

**Noah Webster's Spelling Book Method
for Teaching Reading and Spelling
for the Twenty-First Century,
Selected Excerpts**

Teaching Students to Read from the **Sounds** of the Letters
Rather than Guess from the **Meaning** of the Words



An Adaptation of Noah Webster's
1908 *Elementary Spelling Book* to the
Needs of Twenty-First Century Students

*Bringing the Reading Standards of Today Up to the
High Standards of Yesterday*

WEBSTER'S SPELLING BOOK METHOD OF TEACHING READING
AND SPELLING FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, SELECTED EXCERPTS

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PREFACE

Excerpts from the 1866 Edition with Comments

In Syllabication it has been thought best not to give the etymological division of the Quarto Dictionary, but to retain the old mode of Dr. Webster as best calculated to teach *young* scholars the true pronunciation of words. [*My experience proves that this is the best way to divide the words for purposes of teaching reading and spelling. This is basically the respelling division in the modern dictionaries.*]

The plan of classification here executed is extended so as to comprehend every important variety of English words, and the classes are so arranged, with suitable directions for the pronunciation, that any pupil, who has mastered the *Elementary Tables*, will find little difficulty in learning to form and pronounce any word properly belonging to our vernacular language. [*Webster's Speller is a "System" of English orthography in the true sense. It will enable students to develop the skills necessary to be proficient in English reading and spelling. It can be used on all levels: beginning, intermediate, and advanced.*]

The reading lessons are adapted, as far as possible, to the capacities of children, and to their gradual progress in knowledge. These lessons will serve to substitute variety for the dull monotony of spelling, show the practical use of words in significant sentences, and thus enable the learner to better understand them. The consideration of diversifying the studies of the pupil has also had its influence on the arrangement of the lessons for spelling. It is useful to teach the signification of words, as soon as they can comprehend them; but the understanding can hardly keep pace with the memory, and the minds of children may well be employed in learning to spell and pronounce words whose signification is not within their capacities; for what they do not clearly comprehend at first they will understand as their capacities are enlarged.

The objects of a work of this kind being chiefly to teach *orthography* and *pronunciation*, is judged most proper to adapt the various Tables to these specific objects, and omit extraneous matter. In short, this little book is so constructed as to condense into the smallest compass a complete SYSTEM of ELEMENTS for teaching the language; and however small such a book may appear, it may be considered as the most important class book, not of religious character, which the youth of our country are destined to use. [*I know of no other book that concentrates so much language power into such a small space.*] New York, 1866. William G. Webster. (Comments:, 2009. Donald L. Potter)

PREFACE TO THE 1908 EDITION

The modifications in this revision are not of a character to embarrass those teachers who used the previous editions in the same class. The principal changes are:

The repetition of orthoëpical mark has been omitted as needless in a succession of two or more words having the same vowel letter and sound. In such cases only the first word is marked – the syllable of this leading word being the key to the corresponding unmarked syllables in the words, which follow. But whenever there is liability to mispronounce, the right way is indicated by marking the doubtful syllable.

PREFACE TO THE 2011 EDITION

The Tables have been converted from columns of words into rows in this edition to encourage good left to right word scanning. This allowed me to increase the type size for ease of reading while reducing the number pages.

Bold has been substituted for Webster's accent marks. Students find this an acceptable method for indicating stress. A key element in the book's uncommon success is the classification of polysyllables according to accent. No modern work that I am aware of makes use of this important feature. In the 1822 edition of his *American Spelling Book*, Webster informs us, "In nine-tenths of the words in our language, a correct pronunciation is better taught by a natural division of the syllables and a direction for placing the accent, than by a minute and endless repetition of characters."

Students who complete *Webster's American Spelling Book Method of Teaching Reading and Spelling* will gain a command English reading, vocabulary, and spelling that is available in no other single book. Donald L. Potter, Odessa, Texas, 2009, 2011.

ANALYSIS OF SOUNDS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The Elementary Sounds of the English language are divided into two classes, *vowels* and *consonants*.

A *vowel* is a clear sound made through an open position of the mouth-channel, which molds or shapes the voice without obstructing its utterance; as *a* (in *far*, or *fate*, etc.), *e*, *o*.

A *consonant* is a sound formed by a closer position of the articulating organs than any position by which a vowel is formed, as *b*, *d*, *t*, *g*, *sh*. In forming a consonant the voice is compressed or stopped.

A *diphthong* is the union of two simple vowel sounds, as *ou* (äō) in *out*, *oi* (äĩ) in *noise*.

The English Alphabet consists of twenty-six letters, or single characters, which represent vowel, consonant, and diphthongal sounds – *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, *e*, *f*, *g*, *h*, *i*, *j*, *k*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *o*, *p*, *q*, *r*, *s*, *t*, *u*, *v*, *w*, *x*, *y*, *z*. The combinations *ch*, *sh*, *th*, and *ng* are also used to represent elementary sounds; and another sound is expressed by *s*, or *z*; as in *measure*, *azure*, pronounced *mězh-yoor*, *ăzh-ur*.

Of the foregoing letters, *a*, *e*, *o*, are always simple vowels; *i* and *u* are vowels (as in *in*, *us*), or diphthongs (as in *time*, *tune*); and *y* is either a vowel (as in *any*), a diphthong (as in *my*), or a consonant (as in *ye*).

Each of the vowels has its regular long and short sounds which are most often used; and also certain *occasional* sounds, as that of *a* in *last*, *far*, *care*, *fall*, *what*; *e* in *term*, *there*, *prey*, *i* in *firm*, *marine*; *o* in *dove*, *for*, *wolf*, *prove*; and *u* in *flurl*, *rude*, and *pull*. These will now be considered separately.

A. The regular long sound of *a* is denoted by a horizontal mark over it; as in **ān**-cient, **prō**-fāne; and the regular short sound by a curve over it; as, căt, **pă**r-ry.

Occasional sounds. –The Italian sound is indicated by two dots over it; as bār, **fä**-ther; –the short sound of the Italian *a*, by a single dot over it; as, fäst, lăst (Modern English, as făst, lăst); –the broad sound, by two dots below it; as, bäll, ställ; –the short sound of broad *a*, by a single dot under it; as, whät, **quă**d-rant; –the sound of *a* before *r* in certain words like *care*, *fair*, etc., is represented by a sharp or pointed circumflex over the *a*, as, câre, hâir, fâir, etc.

E. The regular long sound of *e* is indicated by a horizontal mark over it; as, mēte, se-rēne; the regular short sound, by a curve over it; as, mět, re-běl.

Occasional sounds. –The sound of *e* like *a* in *care* is indicated by a pointed circumflex over the *e*, as in thêir, whêre; and of short *e* before *r* in cases where it verges toward short *u*, by a rounded circumflex, or wavy line, over it; as, hěr, pre-fēr.

