabled children.

If parents have been successfully involved in these special programs, one could assume that parents can and should be utilized as a valuable resource for the regular classroom

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<sup>1</sup>Edward J. Kelly, Parent-Teacher Interaction: A Special Educational Perspective (Seattle: Bernie Straub Pub. Co., Inc., 1974), p. 16.



teacher. With the knowledge that the interest and support of a child's parents can affect both his attitude and achievement, schools should begin to tap this vast resource.

Parent involvement in reading can be most effective if parents are knowledgeable of the reading process and the reading setting in the classroom. For this reason, literature pertaining to the reading process and background on reading methods and approaches has been examined.

Examination of the literature on the reading process revealed that experts have differing explanation concerning what reading is and how it happens. E.A. Betts views reading "as a language process rather than a subject; a thinking process; a social process that relates the reader to his environment."<sup>2</sup> E.W. Dolch views reading as "imagining, thinking, and feeling about ideas and thought by perception of printed words."<sup>3</sup> Miles V. Zintz relates that reading is the ability to anticipate meaning in lines of print so that the reader is not concerned with the mechanical details but with grasping ideas from groups of words that convey meaning. Kenneth Goodman explains a psycholinguistic view of the reading process. The entire process can be best understood when "consideration is given to the devices within language that convey meaning and the ways readers interpret and react to these devices."<sup>4</sup> He goes on to

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<sup>2</sup>Council for Basic Education, Phonics in Beginning Reading: A Guide for Teachers and Parents (Washington, D.C.:ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 137 768, 1972), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.7.

<sup>4</sup>Kenneth S. Goodman, Robert Meredith, and E. Brooks Smith, Language and Thinking in School, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970), p. 269.

say that to obtain meaning there are three kinds of cue systems in operation, 1) cue systems within words 2) cue systems in the flow of language and 3) cue systems within the reader. William S. Gray provides a fairly simple four-step model of the reading process:

1. Perception- identifying, decoding words
2. Comprehension- making words into useful ideas in context
3. Reaction- the reader's feelings about what the author said
4. Integration- assimilating ideas into one's own experience

While interpretations vary somewhat concerning how a reader obtains meaning, in most cases experts are in agreement that reading is not reading without comprehension.

A review of the literature on approaches and methods of teaching reading reveals that while reading instruction began with the invention of characters and written symbols, and in America with the use of hornbooks and primers, it is within this century that experts believe that an abundance of fundamental changes in reading practices occurred. Nila Banton Smith states, "This half-century stands out as a truly golden period in the progress of reading instruction. More innovations have been effected in reading during the last fifty years than in the entire three hundred years antedating this period of American history."<sup>5</sup> A brief review of major innovations in reading follows with special emphasis on methods and approaches.

The period of 1910-1920 marked the onset of scientific investigation in reading with Thorndike's handwriting scale and

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<sup>5</sup>Nila Banton Smith, "What Have We Accomplished in Reading-A Review of the Past Fifty Years," in Readings on Reading Instruction, ed. by Albert Harris (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1963), p. 5.

was followed by scales and tests including The Gray Standardized Oral Reading Paragraphs in 1915. During this period research showed superiority of silent reading over oral reading. The specific aim of reading instruction was to teach efficient silent reading to help individuals meet the practical needs of life. The graded readers, which appeared much earlier on the American scene (mid 1800's) followed this trend by emphasizing utilitarian reading.

The 1920's-1930 was notable not only in the increase of research studies, but also their contents. Studies for the first time appeared on reading readiness and individual differences in learning were also noted. In beginning reading, experience charts first came into use. The idea of writing charts based on children's experiences and the practice of introducing children to beginning reading through its use was advocated. This practice, however, was not accepted by most until much later.

The 1930's- 1940 was a period where many ideas previously initiated were extended and applied. Unique to this period was the "Activity Program" where a child had some freedom in following his interests. In reading, pupils had access to a considerable number of books that dealt with the topic of the "Unit of Work." Many charts and school-made booklets were used.

Reading in the 1940's- 1950 was affected by the war due to results which showed that many young men couldn't read well enough to follow simple printed instructions. Reading in content areas and its relationship among all of the language

arts received attention. Also growing during this time was the concept that reading doesn't develop in a vacuum but is part of the child's development and is affected by all aspects of child growth.

The period between 1950-1960 was one in which interest in reading became widespread. It is also marked by harsh criticism by laymen on reading instruction. While several studies of Then and Now were made the results showed that reading was being taught just as well at that time if not better than in preceding years. An innovation of this period was a plan known as individualized instruction. This was different from the individualized instruction of the twenties as in the earlier plan emphasis was placed on the subject matter, not the students' needs. Individualized instruction during the sixties and in its present form is child-psychology oriented utilizing W.C. Olson's theory of self-seeking, self-selection, and self-pacing.

Examining reading instruction at present there seems to be further concern and awareness by the public. Reading readiness, a concern which peaked in the thirties has returned as a concern labeled early childhood. As the public becomes increasingly involved in decision-making concerning reading, there appears to be a return to more structured methods and increased emphasis on standardizing materials and even methods in the classroom. Parent involvement could be viewed as an outgrowth of the concept that schools belong not to educators, but to the public who support them as taxpayers and to parents who want the best education possible for their children.

Although the purpose of this project is ultimately the improvement of children's reading, it is aimed primarily at educating parents as to how they can help their children in this area. As a result, in planning such an undertaking, it is critical that adult learning be given some consideration.

Recent studies of ways that adults learn have revealed that:

1. Adults will learn only what they feel a need to learn.
2. Adults learn by doing (experience).
3. Adult learning focuses on posing realistic problems to be solved.
4. Adults learn best in an informal environment.
5. A variety of teaching methods should be employed.
6. Adults should be given the opportunity to have input into the design for their own training.<sup>6</sup>

With this information on adult learning in mind, it can be said that adults need to see that their learning is useful and that it meets their needs. Parents who are dealt with following these guidelines form the basis of successful learning, which can, in turn, more easily result in improved reading by their children.

