

# Roger Joikl's Revenge

by Arther Trace Jr.

In the examining room of a plush New York doctor's office one Saturday afternoon in the year 1894, an eight-year-old boy, thin and a bit peaky, was surrounded by a group of doctors who were studying him as intently as if he were not a creature of this world. They looked into his ears and eyes, they tested his reflexes, and they consulted his medical charts. Then after conferring for some time among themselves, they appeared to finally to have come to an agreement as to just what was ailing the lad. The diagnosis: dyslexia.

What interested the doctors so much was that dyslexia is one of the rarest diseases ever to afflict the human race. There appear to have been only three cases of it in all the annals of medical history, and even those have not been fully confirmed. But this time there seemed no doubt of the accuracy of the diagnosis: Here the boy was eight years old, he had been attending an exclusive private boys' school for almost three years, he had been taught by the best teachers and tutored by the best tutors, and still he could not read, not so much as a single word. It was a clear-cut case, a classical case, of dyslexia.

And yet everything had been done to help little Roger that was financially possible, because the boy's father, a Mr. Jasper Joikl, was in fact one of the wealthiest men in New York. But nothing and no one did any good.

The difficulty became evident when after about six months Roger's first-grade classmates began to read little stories from their readers with no great difficulty, in fact with considerable ease and even joy. But every time Roger's turn came to read aloud in class, there was only silence. The teacher was troubled because she knew that Roger was in fact a truly bright boy. It was simply that he could not read. When she called on the next boy to read a paragraph of the story in their reader, it always seemed to Roger as if the next boy could read like a professional.

Sometimes the teacher would give the students a half-hour to read silently on their own out of exciting books from the classroom library. Roger would watch the delighted expressions on the faces of his classmates as they absorbed themselves in all kinds of stories: animal stories, adventure stories, spooky stories, and even jingly poems, while he, with a book in front of him, idly fingered the pages, not being able to make out any of the words at all.

As these unhappy experiences multiplied week after week, month after month, Roger became increasingly resentful of his inability to read, because he could see — indeed, everyone could see — that his classmates were posi-

tively reviling in their reading and would talk excitedly about it among themselves and with the teacher, while he was growing more miserable all the while. He even reached the point that he could hardly stand hearing his classmates read aloud because it always reminded him that they could do something terribly important that he couldn't do. He grew increasingly sullen and hostile, and in time withdrew from even the few friends that he had made during the first days of school, as well as his playmates in the neighborhood, who were all good readers.

Because of the extreme wealth of Roger's father, the teachers in the school did not dare keep Roger back but passed him on to the next grade along with his classmates. By the time Roger reached the third grade, school had become too much for him to bear and he began to hate not only his teachers, but his playmates, his mother, his father, his brother, and in fact everybody; he hated everybody that could read, and since almost everybody he knew could read, he hated almost everybody. Only the gardener, who was a jolly old fellow with a big Adam's apple and a ruddy face, was his friend; for the gardener could not read either, and he seemed to understand Roger, and many an afternoon the two spent together talking about the ways of the flowers and the birds.

It was at this time that Roger's father had decided to call in a team of doctors to diagnose Roger's problem, on the assumption that it must be something physical, and it was then that the verdict was dyslexia, a disease for which there was no cure. The doctors told Mr. Joikl quite frankly that there was no help, that Roger would never learn to read and that he and Roger and everyone else would have to get used to his condition; it was after all no worse than blindness or deafness, and in some ways not as bad.

But by this time, the damage of the disease was beyond repair. Roger dropped out of school, and would hardly talk to anyone except his gardener friend; and a burning hatred of all readers, including his family, began to consume him. And so the years passed, Roger living like a recluse, his father and mother and brother and all his relatives and friends giving up on him, almost as if he didn't exist.

Then an event occurred that changed Roger's life – indeed reversed it. When Roger was 33 years old, his father died, leaving Roger his share of a huge estate amounting to something just under 30 million dollars. Despite his sequestered existence, Roger had learned the power of money from his father, and he knew that he was now in a position to take revenge not upon his teachers or his peers or his family, but upon the whole of American society; for even though Roger could not read, he could think big. His plan was nothing less than to create a whole society of non-readers, beginning with

the next generation of first-graders. The question was, how to go about it? Even though he himself did not know what must be done in order to create a nation of illiterates or at least semi-literates, he knew whom to go to find out.

The first step he took after receiving his inheritance was to build a secluded mansion in the wilds of Montana so that he could be as far away as possible from the nation's readers, and he took with him only his illiterate gardener and three servants, who were semi-literate, but who thoroughly detested reading. Through his brother, who had always been rather sympathetic to his plight even though their relationship was not at all close, Roger gathered into his mansion a group of 20 professors of education one afternoon and made them a proposal. The proposal was as follows: they were to put their collective heads together and devise a reading program for the elementary grades that would come as close as possible to guaranteeing that students in the elementary grades of the nation would not be able to read. If they could design such a program, he promised to pay each of them a half-million dollars upon the presentation of conclusive evidence that their textbooks had severely retarded the reading of a good part of the nation.

Upon hearing this offer the professors were almost shocked out of their professional skins, but they gradually regained a degree of composure and upon solemn reflection concluded that they could indeed devise such a program.

Thereupon Mr. Joikl opened up to them the whole west wing of some 30 rooms of his mansion where they were to live and work and play. For Roger made it quite clear to them that their work must remain secret, that they must stay on the premises, that they could not even visit their families on weekends, but would have to tell them that they were engaged in a highly secret project and that there was nothing to worry about, that the work was not only perfectly safe and legal, but also highly remunerative. Some professors had trouble convincing their wives, but when they were reassured about the mounds of money the project would produce, they all at last concurred.

Some of the professors, it is true, experienced qualms about whether they wanted to engage in so nefarious a project as this one, which would in effect deprive hundreds of thousands, nay millions, of Americans of the joys of reading for the rest of their lives. Those with the greatest imaginations called up in their minds the image of old folks some 60 years hence sitting on the porch in their rocking chairs, idle, staring into space, waiting to die out of sheer boredom because they had been deprived of the joys of the printed page. (There was no notion during those years of daytime television.) They thought too of bright children with great potential who might otherwise have

gone through high school and college and graduate or professional school and not only might have carved out noble careers for themselves and their families but might also have made enormous contributions to mankind as statesmen or doctors or writers or who knows what. What they were about to do seemed to have almost as many evil consequences as devising a bomb that would blow a whole city off the map.

Such melancholy thoughts passed through the minds of more than a few of these professors, and one or two almost decided to drop out of the project; but the visions of 500 one-thousand dollar bills, or 1,000 five hundred dollar bills, or 5,000 one hundred dollar bills, as well as the excitement and the novelty of the venture drew them back in again. And once they got started, they never again reflected upon the possible consequences of what they were about to do.

Actually the project was not at all easy to carry out. The difficulty was that it had to give the impression of being a good reading program, an attractive reading program, indeed an irresistible reading program, but at the same time it had to be as nearly totally ineffective as a reading program could be.

The next day they gathered in a huge room of Victorian design, richly carpeted with two enormous crystal chandeliers and a large oval table in the middle with 30 executive-type chairs placed around it. The professors began to put their minds in motion and soon all manner of ideas spewed forth.

“Let’s have lots of pictures, for one thing,” said one of the professors. “Everybody likes pictures, especially colored pictures, and they can take up most of the page, so that there will be room for only a few words at the bottom. This technique will slow them down wonderfully, and besides the pages of the readers look far more appealing than the ones in use now.”

“Good thinking,” exclaimed another of the professors.

