

READING WORKS

Nuts and Bolts
Literacy Teaching Manual

Ellie Hallett

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Quotes worth quoting

The following quotes are the tip of a very large iceberg, and have been included as important viewpoints to ponder.

Children are made readers on the laps of their parents. *Emilie Buchwald*

Through literacy you can begin to see the universe. *Grace Slick, American singer, b 1939.*

To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark.
Victor Hugo

No skill is more crucial to the future of a child or to a democratic and prosperous society than literacy.
Los Angeles Times 'A Child Literacy Initiative for the Greater Los Angeles Area'

Fluency is important because it provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. *K Briggs 'Reading in the Classroom'*

Approximately half of the 550 000 words in English are phonetic – and half are not.
Dryden and Vos 'The Learning Revolution'

According to UNICEF, nearly a billion people will enter the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names, and two thirds of them are women.

The 4th grade is a watershed year. We can predict that if a child is not reading in the 4th grade, he or she will have approximately a 78 percent chance of not catching up.

85% of all juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate.

More than 60% of all prison inmates are fictionally illiterate.

Illiteracy and crime are closely related. Over 70% of inmates in America's prisons cannot read above a fourth grade level.

www.begintoread.com/research/literacystatistics

Public schools are not in the business of teaching people how to talk. They're in the business of teaching people how to read. One of our great social challenges is that there are many more children who are coming to school who really do need a direct approach to improving their oral language abilities and their communication abilities in order for them to become proficient readers. And we just don't have that in most cases. We go right into reading. We do not sufficiently consider that many children have oral language weaknesses, because either the language they're learning at school is not their native language or because they're one of these many children who, for unknown reasons or for many different reasons, are just weak at oral language skills.

Children with oral language weaknesses have brains that are set up in such a way that is not as effective in the oral language domain. Those children are going to need more explicit help. Unfortunately they're generally not getting it. They get to school and the first time anyone notices there is a problem is generally when they start to struggle with reading and therefore everyone just immediately assumes the problem is reading and they go right into reading remediation.

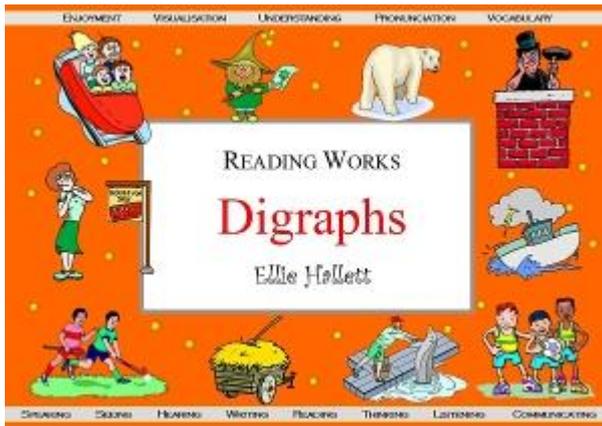
Paula Tallal, Board of governors Chair of neuroscience and co-Director Center for Molecular and behavioural Neuroscience at Rutgers University
www.childrenofthecode.org/interviews/tallal.htm#ESL

Digraphs

In this book are 56 examples of letters that have a new sound when placed together.

Digraphs serves as a natural next step forward from the previous three books, and reflects the growing wisdom and ability of the learner.

The sounds (aural), the saying, using (oral), and the understanding (thinking) go hand in hand with meaning, vocabulary-building and writing (kinaesthetic) via social interactive, teacher-led learning conversations.

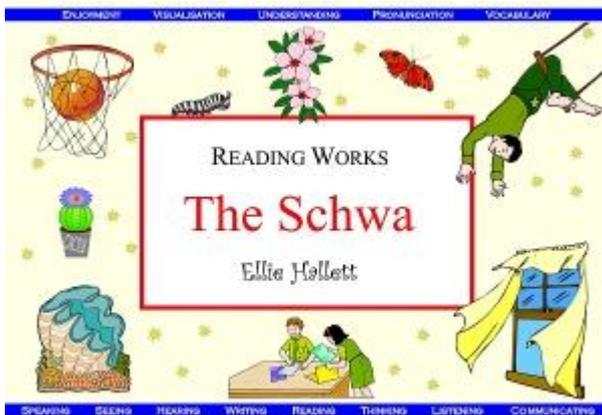


The Schwa

Gathered together here are **91 examples** of this shy but must-know schwa sound.

This book is a problem-solver because spelling errors and incorrect word pronunciations are often made because teachers and learners are not aware of this neglected sound.

