

READING WORKS

Nuts and Bolts
Literacy Teaching Manual

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Contents

Preamble	4
Quotes worth quoting	5
The READING WORKS Series	7
What are the benefits of this system of teaching and learning?	13
There is more to talk than freelance chatting	15
The importance of the human-ness in the mini-story sentences	16
Other gifts of interactive learning for all subject areas	17
The style used in this series	17
What's wrong with worksheets?	18
The very different theories of Vygotsky and Piaget	19
Teaching ideas for the sounds and words of <i>b for balloon</i>	20
Oral language teaching ideas possible from a picture	24
Simple through to advanced vocabulary expansion	26
Teaching upper case letters	27
Matching upper and lower case letters	28
The brain learns through consistencies – but what if these are missing?	28
The <i>In and Out Sound Game</i>	29
Grapes and apples	30
Left to right eye movement	30
The better the vocabulary the better the thinking	31
Some L to R ideas for early readers	31
Why is it so important to have a live teacher/literacy coach?	32
Why isn't READING WORKS electronically animated?	32
Where are the cartoon animals to keep young learners on task?	32
Interactive oral-language skill development	33
Lots of lesson ideas to incorporate with READING WORKS	34
Need-to-know-matters before formal literacy lessons start	36
Identifying problems is the first step towards fixing them	37
Language enrichment suggestions for all abilities and ages	37
Active listening and protocols for asking questions	41
Learning problems happen so easily	42
Spoken language makes all learning more visible	43
Interactive oracy	44
Hearing, listening and teacher enunciation	45
The visual aspects of understanding language	46
The importance of the inner voice	46
Problem-solving	47
How can a wider vocabulary be taught?	47

Assessing persuasive writing and speaking	48
Family and class conversation enrichment ideas	49
A few more vocabulary building ideas to try	49
Research skill development	49
Recalling and memory development ideas	50
How can spelling and word knowledge be made more exciting?	53
Where are the CDs for READING WORKS ?	53
Let's talk about noise	54
Why do some children find learning to read SO difficult?	55
Expectations of success and how to reach this beautiful place	56
The value and risks of failure	56
Good questioning makes all the difference	57
Child age and reading difficulties	57
What do highly effective teachers do differently?	58
Learner comfort	60
The benefits of whiteboards with room for everyone's elbows	60
Imprinting the brain via handwriting	62
Why <i>a for apple</i> can create problems	62
How handwriting teaches spelling	63
The tripod grip and easy ways to teach it	63
Incorporating language into creative and visual arts lessons	66
Paintbrush and scissor skills	67
Intensive language usage via art and drawing media	67
Pattern copying as vocabulary extenders and tool management	68
Handwriting terminology worth knowing and using	70
Teaching suggestions for parents on a topic: e.g. sentences	71
Sound differences within sentences	72
Subtleties that come along for the ride in oral reading	72
When moving onto writing - a helpful checklist for parents	74
Syllable happiness	74
Word games	76
Experiences and general knowledge	77
A last word ...	80
Reference - Helpful spelling rules for consonants	81
A glorious glossary of terminology worth knowing	84
ACARA (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) and READING WORKS	91
Books by this author	95
About the author	97

What are the benefits of this system of teaching and learning?

READING WORKS has been written to leave nothing to chance. Some of the reasons why each book has been designed as it has been are as follows:

- **The emphasis is on oracy.** This does not mean sitting a bunch of learners together so that their chatter magically sprouts new vocabulary, analytical thinking skills, visualisation development and all those other good things that are supposed to happen. A teacher – the expert – must be there guiding their novice learners every step of the way by posing probing questions that teach thinking, deductive reasoning, listening, reinforcing, accommodation with previous learning, and staying on topic.
- Teacher preparation would include such matters as: how to introduce the topic; when and how to use the whiteboard; the books and references needed; prior knowledge revision and linking old and new material; how much and what will be written down; subdividing exercises or activities into several options to suit different abilities and inclinations; making sure written tasks are robust, imaginative and interesting; making *en route* assessments and corrections; designing reteaching strategies and thinking up educationally valid extension tasks. Although this sounds like an overwhelmingly exhausting list, they can be done mentally quite quickly by the experienced teacher. New teachers will soon be doing the same.
- Enriching the brain and nourishing the intellect via well-organised, leader-guided, interactive talk and educationally valid written activities is easily made possible with this system.
- The study of letters and their representative sounds in READING WORKS is the baseline on which the teacher/parent/literacy coach can build according to the needs, abilities, background and unknown potential of the individual learners in that particular group, regardless of whether there are four or forty.
- Every sound and sound combination in English and their representative letters and letter clusters have been set out in easy but intensive bites to provide quality learning in a systematic and uncluttered way. This 'no stone unturned' approach allows teachers to feel more at ease knowing that they have covered all learning steps when teaching their charges to not just read, but to read well. This is why a whole book is devoted to the schwa, for example, and why the IPA symbols also have a book of their own.
- Questions, activities and learning reinforcements can be tailored to not only suit the current knowledge status of each learner but to stretch them to ever greater heights. 'Potential' is an unknown measurement because, like the sky, it has no ceiling.
- The teacher has the freedom to teach to suit the learner rather than making the learner fit a commercial worksheet. Discussion-based, interactive, interesting and involving deep-level learning has a chance to take place. And of course, success is a much more likely outcome.
- A small portable whiteboard rested on the knees when seated theatre-style on chairs facing the teacher works well. Better still would be having a permanently fixed wall-

mounted whiteboard with a space for all learners. One big advantage is allowing learners to stand rather than sitting for long stretches of time. Another is doing on-the-spot marking and correcting *in situ*.

