

Characteristics of the “Let Me Read” and “Reading Sticks” Series



The story behind this program begins back in the 1940's in our family. Little Grace was a beginning student at an old-fashioned rural school when she became very ill and had to miss most of her grade one year in the classroom. Her teacher sent home long lists of words to learn and Grace was very bored. Well, as she grew up to become a primary teacher herself, she thought that there HAD to be a better way of teaching reading skills! As a full-time schoolteacher in the 1950's and '60's, she worked in both the one-room schools teaching all grade levels and the then-newer public schools in Grade 1. Reading and Art were her favourite subjects to teach and like most teachers of her day, she developed a large part of her curriculum by hand. The methods of teaching reading that worked for her classes, her children who were home schooled for a year before entering public school and some of her grandchildren, are the basis for most of the techniques used in the “Let Me Read” reading program. Grace is my mother, now retired, and has helped me substantially as I updated and enhanced her methods. Even in her senior years, artwork, children's stories, and early literacy, remain an interest and she has never learned to be overly content in sitting still for long – something that she said made her fit right in with the grade 1 classroom! But now, a younger generation teaches... A few years ago, her 14 year old grand-daughter took the time to teach a bouncy 4 year old brother how to read over the summer using the “Let Me Read” curriculum and yes, it was easy and fun for both of them. And it is time for a second edition of this popular program, entitled *Let Me Read: Step 1 (Step 2, etc.)*. – Joy, 2016

- Learn to Read and Enjoy It:

When are children ready to start reading? Often it is between the ages of 2-5 years old, so let's encourage their interest and teach them! Think of them saying “Let Me Read!” © This program is not to be frustrating or “pushing” the child to read but rather used when a child shows interest in wanting to learn new words and shows a curiosity about their world and printed materials such as books, cereal boxes, signs, etc.. They will probably be asking you often what various words say or try to tell a story in a favourite book by “reading” the pictures. We believe that early learning should be enjoyed, not endured. Wiggles and giggles are welcome!

Three Kinds of Readers (Books)

1. **Integrative Readers** (also called “Levelled Readers” or “Pre-Emergent/Emergent Readers”)
 - Most popular in public schools
 - Thin books, each on a single topic.
 - Written to integrate literacy with other subjects such as history, math, or science.
 - Words are learned by “context” – seeing a picture on the page and guessing the word.
2. **Phonics Readers**
 - Most popular with traditional schools and homes
 - Basic, straightforward sentences reinforce the sounds of letters or groups of letters. Example: “A fat cat sat on a mat.” A few phonics readers also have an interesting plotline rather than just isolated sentences.
3. **Story Readers**
 - Most popular in public schools during the 1940's-1970's and in some Mennonite schools.
 - Characters in short stories remain the same in early grades to motivate readers to keep reading to find out “what happens next”.
 - Words are learned by phonics rules and sight words developed into vocabulary lists for each short story.

- Learn to Read by Reading:

In this curriculum, reading is learned primarily by practicing reading in contrast to typical programs which tend to primarily teach reading by *writing* words and other activities requiring a pencil.

This curriculum is flexible and works well with various readers or other kinds of reading material. It is YOUR choice of which readers or storybooks to purchase or use from your personal library of children's literature. If you want help to choose some good reading material, check the suggestions listed on our “Literature Bundles” link on our catalogue webpage.

There is a debate around as to whether to start with easy-read picture books and simple readers or to avoid them and teach with only “great” classics that have no pictures, only paragraphs of text. Our perspective is that the “great books” are not so great to teach young children to read. We have had customers who have tried that method and have come to us for help because their “grade 3” child can't read properly yet and they don't feel comfortable moving them on to the junior grades. Yes, there are some readers that lack the zip of a storyline – avoid those because someone will not want to read boring pages of text. But PLEASE, consider teaching a child how to read with stories that have pictures and simple, relevant sentences in large print! Many of these books are not “twaddle” and will not “damage your child for life”. These books break up the ideas and sentences into manageable steps, similar to a good mother putting food into bite-sized pieces for her child.