“Common sense tells us also,” said another, “that we should keep the number of new words to an absolute minimum. The idea is to repeat the same words over and over again in order to keep the vocabulary burden as light as possible. The fewer the words the students are exposed to, the fewer they will learn.”

“Capital,” shouted three or four of the professors in unison.

“I have it,” said another. “Let’s withhold the knowledge of the sounds of the letters from the students as long as we possibly can. Let’s write down in the teacher’s guides that the teachers should teach students to read by memorizing the designs that the words make on the page, so that, for example, when they see the “y” at the end of “monkey,” they will know that that is the monkey’s tail, and they will know that the word is “monkey.” We won’t tell

them that words like “money” and “donkey” and “baloney” also have monkey tails. This device is bound to confuse them, and will do more to slow down their reading than any of the ideas we have so far.”

The professors at this suggestion squealed with delight as visions of thousand dollar bills danced in their heads. They felt now that they were surely on the right track. But then, after rejecting a few bad ideas, such as teaching students the alphabet for appearance’s sake, they all fell silent. It was as if they had come to an impasse, even though they sensed that there was still a good deal more that they could do to keep little children from the joys of reading.

“Wait a moment!” shouted one of the professors at last. “It is coming to me now. What we need to do is to make the stories as uninteresting as we possibly can. We need to have dull boys and girls doing dull things. We can thus make little children think that there is neither profit nor pleasure in reading, and they will give it up altogether.” The response of the professors to this proposal was nearly orgasmic.

And so they worked both night and day for nearly six weeks designing the readers in accordance with the principles that they had agreed upon. They rested only on Sundays, during which time they would stroll in the mansion gardens or play a little croquet. A few of the education professors liked to do a little recreational reading, though this activity, needless to say, posed serious risks on Mr. Joikl’s estate; for by now Mr. Joikl, whenever he saw anyone reading, flew into so terrifying a rage that the poor reader was in danger of his life. Once he pummeled to a pulp a paperboy who came to the house to inquire whether he wanted the Goose Hill Gazette delivered to his door in the morning, and on another occasion he sprayed the back of an encyclopedia salesman with buckshot; in fact the salesman’s lawsuit against him is still pending. Furthermore, Mr. Joikl’s gardener was usually about the grounds, and would unquestionably inform Mr. Joikl if he saw any of the professors reading a book, so that there was great danger that they might be discovered and fired on the spot.

But a few of the professors nonetheless were incorrigible. A sunny Sunday afternoon would find one of them hiding behind the bushes with a book called BUCKING THE BALKY STUDENT; another would bury himself among the buttercups with an enormous tome entitled SUPERVISING SUPERVISORS, and still another would be out behind the gazebo with a book called KEEPING TEACHERS IN THEIR PLACE.

At length the professors felt that their project was completed. They had designed readers for the elementary grades that had as few words as they felt they could safely get by with, they had repeated them as often as possible for

the sake of monotony; there were few enough words on each page so that the pictures could take up most of it, and the stories were so wretched that they felt certain that they had created some of the worst writing ever to appear in print.

Furthermore, they had written teacher's guides which were so big and fat and scientific looking that they would fool even the most suspicious teacher and administrator; and best of all, they supplied elaborate instructions for teaching students to read, not by telling them the sounds of the letters of the alphabet but by making them memorize the design of the whole word as it appeared on the page, just as Chinese students are taught Chinese.

"Let's go to Mr. Joykill and announce that we have completed the project," said the professor whom they had elected their leader, a shrewd little man by the name of Bray.

"His name is not Joykill, it's Joikl," said another professor by way of correction.

"I know," said Professor Bray, "but somehow Joykill sounds more appropriate, don't you think?"

"You're quite right," laughed the first, "but don't call him that to his face. He might turn us all out and thus put an end to all our fiscal dreams."

And so the professors left the workroom together, ordered the barely literate butler to announce to Mr. Joikl that they all wished to see him. As they entered the drawing room, they discovered Mr. Joikl almost swallowed up in a cushy armchair, puffing on a meerschaum pipe and dreaming, as he usually did, about how he was going to spread illiteracy across the land.

"We have good news, Mr. Joykill – I mean, Mr. Joikl," said the principal professor.

"How did you address me?" said Mr. Joikl in an ambiguous tone of voice.

The professor perceived his blunder at once, but tried to make the best of it. "I'm sorry, sir. I called you Mr. Joykill. It was a slip of the tongue."

Whereupon Roger Joikl fell into a fit of laughter that echoed through the room and the rooms adjoining.

"I like that! Joykill! I like that very much. What could be better! Joykill. Joykill. It fits me precisely. Gentlemen, henceforth I will be known as Roger Joykill. I'll change my name officially to Joykill, so that people will remember me ever after for what I am and for what I am proud to be. Well, what is it you have to tell me?"

"We have completed our project, Mr. Joykill. We believe that we have designed a set of readers that will sweep the country. They are new, they are different, they are attractive, they are irresistible. We believe that within ten

to fifteen years they will be adopted by most of the elementary schools in the country and that during that time you will begin to hear reports that students from coast to coast are having difficulty reading, that most will read badly, and that some will not be able to read at all. We cannot, of course, keep all students from being good readers, because some schools will insist on continuing in the same old way of using textbooks that tell exciting stories with lots of words and by teaching students the alphabet and the sounds of the letters. Students in these schools will always learn to read well, but we can virtually guarantee that our readers will take the joy of reading away from most of the kids in the country, and then as they grow up they will not be able to read books or magazines and perhaps not even newspapers very well, but will have to take all their delights from non-literary sources, and when they become too old and too weak for sex and booze they will have to sit on the porch in their rocking chairs staring into space waiting to die.”

“Excellent! Excellent!” exclaimed Mr. Joykill. “But remember, your fortune waits upon solid evidence that your readers really do their work.”

“We understand, Mr. Joykill,” said Professor Bray. “We will report back to you as the results come in. Meanwhile, we are now going to take our readers to the textbook publishers. There is the risk, of course, that they will not publish them, in which case that would be catastrophic, and all our work will have gone for naught,” and with a horrified expression he drew a big zero in the air with his finger.

“If the publishers won’t publish your readers,” said Mr. Joykill, “I’ll start a publishing company of my own, and we will call it the Joy Publishing Company. And we will sell the readers, you need have no fears about that.”

As it turned out, however, there was no need for Mr. Joykill to found the Joy Publishing Company. The education professors discovered almost at once a long-established publisher to take the readers on, and with unbelievable eagerness, - a firm by the name of Lion-Borzmen. The publishers did not know whether the readers would teach students to read or not, but they did know that they would sell, and soon they were coming off the presses by the hundreds of thousands. A whole army of salesmen invaded the nation’s schools with the new, shiny, irresistible books which promised a whole new way of teaching students to read, and new stories, all about Tom and Mame racing each other on their tricycles, visiting the corner bakery, running after their dog Dot, and barbecuing in the backyard with Mommy and Daddy and Baby Sally.

Most of the administrators were excited and some of the teachers were excited, and soon they were trying them out. The students were not excited, but somehow that didn’t matter because students don’t really know what is

good for them anyway. And so the new readers were brought into America's classrooms by the hundreds of thousands and millions. They were so irresistible that other publishing companies got their own professors of education to design readers in imitation of Mr. Joikl's readers, and they too were manufactured and sold by the millions, until almost all the schools all across the nation were saturated with the new readers.