I, O, U. The regular long and short sounds of *i*, *o*, and *u* are indicated like those of *a* and *e* by a horizontal mark and by a curve; as, bīnd, bēnd; dōle, döll; tūne, tūn.

Occasional sounds. –When *i* has the sound of long *e* it is marked by two dots over it; as, **fī**gue, ma-rīne; –when *o* has the sound of short *u*, it is marked by a single dot over it; as, dōve, sòn; –when it has the sound of **ōō**, it is marked with two dots under it; as, mōve, prōve. –when it has the sound of **ō̄**, it is marked with a single dot under it; as, wōlf, wō-man; –when it has the sound of broad *a*, this is indicated by a pointed circumflex over the vowel; as, nōrth, sōrt; –the two letters *oo*, with a horizontal mark over them have the sound heard in the words **boōm**, **loōm**; –with the curve mark, they have a shorter form of the same sound; as, bōōk, gōōd; –when *u* is sounded like short *oo*, it has a single dot under it; as, fūll, pūll; while its lengthened sound, as when preceded by *r*, is indicated by two dots; as in rūde, **rū**-al, **rū**-by.

NOTE. –The long *u* in unaccented syllables has, to a great extent, the sound of *oo*, preceded by *y*, as in *educate*, pronounced **ĕd**-yoo-kāte; *nature*, pronounced **nāt**-yoor.

The long sound of *a* in *late* when shortened, coincides nearly with that of *e* in *let*; as *adequate*, *disconsolate*, *inveterate*.

The long *e*, when shortened, coincides nearly with the short *i* in *pit* (compare *feet* and *fit*). This short sound of *i* is that of *y* unaccented, at the end of words; as in *glory*. The short sound of broad *a* in *hall*, is that of the short *o* in *holly* and of *a* in *what*.

The short sound of long *oo* in *pool*, is that of *u* in *pull*, and *oo* in *wool*.

The short sound of long *o* in *not*, is somewhat lengthened before, *s*, *th*, and *ng*; as in *cross*, *broth*, *belong*.

The pronunciation of diphthongs *oi* and *oy* is the same and uniform; as, in *join*, *joy*.

The pronunciation of diphthongs *ou* and *ow* is the same and uniform; as, in *sound*, *now*. But in the terminations *ous*, *ou* is not a diphthong, and the pronunciation is *us*; as, in *pious*, *glorious*.

A combination of two letters used to express a single sound is called a digraph; as, *ea* in *head*, or *th* in *bath*.

The digraphs *ai* and *ay*, in words of one syllable, and in accented syllable, have the sound of *a* long. In unaccented syllables of a few words, the sound of *a* is nearly or quite lost; as, in *certain*, *curtain*. The digraphs *au* and *aw*, have the sound of broad *a* (*a* as in *fall*); *ew*, that of *u* long, as in *new*; and *ey* in unaccented syllables, that of *y* or *i* short, as *valley* (Modern English long *e*: ē*y*).

When one vowel of a digraph is marked, the other has no sound; as in *cōurt*, *rōad*, *slōw*.

The digraphs *ea*, *ee*, *ei*, *ie*, when not marked, have in his book, the sound of *e* long; as in *near*, *meet*, *seize*, *grieve*.

The digraph *oa*, when unmarked, has the sound of *o* long.

Vowels, in words of one syllable, following by a single consonant and *e* final, are long; as, in *fate*, *mete*, *mite*, *note*, *mute*, unless marked, as in *dōve*, *gĭve*.

The articulation or sounds represented by the consonants are best apprehended by placing a vowel before them in pronunciation, and prolonging the second of the two elements; thus, *eb*, *ed*, *ef*, *eg*, *ek*, *el*, *em*, *en*, *ep*, *er*, *es*, *et*, *ev*, *ez*.

Those articulations, which wholly stop the passage of the breath from the mouth, are called, *close*, or *mute*, as *b*, *d*, *g*, *k*, *p*, *t*.

Those articulations which are formed either wholly or in part by the lips, are called *labials*; as, *b*, *f*, *m*, *p*, *v*.

Those articulations which are formed by the tip of the tongue and the teeth, or the gum covering the roots of the teeth, are called *dentals*; as, *d*, *t*, *th*, (as in *thin*, *this*).

Those which are formed by the flat surface of the tongue and the palate, are called *palatals*; as, *g*, *k*, *ng*, *sh*, *j*, *y*.

The letters *s* and *z* are also called *sibilants*, or hissing letters.

W (as in *we*) and **y** (as in *ye*) are sometimes called *semi-vowels*, as being intermediate between vowels and consonants, or partaking of the nature of both.

B and **p** represent one and the same position of the articulating organs; but *p* differs from *b* in being an utterance of the breath instead of the voice.

D and **t** stand for one and the same articulation, which is a pressure of the tongue against the gum at the root of the upper front teeth; but *t* stands for a whispered, and *d* for a voiced sound.

F and **v** stand for one and the same articulation, the upper teeth placed on the upper lip; but *f* indicates an expulsion of voiceless breath; *v* of vocalized breath, or tone.

Th in **thin** and **th** in **this** represent one and the same articulation, the former with breath the latter with voice.

S and **z** stand for one and the same articulation, *s* being a hissing or whispered sound, and *z* a buzzing and vocal sound.

Sh and **zh** have the same distinction as *s* and *z*, whispered and vocal; but *zh* not occurring in English words, the sound is represented by *si* or by other letters; as in, *fusion*, *osier*, *azure*.

G and **k** are cognate letters, also **j** and **ch** the first of each couplet being vocal, the second aspirate or uttered with breath alone.

Ng represents a nasal sound.

B has one sound only, as in *bite*. After *m*, or, before *t*, it is generally mute; as in *dumb*, *doubt*.

C has the sound of *k* before *a*, *o*, *u*, *l* and *r*, as in *cat*, *cot*, *cup*, *clock*, and *crop* and of *s* before *e*, *i*, and *y*, as in *cell*, *cit*, *cycle*. It may be considered as mute before *k*; and in *sick*, *thick*. **C**, when followed by *e* or *i*, before another vowel, unites with *e* or *i* to form the sound of *sh*. Thus, *ceta-ceous*, *gracious*, *conscience*, are pronounced *ce-ta-shus*, *gra-shus*, *con-shense*.

D has its proper sound, as in *day*, *bid*; when preceded in the same syllable by a whispered or non-vocal consonant, it uniformly takes the sound of *t*, as in *hissed* (*hist*).

F has only one sound; as in *life*, *fever*, except *of*, in which it has the sound of *v*.

