

# Mary Johnson's Two Sentence Reading Test

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Age : \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Test Administrator \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: Students are to read both sentences. Record their oral reading on the line below the sentences. Compare the two readings.

1. Mother will not like me to play games in my big red hat.

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Key words: *like, games, big, red, and hat.*

2. Mike fed some nuts and figs to his tame rat.

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Key words: *Mike, fed, figs, tame and rat.*

They rhyme with the key words in the first sentences.

Logic of the assessment: The first sentence is composed entirely of primer sight-words. The second is composed of simple, phonetically regular words, not usually taught as sight-words. Student who can read the first sentences but have problems with the second are holistic readers, reading by whole word configuration with a minimum of phonetic clues. They need immediate instruction in decoding English words with phonics.

Notes by Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter  
May 31, 2006

Mary Johnson's *Two Sentence Reading Test* is a cleverly devised assessment for determining if students can read by the analogy from memorized sight-words (phony-phonics). I began using the test on January 7, 2002. It is similar to the *Miller Word Identification Assessment* (MWIA) in that both tests compare students' abilities to read sight-words compared to their ability to read simple phonics words. Phonics-first trained students reading from the "sounds" will have no problem whatsoever with either group of words; sight-word-first trained students guessing from the "meaning" will have little problem with the sight-words but will experience great difficulty identifying simple phonics words. Mary Johnson wrote *Programmed Illiteracy in Our Schools* in 1971. In the spirit of the old *Reading Reform Foundation*, the MWIA and excellent free phonics-first programs may be downloaded from the Education page of the [www.donpotter.net](http://www.donpotter.net) web site. Mrs. Johnson's picture and article below were added on 11/22/06. Corrected 11/30/06.

The following information concerning E. G. (Mary) Johnson's test is from Kathryn Diehl and G. K. Hodenfield's *Johnny STILL Can't Read But You Can Teach Him at Home*, Associated Press, 1976, pp. 25 – 28:

Mrs. E. G. Johnson of Winnipeg, Canada, proved that idea (the idea that students naturally learn to read by analogy using parts of memorized sight-words previously learned as wholes, D.P.) completely wrong with some New York City children a few years ago, and we'll get back to that in a moment.

We mentioned earlier in this article the test Mrs. E. G. Johnson gave to some children in New York City.

She merely asked the children to read two simple sentences. The first sentence was, "Mother will not like me to play games in my big red hat." These are words found in most primary school readers, and they are to be memorized by constant repetition. Their key words are: *like, games, big, tame, and hat*. The second sentence was, "Mike fed some nuts and figs to his tame rat." These are words *not* usually found in primary readers but they are simple three- and four-letter words. The key words are *Mike, fed, figs, tame* and *rat*, and they rhyme with the key words in the first sentence.

The publishers and authors of sight-word readers claim that children will apply the substitution technique when they happen across strange words. For instance, when they see the unfamiliar word "fed," they will decipher it by saying to themselves, "This word looks like "red," but it starts like "fun," so it must be "fed." (Need we remind you? – a phonics-trained child simply reads "fed" and goes on.)

Mrs. Johnson and some colleagues from the *Reading Reform Foundation* took a tape recorder to a playground in New York City's Central Park and asked 43 children who had been promoted to the second grade, and 34 children who had been promoted to the third grade to read the two sentences.

Only 16 of the 77 children were able to read both sentences without error. The second sentence, "Mike fed some nuts and figs to his tame rat," came out "Mide fed some nits and fudge to him take right, "and Milk fiz some nuts and fees to his time red." One second grader looked at the second sentence and "read" it as "Sally, father, Dick, Jane." The simple little word "fed," familiar to all children, came out, "feed," "Fred," "fort," "flag," "girls" and "give."

Go ahead, try it on your own children. If you have a child who has finished first grade, but who can't read "Mike fed some nuts and figs to his tame rat." you'll know he is in trouble and it's time to schedule some lessons so you can teach him to read at home.

Here is a picture of Mary Johnson and an article by her taken from the September 1982  
*The Reading Informer*, published by *The Reading Reform Foundation*.