But the question remained: Would they do their job? Mr. Joykill's professors waited with great hopes but also with great fears. Then gradually the first returns began to trickle in. Here and there were heard murmurs that this or that student wasn't learning to read in school, that this or that class did poorly on a standardized reading test; parents began to complain that their children even in the third and fourth grades were having serious troubles with reading. The rumors and the complaints grew and grew, and the professors' expectations grew with them. Then, finally, the official word came from the U. S. Office of Education, indeed from Dr. James E. Allen, the U. S. Commissioner of Education himself. An estimate of the national literacy problem disclosed the following information: (1) that one out of every four students nationwide has significant reading difficulties; (2) that in large city systems (where the new readers are most solidly entrenched) up to half of the students read below expectations; and (3) that about half of the unemployed youths, ages 16 - 20, are functionally illiterate.

When Mr. Joykill's professors received this news, they knew that their fortune was made, for here was conclusive evidence of the success of their project. Professor Bray rushed to the Joykill mansion with the report, burst into Mr. Joykill's sitting room — for he, of course, had no study — and told him that he had astonishing news.

“What is the news?” asked Mr. Joykill.

The professor proceeded to get out the report and began to read: “The U. S. Office of . . . .”

“You Idiot!” shouted Mr. Joykill. “Haven't you the sense to know that I become homicidal whenever anyone reads aloud in my presence? Whatever it is you have to tell me, go into the next room and memorize what is on the paper and then come back and recite it to me.”

Professor Bray was frightened, as well he might be. So he went off into the next room, sat down and tried to memorize the statistics in the report. He found the going a bit difficult because the fact is he hadn't had to memorize anything since he was five years old when his uncle offered him a ten-dollar bill if he could recite “Little Bobby Shaftoe” from memory. But with much labor and perspiration he in time felt that he had at least the gist of the report fixed in his mind. He entered the sitting room once again.



“I am ready, sir,” he said with some trepidation.

“Very well, go ahead,” replied Mr. Joykill.

And so the professor recited the facts and figures just as he had learned them, or almost as he had learned them, from the report of the U. S. Office of Education.

When Mr. Joykill heard the news he cried out: “Splendid! Splendid! We have succeeded — not perfectly yet — but it is a start. My academic dreams have come true and now your financial dreams have come true. Tell your colleagues that they may report to me to receive their checks as agreed.”

And so the professor went back to his colleagues to tell them about their fortune, himself dreaming all the while of a little mansion of his own and a cruise to the West Indies, and perhaps one to the East Indies as well.

Today, Mr. Joykill, now a man of some 88 years, wracked with arthritis, a victim of failing eyesight, fallen hair, and a bad stomach, spends his days on the porch of his Montana mansion rocking in his rocking chair and puffing on his meerschaum pipe. But he is not staring vacantly into space awaiting death. On the contrary, his eyes are still quick and full of sparkle, and his prune-like face wears an expression of ineffable joy, like that of a man who has done something in life. No, he is not waiting for death; he is waiting for the latest report on the failure of the schools to teach students to read in New York and Boston and Philadelphia and Baltimore and Pittsburgh and Cleveland and Detroit and Chicago and St. Louis and Kansas City and Denver and San Francisco and . . . and . . . But his thoughts trail off. After all, a man of 88 can sustain an ecstasy for only so long.

Thank you.

President Rubicam introduced Dr. Trace:

“I am delighted to have our luncheon speaker, Dr. Arther S. Trace, Professor of English at John Carroll University. Dr. Trace earned his Ph.D. from Stanford University in English and presently teaches Literary Criticism and Russian Literature at John Carroll. He is a noted author; among his books are “*Reading Without Dick and Jane*,” and “*What Ivan Knows That Johnny Doesn’t*.” He has written many articles dealing with problems in education, and is editor of the *Open Court Basic Readers*, which are now being used by approximately one million elementary children.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you Dr. Arther Trace.

Dr. Trace: The title of my presentation is “Roger Joikl’s Revenge,” which I have just written for your Conference.

## Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

December 15, 2008

For 21 years I was a public school teacher in Odessa, Texas. I taught elementary bilingual, ESL, and secondary Spanish. I also taught dyslexia classes using the *Herman Method*. During all those years whole-language was all the craze. It came in different flavors. First they just called it whole-language, then balanced-literacy, and finally guided-reading. Some of the schools, on their own volition, introduced *Saxon Phonics* in hopes of closing the gaping literacy gaps that whole-language was creating. I appreciate those brave souls who convinced their schools to introduce *Saxon Phonics*. Some teachers who attended my ESL workshops still use Sam Blumenfeld's great phonics-first program, *Alpha-Phonics*. But the main driving force behind reading instruction was the whole-language philosophy with its three-cueing systems (semantic, syntactic, and grapho-phonemic – in that order). I had opportunity to talk to a lot of older teachers who were nearing retirement. They were a great source of information and encouragement to me. They had taught with some of the great phonics programs that were used here in Odessa years ago, such as: *Economy*, *DISTAR*, Charles Walcutt's *Basic Reading*, the Hay-Wingo *Reading with Phonics*, Palo Alto *Sequential Steps to Reading*, and the old *Open Court*, to name a few. I was terribly puzzled that the colleges did not prepare me, or my fellow teachers, to teach phonics-first. Basically we were told that we would be given the tools to teach reading when we got in the classrooms. Hopefully the situation is improving.

Last week I was reading through a stack of material Kathy Diehl, former Research Director of the Reading Reform Foundation, sent me. Among the materials was a stack of *Reading Foundation Conference Reports*. Kathy wrote, "Arther Trace – p. 22," on the front cover of one of the reports. That directed me to the article I have published above. It is from "Twelfth Annual Reading Reform Foundation Conference," May 4 & 5, 1973. The Sheraton–Cleveland Hotel, Cleveland, Ohio.

I read Trace's satire with great interest because it explains in exquisite language and minute detail the very situation I experienced during my years in public school classrooms. I worked with great administrators and teachers, but the materials for teaching reading were largely of the inferior variety Trace so well describes in this paper.

The Education Page on my web site [www.donpotter.net](http://www.donpotter.net) will provide parents, teachers, administrators, and policy makers with a thorough grounding in phonics-first instructional philosophy, psychology, and methodology.

Document revised and published on 4/8/10.

The article, "The Reading Problem and the National Interest" was added on 5/23/11. It makes a nice companion to the satire. Although basal readers are better than they were in Trace's day, the phonics component in all the "phonics-basals" of which I am acquainted so deficient that far too many student never read well enough to read the stories independently for enjoyment and profit. [It was published in *The Spelling Progress Bulletin*, December 1963 pp 2 -3]

Note, "Arther" is spelled "Arthur" in the Spelling Progress article?

Donald Potter, Odessa, TX.

Last updated on 9/20/2015.

## **The Reading Problem and the National Interest, by Dr. Arther S. Trace, Jr.\***

\*A paper given at the National Reading Reform Foundation August 7, 1963.

It is hard to find anyone nowadays who thinks that our schools are doing a good job of teaching reading. Parents don't think so; employers don't think so; the armed services don't think so; high school teachers and college professors don't think so; and even the students themselves eventually don't think so; and, most significant of all, an increasing number of elementary school teachers and school administrators don't think so either.

Actually the reading problem is rapidly emerging as the gravest of all the academic problems which our schools face at the present time. It is more serious than the shortage of classrooms or of money, or of genuinely educated teachers and school administrators. It is even more serious than the pitifully watered down curriculum of our schools or of the hard-core anti-intellectualism in current American educational theory.

There are compelling reasons why the reading problem commands the attention of everyone who is interested in the future of our children or of the country. One of these reasons is the simple fact that reading is not merely a basic subject in school; it is the basic subject. If a student cannot read well, he cannot learn anything that is learned through reading. He cannot learn history or literature, or science or geography or any other he cannot read. It has been estimated, for example, that over 70% of what a good student learns in high school he learns through reading.