G before *a*, *o*, and *u*, is a close palatal articulation; as, in *gave*, *go*, *gun*; before *e*, *i*, and *y*, it sometimes represents the same articulation, but generally indicates a compound sound like that of *j*; as in *gem*, *gin*, *gyves*. Before *n* in the same syllable it is silent; as, in *gnaw*.

H is a mark of mere breathing or aspiration. After *r* it is silent; as, in *rhetoric*.

I in certain words has the use of *y* consonant; as, in *million*, pronounced *mill-yun*. Before *r* it has a sound nearly resembling that of short *u*, but more open; as in *bird*, *flirt*.

J represents a compound sound, pretty nearly equivalent to that represented by *dzh*; as, in *joy*.

K has one sound only; as, in *king*. It is silent before *n* in the same syllable; as, in *knave*.

L has one sound only; as in *lame*, *mill*. It is silent in many words, especially before a final consonant; as, in *walk*, *calm*, *calf*, *should*.

M has one sound only; as, in *man*, *flame*. It is silent before *n* in the same syllable; as, in *mne-monics*.

N has only one sound only; as, in *pit*, *lap*. It is silent after *l* and *m*; as, in *kiln*, *hymn*, *solemn*.

P has one sound only; as, in *pit*, *lap*. At the beginning of words, it is silent before *n*, *s*, and *t*; as, in *pneumatics*, *psalm*, *pshaw*, *ptarmigan*.

Q has the sound of *k*, but it is always followed by a *u*, and these two letters are generally sounded like *kw*; as, in *question*.

R is sounded as in *rip*, *trip*, *form*, *carol*, *mire*.

S has its proper sound, as in *send*, *less*; or the sound of *z*, as in *rose*. Followed by *i* preceding a vowel, it unites with the vowel in forming the sound of *sh*; as in *mission*, pronounced *mish-un*; –or of its vocal correspondent *zh*; as in *osier* pronounced *o-zher*.

T has its proper sound, as in *turn*, at the beginning of words and at the end of syllables. Before *i*, followed by another vowel, it unites with *i* to form the sound of *sh*, as, in *nation*, *partial*, *patience*, pronounced *na-shun*, *par-shal*, *pa-shense*. But when *s* or *x* precedes *t*, this letter and the *i* following it preserve their own sounds; as in *bastion*, *Christian*, *mixtion*, pronounced *bäst-yun*, *krist-yan*, *mikst-yun*. **T** is silent in the terminations *ten* and *tle* after *s*; as in *fasten*, *gristle*; also in the words *often*, *chestnut*, *Christmas*, etc.

V has one sound only; as, in *voice*, *live*, and is never silent.

W before *r* in the same syllable is silent, as in *wring*, *wrong*. In most words beginning with **wh** the *h* precedes the *w* in utterance, that is, *wh* is simply an aspirated *w*; thus *when* is pronounced *hwēn*. But if *o* follows this combination, the *w* is silent, as in *whole*, pronounced *hole*.

X represents *ks*, as in *wax*; but it is sometimes pronounced like *gz*; as, in *exact*. At the beginning of words, it is pronounced like *z*; as, in *Xenophon*.

Z has its proper sound, which is that of a vocal *s*; as, in *maze*.

Ch has very nearly the sound of *tsh*; as, in *church*: or the sound of *k*; as, *character*; or of *sh* in *machine*.

Gh is mute in every English word, both in the middle and at the end of words, except in the following: *cough*, *chough*, *clough*, *enough*, *laugh*, *rough*, *slough*, *tough*, *trough*, in which it has the sound of *f*; and *hiccough*, in which it has the sound of *p*. At the beginning of a word, it is pronounced like *g* hard; as in *ghastly*, *ghost*, *gherkin*, etc; hence this combination may be said not to have a proper or regular sound in any English word.

Ph has the sound of *f*, as in *philosophy*; except in *Stephen*, pronounced *Ste-vn*.

Sh has one sound only; as in *shall*.

Th has two sounds; whispered, as in *think*, *both*; and vocal, as in *thou*, *this*. When vocal, the *th* is marked thus, (th), as in *thou*.

C has the sound of *sk* before *a*, *o*, *u*, and *r*; as in *scale*, *scoff*, *sculpture*, *scroll*; and the sound of *s* alone before *e*, *i*, and *y*; as, *scene*, *scepter*, *science*, *Scythian*.

ACCENT.

Accent is the forcible stress or effort of voice on a syllable, distinguishing it from others in the same word, by a greater distinctness of sound.

The accented syllable is designed by **bold** font.

The general principal by which accent is regulated, is, that the stress of voice falls on that syllable of a word, which renders the articulations most easy to the speaker, and most agreeable to the hearer. But this rule has the accent of most word been imperceptibly established by a long and universal consent.

When a word consists of three or more syllables, easy of speaking requires usually a secondary accent, of less forcible utterance than the primary; but clearly distinguishable from the pronunciation of unaccented syllables; as in **su**-per-flu-it-y, lit-er-**ar**-y. The strongest accent is on the underlined font.

KEY TO THE PRONUNCIATION VOWELS

REGULAR LONG AND SHORT SOUNDS

LONG. –ā, as in *fame*; ē, as in *mete* (and *y* as in *lady*); ī as in *fine*; ō, as in *note*; ū as in *mute*; ŷ, as in *fly*.

SHORT. –ă, as in *fat*; ě, as in *met*; ĭ, as in *fin*; ǒ as in *not* ŭ, as in *but*; Ÿ, as in *nymph*.

VOWELS. –OCCASIONAL SOUNDS

EXAMPLES.

â, as in <i>care</i> ,	âir, shâre, pâir, beâr.
ä <i>Italian</i> , as in	fâther, fâr, bâlm, pâth.
à, as in <i>last</i> (ă in Modern American English)	âsk, grâss, dânce, brâñch.
ą <i>broad</i> , as in <i>all</i>	cąll, tąlk, hąul, swąrm.
ą, as in <i>what</i> (like short o)	wąn, wąnton, wąllow
ê like â, as in	thêre, hêir, whêre, êre.
ẽ, as in <i>term</i> ,	ẽrmine, vẽrge, prefẽr.
ē, like long <i>a</i> , as in	prey, they, eight.
ī, like long <i>e</i> as in	pique, machīne, miēm.
ĩ, as in <i>bird</i> ,	fīrm, vīrgin, dīrt.
ò like short <i>u</i> , as in	dòve, sòn, dòn, wòn.
ȯ like long <i>oo</i> , as in	prove, dȯ, mȯve, tȯmb.
ȯ like short <i>oo</i> , as in	bosom, wof, wōman.
ô like board <i>a</i> , as in	ôrder, fôm, stôrk.
ōō (long <i>oo</i>), as in	mōon, fōod, bōoty.
ōō (short <i>oo</i>), as in	fōot, bōok, wōol, gōod.
u̇ long, preceded by <i>r</i> , as in	rude, rumor, rural.
u̇ like ōō, as in	put, push, pull, full.
<i>e, i, o</i> (italic) are silent	token, cousin, mason.