## We all can and should get much more involved if we truly want a change.

Editor's (G. K. Hodenfield) note: Mary Johnson of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, was winner of the 1979 Watson Washburn Memorial Award for Excellence in Education. She has attended many RRF conferences, as a speaker and as a workshop presenter and is a pioneer and moving spirit of the RRF. She made the following informal remarks following a special introduction By President Bettina Rubicam at the first general session in Toronto, Saturday morning, July 10.

by Mary Johnson

Thank you, Bettina. It has been a beautiful, long lasting friendship with Bettina, all of 22 years now. All of the RRF conferences I have attended have been in the United States. This is the first one in Canada, and I'm really thrilled to have you here. I wish you a warm welcome and I hope you enjoy your visit.

We really have turned things around in Manitoba, and I can honestly say we do not have a reading problem there now. It is not just one thing. It is not just because we have a lot of phonetic books authorized. I would say basically it was public opinion that turned the situation around. The public was convinced year after year over a 15-year period. It took the same kind of exposure and pressure every single year to do this.

You can make a big splash one time, but when it fizzles out, things go on as they did before. What convinced the public and the media and the teachers was the use of very simple tests. Because I had no "qualifications," no one would listen to me. I argued about theory and textbooks, but no one would listen.

So I had groups of children — **not** especially selected — read two kinds of sentences. They would read a sentence from a school reader, which they could read fluently and easily without mistakes. Then they would read a similar sentence which was not any harder. (Editor's note: All Mary had done was to change a few consonants in some short, simple words. Children who learn to read with the sight word-first approach are supposed to utilize 'consonant substitution, aren't they? )

If you looked at the second sentence, it looked most innocuous. **‘BUT’**, the second sentence would have words which they had not memorized, and on the tape recording, this was devastating.

On the tape you could hear a child whip through the first sentence, and then on the second sentence he would say, “I haven’t had that word, I don’t know. It looks like. ...” and you would hear the groan and sighs and it was awful.

People told me later they heard this over the radio while they were driving their car down a busy street and almost had an accident because they were so utterly horrified. People were convinced, permanently convinced, once they heard the tape. That was all it took.

Last night Charlesetta Alston asked us all to try to do more than we've ever done before. I would endorse that 100%, and I would add, “If you have never tried this kind of homespun research, please try it. If it works, try it again next year, and the next year. It’s very easy to do.

You need to be professional about it and scrupulously careful. Keep very good records, conduct yourself in a professional manner. It may lead to bigger and better things.

I have been employed by the school division since 1970 — for the past 12 years I have worked for the very people who used to discredit me (at least they tried). Not the same people, exactly, but the same system. I have no “qualifications” now, either, but I’m accepted. I have come into the school system because of the ruckus I made for 15 years.

So I don’t think people need to worry too much about being put out of the school system if I can come into it through that door. So I would urge you people to give it a try. If you want to know more, I can fill you in. Thank you all very, very much for coming.

[Spelling Progress Bulletin December 1962 pp2,3,16]

**Mary Johnson's One-Woman War,  
by Stephen Franklin, Weekend Magazine Staff Writer.**

Why Can't Our Children Spell? she asked. The experts were indignant!

The tide is turning in Mary Johnson's six-year war against the experts; a war which has transformed her from an unknown suburban housewife into one of the most controversial women in Manitoba.

Mrs. Johnson is a reading-reform crusader, an unpaid amateur crusader who has single-mindedly plugged away at her contention that children are not being taught to read or spell effectively in Manitoba's primary schools. She has been opposed, ignored and ridiculed and has lost one battle after another. Now, after 10,000 hours of voluntary research and propaganda, of world-wide surveys and home-made tests she is at last gaining increasingly strong support for her assertion that the "look-and-say" method of teaching children to read is guilty of contributing to juvenile illiteracy. At their last convention, 400 Manitoba school trustees unanimously resolved that the present system of "look- say" sight reading leaves much to be desired and recommended a reemphasis on sounded reading (phonics). Former Premier Douglas Campbell championed her cause at the last session of the Manitoba Legislature and called for establishment of a non-partisan legislative committee to examine the problem during the recess.

A government amendment turned the problem over to the Education Advisory Board of the Department of Education for study.

In May this year the Winnipeg School Board, whose inspectors had persistently opposed Mary Johnson's assertions, announced they would launch an experiment in sight reading vs. phonics in three schools this fall. A later announcement said the phonetic system would be tried in at least 12 other schools on a less formal basis.

