

HOW JOHNNY FINALLY LEARNED TO READ

(A story using all 220 Dolch Sight Words)

by Johnny and Mr. Potter

February 10, 2013

Once upon a time, there was a boy named Johnny. He did not live long ago in a land far away, instead he lived right here in America just last year. Johnny is ten years old and in the fourth grade. He is a very happy student, making very good grades; but his life at school hadn't always been so happy. Let's let Johnny tell you his story. I think you are going to like it. This is a true story. It really happened.

Hi, boys and girls. My name is Johnny. I am probably a lot like you. I like to play games and have rides on my own new bike by myself or with my many friends on warm days outside, and sleep late in the morning. I like to eat hot pizza and drink a full glass of cold Root Beer. And I love going to school now. But I didn't always like school.

Before I met Mr. Potter, I couldn't read very well, and that made school an unhappy place for me. The teachers asked me to do my work, but I couldn't read well enough to do my schoolwork. The words seemed to jump around on the page and not keep together. I had trouble remembering the words from one day to the next. I couldn't even tell the letter *b* from the letter *d*. I will tell you that little story later.

Anyway, they made me repeat first grade because they said I wasn't reading well enough for second grade. I still couldn't read after two years in first-grade. Mr. Potter explained why I couldn't read. I will tell why later.

After third grade, my grandparents decided that "enough is enough," and they sent me to a tutoring center they had heard about on the TV.

The people at the Sylvan tutoring center told them it would cost \$8,000.00 to get me ready for fourth grade. I went to them for tutoring three days a week until we had finished the program and spent all eight thousand dollars. After all that tutoring, I still couldn't read very well. I did a lot of workbooks there.

My grandparents knew a Spanish and remedial reading teacher at the *Odessa Christian School* in Odessa, TX, where my cousin attended last year. Mr. Potter also tutors students with reading problems. You never met anybody like him! He has dedicated most of his life to helping children like me to learn to read. My grandma took me to Mr. Potter for testing to see if he could help me. As long as I live, I will never forget the walk down the hall to meet Mr. Potter. The door was open. Mr. Potter said, “Won’t you please come into my room.” He cordially invited me to pull out a chair and sit down.

Mr. Potter gave me two tests. I don’t know everything about them, but I will try to tell you what I learned about them.

The first test was the 1987 *Riverside Informal Reading Inventory*. On that test I just read lists of words until I missed five words. Then Mr. Potter backed down one grade level and asked me to read two pages from a story. He then asked me eight questions about the story. He told me I was reading on a first-grade level! I knew I had problems reading, but never thought I was reading down on a first-grade level. My goodness! I had repeated first-grade and just spent a lot of time at a very expensive tutoring center. When Mr. Potter showed my Grandma the scores, she said, “That’s exactly what we thought!” She was not happy about spending \$8,000.00 for tutoring that didn’t do me much good.

The other test Mr. Potter gave me was the *Miller Word Identification Assessment Level 1*. He gave me the *Level 1* because he said that the *Level 2* would be too hard for me.

I never took a test like that before. He asked me to read two lists of words, with fifty words in each list. The first list was quite easy, but the second list was really hard! It took me a long time to read the second list, and I saw that Mr. Potter kept underlining the words I missed and writing something over them.

After the test, I asked him why the last list was so hard. He replied that it was a bunch of simple phonics words that a kindergarten student should be able to read. I could read the harder words better than the easy words!

The first list of words is called the “Holistic List.” Those words are what Mr. Potter calls sight words. These are words that my first-grade teacher had me memorize from flashcards and a Word Wall.

My teacher sent the words home with me everyday to practice reading to my family, who timed me to see how fast I could read. I was told not to sound out the words, but to memorize them by sight, which is why they are called sight words.

The second list in the test is called the “Phonetic List.” Mr. Potter says it is made up of simple three- and four-letter regular phonics words that should be easier to read than the sight words.

Mr. Potter explained to me that I had “artificially induced whole-word dyslexia.” He uses some pretty big words. All that means is that the sight-words that I had memorized caused my reading problem. I use my right brain to view words as picture-shapes with lots of context guessing, instead of using my left brain to look at all the letters the right way from left to right, without guessing. All the mistakes I made were look-alikes: *did* for *bib*, *lion* for *loin*, *meet* for *met*, *lunch* for *launch*, *frog* for *fog*, *squirrel* for *squeal*, etc.