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<sup>6</sup>Gary B. Wilson, Parents and Teachers (Humanistic Educational Techniques to Facilitate Communication Between Parents and Staff of Educational Programs), (Atlanta: Humanics Press, 1974), p. 3.

## PROCEDURES

Preceding the planning of any form of parent education, the question, "What do parents need to know?" should be asked. In determining the needs of parents in a reading program with parent involvement, decisions were made on the basis of guidelines as presented in professional literature. Robert Wilson and Donald Pfau report that "in a survey sent to parents to assess the role parents play in helping their children read, nearly 100% of the parents questioned offered help to their child when he requested it. Nearly all worked in the development of word attack skills, comprehension skills, and building interest in reading."<sup>7</sup> The authors go further to say that "for teaching success to be achieved in these areas, a relatively sophisticated understanding of the reading process is typically required."<sup>8</sup> Since many parents are already involved in helping their children read, it has been assumed here that parents not only need to have background information on reading, but also they need to feel confident that their help can be beneficial to the child. For this reason a review of ways they have already participated in "educating" their children was included in the booklet. Furthermore, teacher observation has shown that ques-

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<sup>7</sup>Donald Pfau and Robert Wilson, "Parents Can Help," Reading Teacher (May 1968): 759

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p.759

tions on reading, its methods, and possible involvement by parents have been frequent and would warrant explanation of the type planned in this project. While the goal of this project was to answer the question for parents, "How can I help my child in reading?", objectives of the booklet were based on the needs of parents as determined above. As a result, specific objectives were categorized into three parts- those pertaining to the background information on reading, objectives concerning assessment of parents role in learning, and finally specific suggestions on reading at home with a means of continued communication. Frank Freshour states that specific suggestions to parents along with teachers' support to them for helping their children develop reading skills is essential.<sup>9</sup>

On the basis of this information regarding the needs and interests of parents, it has been assumed here that this booklet could prove useful for parents of Clay County children who want to become involved with helping their children read.

Discussion here shall relate methods used in the selection of content for the booklet, and the selection of format.

After having acquired background information on reading and current methods in teaching reading, consideration was given as to which methods should be presented to parents. It was decided that parents needed to be aware of methods that are currently used throughout the county and also ones which are used on even a larger scale.

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<sup>9</sup>Frank Freshour, "Beginning Reading: Parents Can Help," Reading Teacher (March 1972): 515.

One long-standing approach, basal reading, is certainly in popular use today as evidenced by the state re-adoption of a basal reading series and emphasis at the county level of basal reading records. Additional reading methods for explanation to parents were selected by examination of other programs which have attempted to educate parents concerning reading. A San Diego County study on the effectiveness of reading approaches selected the basal reader, individualized, and language-experience approaches for their examination.<sup>10</sup> For these reasons the three methods mentioned above were selected for explanation to parents.

Another concern, the quality of the parent-child interaction was examined. Literature, as previously reviewed, on the home environment and the parent-child learning team, revealed that there were definite guidelines which should be followed by parents in a teaching situation. Also as suggested by Robert Wilson and Donald Pfau "educators should help parents discover for themselves whether or not they are well suited to work with their child. For parents unable to establish this rapport- they can be guided to other types of cooperative effort."<sup>11</sup> Based on this information, a questionnaire was compiled which represented pertinent behaviors and attitudes for parents to consider before working in a teaching situation with their child.

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<sup>10</sup>Roach Van Allen, "More Ways Than One," in Readings on Reading Instruction, ed. by Albert Harris (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1963), p. 97.

<sup>11</sup>Donald Pfau and Robert Wilson, "Parents Can Help," Reading Teacher (May 1968) : 760.



After decisions were made concerning what parents needed to know about helping their children read, the question arose, "How should one present this material to parents?" Research on adult learning mentioned in the review of the literature, provided guidelines which needed to be considered in the selection of a format for the booklet developed. It was decided that an informal manner using a variety of learning activities needed to be included. A small group meeting with active involvement, such as the initial reading activity, discussions, and the questionnaire would create interest and motivation. Yet, the booklet format would provide a "mental set" for the meeting and would also be a handy reference for further study. Adult input, an essential ingredient in adult learning was included in both the small group meeting, at subsequent parent-teacher conferences, and in the monthly correspondence in the form of a letter to parents about reading.

The booklet followed the objectives as previously determined as it consists of three sections, each corresponding to one of the following questions:

1. What is reading?
2. What is the parental role in learning to read?
3. What are some suggestions for parent-child involvement in reading?

For the reasons discussed here, the booklet format was considered one way in which effective adult learning could occur.

Although no formal pilot test of this project has been given, the parent booklet and teacher's supplement have been informally evaluated. It was decided that the teacher's supple-

should be given to a beginning teacher who would evaluate it for clarity of purpose, content, and implementation. The parent booklet was examined by several parents whose children are in the primary grades. The evaluation form in the parent booklet was used as a guideline.

Results from parents have been quite positive. Evaluation forms have generally shown that parents found the booklet to be helpful in explaining what reading is and how they fit into the process of their child learning to read. Strengths of the booklet, as stated by parents were varied, but many found the initial reading experience to be quite enlightening. Comments on the questionnaire from mothers were favorable, and one mother, who has four older children, felt that responses of parents would certainly vary according to the age, maturity, and amount of responsibilities of the parent.

Feedback on the parent booklet and teacher's supplement from teachers showed that teachers found it to be easy to read, to follow implementation guidelines, and felt that it addressed a concern common to many teachers. One teacher suggestion was to offer a variety of methods to use the booklet, i.e. several parent-teacher sessions instead of one. This could be easily done and is one way the teacher can use the materials to meet the needs of her parents and their children.

The data to date is certainly incomplete, and conclusions drawn certainly tentative. To be sure, the materials need to be used, evaluated more formally by the parents in the setting for which they were intended. Only through the actual implementation can alterations for improvement be made.

## PARENT BOOKLET

The parent booklet developed in this project, "Reading: A Preprimer for Parents" is presented on the following pages.