The Schwa book has been for students and is a particularly helpful reference book for teachers.

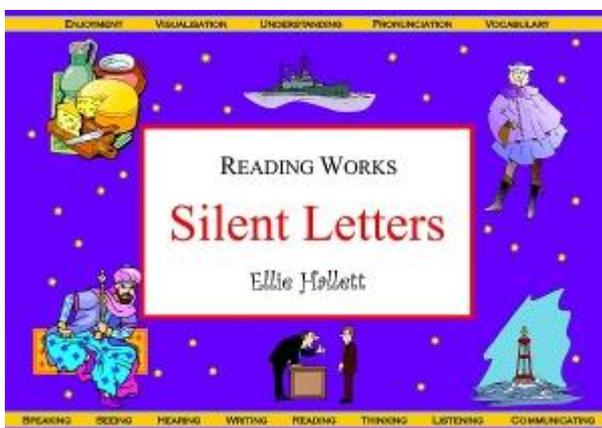


Silent letters

Only three letters in the alphabet are never silent, so this book goes well beyond the usual silent *k* as in *knit*.

These quiet hazards tend to lie in wait for the unaware reader and writer, to become the cause many pronunciation and spelling errors. Having prior knowledge of where they may be lurking solves a great many of these potential problems - and alleviates correction headaches for the teacher.

There are over **200 words, pictures and sentences** in this book.



The better the vocabulary the better the thinking

Without words, thinking cannot take place. A good command of language has benefits beyond price.

Quality teaching doesn't hold back, water down or censor 'big words' with the assumption that they are too difficult for young children. Even if a learner doesn't understand the meaning the first time it is heard, hearing it again at a later time will jolt a spark of recognition and thus make its absorption easier.

A good memory needs thinking skills, and good thinking skills come from knowing words.

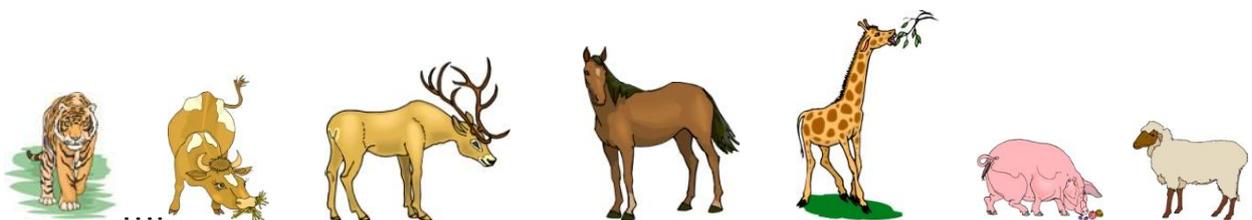
Giving young learners a rich vocabulary is providing a substantial thinking environment that raises quality learning to a higher plane. The converse is also true.

In other words – don't hold back on using advanced terminology or adult-level vocabulary Give their meaning in passing, and use often.

Some L to R ideas for early readers

For many struggling early readers, the all-important **left to right pattern of spoken sounds** as in words is not second nature. For all beginners, teach this by putting rows of pictures e.g. animals, toys, family (mother, father, boy, girl, baby etc) in a line across a whiteboard ledge. Ask learners to name them in a left to right order using different voices for variety, such as high, low, middle, slow, fast, sleepy, happy and so on. Demonstrate and do a great many examples of this sort of exercise until the left to right eye movement and spoken fluency of instant word recall is well established.

- **Memory and concentration development:** After many readings of a sequence of pictures such as those below, say something along the lines of, *Close your eyes while I take one card off the ledge and leave a space. Open your eyes, say the row of pictures but this time put in the name of the one missing.* (Put cards in and out ad lib. Reverse roles, but make some 'errors' and have the learners correct you.)



- Rearrange the set of pictures (such as the animals above) into categories for vocabulary extension, oral expression, general knowledge and thinking skill development. Ideas to try:
 - arrange from smallest to largest
 - sort into alphabetical order by the initial/final letter of each animal's name
 - list long name to shortest name by counting the letters in each word
 - divide into herbivores and carnivores
 - sort into tail lengths/ear size/foot types/leg lengths

The mini-story sentences and pictures in READING WORKS have been designed and selected specifically to stimulate interactive expert-led discussions, to join together oracy, speech clarity, vocabulary development, the imagination, phoneme and grapheme knowledge, the understanding *in situ* of syntax, grammar and meaning, all tied together with understanding.