In short, reading is the base upon which virtually all formal learning rests, so that if a student can read well he can learn much, and if he reads badly, he will learn very little. I should like, then, to make some observations about how the reading problem is related to the national interest and then to examine the weaknesses of the reading program which have made reading our number one academic problem in the schools.

President Kennedy has said that unemployment is our Number One economic problem, and Secretary of Labor Wirtz has stated that our ability to solve the unemployment problem is the test of our greatness as a nation.

And yet, Mr. Coullander, president of the National Association of Manufacturers, has predicted that 10,700,000 persons will be unemployed by 1970 if the economy does not grow faster than it has grown in the past 5 years. There have even been some predictions that unemployment at that time may reach 18,000,000.

However unduly pessimistic these predictions may be what appears to be happening is that an increasing number of unemployed are becoming unemployable.

A second crucial fact about the unemployment problem is that disproportionately large numbers of unemployed are young people who have dropped out of high schools to look for jobs. What many of them found, however, is that although there are lots of jobs, there are no jobs for them. Young men and women no longer in school now constitute 18% of the total number of unemployed, even though they comprise only 7% of the labor force.

This condition is further aggravated by the phenomenon of automation. There is hardly an economist or industrial leader in the country who does not think that automation will proceed apace. Inevitably, those who lose their jobs as a result of automation will in general (there are exceptions) be those with the least education, and insofar as automation will create jobs as well as de-

stroy them they will be jobs which require more education, not less. It will not create jobs for high school dropouts or others among the intellectually unfit.

Nor can anyone fail to realize that an increase of ill-educated unemployables has vast social implications. Unemployed youths in particular become not merely wards of society but potential threats to society. Just as the education problem is related to the unemployment problem, so the unemployment problem is related to juvenile delinquency, which in turn affects the crime rate. Juvenile delinquency has already reached proportions which would give any thoughtful person cause to pause, and much - though by no means all - of it can be traced to young people who have dropped out of high school and who cannot or will not find a job.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation reports that 7% more serious crimes were committed in 1962 than in 1961, and that the number of arrests of juveniles in 1962 increased 9% over the previous year.

Thus, in an indirect way and yet a profound way the education problem is related to the crime problem, for if unemployment increases in the years ahead, and particularly if dropouts contribute to that increase, then both juvenile delinquency and the crime rate will very likely increase, perhaps to the point where almost no one can feel safe.

It will not, I think, be difficult to understand how a solution to the reading problem in the schools will do at least something, and very likely a great deal, not only to solve the problem of unemployment but to raise the intellectual level of the entire country. There can be no doubt that what President Kennedy has called our Number One domestic problem, namely unemployment, is closely related to our Number One education problem, namely reading.

In the last year or two there has been an increasing awareness that the high school dropout problem is directly related to the reading problem. Dr. Emory Stoops, of the Univ. of California, describes the relationship between the reading problem and the dropout problem very simply and very truthfully. "Poor reading ability handicaps students in all subjects, poor readers tend to get poorer marks, and students with poor marks get discouraged and dropout of school."

Dr. Lester W. Nelson, Treasurer of the Fund for the Advancement of Education, has observed that "Much of the dropout problem in our schools is directly related to the reading and language problem"; and the Council for Basic Education warns that "If we are going to salvage school dropouts, we must begin in the first grade and begin with reading."

It is by no means impossible, in fact, that the most important of all causes of dropouts is the inability to read. This is the opinion of Mr. Daniel Schreiber, director of the National Education Association's School Dropout Project. "To my mind," he states, "the greatest factor in school dropouts is reading retardation. Study after study," he goes on to say, "has shown that the average dropout is two years or more retarded in reading.

It is no small irony that as the reading problem grows to outrageous proportions, the number of reading "experts" correspondingly proliferates. The number of reading specialists, reading supervisors, and above all remedial reading teachers has increased to an incredible degree, and the demand for them continues to grow.

Even more ironic is the fact that in the past 40 years mountains of research bearing upon the teaching of reading have accumulated. By 1945, more than 8,000 pieces of research on reading had accumulated in a period of 20 years.

Since the end of World War II, “research” in reading has become so intensive that book length monographs are published periodically which attempt merely to keep up with the bibliography of “research” in the teaching of reading.

If, then, the ability to read is so vital to the future of all our children, and if the reading problem is indeed so great that it profoundly affects the national interest, how do our experts in reading pedagogy account for it?

A few of them, in fact, stoutly insist that our students are reading at least as well as ever before, and perhaps even better. Prof. Arthur I. Gates, the author of a Dick-and-Jane type of reader series, states in a new pamphlet for parents published by the National Education Association, that “today’s youngsters read better than comparable children in previous decades.” Such statements are liable to make many old teachers, old parents, old employers, and old college professors, wince.

But most of our reading specialists have long ago given up the idea that there is no reading problem in our schools. They not only recognize it but they insist upon it. More important, they are so resigned to it that their energies are now spent not in finding out what’s wrong with the reading program, but in finding out what’s wrong with the children. The fact is that our most influential reading specialists are so utterly committed to the status quo in the reading program that to question the effectiveness of it is unthinkable.

It is almost impossible to understand the lengths to which our reading experts have gone in uncovering defects in our children which make them poor readers. In one book called *Reading Difficulties; Their Diagnosis and Correction*, Professors Bond and Tinker classify the reasons for reading difficulties under the following heads:

physical, emotional, intellectual, educational, visual, binocular, hearing, motor, speech, glandular disturbances, brain damage, congenital word blindness, lateral dominance, personal and social adjustment, emotional maladjustment, and effects of home environment.

The only suggestion that the reading program itself may be a cause of reading difficulties is in the term “educational,” which takes up only 6 pages of the book, and which merely suggests that dull stories and too much emphasis on phonics-rather than too little-may be a cause of reading disability.

But as long and thorough as this book is, it is amateurish compared to one called *Why Pupils Fail in Reading* by Professor Helen Robinson, author of the latest Dick-and-Jane Readers. The contents of this book defy description, but some understanding of it may be had from the fact that the index to the book lists 275 causes of reading disability, and none of them have anything to do with the reading program itself, either the materials or the methods.

I have gone through many of the mountains of such “studies” explaining why our children can’t read, and the conclusion has been forced upon me that our reading experts are quite content with the notion that the United States has vastly more emotionally disturbed, half-blind, dimwitted, neurotic, physically ill-formed, mal-adjusted, undernourished, glandularly deficient, and ill-treated children than any other country in the world.

I am not prepared to accept that premise. There may be as many as 2% or even 5% of our children who for one good reason or another cannot learn to read well, but there are not 30% or 50%, which comes closer to the actual number who are poor readers.

It should be clear the problem lies not with our children but with the reading program itself. The teaching of reading is now so vital to the future of our children and to the future of the nation that we cannot afford to have anything but the best of all possible methods and materials to teach reading in our elementary schools. And yet, there is every reason to suspect that the methods and materials from which our children try to learn to read are in fact, very nearly the worst.

There has never been a time, therefore, when we need to examine more carefully the reading problem in our schools than now. And if we examine it closely, indeed if we scrutinize it, as I have done and as I know that many of you have done, what do we find? The best term, perhaps, to describe the present reading program in our elementary schools is "Programmed Retardation." But "Programmed Retardation" in the teaching of reading is actually a three-headed monster. The first head of this monster is vocabulary control, whereby almost all of the words in the English language are kept out of the student's readers, the second is the look-and-guess method of teaching reading whereby a full knowledge of the sounds of the letters is carefully withheld from the student until it is too late to help him; and the third head is the contents of the Dick-and-Jane type reader which deny the students the opportunity of reading anything in their readers that is worth reading. I should like briefly to consider the threat of each of these three heads of this beast called "Programmed Retardation."

