

How Isaac Learned to Read in Kindergarten

Written for Isaac by Donald L. Potter

Readability Grade Level 7.6 on the Flesch-Kincaid Scale
88 sentences, 15.4 words per sentence, 1384 words, 4.4 characters per word

Once upon a time, in West Odessa, Texas there was a nice little boy named Isaac. He was a very smart boy. When he started kindergarten at the Murry Fly Elementary School, he wanted to learn to read. His teacher was a wonderful lady by the name of Cindy Haynes. She loved kids and made going to school a lot of fun for everyone.

One day a teacher by the name of Mr. Potter asked Miss Haynes if he could help teach the kindergarten children to read. Mr. Potter had been a bilingual teacher for twelve years and had developed a reading program for little bilingual children. All of his children learned to read English, even though Spanish was their language. He thought that his method would work with kindergarten students.

Most people do not believe that kindergarten students are smart enough to learn to read. Mr. Potter thought everybody was completely wrong about kindergarten students. He thought they were old enough to learn to read. He called his reading program the TATRAS *Phonics* program. Mr. Potter believes that kindergarten kids can learn to read if they are taught to “look at all the letters the right way.”

In November 2002 Mr. Potter began teaching his TATRAS phonics to the children. The children recited sixty-eight phonograms every day with Mr. Potter. The Phonograms are the letters and letter combinations that words are made of. As the boys and girls learned the sounds of the phonograms, Mr. Potter started to teach them how to sound out the eight hundred and forty most used words in written adult English. Mr. Potter’s good friend Mr. Frank Rogers of Tacoma, Washington organized the phonograms and words into eight groups. Mr. Rogers is trying to teach America to read and spell. Mr. Potter taught these important words one after the other on the marker board. All of the boys and girls started getting real smart as they learned to read the words.

Mr. Potter noticed very quickly that Isaac was working hard to learn the TATRAS phonograms and words. Isaac paid very good attention. When Mr. Potter wrote a word on the board, Isaac always did his best to sound out the words. Miss Rodgers was very happy with Isaac. She always told Mr. Potter

that Isaac was a wonderful student who always paid attention and worked hard. She was very, very proud of Isaac.

Mr. Potter gave Isaac an audio CD that he had recorded of the eight hundred and forty words. Isaac took his CD home and put it in the CD player and started listening to it everyday. He looked at the words and listened to Mr. Potter reading them. He worked hard and learned to read all the words by listening and looking at all the letters the right way. Mr. Potter was very proud of Isaac.

Isaac began reading stories all by himself. On Mr. Potter's birthday (March 20, 2003), he gave Isaac the 1987 *Riverside Reading Inventory*. He was able to read the first-grade reader. This made Mr. Potter very happy on his birthday. It was his best present!

Isaac kept working very hard, by listening to his CD. He paid very close attention to Mr. Potter when he wrote the words on the board. He always did his best to read all the words by "looking at all the letters the right way, without guessing" and using his phonograms. He was careful not to memorize any of the words, but always sound them out. Everyday he kept getting better and better, and smarter and smarter.

His teachers and parents were proud of him. His mother and father told him that he was a very good boy, and they were exceedingly proud of his hard work in school.

Mr. Potter appreciates Isaac because he has helped Mr. Potter show the other teachers that kindergarten children can learn to read. By learning to read in kindergarten, Isaac is going to always be a good reader. He is never going to have any problem with reading. He will always look at all the letters the right way and sound out the words without guessing.

Isaac and Mr. Potter hope that every kindergarten teacher in the land will teach Mr. Potter's *TATRAS Phonics* program. Every child in American can learn to read with *TATRAS Phonics*.

Almost nobody believed that kindergartners could learn to read. People used to laugh at Mr. Potter when he said, "I can teach kindergarten children to read." Almost everyone said, "You can't do that Mr. Potter, nobody can!" Mr. Potter told everyone that they should not teach children to memorize sight-words. But almost nobody would listen to him. But Miss Haynes was a very smart teacher and she listened to Mr. Potter, and let him come into her class and teach the children how to "look at all the letters the right way." They did not read any stories with Mr. Potter because they were doing their best to learn to read the words by looking at all the letters and not let pictures get in the way of learning to read. Mr. Potter taught them how to read without

guessing. He always told the students to “look at all the letters the right way” and “sound out the words.” This made the children very smart. Isaac made Mr. Potter very happy because he helped Mr. Potter to show everybody that kindergarten students could learn to read when teachers taught them the Mr. Potter’s *Secret of Reading*: “Look at all the letters the right way, and no guessing.”

Isaac is now reading a wonderful book of stories called *Dive In*. This summer he is going to go to the public library so he can read lots of books and get real smart. He is going to have a lot of fun this summer reading great books. Isaac does not have to read baby books with lots of pictures in them because Mr. Potter taught him how to read without looking at pictures and without having to guess the words. He can read anything, even big books without pictures. He is going to have great fun reading the books, even the great big thick books that only older children are allowed to read. Isaac does not need to just read little “leveled readers” which were written to help children learn to read by guessing the words from the pictures and sentences. He can read anything!