Sitting in grouped desk clusters can be the most uncomfortable and emotionally draining scenario for many children, creating considerable physical, emotional and learning distress as the result. (See more on this in the chapter *The benefits of whole-class child-height whiteboard writing*.)

- Another advantage of an oracy-based method is not only providing interactive and multi-sensory seeing, hearing, speaking and using the sounds studied simultaneously, but it helps to stimulate the imagination. Visualisation, fluent thinking processes and comprehension of meaning are thus able to take place.
- The positioning of a sound being studied as an initial, embedded and final sound enables to learner to hear its consistencies and inconsistencies. It also teaches that the same letter can look quite different in a list of words. Example: Ask learners to count the f letters in the following sentence: The farmers found that of all their scientifically grown crops, it was wheat that gave them the best of results.
- For many learners, the letter *d*, for instance, can be hard to isolate or identify when placed beyond the initial letter. Not learning to hear or identify what happens after the initial letter can be the cause of the poor reading and comprehension skills for many learners. READING WORKS has been constructed specifically to 'fill in these potholes' and prevent major gaps of understanding before they arise.

Nothing is left to chance. Each word in the mini-story sentences has been chosen for a particular reason to give as much learning nourishment as the teacher deems to be appropriate at that time. The pictures are equally language-rich to stimulate word-based thoughts and questions.

- Teachers/literacy coaches can pace lessons, shorten or lengthen their intensity, allow 'breathing space' by alternating new and old learnings, put in written activities for some while continuing the verbal with others, interchange groups, individuals and partners with ease to suit the moment, all the while having a purpose-built focus on high-quality learning.
- Difficult children are often the ones who have the biggest learning gaps. Filling these gaps – or preventing them in the first place – enables school to become a place of achievement and enjoyment for everyone.
- Learners will feel involved and successful when they know what they are doing and feel that they are progressing. In such an environment, behavioural problems are much more likely to melt away.
- Partner work (research has shown this to be much more effective than group work) that involves oral/visual/aural follow-up activities are especially beneficial not just because they are socially enjoyable in communicating via each other's face and eye-to-eye contact as well as vocally, but because this interpersonal 'both in together' adds

The *In and Out* Sound Game

This game would come after teaching the sounds of language and doing a great many oral language activities.

Colour-blindness will probably be an issue for at least one boy in the average class, (quietly know who they are), so simple shapes are good to have at the ready as a substitute.

Method: Cut out about ten squares of light card in six bright colours to the size that best suits the space available. Group them roughly on a desk and call this the kitty.



How to play: The teacher or literacy coach places three differently coloured squares in a row in front of the learner and explains and demonstrates how each colour represents a sound – e.g. hat could be shown as h a t (Point and go L to R slowly.)



Strategy: 'If this is hat, how can I change it to mat? hat mat. To my ears, the first sound is different, so out goes the yellow square and in goes, let's see, a red one.'



'If this is mat, how can I change it to met? Which square now needs to be changed? (Work with the learner, gradually handing over to them.)



Some more word-string suggestions:

(Note: two-sound words may be more difficult than three-sound words.)

it at an am as is
 go so no ho he ha pa ma me be
 bed bad bid bud bod bon bin ban ran can cap
 tip tap top hop pop pod rod cod kid kip

Imprinting the brain via handwriting

The physical 'choreography' when copying words/sentences using carefully formed handwriting helps imprint a visual memory of how a word is shaped. While words are being written, a lot of thinking happens in the mind along the way.

Writing is a valuable reinforcement step (short and pertinent) that can be inserted during and after the aural/oral/visual treatment. Writing helps the mind and memory re-process ideas, connect new and old learnings, and so make understanding more secure.

Writing tasks scattered in amongst the verbal discussions, demonstrations, questioning and reinforcing steps work well.

Below is a quick summary of the benefits handwriting provides in good literacy teaching:

- Handwriting is highly beneficial when it is unrushed and can be clearly set out in sequence so that the physical formation of each letter, word, phrase, sentence and paragraph is seen, heard and thought about in left to right order by the inner voice.
- A vital part of handwriting is feeling the pleasure of the writing process. Having good writing tools and enough space to write in physical comfort are must-haves.
- The thought processes need an uncluttered path if quality learning is to take place. If a thinking quietness happens automatically, the teacher is doing a superb job.
- When bookwork is required, a draft or practise-run on the whiteboard is an option many learners will enjoy using. The pencil/pen writing task is then more accurate because it has been pre-drafted. Visualisation of that draft – even when erased – will be more vivid because it has been done in colour and with bigger writing.

Why a for apple can create problems

Phonemic awareness of the forty or so sounds of spoken English within the structures of the 26 letters of the alphabet should be aurally secure, unambiguous and embedded in the brain's internalised memory bank of 'things I know' if reading is to be an on-going success.

Repetition to lock in the unchanging and known facts about letters and their sounds is the link that is often missing in a learner's crucial early stages of language development.

When *a for apple* is taught as the only sound for *a*, problems arise. Another difficulty is when the upper and lower case letter shapes are assumed to be understood rather than taught specifically and thoroughly over a longer period of time than just a few lessons.

Even a learner's name can defy the so-called rules in many instances, and so 'classroom truths' cannot be trusted in the minds of some young learners, and learning stress and confusion begin to take hold.

A rule is not a rule if it collapses on itself.

The *a for apple* is obviously not the same sound as *ay* for *apricot*, or the *a* in *Michael*, or the sound of *a* in the word *Monday* or in *primary*, but unless explained, even