Vocabulary control is such a deadly feature of the reading program in American schools today that no one can understand fully what our reading program is like without also understanding what vocabulary control entails.

In the early decades of this century as American pedagogical science became increasingly scientific, our reading experts were horrified to learn that the words in one reader did not correspond very closely with the words in a comparable reader of another series; furthermore in counting the words in these readers, they even discovered that some readers had a larger vocabulary than other readers. This phenomenon led them to conclude that wouldn't it be nice if the authors of the readers all used the same words, and wouldn't it be nicer if all the students learned the most frequently used words first.

As a result, numerous word lists were compiled by our professional word counters, and it was determined that only 300 or 600 of the most frequently used and least interesting words should be used in the readers in the early grades, and that only one or two new words should be introduced on each page, and that furthermore each new word should be repeated at least ten times thereafter.

The fact is that publishers and authors of the Dick-and-Jane type readers and other reading experts have begun to be embarrassed by the fact that the vocabulary control apparatus of the Dick-and-Jane type reader appears to assume that all our students are feeble-minded. This dilemma has now led them to make one of the most specious arguments which they have yet made in defense of the status quo in reading instruction, namely that students read other books besides their basic readers. Prof. Arthur I. Gates, for example, in a recent NEA publication entitled *Your Child and Reading*, tells parents this:

"The basal readers are used to teach certain basal skills, including the ability to learn new words in any and all reading. However, reading of all kinds of material from the earliest possible moment is the heart of the modern program. American children from an early stage read widely and learn far more words than are taught in the basal readers."

“Several studies have shown this. One study demonstrated that fourth grade pupils could read and understand at least 8,000 words, and sixth graders 12,000.”

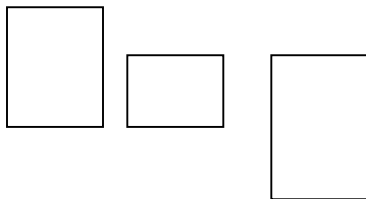
“Since such studies obviously do not test all the words that children know, it is safe to assume that today’s children have a reading knowledge of many more words than the above figures indicate.”

Now let us apply a modicum of logic and common sense to these observations. If our average fourth graders are quite capable of reading and understanding 8,000 different words as Prof. Gates thinks, and as I think, and as European educators think, and as American educators in the last century thought, then what are these fourth graders doing with a fourth grade reader that has less than a 2,000 word vocabulary in it; in fact, what are they doing, with Prof. Gates' own 4th grade Dick-and-Jane type reader with 1500 words in it. And if a sixth grader can understand 12,000 words, then what is he doing with a Dick-and-Jane type 6th grade reader with considerably less (c.3800) than half that number.

The plain fact is that not the authors nor the publishers nor anyone else can argue against the bald fact that in the early grades the Dick-and-Jane type readers assume that, students will learn only about 300 words a year and less than 1000 a year in the upper elementary grades. In what way is this not a programmed retardation?

The second head of the monster Programmed Retardation is even more of a threat to our students in their efforts to achieve mastery of the printed word. The Look-and-Guess method, as we all know, is the result of our reading experts' insistence upon abandoning phonics as the basic method of reading instruction. This development meant, of course, that they had to dig up a variety of nonphonics methods to teach students to read. Now none of our reading experts have been more ingenious in hitting upon non-phonics techniques to teach an alphabetical language than Prof. David Russell, author of a leading Dick-and-Jane type reader series: He recommends that students try no less than 7 non-phonics tricks with the hope that somehow with one of them they may be able to attack a word without being conquered by it.

The first of these tricks is memorizing the general pattern of the word; for example, the word 'dog' might look like this.



This method comes closest to the pure Chinese approach to reading English, i.e., learning the general configuration that the written word makes; but for learning to read an alphabetical language like English it is about as reliable as the flamingo that Alice-in-Wonderland used for a croquet mallet. For not only does the word ‘day’ and the word ‘hog’ and ‘boy’ and ‘bog’ and dozens of other words have the same general design that ‘dog’ has but this trick still doesn’t give the student any way of recognizing a word he hasn’t seen before.

Since, then; it isn't likely that Prof. Russell's dog trick will work, the student may then try trick No. 2, which might be called the monkeytail trick, since, as Prof. Russell suggests, special features of a word sometimes help, such as the double t or the tail on the end of the word monkey. The trouble is, of course, that many words have double t in them and other words also have a tail at the end, like *donkey*, and *money* and *honey* and *funny* and *bunny*, even though bunnies don't have much of a tail.

Having thus been tricked by two of Prof. Russell's tricks, the student can, if he is not yet fit to be tied, try another trick, which recommends trying to guess what the word means from the context. Even Prof. Russell admits that this trick is by its very nature a guess. This is the trick which leads mothers to inquire into the methods of teaching reading after they hear their children read *ship* for *boat* and *bucket* for *pail*. It is best called the wild guess trick,

By the time the student has tried out these three of Prof. Russell's tricks, he may have lost all confidence in his ability to read, but if not, there are still more tricks, including the picture trick, which invites students to guess the meaning of words by looking at the pictures. This trick is impossible whenever there are no pictures, and usually it doesn't work even when there are pictures. It is a highly sophisticated type of Look-and-Guess game but the student almost always loses because he doesn't know which word goes with the picture.

In the hands of the student highly skilled in guessing, then, the dog trick, the monkeytail trick, the wild-guess trick, and the picture trick may help him read as high as 2% of the new words he encounters, but there still remains the problem of dealing with the other 98%. Digging deeper into Prof. Russell's bag of non-phonetic tricks, the student can try finding known parts of words. There is always the danger of seeing the word hen in then or crow in crowd or bit in bite or yes in eyes, but most often there is the danger of the student not knowing any part of the word, and even if he did, it doesn't usually help him much with the parts he doesn't know.

It is difficult to understand how anyone can offer these non-phonetic tricks to students as a good way to learn to read, and yet virtually every teacher's guide of every Dick-and-Jane type reader series now on the market recommends them highly.

Prof. Russell does, it is true, recommend, under certain conditions, the phonics trick. Now the phonics trick not only does the trick for 85% of the words in the English language but is also the best help for the remaining 15% of the words in English, all of which are at least partly phonetic. And yet, as we all know, virtually every Dick-and-Jane type reader series recommends that a full knowledge of the phonics of the student's language be withheld from him until the end of the third grade:

This whole procedure is very much like the procedure of a burglar who wants to rob a certain house by entering through the back door. Among his burglary tools are a sponge, a tube of tooth paste, the backdoor key, a match stick, a hair pin, a nail, and a monkey's tail. Not being quite sure as to which of these tools is the most useful, he engages in 45 years of research to find out which of his tools will best open the back door. Then when he thinks he has found the answer, he approaches it in the middle of the night. He tries first to open the door with the sponge, then the toothpaste tube, then the match stick, then the monkey tail, and so on, until as a last resort he tries the backdoor key without really having much faith in it. And the door opens.

The happy ending of this parable might be that having spent so long fumbling with the lock, he arouses the residents, who call the police. The police apprehend him and haul him off to jail where he is still sitting trying to figure out why the backdoor key opened the backdoor and why his other tools didn't. The damage which the third head of the monster Programmed Retardation can do will be evident to anyone who takes the trouble to examine what is in our Dick-and-Jane type readers.