REGULAR DIPHTHONGAL SOUNDS

EXAMPLES

oi, or oy (unmarked), as in	oil, join, toy
ou, or ow (unmarked), as in	out, owl, vowel

CONSONANTS

ç, *soft*, like *s sharp*, as in
ε, *hard* like *k*, as in
ch (unmarked), as in
çh *soft*, like *sh* as in
eh *hard*, like *k*, as in
ġ *hard*, as in
ġ *soft*, like *j*, as in
s *sharp* (unmarked), as in
ṣ *soft* or *vocal*, as in
th *sharp* (unmarked) as in
tḥ *flat*, or *vocal*, as in
ng (unmarked), as in
ṇ (much like *ng*), as in
x̣, like *gz*, as in

çede, merçy
eall, eoneur.
child, choose, much.
maçhine, çhaise.
ehorus, epoeh.
ġet, beġin, fogġy.
ġentle, ġinger, eleġy.
same, gas, dense.
ḥas, amusẹ, prisoṇ.
thing, path, truth.
thine, their, wither.
sing, single.
linger, link, uncle.
exist, auxiliary.

ph (unmarked), like *f*: as in sylph. qu (unmarked), like *kw*, as in queen.
wh (unmarked), like *hw* as in what, when, awhile.

This “Key to Pronunciation” is from *Noah Webster’s Elementary Spelling Book* (1908). This form of diacritical marks was first introduced in the 1829 edition. It is quite similar to the 1908. Interestingly, no major changes were introduced during those dates. Before 1829, Webster used “figures” or numbers over the vowels to indicate sounds.

An audio for the “Analysis of English Sounds” and the “Key” is available for free on the “Spelling Book Reference Page” of the www.donpotter.net web site.

THE SYLLABARY

SIMPLE CONSONANT-VOWEL OPEN SYLLABLES & VOWEL-CONSONANT CLOSED SYLLABLES

Table 1

bā	bē	bī	bō	bū	bȳ
ca	çe	çi	co	cu	çy
da	de	di	do	du	dy
fa	fe	fi	fo	fu	fy
ga	ge	gi	go	gu	gy
	ġe	ġi			ġy

Most syllables ending in a vowel (open syllables) are long. *ce, ci,* and *cy,* are pronounced *se si, sy.*

Table 4

ăb	ěb	ĭb	ŏb	ŭb
ac	ec	ic	oc	uc
ad	ed	id	od	ud
af	ef	if	of	uf
ag	eg	ig	og	ug

Syllables ending in a consonant (closed syllables) are short (i.e., *cab, ĵeb, fib, bob, cub*).

Table 2

hā	hē	hī	hō	hū	hȳ
ja	je	jī	jo	ju	jy
ka	ke	ki	ko	ku	ky
la	le	li	lo	lu	ly
ma	me	mi	mo	mu	my
na	ne	ni	no	nu	ny
pa	pe	pi	po	pu	py

Table 5

ăj	ěj	ĭj	ŏj	ŭj
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 3

rā	rē	rī	rō	rū	rȳ
sa	se	si	so	su	sy
ta	te	ti	to	tu	ty
va	ve	vi	vo	vu	vy
wa	we	wi	wo	wu	wy
za	ze	zi	zo	zu	zy

Table 6

är	ěr	îr	ôr	ûr
ăs	ės	ĭs	ŏs	ŭs
at	et	it	ot	ut
av	ev	iv	ov	uv
ax	ex	ix	ox	ux
az	ez	iz	oz	uz

The closed syllables with *r* are pronounced like: *car, her, ĵirst, corn,* and *nurse.*

DOUBLE & TRIPLE CONSONANT BENDS IN OPEN SYLLABLES

Table 7

blā	blē	blī	blō	blū	blȳ
cla	clē	clī	clō	clū	clȳ
fla	flē	flī	flō	flū	flȳ
gla	glē	glī	glō	glū	glȳ
pla	plē	plī	plō	plū	plȳ
sla	sle	sli	slo	slu	sly

Table 10

quā	quē	quī	quō	qu-	quȳ
spa	spe	spi	spo	spū	spy
sta	ste	sti	sto	stu	sty
ska	ske	ski	sko	sku	sky
sca	sçe	sçi	sco	scu	sçȳ
swa	swe	swi	swo	swu	swȳ

Table 8

brā	brē	brī	brō	brū	brȳ
cra	cre	cri	cro	crū	cry
dra	dre	dri	dro	drū	dry
fra	fre	fri	fro	frū	fry
gra	gre	gri	gro	grū	gry
pra	pre	pri	pro	prū	prȳ
tra	tre	tri	tro	trū	trȳ
wra	wre	wri	wro	wrū	wrȳ

Table 11

splā	splē	splī	splō	splū	splȳ
spra	spre	sprī	spro	sprū	sprȳ
stra	stre	stri	stro	stru	stry
skra	skre	skri	skro	skru	skry
scra	scre	scri	scro	scru	scry
scla	sclē	scli	sclō	sclu	sclȳ

Consonant Digraphs in Open Syllables

Table 9

thā	thē	thī	thō	thū	thȳ
tha	the	thī	tho	thu	thy
cha	che	chi	cho	chu	chy
sha	she	shi	sho	shu	shy
pha	phe	phi	pho	phu	phy

th is whispered as in *think* and *both*; **th** is vocal as in *thou* and *this*.

No. 26. – 83 Words [4th Grade Level]

WORD OF TWO SYLLABLES, ACCENTED ON THE FIRST.

bā-ker, sha-dy, la-dy, tī-dy, hō-ly, li-my, sli-my, bo-ny, po-ny, ti-lēr, ca-per, pa-per, ta-per, vi-per, bi-ter, fē-ver, o-ver, tro-ver, clo-ver, do-ner, va-por, fa-vor, sa-vor, ha-lo, so-lo, he-ro, ne-gro, tȳ-ro, sa-go, tū-lip, çe-dar, bri-er, fri-ar, so-lar, po-lar, so-ber, pa-çer, ra-çer, gro-çer, çi-der, spi-der, wa-fer, ti-ġer, ma-ker, ta-ker, ra-ker, se-ton, ru-in, wo-ful, po-em, Sa-tan, fu-el, du-el, cru-el, gru-el, pu-pil, la-bel, li-bel, lo-cal, fo-cal, vo-cal, le-gal, re-gal, di-al, tri-al, pa-pal, co-pal, vi-al, pe-nal, fi-nal, o-ral, ho-ral, mu-ral, na-sal, fa-tal, na-tal, ru-ral, vi-tal, to-tal, o-val, pli-ant, ġi-ant.