READING: A PREPRIMER FOR PARENTS

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## WHAT IS READING?

### Initial Reading Experience

Learning to read is not an easy task. One way for you to understand what it is like to learn to read is to put you in the place of a beginning reader.

The following story is written at the preprimer level. It is designed to demonstrate what reading strange symbols is like to the reader unfamiliar with them. It contains thirty-seven words, some of which are repeated up to seven times. Most of the words are frequently used "sight" words, so-called because they are used so often and many times are not easily "sounded out" that the reader comes to recognize them "by sight." A picture appears on each page, as in most preprimers. As a result, then, this material could be considered "easy" reading!

Although the words are not difficult, you may find the preprimer difficult to read because a new alphabet is used. These new symbols represent the letters and corresponding sounds of the alphabet.

Go ahead now and read the story using any means you like. Step into the shoes of the beginning reader!

a - a

n - n

b - b

o - o

c - c

p - p

d - d

q - q

e - e

r - r

f - f

s - s

g - g

t - t

h - h

u - u

i - i

v - v

j - j

w - w

k - k

x - x

l - l

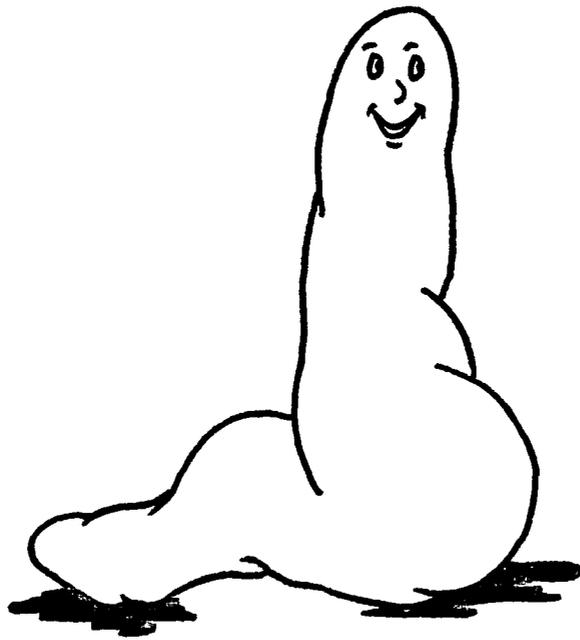
y - y

m - m

z - z

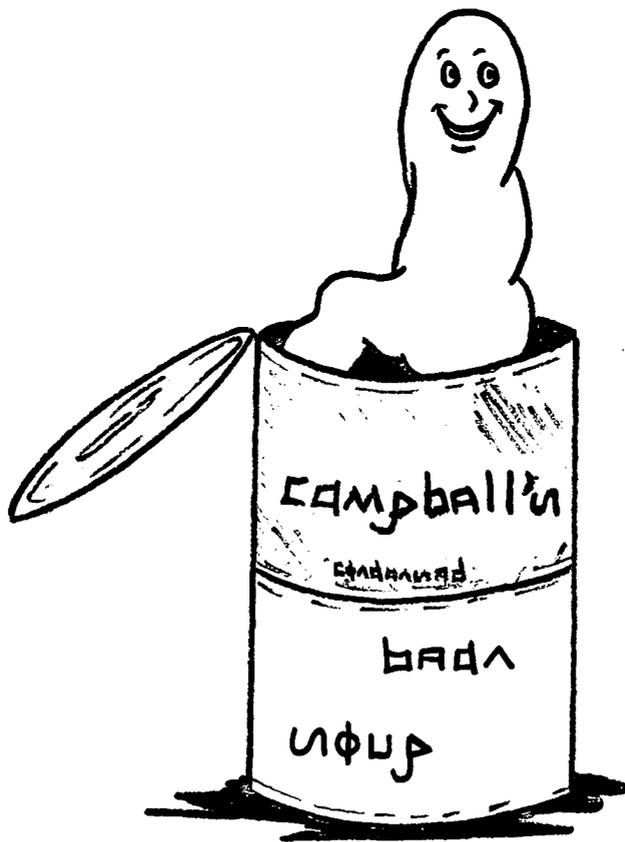


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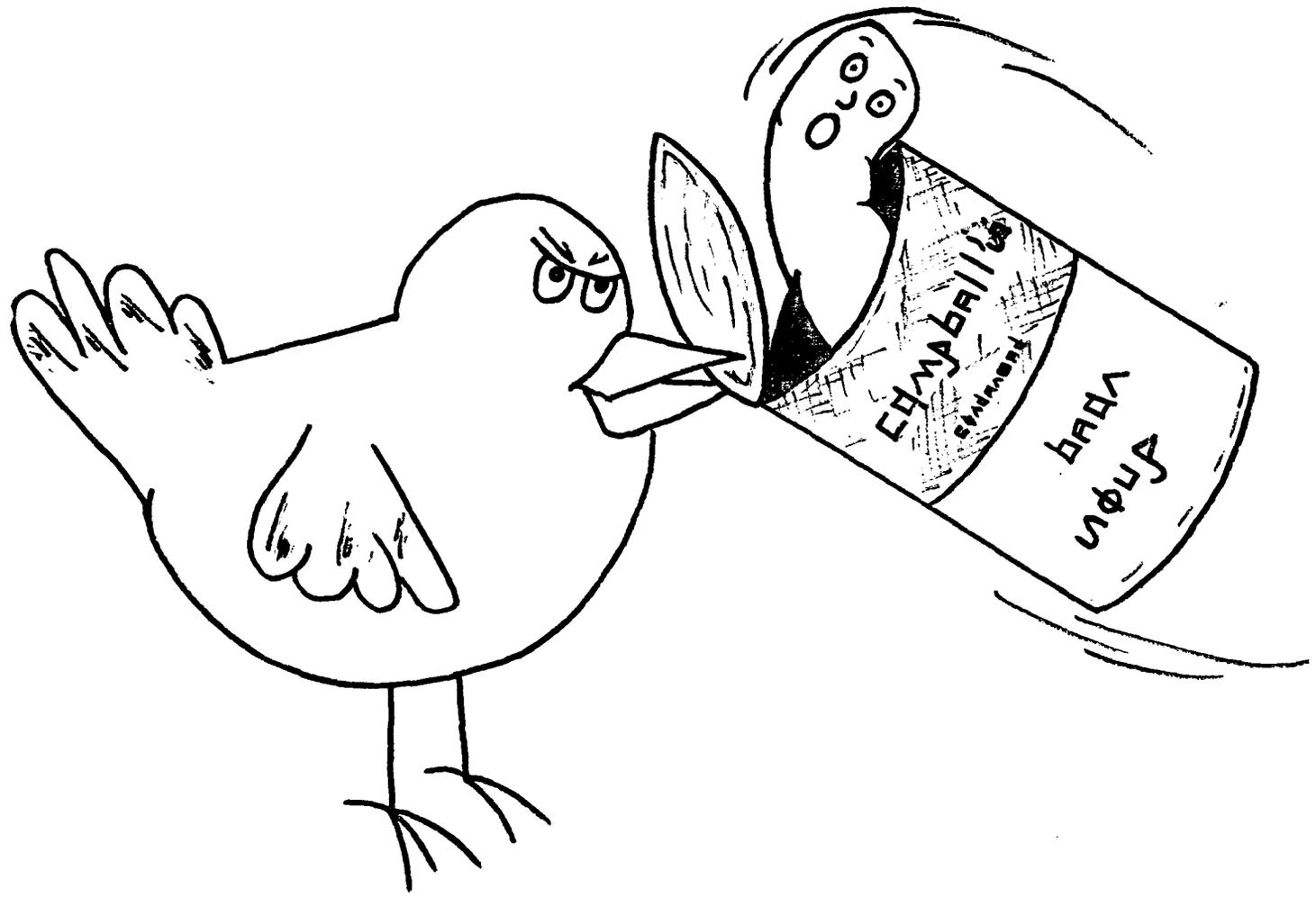
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That was quite a job, wasn't it? Hopefully, this experience has given you an idea of the tremendous task the beginning reader has. It perhaps has helped you to understand why:

1. Frequently used words are learned by sight.
2. A word needs to be repeated many times in order to learn it.
3. Some symbols, which are alike in certain ways, are easily confused.
4. Alphabet charts are useful only if you know the sounds that the letters represent.
5. Oral language is important. If you sound out a word, and have not heard it before, it is difficult to figure out its meaning.
6. Beginners guess words based on such clues as the first letter of a word, or the picture on the page.
7. Beginning readers can become frustrated and overwhelmed!

#### A Definition of Reading

Now that you have gained the experience of being a beginning reader, once again, what exactly happened?

Experts themselves, have differing explanations concerning the process of reading. Some say it is just pronouncing words correctly. Others say reading is getting ideas from printed pages.

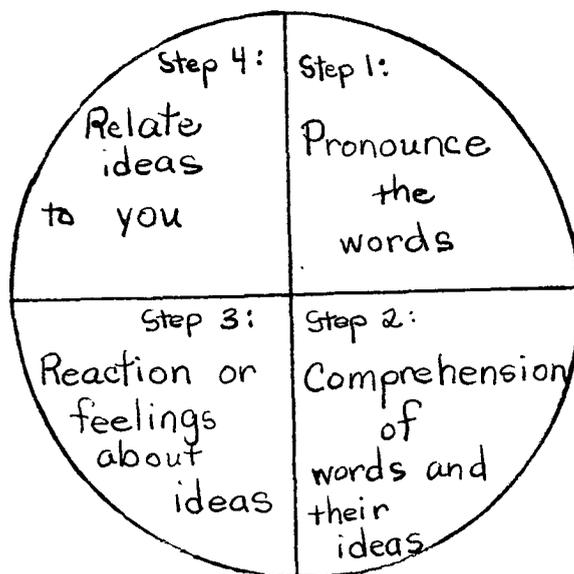
One expert, William S. Gray, describes reading as a four-step process:

1. To translate words in print
2. To understand their meaning
3. React to the writer's ideas
4. Relate the idea to their own experiences <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William S. Gray, On Their Own In Reading (Chicago: Scott Foresman and Co., 1948), pp. 35-37.