Nothing distinguishes European readers or American readers of the last century from our Dick-and-Jane type readers so much as the fact that European educators and earlier American educators were concerned first of all with what students should read in their readers, and then they asked, "How should students learn to read these selections?" whereas our modern reading experts first ask the question, "By what methods should children be taught to read?" and then they ask "What can children learn with these methods?" Anyone who examines European readers or American readers of a century ago knows that students can learn a great deal from their readers, but the answer to what children can learn from the Dick-and-Jane type reader is, "Nothing of any consequence."

"There might be some, though not much, justification for our reading experts permitting the method to determine the content of these readers if the methods were good methods, but they appear to be the worst of all possible methods, namely vocabulary control with all its intricate rules and the Look-and-Guess method with all its profound illogicalities.

Poetry, of course, has virtually disappeared from our Dick-and-Jane type readers because no recognizable poem could possibly pass the rules of vocabulary control. In the Scott Foresman Dick-and-Jane Readers, there is no poetry at all in the readers for the first five grades, and the few poems that appear in the sixth grade reader would not strain the brain of a slow kindergartner to understand or a first-grader to read. Furthermore, with 4 or 5 exceptions, the names of the authors who contributed to the Dick-and-Jane sixth grade readers might just as easily be chosen at random from any telephone book, so far as their contribution to literature is concerned.

Many people are now asking why students cannot any longer read the famous words of our great American patriots in their readers. The answer is simple. Our great American patriots violate the rules of vocabulary control. Benjamin Franklin and Daniel Webster and Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln introduce too many new words on each page and they don't repeat them often enough.

One of the newest primers of the Dick-and-Jane readers tells us the sort of thing our children will be reading in the sixties if our reading experts continue to have their way. It features the antiseptic threesome Sally, Dick and Jane, and stars Mother and Father, who behave like candidates for the all-American clown. In one episode Father thinks that a dummy, which Dick made, is Dick himself. In another, they are all playing blind man's bluff, and Mother, who is the blind man, thinks she has found Sally and her teddy bear, but it turns out that she has found Father, who has the teddy bear. In another episode, Father is pushing Mother in a little red wagon and Mother is waving streams of crepe paper in the air. In still another episode, Father comes out to the garage to get his car to go to work and finds the driveway cluttered up with Dick's and Jane's toys. Father then decides to go to work in Dick's toy car. He asks Dick and Jane if they want to ride in the toy car with him, but Dick and Jane apparently think he is acting so nutty they won't have anything to do with him. Finally, Father gets Sally and Tim, her everlasting teddy bear to ride with him.

In an anti-climatic outburst the selection ends with these well-controlled vocabulary words:

"Oh, oh, oh!" said Jane.  
What a funny father we have.  
What a funny mother!"

These stories do, of course, help adjust students to life, if their fathers and mothers are fools, and they also help adjust them to the lunatic asylum if ever they should be committed there. The Dick-and-Jane readers for the early grades turn out to be comic books in hard covers, but they aren't even very funny.

The extent to which the quality of the selections in American school readers have deteriorated in the past 50 years is almost beyond belief. Whereas authors of the 19th century American readers used to deliberate whether it would be better to include the best English authors or the best American authors in their readers, the authors of our Dick-and-Jane type readers are deliberating how they can somehow concoct some kind of life-adjustment story to amuse the kiddies when they have to draw from a list of 1,000 or 2,000 pre-chosen words without introducing more than two or three new words on each page and of repeating these new words five or ten times in the rest of the book.

President John Adams during his long and distinguished career as statesman had The New England Primer as his constant companion. We are fortunate indeed that the Dick-and-Jane primer is not our president's constant companion today.

Yet there can be no doubt that what children read in their readers has a profound effect upon their thinking and upon their education. A spokesman for Scott, Foresman & Co., stated recently that he did not think the contents of the Dick-and-Jane readers would be changed very much because he said his company gets "Thousands of letters from youngsters addressed to Dick and Jane each year." He also says that Dick and Jane get valentines and that he doubts that anyone ever sent Mr. McGuffey a valentine.

Children are, of course, prone to believe that what is in their basal readers is important, or at least good. But when the selections in their readers are in fact very important and very bad, their whole understanding of what is good, or not good, important or not important, becomes warped.

It may be that the only valentine that William McGuffey ever received was the Memorial Resolution of the National Education Association in 1878, which was one of the highest tributes ever paid to an American educator. When the National Education Association presents a similar memorial resolution to the authors of the Dick-and-Jane type readers, then we will know that we are indeed lost.

Henry Ford and William McKinley and Mark Twain and a host of other eminent Americans as well as thousands of less eminent ones did acknowledge their indebtedness to the McGuffey Readers after they became adults. But it is hard to imagine that anyone who has recently achieved a position of eminence today could acknowledge with a straight face his indebtedness to the Dick-and-Jane type readers he read as a child. It is more likely to be the high school dropout on relief who says, "Everything I am today I owe to Dick and Jane."

After having examined some 150 Reader series from France, Germany, the Soviet Union, Italy, Yugoslavia, Hungary, and other European countries, I can say in all seriousness the comparison between these and our Dick-and-Jane type readers is in every important respect, scandalous. The only people who profit from these readers are the authors, the publishers, and the remedial reading teachers.

Yet there are a number of good reasons for thinking that the Dick-and-Jane type readers with all their various programmed retardation features have had their day. One reason is that there is a rapidly increasing awareness all over the country that the reading problem is becoming more acute.

Secondly, the Dick-and-Jane type readers have become the disgrace of the educational world and the laughing stock of the nation; third, the proponents of the Look-And-Guess method are on the run and fourth, new reading materials are now appearing which for the first time in 40 years challenge the student's intelligence rather than insult it.

But the main point of all these observations is that if leaders in business and industry think that the way reading is taught in the schools will in the years to come have no effect upon business or industry, they are wrong; if labor leaders and government leaders think that the way reading is taught in the schools will have no effect on the strength of labor or the quality of people in government they too are wrong; and if Negroes think that the way reading is taught in the schools will have no effect upon their welfare, they are also wrong. And finally, if anyone at all thinks that the way reading is taught in our elementary schools will have no effect on the future of the student or the dropout problem or the unemployment problem or the crime problem or the national state or local economy or on the very future of this country, he too is wrong. Clearly, the reading problem in American schools has now become everybody's problem, no matter how high he may be in government, business, industry, education, labor, the professions, or any other major area; no matter whether he is a parent or a teacher or a school administrator or a member of the local school board: or whether he is charged with the increasingly heavy responsibility of choosing the textbooks from which our students must learn to read.

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### **Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter**

**May 11, 2011**

I included the following review of the 1963 Open Court Synthetic Phonics Reading Program because I believe it is part of a story-waiting-to-be-told. Harold Henderson gives us some insights into the early history of the program in his magnificent cultural history: *Let's Kill Dick and Jane*; but the whole story of the Carus family's valiant attempt to rescue America from illiteracy and intellectual mediocrity waits to be told in the wake of the later unfortunate history of the program after it was purchased and significantly changed by SRA/McGraw-Hill.

Although the following review may seem hopelessly dated, it reveals the great hope that was generated with the publication of a truly synthetic phonics program with cultural and intellectual sophistication. Two of my children became excellent readers with the original program, as did many thousands of other grateful Open Court students.

Samuel L. Blumenfeld's essay at the end of this document, "Dyslexia and the Rockefellers," will cause those who think Trace's little story about Rodger Joikl was a pure flight of fancy to think again.