Bakers bake bread and cakes. A pony is a little horse. The best paper is made of linen rags. Vipers are bad snakes, and they bite men. An ox likes to eat clover. A tulip is very pretty, growing in the garden. A sundial shows the hours of the day. Cedar trees grow in the woods. The blackberry grows on the brier. Cider is made from apples. A tiger will kill and eat a man. A raker can rake hay. A vial is a little bottle. A giant is a very stout, tall man. The Holy Bible is the book of God.

No. 32 – 89 Words [5th Grade Level]

Words of Two Syllables, Accented on the Second.

a-bāse, de-base, in-case, de-bate, se-date, cre-ate, ob-late, re-late, in-flate, col-late, trans-late, mis-state, re-plēte, com-plete, se-crete, re-çite, in-çite, po-lite, ig-nite, re-deem, es-teem, de-claim, re-claim, pro-claim, ex-claim, de-mēan, be-mōan, re-tain, re-main, en-grōss, discrete, al-lay, de-lay, re-play, in-lay, mis-lay, dis-play, de-cay, dis-may, de-fray, ar-ray, be-tray, por-tray, a-stray, un-say, as-say, a-way, o-bey, con-vey, pur-vey, survey, de-fy, af-fy, de-ny, de-cry, re-boil, de-spoil, em-broil, re-coil, sub-join, ad-join, re-join, en-join, con-join, mis-join, pur-loin, ben-zoin, a-void, a-droit, ex-ploit, de-coy, en-joy, al-loy, em-ploy, an-noy, de-stroy, convoy, es-pouse, ca-rouse, de-vour, re-dound, de-vout, a-mount, sur-mount, dis-mount, re-count, re-nown, en-dow, a-vow.

Strong drink will debase a man. Hard shells incase clams and oysters. Men inflate balloons with gas, which is lighter than common air. Teachers like to see their students polite to each other. Idle men often delay till to-morrow things that should be done to-day. Good men obey the laws of God. I love to survey the starry heavens. Careless girls mislay their things. The fowler decoys the birds into his net. Cats devour rats and mice. The adroit ropedancer can leap and jump and perform as many exploits as any monkey. Wise men employ their time in doing good to all around them. In time of war, merchant vessels sometimes have a convoy of ships of war. Kings are men of high renown, Who fight and strive to wear a crown. God created the heavens and the earth in six days, and all that was made was very good. To purloin is to steal.

No. 66. – 21 Words [6th Grade Level]

WORDS OF TWO SYLLABLES, ACCENTED ON THE FIRST.

a IN **ate**, UNMARKED, DOES NOT HAVE THE FULL SOUND OF LONG **a**.

sĕn-ate, **in-grāte**, **pal-ate**, **stel-lāte**, **in-māte**, **mess-māte**, **stag-nāte**, **fil-trāte**, **pros-trate**, **frus-trāte**, **dic-tāte**, **tes-tāte**, **clī-mate**, **prel-ate**, **vī-brāte**, **pī-rate**, **cū-rate**, **prī-vate**, **fī-nīte**, **pōst-āge**, **plū-māge**, **trī-umph**, **stāte-ment**, **rāi-ment**.

When an old house is pulled down, it is no small job to remove the rubbish. Washington was not a selfish man. He labored for the good of his country more than for himself. Exercises will give us relish for our food. Riding on horseback is good exercise. Lampblack is fine soot formed from the smoke of tar, pitch, or pinewood. Granite is a kind of stone which is very strong, handsome, and useful in building. The Senate of the United States is called the Upper House of Congress. Water will stagnate, and then it is not good. Heavy winds sometimes prostrate trees. Norway has a cold climate. Medals are sometimes given as a reward at school. We punish bad men to prevent crimes. The drunkard's face will publish his vice and his disgrace.

No. 68. – 80 Words [7th Grade Level]

WORDS OF THREE SYLLABLES, ACCENTED ON THE SECOND.

im-**m**ôr-tal, pa-**r**ent-al, ac-**q**uit-tal, **e**n-**a**m-el, im-**p**an-el, ap-**p**är-ent, ū-**t**en-sil, un-**ç**iv-il, trī-**u**mp-al, in-**f**orm-al, bap-**t**is-mal, hī-**b**ēr-nal, in-**f**er-nal, ma-**t**er-nal, pa-**t**er-nal, e-**t**er-nal, in-**t**er-nal, dī-**û**r-nal, noc-**t**ur-nal, pro-**c**on-sul, un-**ç**ēr-tain, in-**c**lem-ent, de-**t**ēr-mīne, as-**s**as-sin, re-**p**lev-in, a-**b**an-don, pī-**a**s-ter, pī-**l**as-ter, as-**s**ev-er, dis-**s**ev-er, de-**l**iv-er, e-**l**ix-ir, pre-**c**ep-tor, com-**p**o-sure, en-**a**m-or, to-**b**ac-co, si-**r**oc-co, me-**m**en-to, pī-**m**en-to, mu-**l**at-to, pal-**m**et-to, en-**v**el-ope, de-**v**el-op, De-**c**em-ber, Sept-**t**em-ber, No-**v**em-ber, en-**c**um-ber, con-**s**id-er, be-**w**il-der, mis-**f**ort-ūne, me-**a**n-der, en-**g**en-der, sur-**r**en-der, dis-**ô**r-der, nar-**c**is-sus, co-**l**os-sus, im-**p**ēr-fect, in-**t**er-pret, in-**h**ab-it, pro-**h**ib-it, dis-**c**red-it, de-**c**rep-it, in-**h**er-it, de-**m**er-it, pōme-**g**ran-ate, ex-**a**m-ple, in-**t**es-tāte, a-**p**os-tāte, pro-**m**ul-gate, in-**c**ar-nate, vol-**c**ā-no, Oc-**t**ō-ber, in-**c**lo-sure, dis-**c**lo-sure, ex-**p**o-sure, fore-**c**lo-sure, dis-**c**ov-er, dis-**c**ol-or, re-**c**ov-er, dis-**a**s-ter, re-**p**āss-ing.

The spirit is immortal; it will never die. Our bodies are mortal; they will soon die. Utensils are tools to work with. Plows, axes, and hoes are utensils for farming; needles and scissors are utensils for making garments. A formal meeting is one where the forms of ceremony are observed; when people meet without attending these formalities it is called an informal meeting. Children are sometimes bewildered and lost in the woods. Sons and daughters inherit the estate and sometimes the infirmities of their parents. The diurnal motion of the earth is its daily motion, and this gives us day and night. Pimento is the plant whose berries we call allspice. Paternal care and maternal love are great blessings to children, and should be repaid with their duty and affection. The blowing up of a steamship was a terrible disaster to us. Pomegranate is a fruit about the size of an orange.