As a bonus, the real-world scenarios of humans doing human things provide the sparkle of entertainment via understated wry humour to make the learning less schoolish and more in keeping with life beyond the classroom walls.

Interactive oral-language skill development

The overriding principal behind the READING WORKS intensive English language sound/symbol tuition is to provide teachers, (literacy coaches, parents, siblings, carers *et al*) with a no gaps, an all-inclusive system on which they can base their teaching.

These books are designed to be enjoyed – and to do a thorough job.

They are built for demonstrating, involving and getting into the basic elements of learning how to speak and read English. Writing is not forgotten, but oral language and its partner, visual recognition of sound with symbol, are paramount.

This method of teaching and learning requires a live teacher working with their students in the same physical space so that two-way dialogues take place. Lessons therefore involve interactive conversations between teacher to learners and between learners and fellow learners. EH

Another vital voice is the self-talk component, where the mind is busy thinking, drafting answers, assimilating, manipulating and re-organising thoughts in the light of new information that has just come in from external sources.

This sort of learning shares experiences, adds valuable new ideas and creative touches, fixes misunderstandings on the spot, and provides new data at the moment they're needed.

As a result, this method has every chance of being able to provide more than the sum of its parts because it involves face-to-face, body-language rich and close-range guided learning. It can be tailored to suit those learners and that teacher at that particular time and place – and in the local accent of spoken English.

In amongst all this language interaction, the self-talk thinking part can be given the time it deserves by enabling a quietness to be interspersed with the conversational lessons.

This quietness should just happen naturally because everyone will be busily occupied with a cerebral task that of its own accord will enable a thinking quietness to reign. Such stillness may last for 30 minutes, or for less than a minute, but the brain and the senses need this chat-free 'time out' to re-gather thoughts and re-process ideas. (All-day noise is also stressful for all parties.)

br br cr br br br
 p b p p p p
 h l h h h h
 sprint squint sprint sprint
 queen of tarts queen of hearts queen of tarts
 roly poly roly poly roly poly poly roly roly poly

- **Continue my pattern** Learners listen to a row of words, and when they're *in the groove*, so to speak, they continue the pattern with one-by-one called-out examples.

All sorts of extensions can be given to keep the learning fresh and vibrant such as adding an animal noise after each word, stretching out each word to be two seconds long, putting in an abstract action unrelated to a chosen word, using a squawky voice for every first word in the pattern and so on.

Have learners make the suggestions after the idea has been established.

cat dog sheep cat dog sheep cat dog sheep ...
 willow wallow whale willow wallow whale
 hot cold tepid frozen hot cold tepid frozen
 hat socks belt sausages hat socks belt sausages
 birds bats bullants bricks birds bats bullants bricks
 one seven nine thirteen
 London New York Paris (local town)

The enjoyment rather than the labour of language is the aim with all the above exercises. Word-exploration activities as a normal part of day-to-day teaching can be a healthy preventative measure to counteract that frightening statement by many young learners that they 'don't like reading.'

When teacher-directed talking is right, reading and writing become a natural and pleasurable progression.

Active listening and protocols for asking questions

A most effective sort of interactive classroom is one where there are alternating one-voice-expert sessions, partner conversations, groups working together on a set task, whole class presentations – or no talk at all. In amongst all this is that essential element of good learning and listening. Along with this good listening is thinking.

Teachers often despair that their students do not listen very well, but are unable to fix the problem apart from telling their charges in an ever-increasing volume To Listen.

A few classroom protocols are easy to teach and will promote better listening habits.

Some of these ideas are:

test results), a sense of 'getting somewhere because I know I can and because my teacher believes in me' sort of climate will prevail.

Learning in an encouraging and family-like environment is based on a foundation of trust and support, travelling together as a group with the teacher-expert as the 'tour guide' initiating proceedings and making the learning journey exciting, challenging, but never daunting. In this sort of scenario, school can be something to be looked forward to every day.

Spoken language makes all learning more visible

To think about this point, the quotations listed below are worth reading, not only for their eloquence but for the substance of their message. The Russian psychologist Vygotsky holds centre stage for these philosophies because of his wisdom on the value of language and the vital place it holds in the classroom.

Here are some *bon mots* you might enjoy ...