When she began her crusade quite by accident six years ago, Mary Johnson was simply a Winnipeg lawyer's wife, with three children, who gave music lessons at her home in the suburban city of St. James. She was - and still is - a shy, soft spoken woman. An English war bride, she met and married Winnipegger Ernest Johnson over-seas in 1943 when she was with the Woman's Auxiliary Air Force, and he an officer in the R.C.A.F. As the daughter of a church organist and choirmaster and a music teacher herself, she was very interested in sound and had a penchant for painstakingly devising dial charts like the Johnson's Harmony Guide and Johnson Chord Selector as musical ready-reckoners.

Apart from this, she was just "a mere parent." And this she remained as far as most educators were concerned long after the spring day in 1957 when an 11-year-old pupil of hers, an intelligent girl arrived for her lesson, sat down at the piano and proudly announced she was going to play a new piece entitled Minuet. "Called what, dear?" asked Mrs. Johnson looking over her shoulder, for the music was plainly entitled Mimic. No amount of effort, however, could get

the fifth-grader to sound out the word "Mimic". She knew what a mimic was, it transpired, but was incapable of reading the word.

Mrs. Johnson was both, disturbed and curious. After six months tuition the girl could sight-read music, but she could not read the title of it after 4½ years in school. "Unfortunately, she had never been taught how to sound out a strange word which she couldn't recognize by its shape" Mary explains.

She decided to check to children on her block to find out if they had trouble reading aloud. She was appalled to discover that not only were they guessing wildly at the pronunciation of words they did not recognize but her own son Grant, then age nine and in Grade 4, was as bad as the rest. And this despite good school reports in reading.

The Royal Commission on Education was due to sit that November of 1957 in Manitoba. With her husband's help, Mary Johnson determined to submit a brief urging the introduction of articulated phonics at the start of a child's school career.

First she needed evidence. She sat down at the dining-room table which has been her office ever since, and composed her own spelling test. It was a list of 25 simple one-syllable words - words like joy, nod, bog, wax and lent - most of which the children had not learned to sight-read in the Dick and Jane readers (the Curriculum Foundations Series which has been the authorized text for Manitoba schools since 1946).

She then persuaded nine school principals to give the test to 600 students in Grades 3 and 4. Only 10 of the 600 children spelled all 25 words correctly, and the average incidence of errors was 30%. By contrast a group of Grade 1 children taking the same test at a school in Argo, Ill., where the phonic system is used, averaged only 7% of errors. The results from Greater Winnipeg schools revealed not only misspelled words but the most bizarre of guesses. Students managed to misspell the word "jot" 95 different ways from "joket" to "cohawe" and from "kote" to "jinned."

It was two years before the Royal Commission on Education published its final report, but when it did it supported Mrs. Johnson's plea. The report noted that the author of the Curriculum Foundation Series "insists that consonants should never be sounded in isolation. (He) asks pupils to deduce the sound of a consonant from his ability to pronounce several sight words in his vocabulary. Thus, (he) reasons, if a child knows 'now', 'not' and 'never', he will deduce the beginning sound of the word 'name'. "The advocates of the phonic method would say, rather, "Teach the child the sound of the letter 'n'."

The Commission recommends "that after an initial stock of sight words has been taught, the teacher should teach the sounds of the letters, even the consonants, and thus give the child, almost from the outset, two methods of attacking new words."

The Royal Commission made a further point which Mary Johnson had raised: "If beginners in reading are taught letters in isolation, the Commission believes that parents will find it possible to help their children to learn to read at home, if they have need of help. Since parents generally

do not understand the sight method of teaching reading, they seem unable to help youngsters who are experiencing reading difficulties.”

They added that this change could be made without abandoning the Dick and Jane readers but that the use of the recommended phonetic attack would have to be taught at the Teachers' Training College. Mrs. Johnson did not wait for the Royal Commission report. With a team of 11 Winnipeg mothers with a total of 34 children, she first canvassed the English-speaking world through a letter sent to 200 newspapers in the Commonwealth, the United Kingdom & the United States. The 301 replies from parents, teachers and organizations convinced them the problem was widespread. Mary sat down and worked out a second and more elaborate test, this time a comparative phonic sight-word one. It consisted of 13 words from “look-say” readers and 13 unfamiliar words which rhymed with them. The test was given to 1,934 schoolchildren from Albuquerque N.M., to Edmonton, and from Nottingham, England, to Toronto, a total of 62 classes in three nations.