WORDS OF THREE SYLLABLES, ACCENTED ON THE SECOND.

re-venge-ful, for-get-ful, e-vent-ful, neg-lect-ful, dis-gust-ful, dis-trust-ful, suc-çess-ful, un-skill-ful, col-lect-ive, pros-pect-ive, per-spect-ive, cor-rec-tive, in-vec-tive, vin-dic-tive, af-flict-ive, at-tract-ive, dis-tinct-ive, sub-junct-ive, con-junct-ive, in-duct-ive, pro-duct-ive, con-struct-ive in-çen-tive, re-ten-tive, at-ten-tive, pre-vent-ive, in-vent-ive, per-çep-tive, pre-sump-tive, de-çep-tive, as-sẽrt-ive, a-bour-tive, dĩ-gest-ive ex-plu-sive, com-pul-sive, im-pul-sive, re-puls-ive, de-fen-sive, of-fen-sive, sub-vẽr-sive, dis-cẽr-sive, ex-cur-sive, in-cur-sive, suc-çess-ive, ex-çess-ive, pro-gress-ive, ex-press-ive, im-press-ive, sub-mis-sive, per-mis-sive, trans-mis-sive, in-ac-tive, de-fect-ive, ef-fect-ive, ob-ject-ive, e-lect-ive, ad-he-sive, co-he-sive, de-çi-sive, cor-ro-sive, a-bu-sive, con-clu-sive, ex-clu-sive, in-clu-sive, e-lu-sive, de-lu-sive, al-lu-sive, il-lu-sive, co-lu-sive, ob-tru-sive, in-tru-sive, pro-tru-sive, e-va-sive, per-sua-sive, as-sua-sive, di-sua-sive, un-fad-ing, un-feel-ing.

We are apt to live forgetful of our continual dependence on the will of God. We should not trust our lives to unskillful doctors or drunken sailors. Washington was a successful general. A prospective view means a view before us. Prospective glasses are such as we look through, to see things at distance. Telescopes are perspective glasses. Rum, gin, brandy, and whisky are destructive enemies of mankind. They destroy more lives than wars, famine, and pestilence. An attentive boy will improve in learning. Putrid bodies emit an offensive smell. The drunkard's course is progressive; he begins by drinking a little, and shortens his life by drinking to excess. The slouch is an inactive slow animal. The President of the United States is elected once every four years. He is chosen by electors who are selected by the people of the different states.

No. 90. – 57 Words [9th Grade Level]

WORDS OF FIVE SYLLABLES, ACCENTED ON THE SECOND.

WORDS IN FINAL SYLLABLE ARE, IF UNMARKED HAVE NOT ITS FULL LONG SOUND

trī-**en**-ni-al, līx-**iv**-i-al, mil-**lĕn**-ni-al, quād-**ren**-ni-al, per-**en**-ni-al, sep-**ten**-ni-al, sex-**ten**-ni-al, ter-**res**-tri-al, col-**lat**-er-al, de-**līr**-i-um, lix-**iv**-i-um, e-**ques**-tri-an, il-**lit**-er-ate, a-**dul**-ter-āte, as-**sev**-er-āte, de-**çem**-vi-rate, e-**lab**-o-rate, cor-**rob**-o-rāte, in-**vig**-or-āte, de-**lin**-e-āte, e-**vap**-o-rāte, in-**ac**-cu-rate, ca-**paç**-i-tāte, re-**sus**-çi-tāte, de-**bil**-i-tāte, fa-**çil**-i-tāte, de-**cap**-i-tāte, per-**çip**-i-tāte, in-**def**-i-nīte, e-**rad**-i-cāte, çer-**tif**-i-cate, in-**del**-i-cate, pre-**var**-i-cāte, au-**ten**-ti-cāte, do-**mes**-ti-cāte, prog-**nōs**-ti-cāte, in-**to**-i-cāte, re-**ç**i-ro-cāte, e-**quiv**-o-cāte, in-**val**-i-dāte, con-**sōl**-i-dāte, in-**tim**-i-dāte, di-**lap**-i-dāte, ac-**com**-mo-dāte, com-**men**-su-rate (*com-**mĕn**-shoo-rate*), in-**ves**-ti-gāte, re-**tal**-i-āte, con-**çil**-i-āte, ca-**lūm**-ni-āte, de-**mōn**-stra-tīve, de-**rīv**-a-tīve, con-**sĕrv**-a-tīve, de-**fin**-i-tīve, in-**fin**-i-tīve, re-**trib**-ū-tīve, con-**sec**-ū-tīve, ex-**ec**-ū-tīve.

A triennial assembly is one that continues three years, or is held once in three years. The Parliament of Great Britain is septennial, that is, formed once in seven years. The sun will evaporate water on the ground. It is difficult to eradicate vicious habits. Never retaliate an injury, even on an enemy. Never equivocate or prevaricate, but tell the plain truth. A definitive sentence is one that is final. Liquors that intoxicate are to be avoided as poison. Love and friendship conciliate favor and esteem.

WORDS OF FOUR SYLLABLES, ACCENTED ON THE SECOND.

ad-vent-ūr-oūs, a-non-y-mous, šy-non-y-mous, un-ġen-er-ous, mag-nan-i-mous, ū-nan-i-mous, as-pār-a-gus, pre-çip-i-toūs, ne-çes-si-tous, am-**phib**-i-ous, mǎ-rac-ū-lous, a-nal-o-gous, per-**fid**-i-ous, fas-**tid**-i-ous, in-**sid**-i-ous, in-**vid**-ious, con-**spic**-u-ous, per-**spic**-u-ous, pro-**mis**-cū-ous, as-**sid**-ū-ous, am-**big**-ū-ous, con-**tig**-ū-ous, mel-**lif**-lu-lous, su-**pēr**-flu-ous, in-**ġen**-ū-ous, con-**tin**-ū-ous, in-**con**-grū-ous, im-**pet**-ū-ous, tu-**mult**-u-ous, vo-**lupt**-u-ous, tem-**pest**-u-ous, sig-**nif**-i-cant, e-**trav**-a-gant, pre-**dom**-i-nant, in-**tol**-er-ant ĩ-**tin**-er-ant, in-**hab**-i-tant, con-**com**-i-tant, ir-**rel**-e-vant, be-**ne**-fi-çent, mag-**nif**-i-çent, co-**in**-çi-dent, non-**reş**-i-dent, im-**prov**-i-dent, in-**tel**-li-ġent, ma-**lev**-o-lent, be-**nev**-o-lent, pre-**dic**-a-ment, dis-**par**-aġe-ment, en-**cour**-aġe-ment, en-**fran**-chġse-ment, dis-**fan**-chġse-ment, en-**tan**-ġle-ment, ac-**knōwl**-edġ-ment, es-**tab**-lish-ment, em-**bel**-lish-men, ac-**com**-plish-ment, as-**ton**-ish-ment, re-**lin**-quish-ment, im-**ped**-i-ment, ha-**bil**-i-ment, im-**pris**-on-ment, em-**bār**-rass-ment, in-**teg**-ū-ment, e-**mol**-ū-ent, pre-**em**-i-nent, in-**con**-ti-nent, im-**pēr**-ti-nent, in-**dif**-fer-ent, ir-**rev**-er-ent, om-**nip**-o-tent, mel-**lif**-lu-ent, çir-**cum**-flu-ent, ac-**çou**-ter-ment, com-**mū**-ni-cant.