[Spelling Progress Bulletin October 1963 pp22-24]

## **Reviews of New Books, by the editors.**

### **The Open Court Basic Readers, by Priscilla L. Mc Queen and Arther S. Trace, Jr.**

Of the new books designed to teach reading by direct phonics, few that have come our way seem to us to measure up to Book 1-1 and Book 1-2 of the Open Court Reading Series. This excerpt from the Forward of the Teacher's Guide to these beautifully printed, beautifully illustrated volumes will go some way to explain this eulogy.

“Because the children are taught the basic rules to sound out words the first semester of the first year, thereafter they can pronounce most words they see in print. Since a six-year old’s speech recognition vocabulary is more than 10,000 words and often over 20,000, it has been thought not desirable to “control” (draw from standardized lists) the vocabulary of the Open Court Readers. Such “control” would have rendered impossible the inclusion of dozens of selections of the highest quality. Yet the selections included are wholly within the grasp of the below average student.

If this last sentence should prove widely true, these readers would obviate the need to divide primary classes into groups of bright, average and slow readers, to the silent heart break, the humiliation, the resentment, the incipient delinquency of tens of thousands of these February beginners. Only time and wide experimentation under diverse conditions could validate or reluctantly disprove this claim.

The phonic method is one developed through of trial by Mrs. Priscilla L. McQueen, editor of Reader 1-1. It teaches its 42 basic speech sounds in the order best calculated to build up a large reading vocabulary by the end of the first semester. With each sound, the children then and there, learn its commonest spellings, be there one, two, three or even four, For instance, the long sound of *i* is taught as depicted in *lie, light, tile, by*, and that of *k* as in *cat, Kit, kick*. Consonant blends are early introduced to give scope for meaningful sentences from quite early in the term. But of course, with phonics taught at this pace and with this thoroughness not much in the way of real literature can be attempted this first semester Even so, one finds little gems here and there. For instance, *w* demonstrates itself through

“Walk with me to the wishing well. Throw in a penny. Now make a nice big wish.  
Do you think it will come true?”

The *kwh* sound of *qu* comes with a little touch of poetry:

Kathy and Dorothy were quietly walking down the path.

“Quack, quack,” they heard.

“Hide quickly and watch the baby ducks come down the path,” Cathy said.

“Quack, quack,” said mother duck.

“She walks like a queen,” said Dorothy.

But real literature abounds in Reader 1-2, the second semester book. Its editor is Arther S. Trace, Jr., author of that *What Ivan Knows That Johnny Doesn't* which created such a furor among the more entrenched of the Look-and-Say persuasion. Some of our readers may remember our review of it in the Bulletin of June 1962. In any case, else where in this issue, they will find a copy of a no-holds-barred speech of Dr. Trace’s delivered at the last yearly convention of the Reading Reform Foundation in New York.

A few brief quotations from the Foreword to the Teacher’s Guide to this second reader will give

some idea of the level of its content. “The selections,” it states, “were chosen after considering thousands of possibilities and rejecting most of them either for pedagogic reasons, or else for the equally important reason that they were not good enough. A special effort has been made to exclude selections which are inane, trivial, dull or otherwise unrewarding. In fact, every effort has been made to offer the best and most rewarding selections that have ever been brought together in a reader series.”

In this reviewer’s opinion, both efforts - that to exclude and that to bring together - have been refreshingly successful.

Other revealing excerpts from Dr. Trace’s Forward are “Since the selections are primarily children’s classics, and therefore have stood the test of countless critics, parents and children, the teacher will know they are as much a delight to teach as the students will find them a delight to read...” “Among the fables, for example are *The boy who cried wolf*, *The fox and the grapes*, and several others from Aesop. *The Arab and his camel* and other fables from various countries are included. The Mother Goose rhymes are represented by *Old Mother Hubbard* and *Cock crow, in the morn*. Among the many folk tales are *The gingerbread boy*, *The little engine that could*, *Three billy goats gruff*, and *How the rabbit got its tail*. The fairy tales include, among others, *The Brementown musicians*, *The shoemaker and the elves*, *Hansel and Gretel*. Classical myths included are *King Midas and the golden touch*, *The Trojan horse*, and *Daedalus and Icarus*.”

“Stories from many of the major countries of the world are also included, such as *Makulu* from South Africa, *Jakata Tales* from India, *The Snow Maiden* from Russia, *King Arthur* from England, and *The Dutch Boy and the Dike* from the Netherlands... The many poems in these readers include not only a large number of American folk rhymes but also poems by such poets as John Keats, Christina Rossetti, Emily Dickinson, Walter de la Mare, Robert Louis Stevenson and Robert Frost.”

Children’s poems by poets of this caliber have been this reviewer’s delight since toddler days. Some of our readers may have preschoolers who would be enchanted by those in this book. Here are a few samples to try on them:

### **The Elf and the Dormouse**

Under a toadstool  
Crept a wee Elf  
Out of the rain  
To shelter himself.

Under the toadstool  
Sound asleep  
Sat a big Dormouse  
All of a heap.

Trembled the wee Elf  
Frightened and yet,  
Fearing to fly away

Lest he got wet.  
To the next shelter-  
Maybe a mile!  
Sudden the wee Elf  
Smiled a wee smile

Tugged till the toadstool  
Topped in two.  
Holding it over him,  
Gaily he flew.

Soon he was safe home.  
Dry as could be.  
Soon woke the Dormouse -  
“Good gracious me!

Where is my toadstool?"  
Loud he lamented.  
And that's how umbrellas  
First were invented.

*Oliver Herford.*

### **The Kite**

I often sit and wish that I  
Could be a kite up in the sky  
And ride upon the breeze and go  
Whichever way I chanced to blow.

*Christina Rossetti.*  
Hearts are like doors  
Hearts, like doors, will open with ease  
To very, very little keys,  
And don't forget that two of these  
Are “Thank you, sir,” and “If you please.”

*Anonymous*

### **The Swing**

How do you like to go up in a swing  
Up in the air so blue?  
Oh, I do think it's the pleasantest thing  
Ever a child can do.  
Up in the air and over the wall,  
Till I can see so wide,  
Rivers and trees and cattle and all  
Over the countryside  
Till I look down on the garden green,  
Down on the roof so brown -  
Up in the air I go flying again,  
Up in the air and down.

*Robert Louis Stevenson*

### **Clouds**

White sheep, white sheep,  
On a blue hill  
When the wind stops  
You all stand still.  
When the wind blows  
You walk away slow,  
White sheep, white sheep,  
Where do you go?

*Christina Rossetti.*

The happiest “Happy New Year”, the Bulletin could wish the more than 2,000,000 small Americans starting school this February, 1964, would be a school year magicked by charts, primers and readers -and dozens of enchanting story books aul printed in wun-sien-wun-sound spelng - a spelling so rational, so predictable that the mechanics of reading all but teaches itself. Failing that - and alas, all but a few thousand of them will fail of it - we wish them instruction from the very start thru phonics as efficient and reading matter on as high a literary level as these Open Court Readers provide.

Reviewed by Helen Bowyer.

# Dyslexia and the Rockefellers

By Samuel L. Blumenfeld

*The New Republic*, February 28, 2012

One of the great ironies of the Progressive Education Movement is that its leaders were able to convince John D. Rockefeller, Jr. that he ought to give his sons a good progressive education and donate \$3 million to the Lincoln School, a new experiment in social education in accordance with John Dewey's radical new ideas. So he put Nelson, Laurence, Winthrop, and David in the school, which turned them all into dyslexics, proving that progressive reading programs can cause dyslexia.