This process can be more simply stated using the following diagram:



As one helps children to read, it is helpful to keep this definition in mind. Remember, the emphasis shown here is not merely perfect word calling, but the understanding and reaction to the author's message.

### Methods of Teaching Reading

A question frequently asked by parents is, "How is reading being taught in my child's classroom?" In order to help your child read, it is helpful to understand some of the common approaches to teaching reading that are in use today.

An approach to teaching reading as used here shall refer to the overall plan used by teachers- including how the classroom is organized for instruction and what type of materials are used. A method of teaching reading shall refer more directly to the act of reading itself- the way in which children are taught to figure out new words and get meaning from what they read.

Several common approaches to the teaching of reading are: the basal reader approach, the language-experience approach, and the individualized reading approach.

Typically, the basal reader approach involves using a series of carefully sequenced books called basal readers. The class is often separated into reading groups with activities and skills sequenced by the teacher's manual. Usually children are placed in a leveled book and are expected to complete it during the school year. The completion of a book means essentially that the child has covered the skills at that level. Other materials frequently used are workbooks and/or accompanying dittos.

The language-experience approach is one in which the teacher takes advantage of the children's interests and background to produce reading material with which to read. Children relate stories and the teacher writes it down. This "experience story" allows children to gain success as they are reading what they have spoken. This highly motivating method helps the child to view reading as "talk written down" and that the purpose of reading is to understand what you read. This method is a good approach for beginning reading and can be used as a valuable supplement to other printed materials.

The individualized reading approach is one in which children in a class are reading in different materials. Children select books they want to read based on their personal interests and read them at their own pace. Frequently this program involves regularly scheduled individual conferences with the teacher, times for silent reading and group reporting. Skill exercises

still an important part of the program, receives attention based on students' needs.

Methods of teaching reading also vary to suit the needs of both student and teacher. Two basic methods of teaching reading that will be discussed here are the sight method and word-attack methods.