He said that if I would have learned phonics-first, instead of sight-words taught in the Guided-Reading program published by Heinemann, I never would have had a reading problem.

Here is where my story gets good! Mr. Potter said he could help me. He told me that he was going to use his *Blend Phonics Lessons and Stories* to teach me to read without having to guessing. I would have to learn to look at every letter in every word and stop guessing. He does not allow guessing. Mr. Potter is very nice, but he can be very strict about things like that. My former teachers all told me to guess the words from context and pictures. Mr. Potter forbids those things. In fact, there were **NO PICTURES** at all in any of the stories had me read. He said pictures were a distraction.

Mr. Potter first told me the sounds of all the consonants and the short *ă*, and then had me sound out a bunch of simple two- and three-letter words. Then I read a little story, answered four questions about the story, and spelled some words from the lesson. If I didn’t remember the answer to the question, he let me go back to find it. Pretty soon I started to grow in my ability to read. That’s exactly what we did everyday until I finished the last lesson. Sometimes he would say, “Shall we draw a picture to go with the story?” I would pick out a word from the story to draw. I once drew a fly that ate a pie from a story we were done reading.

Let me tell you about how Mr. Potter cured me of my *b-d* confusion. I always had problems telling *b* and *d* apart. As I was sounding-out the words, I came to a word with a *b* in it, but couldn’t figure out which it was. I asked Mr. Potter to tell me. He looked at me kind of strange like and said, “I don’t tell my students things like that.” I said, “What do you mean you can’t tell me? I can’t read the word till you do!” Then he looked straight at me and said, “I will cure you in five minutes, but you can never ask me that question again once I have cured you.” That just blew away my mind. All I could say was, “Yes, sir!”

I had repeated first grade and been to hundreds of hours of expensive tutoring with no one able to help me, and this guy is going to cure me in five minutes! He then asked me to look at my lips in a mirror and make the b-sound, noting that my lips formed a **line**. He then had me make the d-sound while looking in the mirror, and note that my lips made a kind of **circle**. Then he said, “There, I cured you in five minutes. Read the word, and remember never to ask me that question again.” I looked at the *b* that I hadn’t been able to identify and noted that it started with a line so it must make the b-sound. Then I read the word. The next day, I was reading along with no problem, when it dawned on me that I really was cured. I looked at Mr. Potter and yelled out loud, “You cured me Mr. Potter! I really am cured! You did it in five minutes!” I have never had a problem with *b* and *d* since.

Mr. Potter also taught me how to hold my pencil correctly and to write in cursive. He told me that kids who write cursive have far less problems with reading and spelling. No one ever tried to teach me cursive before. Mr. Potter taught me the down-curve, over-curve, under-curve, and slant so my letters all look beautiful. I am proud of my cursive. If you want to learn the best cursive, you need to see Mr. Potter. He told us that everyone should buy a blue, brown, green, hot red, yellow, white, or black fountain pen. He showed me how to wash a nib (tip) with warm water to clean it. There’s nothing better than a fountain pen for making writing easy and enjoyable.

When we finished the *Blend Phonics Lessons and Stories*, Mr. Potter gave me the tests again to see if I had learned anything. I was really happy when he told me I had improved to “ready for fourth-grade.” That was two grade levels just over the summer. He told me that I could now start reading books since I now read **accurately with my left-brain** instead of **inaccurately with my right-brain**. I love reading now!

Mr. Potter is a really nice man. He never got upset with me when I was having trouble reading. He always says everything positively. He can laugh a lot and is sometimes very funny. He will usually carry a small harmonica. He would play fun kids’ songs and ask us to sing along. He must have told me hundreds of times, “Remember Mr. Potter’s Secret of Reading: Look at all the letters the right way, and no guessing.” He cured me of the guessing habit that I had acquired at my other school where they taught sight-words. I wish that Mr. Potter could show teachers today how they can teach reading without any sight-words. He says, “Phonics-first is the way to go for all kids.”

School is really easy now that I have learned to read from the sounds of the letters, without having to guessing. My grandparents were so happy with my progress that they put me in the school where Mr. Potter teaches. Thank you Mr. Potter!