The results were interesting, Mrs. Johnson discovered. They not only indicated a similar state of affairs elsewhere in the world, but showed that English and U.S. school children taught by the sight method were by and large even worse spellers than the Canadians. 96 out of every 100 children had been able to spell “sun”, but the word “spun” stumped as many as 96% of the children in one Omaha, Nebr. school; 72% in Leeds, England, and 67% in one Winnipeg classroom. Also, quite a number of the attempts to spell “spun” were not just near-misses, but meaningless collections of letters like “cping”, “xouyeis”, “duodp”, “foeal” and “sishsha”.

The 12 mothers issued a detailed 16-page report a month before the Royal Commission report appeared and sent copies to every school trustee, every legislator and many educators in the area.

Educators did not take kindly to Johnson's intrusion into the methods of teaching reading. Nor did all the parents. Wrote one woman in a letter to the editor of the suburban St. James Leader signed Mrs. X- “It seems ridiculous to me that a non-professional should be allowed to have her self-styled reading tests even considered, let alone digested by those intelligent men who make up our school board. I would rather take my child to a good veterinary surgeon to have his tonsils removed than to have his reading difficulties diagnosed by Mrs. Johnson's tests.

Counters Mary Johnson: “I am not trying to tell the educators what to do. If only they themselves would take a good look at the present series of readers and investigate them objectively, I should be satisfied.” As it is, she explains, the publishers of the authorized texts not only supply the readers and the voluminous guidebooks for teachers, but also sponsor the lectures, reading experts and consultants who give regular seminars to student teachers. The publishers also supply the tests the children take. “All the tests do is camouflage the weaknesses of the system,” she claims.

To round out her own experiments, she charted the Johnson Oral Reading test, a series of 15 sentences using words not found in the Dick and Jane readers, plus a control group of three sentences using sight words familiar to her subjects. Armed with the test, a portable tape recorder and a supply of candy suckers, Mrs. Johnson headed for four widely separated playgrounds accompanied by her daughters, Anna, then 13, and 6 year old Susan. She found plenty of

volunteers to take the tests but not many who failed to stumble over the reading of the sentences. Later she played the tapes on television panel shows and at Parent-Teacher Association meetings, as dramatic rebuttal of suggestions that children now read better than they ever did.

For all her industry and effort, she seemed to be getting nowhere. The bookshelves in the Johnson home by now were filled with technical books, texts, surveys and reports on the vital subject of reading. She was spending five or six hours a day on this self-appointed labor of persuasion. More often than not when she was baking a chocolate layer cake in the kitchen or cooking supper for her family, at the same time she was busy on her conveniently long-chorded telephone giving what help she could to mothers worried about their own children's reading difficulties.

"I got lots of sympathy and agreement," she says, but support, which suggests doing something actively, was forthcoming from only a small number of people. There were times when I would decide to drop the whole thing. Then my family would look at me and say: 'Mother, you just can't!'"

"I couldn't have stopped even if I had wanted to. If I had I would have been throwing away all that had been done. I knew it would take dynamite to have any effect on this problem, because it is a big problem and an old one. I knew that parents would have to keep on hooting and hollering to get it done. And they have. It is really quite remarkable, because I don't think an uprising of parents like this has ever happened before. Our activities here are very meek and wild really compared with what is happening in the United States. But for once we are able to help the Americans instead of them helping us, which is good."

As a leader of the "phonics underground" and now a member of the national advisory council of the Reading Reform Foundation in New York, Mary Johnson has been running a clearing house and information center from her dining-room table in the past two years. Few developments on the subject anywhere in the English-speaking world have escaped her eye. She has eight bulging scrapbooks of clippings and reports. "Each month," she says, "I write a confidential letter to 11 girls who are leaders of parent groups across the U.S.A. One is in Phoenix, Ariz., another in Menominee, Mich., a third in Salt Lake City, Utah, a fourth in North Carolina, and so on."