On Saturday, April 26, 2003, Mr. Potter stopped by Isaac’s house and listened to him sound out his last group of words. Now that Isaac has learned all of the phonograms and knows how to read all of Mr. Potter’s eight hundred and forty words, he is now a *Certified TATRAS Student Teacher*. As a *Certified Student Teacher*, he will begin helping Miss Haynes and Mr. Potter to teach the rest of the children how to read. Isaac is going to be a great teacher!

Isaac is now ready to begin studying the *TATRAS Fast Track* enrichment program. He will learn to sound-out nine hundred and forty-three multi-syllabic words. These are words on a twelfth-grade level. This will help Isaac to read books that only the bigger kids usually can read. The big books are more fun to read than the little kid’s books.

Because Isaac is so smart and already knows how to read English, Mr. Potter is going to teach him how to read Spanish. He already knows how to speak Spanish because his wonderful parents taught him at home. Mr. Potter’s *Spanish* reading program uses the same words as the English program to teach children to read Spanish. Isaac will be able to start reading Spanish books in the library this summer. Reading English and Spanish will make his summer DOUBLE FUN!

This little story was written on April 27, 2003. It is dedicated to Isaac. Isaac is the first kindergartner to master all 68 phonograms and 840 words of the *TATRAS Vertical Phonics Reading Program*.

Isaac scored 94% on the Rigby Running Record for fifth grade. He scored “place in middle third grade” on the *1987 Riverside Reading Inventory*. Mr. Potter gave Isaac the *Miller Word Identification Assessment I* (MWIA I). He showed absolutely no signs of whole-word dyslexia! He only missed one phonics word, and had no slow-down, a truly amazing score!

Mr. Potter has a wealth of free material concerning the best way to teach kindergarten children to read on his www.donpotter.net web site.

Personal Note: When Mr. Potter initially published the story, he changed the names, using the following pseudonyms: **School:** Cass Union Elementary, which was Mr. Potter’s elementary school; state: Indiana, Mr. Potter’s home state; **Student:** Johnny (from Rudolf Flesch’s famous 1955 *Why Johnny Can’t Read*), and **Teacher:** Geraldine Rodgers (reading researcher extraordinaire, who encouraged me to teach phonics to kindergarteners BEFORE they receive any harmful sight-word instruction). On March, 25, 2012, Mr. Potter decided that enough time had passed, and it would be good to go ahead and publish the original story with the real names of the school, state, student, and teacher. Mr. Potter was mighty proud of Isaac when he read this little story all by himself a week before his sixth birthday. Isaac and Mr. Potter hope that all kindergarten children learn the simple *Secret of Reading*: “Look at all the letters the right way, and no guessing” so that they can read this little story all by themselves.

Editorial Note: I would like to assure all Internet readers that this story is absolutely true. Isaac read this story the first time without ever having heard it read. Later he read it from an overhead to numerous classes at his school on every grade level. These teachers and students would be delighted to testify to his adult-like fluency and perfect comprehension.

Encouragement: I encourage every kindergarten teacher in America to duplicate my results by teaching phonics-first to their classes. The **TATRAS** program is inexpensive and easy to teach. **TATRAS** stands for *Teaching America To Read and Spell*. It takes only about 20 minutes a day. The kids will enjoy every minute of the fun lessons. You will be amazed at the capabilities of five-year-old children to learn to read if you teach them to “look at all the letters the right way, and no guessing.” The TATRAS website address is www.verticalphonics.com.

For interest's sake: I (Donald L. Potter) was born in 1947 in Milan, Indiana. I attended the Cass Union Elementary School, which is now closed. My first-grade teacher was Mrs. Pearl Monroe. Miss Geraldine Rodgers is an independent reading researcher, who is having a major impact on reading instruction in America through her books: *The Hidden Story: How America's Present-day Reading Disabilities Grew Out of the Underhanded Meddling of America's First Experimental Psychologist* and her magnum opus *The History of Reading in America: From Teaching by Sound to teaching by Meaning*. She was my inspiration for going into a kindergarten class with phonics-first in order to see if I could prevent artificially induced whole-word dyslexia at **the point of origin**. And I did!

It appears that TATRAS is no longer in print. I have published the TATRAS Manual in its entirety for anyone who would like to teach the program. I would recommend making a deck of Alphabet flashcards and TATRAS flashcards. You can access the scanned document in pdf at the link below.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/qbd516b1dr0pybw/TATRAS_Manual.pdf?dl=0

I continue to believe that having kids memorize sight words is a leading cause of reading problems in America today. The success of Isaac and his classmates is perfect proof of how well kids can learn to read with phonics-first and no sight-word memorization.

Last edited by Mr. Potter on June 1, 2021.