When I finished writing this story, Mr. Potter told me that there were still some Dolch List Sight Words missing. Here is a funny tale that uses the words that were missing: A little girl had a bad fall when she ran round the house seven times in a light rain and cut both hands. She had to call her mom because she hurt so bad! The only word that was still missing after writing that sentence was “its.” Now it’s there! I hope you enjoyed reading the true story of how I finally learned to read with Mr. Potter’s *Blend Phonics Lessons and Stories*.

Mr. Potter says that kids who learn to read with his *Blend Phonics Lessons and Stories* will be able to read all the Dolch List words without guessing because they were taught to read by looking at all the letters, and no guessing.

Well, that’s my story of how I finally learned to read. If you have finished Mr. Potter’s *Blend Phonics Lessons and Stories*, I bet you have a good story to tell, too.

Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

February 17, 2013

Odessa, TX

This little story was written to document this all too typical tutoring case. Everyday I work with students just like Johnny. By the way, his real name was Sebastian.

Their teachers wonder why these students have so much trouble reading, little realizing that Johnny's problems were manufactured in their classrooms by the instructional materials and techniques the teachers unfortunately are required to use. It is paradoxical that the technique meant to improve reading creates serious reading problems that require special skills to remediate.

Every sight word taught is an insult to the human nervous system because it gives the child the impression that English is a hieroglyphic writing system instead of an alphabetic writing system. To teach words as pictures develops a reflex on the right side of the brain that severely interferes with learning to read properly from the sounds represented by the letters. The cognitive conflict from these two competing systems of reading causes immense stress and frustration, which leads to fixation of the undesirable guessing habit: confused visual patterning responses.

I have tutored several students whose parents and grandparents had spent thousands of dollars with professional tutoring. I used to be both amazed and puzzled at the rapid progress these long-term, struggling readers made when I **removed** them from their whole-word guessing environment, and **taught** them intensive phonics.

Eventually I came to understand that their problems were created in the classroom by the universal practice of teaching sight words and context guessing. Sight word readers are often called "predictable text" because the students are taught to guess the next word from the memorized context bed of sight words plus pictures and context.

For more information on the cause of artificially induced whole-word dyslexia and how to cure it with intensive phonics, visit my websites: www.donpotter.net and www.blendphnoics.org.

I am including the *Miller Word Identification Assessment Level 1* at the end of this document so parents can run off copies to use to test their children to see if they have artificially induced whole-word dyslexia.

Some may question whether such a condition as artificially induced whole-word dyslexia really exists since there is little about it in the literature on dyslexia. I questioned its existence myself; but after giving way over 500 assessments, I can see no other explanation for the patterns of errors the children make. It is also interesting that these children are often in dyslexia classes at their public schools, but overcome their problem with my intensive phonics instruction. In principle there is virtually no difference between my instruction and the Orton-Gillingham programs, except that I cover the skills much faster.

The Blend Phonics Lessons and Stories that I used to cure Sebastian of his artificially induced whole-word dyslexia are now available in a convenient paperback edition from Amazon and Barnes and Nobles. Complete information on how to teach lessons and stories is included in the book. Nothing else is necessary. It is equally good for young beginning readers or older students in need of remediation. The link below will take you to the slides that I used with Johnny (Sebastian).

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/6sb98nzskxlbiko/AAAvYSyOnEcGavu7oN509fkFa?dl=0>

Last edited, 3/06/2013, 4/13/2016, 5/27/2017.

Charles M. Richardson, B.S, M.S, P.E, September 25, 2003

DIRECTIONS for the *MILLER WORD IDENTIFICATION ASSESSMENT I* (MWIA I)

INTRODUCTION

The MWIA Level I is a quick way to see how a person analyzes words: By decoding (sounding-out), by sight memorization, or a mix of the two. The MWIA consists of a “Holistic” and a “Phonetic” list. You need a pen/pencil, stopwatch or equivalent, a clipboard or folder to hold your copy out of sight of the student, and a copy of the test for the student. (Use a separate copy to record each student's responses.) If the student is apprehensive about being timed, tell him this is part of some research (which it is) and that we need to see if he reads one list slower or faster than the other. Explain that he should read aloud across each line (point), and stop at the end of the first list.