In their long war against the established "look-sayers" Mrs. Johnson and her supporters found two particularly hard obstacles to overcome. The first was educators' assertions that present methods do already incorporate a blend of sight reading and phonics, a claim advanced by, among others, Manitoba's Minister of Education, Hon. Stewart E. McLean.

The claim is true. What is equally true is that the two sides are talking about different forms of phonics, the degree to which sight reading should be supplemented by phonics and the timing of its introduction. The Curriculum Foundation Series guide book prescribes that teachers use abstract phonics in which the sounds are sensed. The reading reformers want the introduction of articulated phonics in which the sounds are sounded out. They claim abstract phonics are hard for any but the brightest children, and lead to wild guessing.

Mary Johnson's other big obstacle was that, in the main, educational authorities in Manitoba refrained from coming out and answering her; for to answer her would have been to recognize her. And to recognize her would have been to admit that parents might know what they were talking about.

An interview with Manitoba's Deputy Minister of Education, H Scott Bateman, and his director of curricula, G. M. Davies, reveals that the department has not been unmindful of trends in the teaching of reading. "We don't think the Curriculum Foundation Series is perfect," Bateman explained. "And we do have experiments already under way with other readers in selected classrooms. But we would much sooner defer a decision for at least another year until we've had a chance to fully test the new readers. For quite apart from any other considerations, extremely high costs are involved in switching to new readers for all Grade 1 to 6 classrooms in the province.

"There are six different texts under experiment now. Two are quite new series and there are other and newer series coming on the market. There is also an upsurge of interest to turn out new series which would be Canadian rather than American."

Successive editions of the teachers' guide book to the Curriculum Foundation Series have themselves recognized the trend and there has, the two officials agreed, been a trend in them to an earlier introduction of phonic elements on a permissive basis. Manitoba teachers still use the 1948 edition. "But to shift to the 1952 edition would be to introduce a book that is already 10 years old,"

Bateman explained. "Some of these classroom tests take three years to complete. One has already been under test for two full years. We have to turn to the practicing teachers for their reports on the readers unless we want to be a bunch of ivory tower jackasses. And so it takes time to reach a sound decision."

Mary Johnson's six years of "pecking away at one single problem" may have had more effect than she yet realizes. (end of quotes),

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### **Comments by Helen Bowyer**

The S.P.B. has its own special reasons for congratulating the Weekend Magazine of the Winnipeg Tribune on its eulogy of Mrs. Mary Johnson. She was an early contributor to our fledgling publication and has since been an arresting source of information on the state of reading both in our northern neighbor and in other countries of the English-speaking world. Moreover, anyone actively crusading against *look-and-say* is to that extent, a colleague of ours. Like us, the *back-to-phonics* advocate realizes that English is an alphabetic language, not an ideographic one. He recognizes that its print is made up of sequences of letters and letter combinations, each one of which is *intended* to visualize one of the forty basic sounds, of which our spoken tongue is composed. Thus the printed word *dog* is a sequence of the letters d, o, g,

and quite correctly visualizes the sequence of basic speech sounds we utter in the second member of the sentence, "The dog is an immemorial friend of man." If this correspondence of symbol and sound held for: *one, child, his, mother, know, gnat, phlegm*, and thousands of other such everyday words, "*back-to-phonics*" would be all that is needed to solve our reading problem, and the Bulletins campaign for spelling reform would be as superfluous as gilding a ten dollar gold piece.

But it is precisely because this symbol-sound correspondence doesn't hold often enough, that *look-and-say* drove phonics from our schools. Instead of the merely forty symbols (letters and letter combinations) required to give each basic sound the single, consistent, and wholly predictable visualization which truly efficient spelling demands, there are some seventy such phonograms, not one of which can be depended on "*to do its job, its whole job, and nothing but its job*" by itself. For instance, j permits g to oust it from *gem*, and dge to take its place in such words as *pledge, ridge, budge*, which obviously should transmute themselves as *plej, rij, buj*. Ea serves with equal aplomb in *mead, bread, heard*, and ou in *four, tour, sour*. T thinks nothing of letting d pinch-hit for it in the past tense of whole categories of verbs - vide: *dropped, talked, puffed* - and s takes over for z in thousands of words and their inflections - girls, rose, Nan's, raises, noises, teaches, and use (which is it, use or uze?).