- Language plays a central role in mental development. Thought is not merely expressed in words – it comes into existence through them.
- Our internal voice (or private talk) happens because our minds are at work using words. (Piaget refers to a child's inner thoughts or private talk internal talk as 'egocentric speech' and which disappears as a child matures. Vygotsky, on the other hand, considers all speech to have a communicative function, interacting and influencing the thinking and learning processes, and which continues beyond childhood to operate as an inner consciousness called verbal thinking.)
- Children learn most effectively through interaction with a more knowledgeable person. (Piaget encourages children to learn in a 'discovery sandpit'. Vygotsky prompts children to tackle a 'cognitive climbing frame.') *Edwards and Mercer, 1987*
- Vygotsky believes in the value of instruction rather than discovery, and learning as a social communicative process.
- **What a child can do today in co-operation with a significant other can be done alone tomorrow.**
- The acquisition of language is the most influential part of a child's life.
- The only good instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it. Instruction needs to aim at the ripening functions rather than at the already ripe.
- Instead of measuring what a child can do alone (i.e. testing), intelligence can be better measured by what a child can do after skilful tuition.
- Piaget believed that intelligence comes about as the result of interaction with the surroundings and that learning takes place after development. This means that learning is only possible after a given stage of development has been reached, hence the terms reading and writing readiness.

Experiences and general knowledge

This is another perhaps rather neglected part of extra-curricular education that could be loosely called 'general knowledge', an area of learning usually left to chance and more dependent on luck than being the result of someone Making It Happen.

However, many schools and families at weekends get out and about to enjoy new experiences with their resultant rich supply of life matters upon which to ponder and recall at later times.

Set out below are some of these experiential avenues that would go a long way to doing the job in providing these experiences. (This list has no end ...)

Every child by the end of Year 6 should have, in this frequently mentioned ideal world, have experienced the following, or have been given opportunities to do so.

- Been to an art gallery, museum, exhibition, fun-fair, live theatre, pantomime, live debate, symphony concert and ballet, and has been taught audience protocol.
- Has performed in school plays and public concerts.
- Has entered high-quality works in school and local public art exhibitions.
- Can give a speech without notes, including knowing how to speak fluently and clearly both with and without a microphone.
- Can read basic musical notation, play an instrument and knows at least ten traditional songs and ten classic poems from memory.
- Knows about the lives and contributions to mankind of scientists, explorers, painters, thinkers, architects, inventors, writers, artists, composers, discoverers ...
- Has travelled on a boat, ferry, train, canoe, sled, toboggan, yacht, snowboard/skis, horse-drawn cart, tractor ...
- Has slept overnight in a tent. (In the back garden at home is a good start.)
- Has helped collect wood for a safe campfire, prepared and cooked a meal in the bush, sat around it telling stories in the dark, and has seen the night sky away from city lights.
- Can read a compass and knows basic bushcraft.
- Has grown vegetables and flowers from seed.
- Knows something about geology, geography, astronomy, chemistry, palaeontology, botany, biology, anatomy, engineering ...
- Knows how to use a saw, hammer and other basic carpentry tools.
- Can shop for, prepare, cook, serve and clean up after a family meal.

About the author



Growing up in the Ulmarra/Grafton area of NSW, Australia, Ellie began teaching when she was four years old, with her doll, a somewhat reluctant younger brother, a few pot plants and a one-eared teddy as her class. After high school and leaving home aged 16, she formalised this early start by training to be an Infants/Primary teacher at the then new Wollongong Teachers' College. Her first appointment was to the Snowy Mountains town of Khancoban on the NSW/Victorian border. She taught here for many years, including ESL to adults at night school.

After moving to Sydney, Ellie taught in suburban Primary schools until winning a place to study four years full-time at the NSW State Conservatorium of Music in Music Education and English for secondary schools, also becoming an accredited piano teacher during this time. After graduation, Ellie taught class English and Music in city and regional high schools. Part-time English/Music teaching at an Intensive English Language School for refugees was another position held at this time.

Ellie discovered her creative side as Co-ordinator and Creative Arts Demonstration Teacher for an inner-city cluster of three primary schools in a 3-year Disadvantaged Schools Program. This involved presenting 22 demonstration lessons per week in Art, Music, Drama/Movement for classes and their teachers from Kindergarten to Year 6. After three very happy years, Ellie returned to being a class teacher and later as a music, drama and literacy specialist in Sydney.

Ellie has a grown-up son in Brisbane, and is married to Roger, without whose help with the technical side of computers no writing would have been possible.

As an indication of Ellie's teaching style, two of her most cherished and memorable compliments received were *Why can't we have school on the weekends* and *I wish you were my mum*.

Please let Ellie know if this book helps you enthuse your learners for learning.
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