In the sight method the word is shown to the student and pronounced for him. The word is then pronounced by the student and is combined with other words to form sentences. Pictures often are used to introduce the word and children often learn the word by its general shape. The sight word method has been used by educators since the early 1800's and is one which is considered relatively easy for children to use. In this method the meaning in reading is found in words, and as a result children discover that printed words "talk," as the written and spoken form of words is shown together. It does not take long for children, using this method, to be able to read a simple story in which many words are repeated.

Two common word-attack methods we will examine are phonics and one which looks at the structure of words. Methods which examine the parts of words have been popular also from the 1800's although they have varied somewhat in their emphasis and have different names from those of today.

The phonics method involves associating sounds to letter symbols. Using a set of letters, children learn their sounds. Next, the sounds are blended in two or three letter words. While independence in reading can be gained in this method,



some children can not accept the drill in this type of program. One must also be careful not to promote "word calling" which results when the "sounds" of words are emphasized over the meaning of what is being read.

Another word-attack method looks at the structure of the word, its parts. In this method the student unlocks new words by looking at root words, prefixes, suffixes, and other word parts such as syllables. This method generally is used as a supplement to other methods, such as the sight word method or phonics.

Most teachers today teach reading using a combination of these methods. In fact, experts have found that there are four aspects of learning to read which are common to many of the methods and approaches which have been discussed here. They are:

1. The student masters basic sight vocabulary. This list of frequently used words may or may not be easily "sounded out." Due to the frequency of its use, students are encouraged to learn it "by sight."
2. The student develops skills to "sound out" unfamiliar words. This can be through phonics or other word-attack methods which look at the "parts" of words, in order to recognize the whole.
3. The student develops comprehension skills. These skills help the reader understand and get meaning from what he reads.
4. The student needs lots of easy practice! After all, in order to be a good reader, one must have lots of practice reading.<sup>2</sup>

Now that we have looked at some of the different ways reading can be taught, your question might be, "Which one

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<sup>2</sup>Miles V. Zintz, The Reading Process: Teacher and Learner (Dubuque: William C. Brown Company, 1970) p. 10.

is best?" The answer, of course, is that there is no one "right" way of teaching reading. The teacher, herself, has a great influence on the effectiveness of a reading program, regardless of which methods are used. Methods should be selected on the basis of meeting individual students' needs. Since children learn in different ways, it is only reasonable to attempt to teach reading using parts of many methods.

Your child's teacher is the best source to turn to for an explanation of your child's specific program. He/She can also provide specific information regarding your child's progress in reading. Take advantage of this valuable resource!

## PARENTAL ROLE IN LEARNING TO READ

### Reasons for Involvement

Parent involvement has gained much support in current research. Many studies have shown that the interest and support a young child receives produce significant and long lasting results. The child's attitude and achievement in school improves and continues to do so. This information certainly points out the importance of the parent in children's learning.

You, as parents, have long provided your children with basic education. You have taught your children to walk, to express their thoughts, to share things with others, and to listen. You help shape their attitudes and feelings about learning itself. You can, therefore, also help your children in learning to read. Since you have access to the most information about your child, it is crucial that you share in the role of teaching your child to read. Furthermore, you are important in this endeavor because you can help your child develop a good feeling about himself and school. You can do this by assuring him that you care about him and the things he does in school. By becoming actively involved in your child's reading you are saying, "I care!"

### Parent-Teacher-Child as a Learning Team

We tend to think that a child has learned to read when

he can correctly call out printed words. But actually children learn to read at a much earlier age. They have "read" faces and voices of others, size and weight of objects, and likenesses and differences in many things around them. You and your child have worked together to provide a firm foundation on which further learning can take place.

Beginning reading can be viewed as a way of extending your child's listening and speaking skills. You, as a parent, have helped your child prepare for reading by:

1. Interacting (talking, listening, and communicating) with your child.
2. Helping your child develop a large oral vocabulary and thinking skills.
3. Encouraging your child to feel secure and confident!

As you can see, a child's education truly begins in the home!

The teacher, as a newer member of this learning team is trained to help children extend their learning. It is important that both parent and teacher work cooperatively for the benefit of the child. Each, with their own areas of expertise, should be able to plan out a program of reading that is consistent for the child and complementary to the classroom setting. A situation in which each side is at variance creates great confusion for the child. By maintaining good communication, parent, teacher, and child can create a learning environment which encourages success in reading.

In preparation for helping your child in reading, it is important that parent (and teacher) ask themselves, "Can I work effectively in a teaching situation with this child?"

The following questionnaire will help you to determine if this more formal teaching situation is an effective way for you to work with your child. If you find out it is not, then you can enjoy your child in other ways. Remember, the most important thing that you can do for your child is to provide him/her with love, guidance, and encouragement!

## QUESTIONNAIRE

The following is a list of questions which should be contemplated by those intending to work with children. They may at first appear to be so obvious that they do not deserve answers. Yet, they represent attitudes and behaviors that educators feel are necessary to work successfully with children.

1. Am I able to show openly and easily that I love and care for my child?  Yes  No
2. Am I careful not to compare him/her with siblings who are more successful at school?  Yes  No
3. Do I avoid unnecessary criticism of my child's work?  Yes  No
4. Am I able to respond honestly to my child's work, while relating my feelings in an encouraging way?  Yes  No
5. Do I find it easy to listen when my child speaks?  Yes  No
6. Does my child seem responsive to working with me?  Yes  No
7. Am I able to work patiently with my child, not losing my temper, raising my voice, or otherwise causing the child anxiety?  Yes  No
8. Am I aware of signs of fatigue or emotional distress which should result in rescheduling a time to work with my child?  Yes  No
9. Do I feel I have the time to help my child in this type of situation?  Yes  NO

If your answer was NO to more than a couple of these questions, then perhaps you need to reconsider helping your child in a teaching situation. Or you might want to consult your child's teacher for suggestions to improve your weak areas.

As you work with your child, you may want to review these questions from time to time, as they can serve as guidelines for success for both you and your child!