TESTING

When you and your watch are ready, tell him to begin, and start your watch. Underline each word he mis-calls, but give no hint or signal; if he self-corrects, just circle the word. If possible, mark some indication of his error for later analysis. When he completes the Holistic list, stop your watch. Ask him to wait while you record the time, and reset your watch.

Repeat as above for the next list. Stop your watch; record the time.

On the PHONETIC LIST ONLY, re-visit 6 - 10 of the words he mis-called, point to each and say, “Spell this out loud while you’re looking at it, then say it again.” If he says it right, complete the underline into a full circle around the word. If he still says it wrong, bracket the word /thus/ to indicate that it was attempted but not successful. If he “blurts out” the correct word without spelling it, just circle the word. Enter the # of words spell-corrected and total # re-tried for the Phonetic list.

SCORING

Convert the recorded times to speeds in WPM (words-per-minute) by the formula (3000 divided by seconds). Record WPM's. The percent slow-down (SD) from the Holistic speed (HS) to the Phonetic speed (PS) is $100(PS/HS)$ subtracted from 100: $100 - 100(PS/HS) = \%SD$

% Phonic Efficiency is words corrected divided by words re-tried, expressed as a percent.

INTERPRETATION

Severity of “Whole -Word-Dyslexia” (WWD) is proportional to %SD and the rise in errors on the Phonetic list. Up to 5% SD is mild, 10-20% is moderate, >20% is severe. Up to 3 Phonetic errors is mild, 4-8 is moderate, >10 is severe. Combinations are left to the judgment of the examiner. Examine the errors: if the substituted word is a “look-alike,” he’s using memory instead of decoding. If he switches a vowel it’s a phonetic error. If he mistakes look-alike consonants, e.g., “n” or “b” for an “h,” it could signal a visual difficulty. The above are not absolutes!

This test was first published on 9/27/03 on the www.donpotter.net website from a copy Mr. Richardson send Donald Potter. Rudolf Flesch’s 1955 phonics primer, *Why Johnny Can’t Read and what you can do about it*, is readily available in an inexpensive paperback and highly effective for helping students with WWD. Hazel Loring’s highly effective *Reading Made Easy for First Grade with Blend Phonics* is available for free on Donald L. Potter’s website: www.donpotter.net and www.blendphonics.org. Mr. Richardson passed away in 2008 and his TLC organization was disbanded. There is also a MWIA II, which consists of two lists of words of 210 words each to use with older students. Writing the students response over the misread word will quickly reveal that the students are reading the words by shape. Articles by Samuel L. Blumenfeld, Miss Geraldine Rodgers, Raymond Laurita, Helen Lowe, Charles Walcutt, Dr. Patrick Groff and many other experts can be read for free on Mr. Potter’s website.

The Miller Word-Identification Assessment I (MWIA I)

SUMMARY SHEET

Edward Miller, 1991

Name _____ M () / F () Age ____ Grade ____ Test Date _____

School _____ City/State _____

Level I

Holistic WPM ____ Phonetic WPM ____ Difference ____

Difference ____ / Holistic WPM ____ x 100 = ____ % of Slow-down

Holistic Errors ____ Phonetic Errors ____ Difference ____

Ratio of Phonic Errors ____ / Holistic errors ____ = ____

Phonetic Corrected ____ out of ____ attempted = ____ % Phonic Efficiency

Tested by _____

Scored by _____

K - 1 School _____ City/State/District _____

Method/Program _____

Publisher _____

Comments:

Name _____ M ()/F () Age _____ Grade _____ Test Date _____

Holistic – I Time _____:_____” = (_____ Sec)\3000 = _____ WPM

Err _____

Sam am and anywhere a are box be
boat could car do dark eggs eat fox
green goat good ham here house I in
if like let mouse me may not on
or rain say see so that them there
they tree train the try thank would will
with you

Phonetic – I Time _____’ _____” = (_____ Sec)\3000 = _____ WPM

Err _____ Spell-Cor _____ / _____ Phon Eff _____% Slow-Down _____%

bib nip map tag job met sip mix
pad lock wig pass hot rack jet kid
pack Tom luck neck pick cut deck kick
duck fuzz mud hack sick men hunt rash
pest land tank rush mash rest tent fond
bulk dust desk wax ask gulps ponds hump
lamp belt

Copyright 1991