An anonymous author writes without signing his name to his composition. Synonymous words have the same signification. Very few words in English are exactly synonymous. Precipitous signifies steep; the East and West rocks in New Haven are precipitous. An amphibious animal can live in different elements. The frog lives in the air, and can live in water for a long time. A miraculous event is one that cannot take place according to the ordinary laws of nature. It can only take place by the agency of divine power. Assiduous study will accomplish almost any thing that is within human power. An integument is a cover. The skin is the integument of animal bodies. The bones also have integuments. Young persons are often improvident – far more improvident than the little ants.

WORDS OF FIVE SYLLABLES, ACCENTED ON THE SECOND.

co-**tem**-po-ra-ry, ex-**tem**-po-ra-ry, de-**rog**-a-to-ry, ap-**pel**-la-to-ry, con-**sol**-a-to-ry, de-**fam**-a-to-ry, de-**clam**-a-to-ry, ex-**clam**-a-to-ry, in-**flam**-a-to-ry, ex-**plan**-a-to-ry, de-**clar**-a-to-ry, pre-**par**-a-to-ry, dis-**pen**-sa-to-ry, sub-**sid**-i-a-ry, in-**çen**-di-a-ry, stī-**pen**-di-a-ry, e-**pis**-to-la-ry, vo-**cab**-u-la-ry, im-**aġ**-i-na-ry, pre-**lim**-i-na-ry, con-**fec**-tion-er-y, un-**neç**-es-sa-ry, he-**re**-di-ta-ry, in-**vol**-un-ta-ry, re-**sid**-ū-a-ry, tu-**mult**-ū-a-ry, vo-**lupt**-ū-a-ry, ob-**serv**-a-to-ry, con-**serv**-a-to-ry, pro-**hib**-it-o-ry, pre-**mon**-i-to-ry, re-**pos**-i-to-ry, sup-**pos**-i-to-ry, le-**ġit**-i-ma-çy, in-**vet**-er-a-çy, sub-**serv**-i-en-çy, de-**ġen**-er-a-çy, con-**fed**-er-a-çy, ef-**fem**-i-na-çy, in-**del**-i-ca-çy, in-**ab**-it-an-çy, ac-**còm**-pa-ni-ment.

Addison and Pope were contemporary authors, that is, they lived at the same time. A love of trifling amusements is derogatory to Christian character. Epistolary correspondence is carried on by letters. Imaginary evils make no small part of the troubles of life. Hereditary property is that which descends from ancestors. The Muskingum is a subsidiary stream of the Ohio. A man who willfully sets fire to a house is an incendiary. An observatory is a place for observing heavenly bodies with telescopes. An extemporatory discourse is one spoken without notes or premeditation. Christian humility is never derogatory to character. Inflammation signifies to heat, or excite. Strong liquors inflame the blood and produce disease. The prudent good man will govern his passions, and not suffer them to be inflamed with anger. A conservatory is a large greenhouse for the preservation and culture of exotic plants.

No. 121. – 18 Words [12th Grade Level]

WORDS OF SEVEN SYLLABLES, ACCENTED ON THE FIFTH.

im-ma-te-ri-**āl**-i-ty, in-di-vis-i-**bīl**-i-ty, in-di-vid-ū-**āl**-i-ty, im-compat-i-**bīl**-i-ty, in-de-struct-i-**bil**-i-ty, im-per-çep-ti-**bil**-i-ty, ir-re-sist-i-**bil**-i-ty, in-com-bus-ti-**bil**-i-ty, im-pen-e-tra-**bil**-i-ty, in-el-i-ği-**bil**-i-ty, im-mal-le-a-**bil**-i-ty, per-pen-dic-ū-**lār**-i-ty, im-com-press-i-**bīl**-i-ty, in-de-fen-si-**bil**-i-ty, val-e-tu-di-**nā**-ri-an, an-ti-trin-i-**ta**-ri-an.

WORDS OF EIGHT SYLLABLES, ACCENTED ON THE SIXTH.

un-in-tel-li-ği-**bil**-i-ty, in-com-pre-hen-si-**bil**-i-ty.

The immateriality of the soul has rarely been disputed. The indivisibility of matter is supposed to be demonstrably false. It was once a practice in France to divorce husband and wife for incompatibility of tempers; a practice soon found to be incompatible with social order. The incompressibility of water has been disproven. We can not doubt the incomprehensibility of the divine attributes. Stones are remarkable for their immalleability. The indestructibility of matter is generally admitted. Asbestos is noted for its incombustibility. A Valetudinarian is a sickly person.

January 10, 2009

Since I use cedilla (ç) for the *soft* c, there is no need to code the *hard* c with a line through it. It is sufficient to write: c for *hard* k. The c with strikethrough looks a lot like *e* to my students. I used strikethrough (e) in the explanation but not in the Tables. The hard c of ch has the strikethrough, *eh*.

I have marked all the g letteres that present the /j/ sound with a dot, ġ I have only marked the *hard* ġ, when the following letter is an e or i, since there is not so many exceptions.

The line under s and x are not quite like Webster, which appears to be connected to the letter by a tiny line in the middle. I found the “combining up tack below,” but for now the underline seems to be sufficient. It is very hard to see it clearly even in the good print of the 1908 edition. Combining print is much more difficult (requiring more work) than the simple underline - which works with any font.

The crossed t (t) of the **th** isn't quite the same since Webster's appears to be a line touching the top of the t.

In the body of my *Webster's Spelling Book Method for Teaching Reading and Spelling*, I avoided overusing didactical. The original work coded more words. I believe the diacriticals in this editor are sufficient for teaching reading and spelling.

Most of the text is in *Times New Romans*, except where I had to switch to *Microsoft Symbol* or *Lucida Grande* in order to gain access to the diacritical marks that are not available in *Times New Romans*.

I prefer Webster to the newer dictionaries because he did not use the schwa. The introduction of the schwa as a diacritical mark has done much to limit the effectiveness of the modern dictionary for the purposes of teaching the common conventions of English orthography.

I used **bold** to indicate accented syllables instead of Webster's accent marks because it is easier for children to understand. Experience teaching the program has proven that the move from written accents to bold type was a good idea.