It all works out that we have 251 common spellings (and more than 200 less common ones) for our 40 basic speech sounds and not one of them does the back-to-phonics movement propose to drop!

The American school had been struggling with this monstrous superfluity for almost three centuries when new compulsory attendance laws triggered what its leadership hoped would be a way out of it. Until then, the kid who couldn't learn to read could usually drop out of school at the age of 12, but now the school had to keep him till 16. Away, then, with all this futile sounding out of who, do, you, through, grew, blue, evil, devil, weevil, bevel, they said, let's teach the word as one piece and be done with it.

Why desperation should have taken this turn is something for the psychologist of our phonemic future to diagnose. For not only did our education archives have on record a number of highly successful experiments here and in England in the "teeching ov reeding and rieting bie meenz ov wun-too-wun alphabets", but the mere crossing of a bridge at El Paso or Brownsville landed one on the northern edge of some 3,500,000 square miles of Spanish-speaking territory where all education from first grade through medicine, law, engineering was carried on through a notation which closely approximated that ideal. There is no use pleading that a comparable regularizing of our spelling couldn't have been brought about because the public wouldn't stand for it. When have our schools ever sought the acquiescence of the public? When has the reform which would transfigure the lives of millions of their children ever been presented to them as other than a thing to ridicule or to be brushed off as wholly impracticable?

Well, now the time of a second great discard may be approaching - the discard of this 30 year reign of look-and-say. Is it really thinkable that the best we can do is to return to "phonics" applied to the same old 251 shifting spellings of our 40 basic speech sounds? And this in the face of the big English project now half way through its second year, in which 2500 moppets from 4

to 6 years old are careering through phonemic primers, readers and story books with an ease, speed and enjoyment which one headmaster describes as “fantastic” and a headmistress as “simply out of this world !”

There is just one condition under which “back-to-phonics” is worth the gallant struggle our friend is waging for it. And that is when the print to which this method is applied shall be itself one-to-one-phonemic, that every new word the child meets from the first primer on, shall smile up at him with “Just sound me out. If you know my symbols, you can’t go wrong.”  
(Miss Bowyer is a retired teacher, with experience in teaching “South of the border.”)

[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1971 pp5,6]

### **Toward Mastery of Spelling, by Mary Johnson**

Pity the poor speller! His problems are much more serious than the obvious one of not making a good impression. Far worse is his inability to communicate precisely on paper due to the fact that his misspelled words sometimes convey a meaning he did not intend. His writing also tends to be trite and immature because he avoids using words which he hasn't previously studied. Psychologically, the poor speller is anxious, insecure, frustrated and tense because he knows that in spite of his strenuous efforts his writing will nevertheless be riddled with errors invisible to his undiscerning eye.

The poor speller’s communication gap, his frustration and lack of self-confidence, can be traced to the unsystematic way he has been introduced to written English. His ear has not been trained to distinguish the speech sounds and their proper order in spoken words, and he has not learned how to build words on paper. Because he has never been sure of the relationship between spoken and written sounds, his eye has not learned to spot the irregularities and peculiarities in new words when he is reading. This lack of visual acuity means that he is often unable to recall the spelling of words he has read or written many times before.

It is this inadequate foundation which has produced poor spellers on an unprecedented scale. The problem today is not merely that of a few inept spellers who confuse “ie” with “ei” in words like “receive” - now we have such chronic and widespread misspelling that obtaining evidence of wholesale illiteracy is frighteningly easy. As one example, these 15 words conform to common spelling patterns and contain the most basic English speech sounds:

bombard, scuffle, chide, groin, hex, Jove, rakish, refute, yowled, quell, twang, zither, whiff, stork, plucky [1]

In tests on over 2,000 American and Canadian junior and senior high school students, 1/3 of these simple words was misspelled - usually in a grotesque and unreadable manner.

In one Winnipeg survey, the word *groin* was misspelled by 108 out of 245 junior high students, with these 43 variations, none of which would have been written by a student who had a working knowledge of English phonics: [2]

growing, croine, grone, growng, greown, groane, gron, gronen, groind, growin, grome, roine, goen, groned, coran, grind, grond, croin, groeing, gorwing, gerone, groien, gowun, grong, guawen, growng, groinde, grorn, gwoing, gorn, grine, groining, groune, grouien, grown, gorion, grane, groen, grioned, grion, groan, groun, groing.

