

Explanatory Introduction

To The Great Stony Face Sight Word Eliminator.

Mr. Edward Miller has developed a very unique tool for helping students overcome whole-word dyslexia called the *Sight Word Eliminator* (SWE). With kind permission from Mr. Miller we have reproduced below his informative explanatory forward to his *Sight Word Eliminator*, which is a modified version of Pat Robertson's *America's Dates with Destiny*. Everything Mr. Miller writes concerning his SWE applies to my *The Great Stone Face SWE*. (Donald L. Potter)

WHY THIS BOOK

This book is to help students phonetically decode print at an automatic rate of speed. Students that have learned to holistically identify words and have automatized this way of looking at words become handicapped readers. Many of the sight words in this book have been deleted. We have found that this facilitates phonetic decoding. Controlled vocabulary books facilitate the “holistic by sight” way of looking at words. This book will enable the student to make a cognitive switch from the “automatic holistic by sight” way of looking at words to the “automatic phonetic” decoding of print.

THE COGNITIVE SWITCH

It is our basic theory that reading requires access to and the use of the phonetic code. Not only that, it requires a definite strategy by the child in his analysis of written text—it isn't simply that the task requires phonetic decoding—it is also that the child must be “committed” (or his brain must be “committed”) to this phonetic strategy.

Otherwise, in the absence of that commitment, a conflicting strategy might dominate the child's analysis of written material. If this conflicting strategy is contradictory to—and mutually exclusive of—required phonetic strategy, then the child will be unable to use the phonetic code and will therefore have great difficulty in learning to read. The major conflicting strategy that pre-empts phonetic decoding is the strategy of automatic holistic-by-sight viewing. This strategy or viewing tendency conflicts with a phonetic strategy since it attends to words as visual wholes, and not as phoneme sequences. Children who bring this holistic-by-sight strategy to the task of reading will find themselves prevented by that strategy from analyzing written material into its constituent phonemic ingredients.

Furthermore, if the child (or his brain) is already committed by previous experience to a holistic-by-sight viewing tendency, then he may have persisting, even permanent, difficulty in revising that strategy to accommodate the phonetic realities of reading. A child who is having trouble switching from a holistic-by-sight viewing tendency to a phonetic strategy may be having one of several problems: (1) the prior learning of the mutually exclusive holistic-by-sight viewing strategy, (2) a difficulty in strategy changes in general; hence, a kind of cognitive inflexibility or (3) an inability to employ the phonetic code regardless of the kind of prior strategy used. There is no research to support possibility three. If students are having problems one or two, then *Sight Word Eliminator* will help. Students often have great difficulty learning to spell, so spelling is best taught from specially prepared word lists that enhance the learning of the phonetic code. Students often tire easy when they do read. Our research shows that the students are using two mutually exclusive viewing systems especially as they read from controlled vocabulary books.

SIGHT WORD ELIMINATOR

The most damaging result of the over learning of sight vocabulary is the development of a rapid way of guessing at a large number of words the student will see in print. This guessing is based upon the students' automatic holistic-by-sight way of looking at words. Even if the student can guess 90% of the words in his controlled vocabulary books, this leaves 10% of the words that must be skipped, wild guessed, ask the teacher or as a last resort, attempt to phonetically analyze. The controlled vocabulary books give the student the false hope of learning to read if only he will keep trying. After ten years of controlled vocabulary books, becoming a good reader is still just as elusive as ever for most handicapped readers. Is there any hope? Yes, now let's have the opposite of a controlled vocabulary book.

We take well-written, interesting print and block out the most common "sight" words. This certainly gives the opposite of a controlled vocabulary book. Then we listen to the student call the remaining words. We still discourage word guessing. When the student calls the word incorrectly, we simply say "please decode". We may ask the student to call the first portion—the first syllable of the word—then which letters go together—take all of the time necessary to help the student phonetically decode the words.

At first, the student may only phonetically decode ten or fifteen words per minute. If the student does a chapter at this slow rate, then he simply goes back and does the chapter again. Much to the parents and students surprise, the words start to automatically blend at 30 to 60 words per minute. The student and the parent sense success. Please be willing to work thirty or forty hours to fully develop the automatic phonetic decoding ability—thirty or forty years of pleasant reading are sure to follow.

Just another word about the use of the *Sight Word Eliminator*: The student is asked to phonetically decode words for just one hour at a time—no more. He should always start at the beginning of a chapter. If he completes the chapter in less than one hour, that completes the lesson. He will not be asked to do that chapter again. If the student gets only part way through the chapter, he should do that chapter again starting at the first. The student should never spend more than two one-hour lessons on each chapter. The student will sense great success when he decodes a complete chapter on first effort in less than one hour. This will indicate that the words are automatically blending for him. Don't stop working. The typist doesn't stop working when she can first type 30 w.p.m. Continued practice is necessary to become an excellent reader or typist.

The last lesson each week should be from the regular book. Students and parents should be pleasantly surprised with the rapid progress.

The student may have read only the first four or five chapters from the regular book when he finishes the *Sight Word Eliminator*.

The lessons should continue until the student reads the entire book aloud.

The student should then take a break (at least 2 weeks) and return to the regular book and read silently.

To maintain the student's new phonetic decoding ability, he should read good literature. Stay away from those controlled vocabulary books.

Notes from Internet Publisher: Mr. Donald Potter

Mr. Miller also uses the *72 Phonics Exercises* in Rudolf Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read and what you can do about it*. Ed usually works with two students at a time, one on either side of him. One student reads two columns of words, Ed will read the middle column, and the other student reads the two columns on the right. I have tried this procedure and found it very effective. It is important to remove the student from his or her word-guessing environment.

I have used Mr. Miller's original SWE with one High School Student with severe whole-word dyslexia. He made excellent progress with a combination of Flesch's 72 Exercises and Mr. Miller's SWE.

Paul Lukawski, a high school teacher in Florida, has used my *Great Stony Face SWE* with great success. Paul has helped hundreds of high school students improve their reading with intensive phonics instruction.

You can download - for free – *The Great Stony Face SWE* from the Education Page of the www.donpotter.net website. There are numerous highly effective phonics programs available there for free download.

April 21, 2005
Odessa, Texas

Update from Mr. Potter

October 26, 2013

We were saddened with the news that Mr. Miller passed away in 2009. I count it a privilege to have been able to republish the materials that he sent me over the years. I called Mr. Miller on March 11, 2003 to discuss the use of the SWE. It was then that I discovered that he also used the exercises in Rudolf Flesch's 1955 *Why Johnny Can't Read and what you can do about it* along with the SWE.

Samuel Blumenfeld has published two very significant articles on Mr. Miller's theory. They are available on my website. Actually it was from reading Sam's theory that student learning the Dick and Jane look-and-say method would show signs of dyslexia that set Mr. Miller on his research program. He also used the split-brain research by Sperry and others.