- Learn to Read Without Sequential-based Mastery Requirements:

Some typical reading programs available on the market take the approach that alphabet sounds must be learned and mastered first, followed by word list drills (often timed). When the child has shown that they have mastered these steps, they can move on to reading simple sentences and sounding out or guessing at words they have not learned in their drilled lists. The word lists begin with only one syllable; then when these are mastered, bigger words with more syllables are given. The initial reading practice involves reading sounds often in combination of non-words such as “sa”, “ba”, etc. The initial reading of whole words may be only in a string of words together that follow the same “phonics rule”. The “Let Me Read” program is NOT LIKE THIS!!! Rather it is flexible and non-sequential – YOU choose the order of letter sounds or themes and let the children keep going in the next week’s lesson, even if not all words are mastered. There is repetition built-in so he or she will meet up with the words again sometime and can try to learn more then. No child likes to be held back from a new poster page or weekly theme. We allow (and encourage) children to learn big words as well as little words, We list words according to pictures, fun themes, or interesting stories. And they learn to read in SENTENCES right from the start, using pictures and words (otherwise known as “rebus” sentences).

- Learn to Read With Relevant Material:

Our material is relevant to a child’s day-to-day world, after all, childhood experiences should be already delightful to him. We also focus on Canadian life and, as an example, we don’t teach “A is for Alligator” since that could result in changing the lesson focus about the sound of the letter to a science lesson in having to explain what an alligator is. To encourage confidence and avoid distraction, we choose examples that are easily understood by *Canadian* children such as A is for an airplane, an apple, etc..

Reading Tip: Fluency

To prevent “jumpy” reading of sentences, don’t point to words with your finger. Slide smoothly instead or keep a bookmark without movement under each line of text.

Four Ways People Learn Words

- **Phonics** (sounds of words)
- **Visual Memory Cues** (e.g. shapes of words)
- **Spelling Patterns** (e.g. little words within big words)
- **Context** (e.g. guessing the word in relationship to a picture)

- Learn to Read Early and How to Teach Reading After Grade 1:

The idea is that by the end of Grade 1, most children who began in JK or SK will be reading fluently enough to not need a separate “reading” curriculum other than phonics units, spelling lessons, reading comprehension work, and *plenty of reading material to practice with* such as storybooks, information books, and/or readers. Their reading vocabulary is already large enough to read most primary-level literature, they have already been taught the skills involved in deciphering future new words, and are confident to read the most frequent words used.

Since I was doing a second edition of the original JK-grade 1 program, updating some graphics and expanding it a bit, I also decided to expand the “Let Me Read” series to offer more guidance to parents and students of the grade 2+ levels. This is done simply by combining the our phonics units, spelling, reading comprehension topics while

briefly reviewing the literacy concepts taught in the earlier levels. Over the years, a number of our customers have indicated a need for this to be addressed, for example, if their students are older, have never used our “Let Me Read” program, but not reading fluently yet. To do this, I have given one more year under the “Let Me Read” title which bridges the gap between the early literacy foundation and the student work in the “Reading Sticks” series for fluent readers.

Because our “Let Me Read” program is so flexible, any student, including “special needs” children and those with a “delayed start”, can begin, continue, and end according to their own pace. If a child begins to learn the alphabet sounds in grade 1, it might take

Manipulative Tip: Flat or Chunky?

Letters are fun to arrange into words. While “flat” cardboard letters are “OK” and inexpensive, chunky ones (even tiles from board games) are easier for small hands to grasp.

longer than a year to finish the program but it still offers a very solid foundation for future grades. Back in the days when kindergarten was not as popular, my mom’s grade 1 classroom students were enjoying stories in their readers by Christmastime while the other grade 1 classroom was still learning letters/sounds and sight words using a traditional sequential method. If a “grade 3” student cannot read well, the Step 2 material. However, the ideal situation would be to begin at age 4 or 5 years old.

We use a variety of hands-on, auditory, visual, and written methods within the program to teach literacy. The sooner your child learns to read confidently and loves it, the easier your work as a teacher will be.