## The Home as a Learning Environment

The home has been a learning environment for your child for many years before his entrance into school. To continue to provide a home environment that will help your child in reading, parents need to provide an environment that places value on reading. This can be done by you being a reader yourself! This shows your child that reading is not only a useful but an enjoyable skill. Try to become a reading family by setting aside time each day for reading, including time for reading with your child for short periods. Research shows that good readers were read to as youngsters.

The following is a list of other things to do which will help create an environment in the home that is helpful for children learning to read. You are probably already doing many of these things.

1. Keep your child well and rested. A child who has stayed up late to watch t.v. etc., shows the effect the next day.
2. Talk to your child. Help him/her to add words to his/her speaking vocabulary. The more words that are used naturally in ordinary conversation, the more words will have meaning for your child when they are seen on the printed page.
3. Listen to your child. Encourage your child to talk about things he/she has done or seen. The more a child talks, the better he/she is likely to read.
4. Teach your child how to take care of books. He will then learn to regard books as friends. Encourage reading.
5. Take your child on trips. Point out interesting things and give him/her new words and meanings for words.
6. Buy games and puzzles for your child when possible. These help your child learn shape and form and new words. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> H. Alan Robinson and Sidney J. Rauch, Guiding the Reading Program (Chicago: SRA, 1965), pp. 81-83.

This is only a sampling of the many ways to create a good environment for learning at home. Specific suggestions from your child's teacher should serve as a supplement to this environment which is already supportive of reading.



## READING SUGGESTIONS

### General Guidelines

Thus far we have discussed the reading setting in the classroom and the home as a learning environment. We have examined some of the advantages of parents becoming involved in helping their children read at home. We have also looked at some of the behaviors that are helpful in working with children. At this point, we are ready to introduce some specific reading do's and don't's followed by some suggested reading activities you might like to try with your child.

#### WHEN HELPING YOUR CHILD READ.....

##### DO:

Praise your child sincerely and avoid sarcasm.

Provide rewards for jobs well done- a hug, pat on back, etc.

Provide books and other materials for him to look at or read.

Read to him as often as possible.

Try to make reading a fun and successful experience.

Provide a quiet place for reading.

Make learning meaningful for him by helping him realize how he can use the information or skill he's learning.

##### DON'T:

Force him to read when he is upset.

Shame him because others can read better than he can.

Make him read during a favorite t.v. show or when his friends are outside playing and he wants to join them.

Punish for mistakes made.

Be overly concerned about your child's reading achievement.

Pressure him too much- no child wants to be behind in reading.

### Specific Teacher-Child Prescriptions

A teacher-child "prescription" is exactly that- a diagnosis by the teacher relating both a child's strengths and weaknesses in reading. One way to communicate this information to parents is in the form of monthly letters. The letters would offer suggestions on helping your child improve in reading.

The following letter is intended to be only the first of several which you may receive during the school year. The monthly letter you receive will help us to express our feelings and ideas as they relate to our common interest-- your child.

The letter, in general, will suggest some activities concerning reading which can be done at home. More specifically, the letters will include helping your child:

1. Develop more interest in reading.
2. Learn to recognize words.
3. Develop better comprehension in what he reads.

It will also provide us with a means of sharing information about your child's progress in reading. Please feel free to detach the bottom part and return it to me if you wish. Remember- most importantly, have fun doing the activities together!

September 1978

Dear Parents,

Helping your child learn to read does not mean turning your house into a school. There are many ways to help your child in reading that are best done in informal situations found in the home. The following ideas are ones which can best be done in this manner. I hope you enjoy doing the following activities with your child.

This letter includes suggestions for helping your child develop more interest in reading. As a result, it will help your child understand that reading can be not only useful, but fun!

1. Use your local public library. There are many worthwhile activities specially planned for children which should be utilized. The librarian can also help you and your child locate materials of interest.
2. Subscribe to children's magazines. There are a variety of very good magazines for children which include material of interest to most children. They include stories, factual information on many different topics, word puzzles, and special projects.
3. Use children's curiosity about the world around them to show how books can help answer their questions. Reference books such as encyclopedias, almanacs, etc. may also be used.
4. How To. Many books which tell how to do things, make things, etc., are available. Also encourage your child to read and follow directions with a minimum of help-- such as those found in games, recipes, and models.

If you would like further ideas, please contact me.

Sincerely,

-----  
Teacher Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

EVALUATION

1. Did this booklet provide you with information that you feel will be helpful for you and your child? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No

2. Check any of the following statements that describe your feelings about this booklet:<sup>4</sup>

a. It was exactly what I wanted to know about reading. \_\_\_\_\_

b. I'm looking forward to more information. \_\_\_\_\_

c. It was relevant to my concerns about helping my child in reading. \_\_\_\_\_

d. It was helpful. \_\_\_\_\_

e. I was mildly disappointed. \_\_\_\_\_

f. It didn't hold my interest. \_\_\_\_\_

g. It didn't deal with issues I feel are important concerning helping children read. \_\_\_\_\_

h. It was a complete waste of time; I didn't learn anything. \_\_\_\_\_

3. What were some of the strong points of this booklet? What did you especially like about it? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What were some of the weak points? Include any areas which you feel a need for further clarification, or those which you feel were not worthwhile for you.

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What new things did you learn from this booklet? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (include other comments on back)

<sup>4</sup>Gary B. Wilson, Parents and Teachers (Atlanta: Humanics Press, 1974), p.121.

## TEACHER'S SUPPLEMENT

The teacher's supplement to the parent booklet, "Reading: A Preprimer for Parents" is presented on the following pages.

READING:

A PREPRIMER FOR PARENTS

TEACHER'S SUPPLEMENT

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## INTRODUCTION

As a teacher you know the importance of parent-school cooperation. It is often difficult for the teacher to devote adequate individual attention to each and every child in the classroom. Parents, with their own information concerning the child, can help fill this gap.

