

## Words in Colour

Helping children learn to read is at the same time easy and difficult. It is easy because children who can speak have already done most of the work required for a quick conquest of the written code. It is difficult because adults who can read have, on the whole, no idea of what must be done to make someone else a reader. This ignorance, which is almost universal, becomes intermingled with pride, impatience and preconceptions, and often leads to a tension which obscures the issues involved in learning.

To teach your child to read, you need not have taken education courses. If parents wish to take on the job, they should think of themselves as people who are willing to play certain games and use materials which are as new to them as to their children; they will then become more willing to accept mistakes and to try various ways of working with the materials.

Patience in learning is not a virtue, it is a necessity. To make mistakes is part of the learning process. A wise person, after all, is one who can learn from his mistakes.

## INTRODUCTION

Why use colour?

For the beginning reader who first looks at words, there is nothing to tell him how they should be spoken. Letters don't shout their sounds any more than sentences speak their meanings.

Colour-coding provides the clue to this puzzle because it is unmistakable, it is easily recognized, and it does not change the traditional shapes of the letters. It is used on the word charts to identify sounds. Identical colours are used for identical sounds.

Example: **s** in us

**ss** in pass

The signs **s** and **ss** are the same colour, which suggests that you should say them the same way. Therefore when your child later sees the word **science** on the chart and recognizes that the **sc** and **ce** are the same colour as the **s** in us, he will produce the correct sound (because he already knows the sound associated with that colour).

But look at another example:

**s** in us

**s** in as

By colouring the shape s differently in these two words, we give a clue which indicates that their pronunciation must also be different. On the charts you will find as many colours as are necessary to represent the 23 vowel and 35 consonant sounds of English. No special phonetic symbols are introduced.

Once sounds are known, colour is no longer necessary and indeed the materials in the kit, except for the reading charts and the Word Transformer, are in black and white.

It may be that your child is already familiar with the alphabet or some of it. Of course the alphabet is extremely useful for looking up words in a dictionary or names in a telephone directory, but as a method for introducing the written forms of speech, it creates more problems than it solves; a knowledge of abc is of very little help in sounding out the word cab. The sign *a*, as you will see, appears in eleven different columns on the Fidel (Phonic Code), which indicates that it corresponds to ten different sounds in English, as in: pat, was, village, any, swamp, metal, father, all, late, care. (As you listen to yourself uttering each of these examples, you will hear that only in one of them does the shape a carry the sound we give for it in the alphabet. Besides most letters never carry in a word the sound we give to them when naming the alphabet.)

Instead of the alphabet, here your work will be with the signs (letters or groups of letters) which stand for the sounds of English, each represented by a different colour.

However, since reading has several other components besides decoding (which means going from print to speech) colour does not solve all the problems of learning to read. The problem it does solve, it solves steadily and easily in a way that preschool children find within their reach.

## Some truths about reading

Every child who is ready to learn to read has already done two jobs that were much harder...all by himself! First he figured out the meaning which underlies the words we speak. Then he learned to connect the specific sounds used by people around him with specific meanings, and he learned to speak.

In comparison to these tasks, reading is a simple matter. The child only has to match a system of signs with the corresponding sounds he makes when he speaks

You will give your child all of the keys he needs for reading if you introduce him to six simple conventions: these conventions are inherent in the reading approach and therefore need not be learned as a separate series of rules.

1. Words are printed or written on a straight line. (In English, the line is horizontal, but in some languages-it is vertical.)
2. We read from a given starting point. In English we read from left to right and from top to bottom of the page.

3. Our language is made of words. Words are printed with spaces between them. The spaces do not match the way we pause or run our words together in speech, so we must often ignore the spaces when we read aloud if we are to get the proper rhythm of speech.

4. Sounds are represented by signs. In English, a sign may be a single letter or a combination of letters. Unusual spellings should be carefully observed. Developing an awareness of the inconsistencies of English spelling is one way to become a proficient speller, as well as a proficient reader.

5. In print, the signs can be switched around to form different words, just as sounds can be reordered to form different spoken words. (pat, tap, apt.)

6. Reading should have the melody that your child uses when he speaks, but the correct melody can only be found after the meaning of the whole phrase has been grasped. A fluent reader looks ahead, grasps a meaning for the whole phrase, and adds the speed and melody of his own speech, as well as the proper tone of fear, surprise, joy, anger, etc. Reading with melody helps the child to determine how sentences and paragraphs are linked together to convey meanings and ideas.

## Some do's and don'ts to make your job easier and your time more enjoyable

1. Introduce the signs by one of the sounds associated with them, not by their letter names.
2. Do not sound consonants in isolation, but only as part of a syllable.
3. Be aware that your child is learning to read - he is not yet a reader. Accept his mistakes as a natural part of the process of learning. When he meets words that he does not know, don't tell him. Let him struggle with his difficulties and learn to decode.
4. Repetition is deadly! When your child does not understand, don't repeat yourself; find another way of presenting the problem to him.
5. It is not necessary to spend the same amount of time each day. Learning is a cumulative process, and you will probably find that reading skills develop in relation to the quality, rather than the quantity of time invested.

These words are extracted from Caleb Gattegno's original 'NOTES FOR PARENTS' the guide that accompanies the WORDS IN COLOUR charts and fidel. WORDS IN COLOUR products are available in our [online shop](#)