Pinpointing the exact cause of the trouble is easiest at the primary level - where the effect of basic instruction (or lack of it) in spelling and reading is most obvious. Children who have been taught the separate letter sounds and how to use them to build words can spell both sections of this test equally well, averaging five errors in spelling the 26 words.

new words: jot, wax, hub, zip, cob, gap, vet, skid, fret, spun, dump, yelp, quilt.

known words: not, wag, cub, skip, Bob, tap, pet, did, frog, sun, jump, help, quits. [3]

Primary pupils who have *not* been taught functional word building misspell, on an average, 10 out of 13 new words and 5 out of 13 known words. The contrast between the spelling of known and new words is dramatically revealing. One third grade class in Denver, Colo., for example, made only two errors in spelling *not-know*, *nat*. When *jot* was dictated, 17 out of the class of 29 made these mistakes: jhot, jar, jote, juout, jit, junt, jaest, juht, jut, jont, jatele, gurt, juct, jouit, jaut, junt.

Teaching spelling effectively is simple - but not easy. The difficulty lies in the need for systematic, daily training: first, of the ear, teaching it to hear the difference between similar speech sounds and to identify them in words; next, ear and hand must learn to work together in associating spoken speech sounds with written letter symbols; and lastly, ear, hand and eye have to co-operate in studying the speech and spelling patterns of our language.

The effect of daily training, like that of daily nutrition, is cumulative and of enormous importance-but it does not show up in the first few days. Sometimes it takes weeks or months for this training to prove its worth. And unless a teacher is thoroughly educated herself in the sequencing of the necessary skills, and unless she has been convinced of the vital importance of this training, she does not persevere long enough or schedule it often enough to get results.

There is a long standing and urgent need for teacher training in this field by practical, experienced and successful primary teachers-instructors who can spell out for the novice the many little steps toward mastery of our wayward English spelling.

Spelling is important and it is worth teaching, not merely so that the student will make a good impression, but so that he can communicate his innermost thoughts and ideas with accuracy, ease and style.

(1) Johnson Test No. 2.

(2). Johnson, Mary, *Programmed Illiteracy in our Schools*, Clarity Books, Box 92, Sta. C, Winnipeg, Man. Canada, 1970.

(3). Johnson Test No. 3.

### **Oral Reading Survey, New York City, by Mary Johnson.**

On August 3rd and 4th, 1965, members of the Reading Reform Foundation under the guidance of Mary Johnson of Winnipeg, Canada, tape-recorded the oral reading of primary school children in New York City parks. A total of 139 children volunteered to read, and the performance of *all* children in the survey who had been passed to grades II and III in New York City Public Schools has been tabulated in the accompanying table.

Volunteers were asked to read Johnson Test # 9, which consists of the following two sentences

1. Mother will not like me to play games in my big red hat.
2. Mike fed some nuts and figs to his tame rat.

The words in Sentence 1 are in most primary school readers and therefore test for recognition of familiar words. Key words are: *like, games, big, red, hat*. The words in Sentence 2 are not usually found in primary readers and therefore test children's ability to attack new words. The words: *Mike, fed, figs, tame, rat* rhyme with the key words in - Sentence 1.

It is frequently claimed by authors and publishers of look-say basal reading programs that children taught by these texts will be able to apply the "substitution technique" when reading new words at the Grade I level. This means that if they know the familiar word *red*, they will be able to decipher *fed* by thinking, "This word looks like *red* but starts like *fun*, so it must be *fed*". This theory is not successful in practice, as the test results in the table demonstrate. Without formal teaching in phonics, it is expecting too much of many children to make such deductions on their own.

#### INCIDENCE OF ERROR

Passed to Grade II	Familiar Words, Sentence 1	Unfamiliar Words, Sentence 2.
Pupils # 1 to 43	32%	84%
Passed to Grade III		
Pupils # 44 to 77	22%	40%

Mary Johnson is the author of a number of articles on testing the ability of pupils to use their knowledge of phonics and the effectiveness of teacher's teaching.