Much of the recent attention that has focused on the "basic" skills in our public schools has resulted in increased public awareness and concern over students' learning. Many parents want to become more actively involved in their children's learning and are turning to you, the classroom teacher, for an answer to the question, "How can I help my child in reading?"

The booklet, "A Preprimer for Parents," is in response to this question. Its purpose is to provide parents with some background information on the reading process and reading methods along with some specific suggestions of ways they can help their children learn to read.

As a teacher you are able to influence and provide guidance for learning that occurs in the home. The degree to which you help the parent understand effective ways of encouraging and guiding children's reading will, in part, determine a child's attitude about and success in learning to read.

This booklet has been developed to provide you, as a busy teacher, with essential information for parents who wish



to become involved in their children's reading. Hopefully, it will at least provide you with a basis upon which you can extend or alter its contents to suit you, your students and their families!

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

This booklet is designed for parents of students in the primary grades who are beginning readers. It can be adjusted, however, to meet the needs of the parents of most children at the elementary level. It is composed of three parts, each of which provides an answer to one of the following questions:

1. What is reading?
2. What is the parental role in helping the child learn to read?
3. What are some suggestions for parent-child involvement in reading?

Since this booklet not only provides some initial information on reading but also activities that can extend throughout the school year, it is intended to be used in conjunction with either a small group meeting of parents and teacher or individual parent-teacher conferences. Certain activities in the booklet are especially conducive to such a plan, such as the initial reading experience of "The Bird and the Worm." Parents receive the full social and emotional impact of beginning reading as they take part in the group reading and the subsequent discussion of the story. Furthermore, a meeting of this type would clarify any questions, serve as a motivator for implementation, and allow parents to exchange ideas and suggestions for utilizing the booklet.

Teacher suggestions correspond to each of the booklet's three sections. In addition, there are appendixes at the back of the booklet concerning topics for monthly letters to parents

including games and activities for reading at home, and a bibliography for parents who are interested in further information on helping their children in school.

## PREPARING FOR PARENT MEETINGS

In preparing for your parent meeting, it will be helpful for you to review some effective ways to work and communicate your thoughts and information to them. The following is a list of tips on parent-teacher interactions:

1. Parents that are met with equality and understanding will more likely be cooperative partners in educating their children.
2. Try to begin with an especially positive or friendly statement.
3. Be sure to use words which all parents can understand. Avoid words which tend to be "educational jargon."
4. Be very clear in stating the purpose of the meeting.
5. Listen attentively, and encourage participation in the form of questions, comments, etc.
6. Avoid discussing special problems that relate to students, parents, and other teachers.
7. Try to maintain a friendly, informal atmosphere, while at the same time being informative!
8. Don't allow the meeting to "drag on" forever. A long session can cause parents to "turn off" to further involvement.
9. Draw the meeting to a close with a positive note, that encourages further action. Let them know what they can expect in the immediate future- such as letters home, etc.

## PART ONE

### Background Ideas

This section discusses the reading process and reading in the classroom. The story, "ΦΑΒ ΗΙΡΔ ΔΛΔ ΦΗΑ ΨΦΓΜ" which uses strange symbols, is one way to vividly show parents what beginning reading is like. Specifically, its purpose is to:

1. Point out word-recognition techniques that can be used in reading.
2. Point out different reading techniques used by individuals to meet their learning styles.
3. Point out the emotional and social aspects of learning to read!

### Discussion

To introduce this activity you might begin by placing a word on the board such as ΨΑΙΣΦΜΑ. Explain that as parents who want to help their children learn to read you've planned a short activity that will help them realize what beginning reading is like. Point out that just as this word appears foreign to them so do many words to the beginning reader. Help them to see that in order to figure out this word they must know the letters of this new alphabet and the corresponding sounds the letters represent. Show the new alphabet and provide time for parents to decode the word.

Introduce the story and allow time for silent reading. After reading, these suggested questions will help emphasize the points brought out in the booklet.

1. What are some of the ways you figured out new words?
2. Did the pictures help you to read the story?
3. Did you rely on the alphabet chart to translate each symbol into a letter? or
4. Did you figure out a word by deciding what would make sense in the sentence?
5. Did you soon recognize repeated words by sight?
6. Did you at times find yourself emphasizing letters instead of reading for meaning?
7. Were you worried that others were reading faster, better, etc. than you?
8. Did this cause you to pretend to be reading when you really weren't?

Mention the fact that often silent reading is followed by oral reading in a classroom situation with children. Ask what effect this might have had on them if they had to read in front of the group. Relate the idea that methods of instruction attempt to focus on students' strengths and are geared to allow for individual differences. For this reason, a variety of methods can and should be used. Stress the idea that reading is a four-step process of pronouncing words, comprehending their ideas, reacting, and relating the ideas to you. Then encourage parents to read through the sections dealing with methods and approaches to teaching reading at their leisure. A summary of those methods utilized in their children's situation would be appropriate.

## PART TWO

### Background Ideas

This section discusses the parental role in learning to read. It relates reasons for parent involvement and clarifies the parent-teacher-child as a learning team. The questionnaire is included as a method of helping parents determine their effectiveness in a teaching situation with their child. It provides them with some guidelines for working successfully with children. Finally, this section of the booklet reviews for parents how to provide a home environment that encourages success in reading.

### Discussion

The idea that reading is not an easy task can easily be followed up with the idea that children need our support, encouragement, and guidance in this endeavor. Furthermore, point out that research has shown that the support a youngster receives produces significant and long lasting results. Emphasize the concept that we need to be sure that our approach is positive. Briefly review the questions presented in the questionnaire. Bring out the idea that questions six through eight are especially critical in working in a structured situation with their children. Finally, included in this section is the notion that we can all help our children in reading by being a reading family.

## PART THREE

### Background Ideas

Continued communication is the emphasis of part three of the booklet " A Preprimer for Parents." It provides some specific guidelines when helping your child to read along with suggested activities. It also provides an introduction to the use of monthly letters as a way of relaying information, suggestions, and concerns from teacher to parent and vice versa.

### Discussion

The ideas in this part can briefly be presented by the teacher. Main emphasis should be placed on an explanation of the monthly home letter, its intentions, and format.



