

# **The Syllabary**

**Webster's Spelling Book Method of  
Teaching Reading and Spelling**

**Based on Noah Webster's 1908  
*Elementary Spelling Book***

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# Table No. 1

bā	bē	bī	bō	bū	bȳ
ca	çe	çî	co	cu	çȳ
da	de	dî	do	du	dȳ
fa	fe	fî	fo	fu	fȳ
gā	gē	gī	gō	gū	gȳ
	ġe	ġî			ġȳ

## Table No. 2

hā	hē	hī	hō	hū	hȳ
ja	me	ji	jo	ju	jȳ
ka	ke	ki	ko	ku	jȳ
la	le	li	lo	lu	ly
ma	me	mi	mo	mu	my
na	ne	ni	no	un	ny

# Table No. 3

pā	pē	pī	pō	pū	pȳ
ra	re	rī	ro	ru	ry
sa	se	sī	so	su	sy
ta	te	tī	to	tu	ty
va	ve	vī	vo	vu	vy
wa	we	wī	wo	wu	wy

## Table No. 4

ǎb	ěb	ěb	ǒb	ůb
ac	ec	ic	oc	uc
ad	ed	id	od	ud
af	ef	if	of	uf
ag	eg	ig	og	ug

## Table No. 5

ǎj	ěj	ǐj	ǒj	ǔj
ak	ek	ik	ok	uk
al	el	il	ol	ul
am	em	im	om	um
an	en	in	on	un
ap	ep	ip	op	up

# Table No. 6

är	êr	îr	ōr	ûr
äs	ēs	īs	ōs	ūs
at	et	it	ot	ut
av	ev	iv	ov	uv
ax	ex	ix	ox	ux
az	ez	iz	oz	uz

## Table No. 7

blā	blē	blī	blō	blū	blȳ
cla	cle	cli	clo	clu	cly
fla	fle	fli	flo	flu	fly
gla	gle	gli	glo	glu	gly
pla	ple	pli	plo	plu	ply
sla	sle	sli	slo	slu	sly

# Table No. 8

brā	brē	brī	brō	bṛu	br̄y
cra	cre	cri	cro	cṛu	cry
dra	dre	dri	dro	dṛu	dry
fra	fre	fri	fro	fṛu	fry
gra	gre	gri	gro	gṛu	gry
pra	pre	pri	pro	pṛu	pry
tra	tre	tri	tro	tṛu	try
wra	wre	wri	wro	wṛu	wry

## Table No. 9

thē	thē	thī	thō	thū	thȳ
ṭha	ṭhe	ṭhi	ṭho	ṭhu	ṭhy
cha	che	chi	cho	chu	chy
sha	she	shi	sho	shu	shy
pha	phe	phi	pho	phu	phy

## Table No. 10

quē	quē	quī	quō	qu-	quȳ
spa	spe	spī	spo	spu	spy
sta	ste	stī	sto	stu	sty
ska	ske	skī	sko	sku	sky
sca	sçe	sçī	sco	scu	sçy
swa	swe	swī	swō	swu	swy

## Table No. 11

splā	splē	splī	splō	splū	splȳ
spra	spre	sprī	spro	spru	sprȳ
stra	stre	strī	stro	stru	strȳ
shra	shre	shrī	shro	shru	shrȳ
scra	scre	scrī	scro	scru	shrȳ
scla	scle	sclī	sclo	sclū	sclȳ

## Concerning the Diacritical Marks

Webster first used these current diacritical marks to indicate the precise pronunciation of speech sounds in his 1829 *Elementary Spelling Book*. Before that he had used numbers over the letters to indicate the sounds (phonemes) represented by the letters (graphemes). Unfortunately these marks of pronunciation, although once universally understood, are poorly known by the general population these days, so a little explanation is in order.

Letters with a macron are all long: ā, ē, ī, ō, ū: as in **ā**te, **ē**at, **tī**me, **ō**ld, **ū**se. Vowels are often long at the end of syllables. These are traditionally called open syllables.

Letters with a breve are all short: ă, ě, ĭ, ǒ, ŭ: as in **hă**t, **pĕ**t, **tĭ**n, **pŏ**t, **mŭ**t. Vowels are usually short when they are not at the end of a syllable (when followed by a consonant). These are traditionally called closed syllables.

The letter **c** with a curved line under it, called a cedilla, **ç** is pronounced /s/ like the c in city. The universal rule is that c followed by e, i or y is pronounced /s/.

The letter g with a dot over it (**ġ**) is pronounced as a /j/ as g in gem. Sometimes a line is placed over the g (**ḡ**) to show that it is hard /g/ as g in get.

The so-called r-controlled vowels require special consideration.

är, êr, îr, ôr, ûr: är as in **car**, êr as in **her**,  
îr as in **bird**, ôr as in **order**, ûr as in **nurse**.

The **ұ** is a special use of long u after the letter r as the u in spruce.

Further information on Webster's diacritical marks can be found in his 1908 *Elementary Spelling Book* or older editions of his later dictionaries (not the popular 1828 edition).

# Note From Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

January 31, 2010

This syllabary is based on Noah Webster's 1908 *Elementary Spelling Book*. This form of Webster's Spelling Book was first published in 1829. The 1908 edition was the last revision.

I have taken the liberty to make a few minor changes to the syllabary. Dr. Gene Roth has been particularly helpful in making suggestions for the revision. I have not gone as far as Dr. Roth in updating the syllabary; but my revision, I believe, is a definite enhancement of Webster's excellent Syllabary.

Inspiration for experimenting with Webster's spelling book method of teaching reading and spelling came from the work of Miss Geraldine Rodgers. Her essay, "Why Noah Webster's Way Was the Right Way," alerted me to the fact that Dr. Webster's method offered advantages lacking in today's reading methods. Extensive experimentation in my classroom has convincingly demonstrated the validity of her claims. Students who master the syllabary and Webster's spelling tables are able to make dramatic advances in their reading abilities, including: word identification, oral fluency, silent reading speed, accuracy, and comprehension. Miss Rodgers' essay is available on my web site [www.donpotter.net](http://www.donpotter.net)

I am planning to publish an updated version of Webster's 1908 *Elementary Spelling Book* under the title, *Webster's Spelling Book Method of Teaching Reading and Spelling for the Twenty-First Century*. Our plan is to publish it as an On Demand publication in 8 ½ x 11, spiral-bound volume. I have published the first 110 pages so that interested educators can start using the method to help students reach their maximum reading potential.

My coworkers and I have found Webster's way of teaching reading and spelling superior to any currently available. We are excited about the prospect of seeing today's children given the same advantages as children of Webster's day.