

Word Attack Methods

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Teachers of pupils in the primary grades have a tremendous responsibility. On them is placed the difficult task of giving a proper fundamental foundation of READING. A child without such a foundation is a pathetic figure.

A person needs only a little understanding of words and he will discover the English language presents many problems. He cannot be satisfied with sight or memory reading. He must have some way of attacking new "fields." Why not introduce him to PHONICS?

Phonics is the study of sounds. The phonetic ideal is a language in which every spoken sound is represented by one letter and only one. No language has reached this idea, although Spanish, Italian, and German are closest to it.

The words of the English language follow no set rules. One reason is that English language follows no set rules. One reason is that English has borrowed so much from other languages. Accent marks are usually dropped but the pronunciations are kept, e.g., café. A second reason is that ideas about correct pronunciation have changes. Hundreds of years ago printers decided on English spelling but speech has continued to change the sounds. Around 1700 the word "join" was pronounced "jine" to rhyme with "dine." "Been" has been pronounced bin, ben, and bean. "Soot" was pronounced "sut" (but).

Long ago educators were phonic-minded. Then, for a time, phonics were more or less incidental. Recently, however, the pendulum is swinging back to systematic phonic lessons. I agree with those who advocate acquainting the child with various ways of attacking words. I think it has been proved that phonics help the child read more accurately, enunciate more clearly, and attack strange words more effectively. Let no one think a simple task awaits those who desire "A Johnny who can Read."

There are many ways to attack words. Ear training is a necessity. Children must learn to hear initial and final sounds. Later medial sounds can also be distinguished. Digraphs (ch, sh, wh), consonant blends (sn, scr, wr), and endings for base words are parts of words that appear time and again in reading material. A child must master the difference between wh and th. If not, he will continue to say, "when" instead of "then," "where" instead of "there," etc.

Every vowel has various sounds. For the young pupils, knowing the long and short sounds is sufficient. Many exercises should be given to train the eye and ear to detect these differences.

Knowledge of family words (words having the same endings, as ake, all, ail) proves of value in attacking words. It is worthwhile to take an extra ten minutes at the end of a science lesson to find family words on a certain page. It is surprising how many words of this type are encountered. It is also beneficial to dictate sentences with family words (Keep the sheep away from the deep water). Words that rhyme with a certain word can also be dictated (train, sprain, pain, chain). When a teacher checks these papers, she can readily detect which pupils are unable to write the sounds they hear.

Children enjoy receiving lessons with pictures of various objects made by the teacher. Under the pictures they must write the first letter of each word. At times similar pictures can be used and the pupils must write the first two letters of the words that name the objects.

It is important to use the new words of a lesson in unfamiliar surroundings. Hence, it is worth the effort to make original stories, or sentences, on the board. Pupils enjoy discovering

their new words in unique settings. New words may also be listed on the board. The class will undoubtedly be happy to add words that rhyme. Or, parts of new words on the board may be completed by adding initial or final consonants or blends. Prefixes and word endings should be pointed out at various times because it is essential for a child to recognize base words. Compound words present another form of attack.

An instructor, thinking she has given sufficient drill and having used various methods mentioned above, is often disappointed when a paragraph test is given. By this I mean writing out original stories of one paragraph for each method of word attack. In one paragraph endings are called for because blanks must be filled in when this type of work is given. In others a child is requested to furnish the necessary blends, endings, prefixes, or digraphs. Though this method may be another way for the teacher to detect unexpected weaknesses, it is a means to teach the child that much effort is required in the learning of speech sounds. Having no difficulty in recognizing or associating sounds with parts of words he sees in printed form, a certain child may need many lessons before he can independently furnish the symbols required in the blanks. After having had a few of these tests, many children are fascinated by them. To a few this type seems to remain a drudgery.

I came across a sentence recently which made me think that the English language must be saddled with more than 13% irregularly spelled words. "Though he pulled through a cough and hiccough, he still had a rough night on a bough" contains six different sounds spelled the same.

Good readers are not only desired in the schoolrooms but also in the church. Good readers do not make good society members but good society members are usually good readers. Catechism instruction is a means to help children take their places in the midst of the church. Does it take much imagination to know reading is a very important tool?

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