## CONCLUSION

Be sure to allow time for questions and suggestions regarding the information in the booklet. Finally, parents should be offered encouragement and support for helping their children learn to read. You, the teacher, need to be readily accessible to help provide solutions for their concerns. Above all, be sincere, honest and positive in all interactions, and give praise for their good intentions and efforts. Last, set a good example by being prepared to follow through with your good intentions!

## APPENDIX A

The following is a list of suggested topics, activities, and resources for consideration to aid the teacher in compiling future monthly letters to parents. The suggestions focus on word recognition and word attack skills, and comprehension skills. It is by no means a complete listing of activities, but serves only as a beginning. Many other games can be found in the books used here, which are listed following appendix A.

### Word Recognition and Word Attack Skills

1. When a child asks you "What's this word?" there are several suggested responses. First, ask him to read the rest of the sentence to see if that will help him figure out the new word. Then you might ask him if he sees a familiar sound pattern such as at, ill, ake, etc., and remind him to look at the beginning and ending sounds. Often children can pronounce a word if they analyze it for a moment. Finally, it is usually better to tell the child the word before frustration sets in and meaning is lost.
2. Letter sounds Have child find pictures or words that have a particular consonant sound. This may also be used for vowel sounds.
3. Tick-tack-toe One player chooses a sound, perhaps long a; the other short a. Each child, instead of writing X or O writes a word containing his sound.
4. Rhyming words Try to think of as many words as possible that rhyme with a given word.
5. Word Building Using the letters of a word, try to make as many words as possible using letters from the chosen word.
6. Things added Find words in magazines and books that have letters added at the beginning or end of a word and talk about how these changed the meaning.

## Comprehension

The following list of ideas can be used to check a reader's comprehension after reading a story.

1. Draw illustrations of characters, actions, or scenes from a story.
2. Tell about the part of a story they liked best.
3. Tell in what way two characters were alike and in what way they were different.
4. Tell the five W's about their story-- Who, What, When, Where, and Why.

These activities and games can be used to help children increase their comprehension of material they read.

1. Guessing Riddles- Make up or find riddles about animals or people in a story. Try to guess who they are.
2. Leave notes and messages for your child around the house. This is just one way they can see that reading can be useful.
3. Comic strips- Select comic strips that complete a story. Number on the back and cut them apart. The child arranges them in proper order.
4. T.V. characters- Ask your child to tell about his favorite character, describing every detail he can.
5. Predicting the outcome- During a T.V. show, or while reading a story together, ask your child to tell how he thinks it will end and why.
6. Survey first- You can help your child develop the habit of surveying materials before he reads them. Have the child notice the pictures, major headings, even a summary (if there is one.) This helps him develop a purpose for reading and aids in concentration.
7. Real or make believe- While reading a story have your child tell which things could really happen and which are make believe.
8. Main idea- Find pictures in magazines and books. Ask your child to tell you what is happening. Together try to decide what the main idea of the picture is.

This is just a few of the many activities that can be sug-

gested to parents in the monthly letters. As a teacher, you can best decide which ones are particularly suited for your students. Activities should be selected on the basis of meeting their needs.

The following books are suggested by this author to provide a beginning list of games from which to choose.

Herr, Selma E. Learning Activities for Reading. Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1970.

Spache, Evelyn B. Reading Activities for Child Involvement. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1973.

APPENDIX B  
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## CONCLUSIONS

This project has dealt with the concern of parent involvement in reading. Reasons for parent involvement were investigated along with similar parent involvement programs. The reading setting in the classroom and the home environment were also examined. Finally, the interaction between parent and child-- the parent's attitude and behavior were reviewed and guidelines for successful interaction were presented.

Throughout this project the premise was put forth that children and their parents can benefit from constructive involvement in reading with the guidance of a caring and able teacher. Not only can their involvement improve community relations, it most importantly has a direct effect on the child! It can have a positive effect on the child's attitude and his reading achievement increases. Since it can be concluded from research that parent involvement can produce positive results in their children's reading, the role of the teacher must be carefully analyzed. It is critical that educators change their view of parents as "threatening" and "interfering" and perceive them as an integral and valuable part of the learning team. Consideration must be given as to how to effectively utilize parents. Much has been done recently in the area of training of parent volunteers, both nationally and locally. Teachers are turning to not only parents, but grandparents as resources

from which to draw. Educators must be sure to include parents outside of the classroom; those who prefer to remain "involved" and helping in the home. While this author feels the need for parent training in our schools, it is also important to help parents develop the knowledge and understanding as to the reasoning behind the suggestions made and methods used by educators. This project addressed this concern. It is important for parents to have some understanding of what reading is and how to work in a positive manner with children before they attempt to help their child. With this background, and with open communication with the school and teacher, a successful, cooperative effort in parent involvement in reading can be accomplished.

There are several areas presented in this project which could be developed even further so as to improve the quality of parent involvement. While the scope of this project was essentially an introductory meeting which set the stage for further communication, the program could be expanded with emphasis on this continued communication between teacher and parent. Further meetings could be planned where parents engage in role playing tutoring situations in which they learn how to listen to their child read and learn how to help their child use context clues etc. to decode unfamiliar words. Other suggested topics could include making and/or playing reading games which are pertinent to their child's needs, or exposing them to various materials in children's literature.

Only recently has parent involvement become a concern of

educators. Previously little attention was given to the job of parenting, especially for parents of school age children. While of necessity, parents have played more active a role in the education of their "special" child, (handicapped, emotionally disturbed, etc.) only recently has the encouraging results of this involvement generalized to become indicators of success for the regular classroom teacher. As the public spotlight continues to be on achievement of students, educators will become increasingly aware that a child's education rests not solely on the teacher's shoulders, but is shared also by the child, and the parents. Parent involvement is an attempt to utilize this parent responsibility in a beneficial way by creating a foundation of trust, knowledge and understanding, and communication between the home and school environment. It is a cooperative effort that shows that parent and teacher, together, can pursue the best education possible for the child!



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