According to Education Encyclopedia, StateUniversity.com:

The Lincoln School (1917–1940) of Teachers College, Columbia University, was a university laboratory school set up to test and develop and ultimately to promulgate nationwide curriculum materials reflecting the most progressive teaching methods and ideas of the time. Originally located at 646 Park Avenue in New York, one of the most expensive pieces of real estate in the city, the Lincoln School was also a training ground for New York City's elite, including the sons of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who provided the funding for the school. Among the school's chief architects were Charles W. Eliot, a former president of Harvard University and an influential member of the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools; his protégé Abraham Flexner, a member of the controversial Rockefeller philanthropy, the General Education Board; Otis W. Caldwell, a professor of science education at Teachers College and the school's first director; and the dean of Teachers College, James E. Russell.

Unfortunately, Rockefeller's four sons were some of the earliest victims of school-induced dyslexia, a condition they had to deal with for the rest of their lives.

Jules Abel, in his 1965 book, *The Rockefeller Billions*, wrote:

The influence of the Lincoln School, which, as a progressive school, encouraged students to explore their own interests and taught them to live in society has been a dominant one in their lives. ... Yet Lawrence gives startling confirmation as to "Why Johnny Can't Read." He says that the Lincoln School did not teach him to read and write as he wishes he now could. Nelson, today, admits that reading for him is a "slow and tortuous process" that he does not enjoy doing but compels himself to do it. This is significant evidence in the debate that has raged about modern educational techniques.

David Rockefeller writes of his experience at the Lincoln School in his *Memoirs*, published in 2002:

It was Lincoln's experimental curriculum and method of instruction that distinguished it from all other New York schools of the time. Father was an ardent and generous supporter of John Dewey's educational methods and school reform efforts. ... Teacher's College of Columbia University operated Lincoln, with considerable financial assistance in the early years from the General Education Board, as an experimental school designed to put Dewey's philosophy into practice.



Dewey's educational methods were conceived and calculated to dumb down the nation, and he started out by dumbing down the four Rockefeller boys. Nelson, of course, was in later years able to hire Henry Kissinger to do his reading for him.

David Rockefeller writes further:

Lincoln stressed freedom for children to learn and to play an active role in their own education. ... But there were some drawbacks. In my case, I had trouble with reading and spelling, which my teachers, drawing upon "progressive" educational theory, did not consider significant. They believed I was simply a slow reader and that I would develop at my own pace. In reality I have dyslexia, which was never diagnosed, and I never received remedial attention. As a result my reading ability, as well as my proficiency in spelling, improved only marginally as I grew older. All my siblings, except Babs and John, had dyslexia to a degree.

Apparently, David Rockefeller still doesn't understand that he was made dyslexic by the teaching methods at the Lincoln School. He says, "I have dyslexia," as if he were born with it, and that is why he had such a difficult time learning to read.

The reason why David's older brother, John D. Rockefeller III, did not become dyslexic is because he attended the traditional Browning School in New York and the Loomis Institute in Windsor, Connecticut. He then went on to Princeton, where he received high honors in economics.

Winthrop Rockefeller, born in 1912, attended the Lincoln School. He later found formal education difficult, suffering from dyslexia. He entered Yale in 1931 but was expelled in 1934 for misbehavior. He had a successful military career, after which he moved to Arkansas and became its first Republican Governor. What is most significant in all this is that the experience of the four Rockefeller boys provides confirmation that the sight method of teaching reading, used at the Lincoln School, caused dyslexia. Of course, we were not able to know this until years later when their memoirs and biographies were published.

Yet, the progressive educators were well aware of this harmful phenomenon as early as February 1929, when Dr. Samuel T. Orton — a neuropathologist who had made a survey in the 1920s of children with reading problems in Iowa, where the sight method was being used — wrote an article for the *Journal of Educational Psychology*. Its title was quite explicit: "The 'Sight Reading' Method of Teaching Reading as a Source of Reading Disability." He wrote, as diplomatically as possible:

I wish to emphasize at the beginning that the strictures which I have to offer here do not apply to the use of the sight method of teaching reading as a whole but only to its effects on a restricted group of children for whom, as I think we can show, this technique is not only not adapted but often proves an actual obstacle to reading progress, and moreover I believe that this group is one of considerable educational importance both because of its size and because here faulty teaching methods may not only prevent the acquisition of academic education by children of average capacity but may also give rise to far reaching damage to their emotional life.

Orton's article was written for the very educators who were in the process of launching their sight-reading programs in all the public schools of America. And of course they rejected his warning. But it wasn't until 1955 that American parents became aware of what was being done to their children in the schools. It was that year in which Rudolf Flesch's famous book, *Why Johnny Can't Read*, was published, and it created quite a storm among educators and parents. The educators rejected Flesch's assertion that it was the sight or look-say method that was causing the prob-

lem, but parents read the book and many started to teach their children to read with phonics at home.

My own book on the reading problem, *The New Illiterates*, was published in 1973, some 18 years after *Why Johnny Can't Read*. Indeed, in 1973 Johnny still couldn't read! In *The New Illiterates* I revealed that the sight method had been invented by the Rev. Thomas Gallaudet, the teacher of the deaf and dumb at his asylum in Hartford, Connecticut, as a means of teaching the deaf both language and reading. He thought the method could also be used to teach normal children to read. So he wrote *The Mother's Primer*, which was published in 1836 and adopted by the Boston primary schools as a new, easier way to teach reading. Instead, it produced a literacy disaster. In 1844, the Boston School Masters wrote a devastating critique of this new way of teaching reading. The schools then quickly went back to the phonetic method.

In my book, I also did a line-by-line analysis of the Dick and Jane reading program and came to the conclusion that anyone taught to read by this method could become dyslexic. But nothing I've written on the subject has had the slightest influence on the professors in America's colleges of education or changed the prevailing sight methods of teaching reading in the public schools.

And that is why I then developed the *Alpha-Phonics* reading program, so that parents could easily teach their children to read at home in the proper phonetic manner. Since its first publication in 1983, thousands of homeschooling parents have used the program to teach their children to read. Of course, I have tried to get the public schools to adopt the program, but with no success. However, one high school teacher in Florida, who heard about my work and has actually used *Alpha-Phonics* to help potential dropouts learn to read, claims that it works miracles. He wrote in a letter to me:

I once was explaining to a student why children have reading problems. When I finished, a girl from the other side of the class, who I thought was not listening, said, "This is what happened to my brother. He is in the fourth grade, hates to read and gets stomach aches and headaches." I told her that his troubles were over and gave her a copy of *Alpha-Phonics*. Four months later, I asked how was her brother doing. She said he completed the book and reads just fine.

I had the same success with students in special education, who were labeled as learning disabled or educatably mentally retarded. I have 100% success with every student. The only variable is the speed at which students progress. You must follow Dr. Blumentfeld's advice and be patient. Do not pressure the child.

I have many other heartbreaking stories about children who have quit school because they did not know how to read, and no one will teach them. I have had children take a copy of *Alpha-Phonics* and keep it to teach friends they know, how to read. I encouraged everyone to try *Alpha-Phonics*. The results you see in the child are truly miraculous. It must be seen to be believed.

So if America wants to reclaim its preeminence as the most literate nation on earth, they can do so by simply using *Alpha-Phonics* in all the schools across the country. Not very difficult to do, and not at all expensive. In other words, we don't need No Child Left Behind or Race to the Top to pretend that we are helping the kids. But a dysfunctional federal government is simply incapable of doing what can be done easily and cheaply. There is neither the will, nor the intelligence, nor the open-mindedness to make it happen. And so if you, a parent, want true education reform, you can have it instantly — at home.