All fonts were found on my Macbook computer on January 10, 2009. Thanks to Dr. Eugene Roth Jr. for assistance in finding all the diacritical marks.

Thanks also to Elizabeth Brown for using this book in her tutoring and providing valuable feedback. Here informative web site is, www.thephonicspage.org. Mrs. Brown's success using this this book with her tutoring students was one of my main reasons I went ahead with the publication.

Special thanks to reading teacher, researcher, and reading historian Miss Geraldine Rodgers whose brilliant essay, “Why Webster's Way was the Right Way,” motivated me to explore the power of Webster's Spelling Book Method for teaching reading from the “sounds of the letters” instead of from the “meaning of the words.” Her essay may be read on my web site.

Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

November 10, 2008

This book is an adaptation of Noah Webster's 1908 *Elementary Spelling Book*. Previously I had typed and published the 1824 *American Spelling Book*. I taught the 1824 edition in my classroom with great success. I have seen students improve their reading levels by several grades with Webster in a very short period of time. It is a little known fact that **the current grade-level system of teaching can have retarding effect on student's advancement in reading**. Many students who are performing on grade level in reading are often reading **far below their personal potential**. I experimented years with teaching polysyllables to second grade bilingual students and regular English speaking first grade students. The results completely changed my opinion of student capabilities if they were systematically taught how to read polysyllables.

Grade levels are determined by tests like the *Fries Readability Formula*, the *Flesch-Kincaid Formula*, or the *Dale-Kincaid Formula*. With the *Fries Formula*, the average number of syllables and sentences in a 100 words passage are used to determine reading level. It was **obvious** that restricting students to small words and short sentences can have a **severe retarding effect** on their grade level ability. When I taught the first graders to read polysyllables, they experienced dramatic improvement on standard grade level reading assessments. Several were able to pass the *1987 Riverside Informal Reading Inventory* 5th and 6th grade levels. The *Accelerated Reader Program*, for example, strictly controls reading levels. The same is true of most grade level curriculum material.

Students in Noah Webster's day did not experience this unfortunate retarding effect because they learned to read polysyllables at an early age with Webster's spelling books. **In Webster's day, spelling books were used to teach reading**. Their reading books consisted of material of interest to children but not restricted to small words or short sentences. The *Bible* in the KJV and *Pilgrims Progress* were often their first reading materials.

Visit my web sites, www.donpotter.net, especially my Education and Spelling Book Reference pages. I highly recommend Elizabeth Brown's www.thephonicspage.org

Mrs. Elizabeth Brown and I have started a blog for **Webster's Spelling Book Method**: <http://phonicsfirstsyllablesalways.wordpress.com/Last>. Mrs. Brown and I will be publishing free printed and audio-visual (YouTube) training material.

Special thanks to Dillon DeArmond, one of my 6th grade tutoring students (in 2008), who was the first student of mine to complete *Webster's Spelling Book Approach for Teaching Reading and Spelling*. His editorial assistance has been invaluable. His progress with Webster was excellent.

Notice these definitions from Webster's 1828 Dictionary: "**Spelling Book**: A book for teaching children to spell and read. **Spell**: to tell or name the letters of a word, with proper division of syllables, for the purpose of learning the pronunciation, children learn to read by first spelling the word." On page 26 of the 1783 *Grammatical Institutes of the English Language*, Part I, Webster wrote, "Spelling is the foundation of reading and the greatest ornament of writing"

Revised 1/21/12.

For those who might question the wisdom of teaching kids to read some words beyond their level of comprehension, let me suggest a consideration of the following quote from the "Preface" to

the 1908 **Elementary Spelling Book**: “The reading lessons are adapted, as far as possible, to the capacities of children, and to their gradual progress in knowledge. The lessons will serve to substitute variety for dull monotony of spelling, show the practical use of words in significant sentences, and thus enable the learner to better understand them. The consideration of diversifying the studies of the pupil has also had its influence in the arrangement of the lessons for spelling. It is useful to teach children the signification of words, as soon as they can comprehend, but the understanding can hardly keep pace with the memory, and the minds of children may well be employed in learning to spell and pronounce words whose signification is not within the reach of their capacities; **for what they do not clearly comprehend at first, they will understand as their capacities are enlarged.**”

It is important to note that the division of syllables is **not** based strictly on roots, prefix and suffixes, that is etymology. Webster’s 1908 *Elementary Spelling Book* clearly states, “In Syllabication it has been thought best not to give the etymological division of the Quarto Dictionary, **but to retain the old mode of Dr. Webster as best calculated to teach young scholars the true pronunciation of words.**” Previous experience with a polysyllable reading program that I developed eight years ago lead me to recognize the wisdom of Webster’s original method of dividing syllables according to pronunciation, similar to the respelling in our modern dictionaries.

In the 1822 edition of his *American Spelling Book*, Webster informs us, “In nine-tenths of the words in our language, a correct pronunciation is better taught by a natural division of the syllables and a direction for placing the accent, than by a minute and endless repetition of characters.” For this reason, I have curtailed the use of diacritical marks as much as possible, especially the breve in closed syllables.

I always have the children orally spell some of the words we have read to help fix the spelling in their minds. Students can practice looking the words up in a dictionary.

It is important to keep in mind that the spelling book in Webster’s day was considered a method of **teaching reading** and spelling - not just spelling, as in our day.

One of the chief advantages of Webster’s method is the way the words are grouped according to **accent**. This **crucial aspect of word identification** is largely overlooked in modern reading and spelling methods. It is especially important for second language learners.

I recommend that students practice both oral and written spelling. All written spelling should be done in **cursive only**, as it was done in Webster’s day. Manuscript was not introduced into American schools until 1922, with the results that handwriting, spelling, and composition have deteriorated considerably since Webster’s day.

Unknown words can be explained by definition or use in illustrative sentences. Example: “*Demeanor* is how you act. You have a nice *demeanor*. You act nice.”

**FLESCH-KINCAID GRADE LEVELS
FOR WEBSTER’S 1908 ELEMENTARY SPELLING BOOK**

Table	Grade Equivalent	Table	Grade Equivalent	Table	Grade Equivalent
16	0.4	74	5.3	110	9.9
25	0.7	75	9.3	111	10.6
26	4.0	77	3.8	112	6.3
32	5.1	79	7.0	113	10.1
35	0.7	80	3.8	114	7.3
43	1.4	81	8.0	116	8.2
44	4.8	82	6.8	117	10.5
46	1.3	85	8.1	120	10.3
47	1.3	87	4.0	121	12.9
49	1.3	88	5.8	123	8.3
53	2.4	89	6.3	124	7.1
54	8.9	90	9.5	125	10.7
55	3.4	92	5.8	126	5.3
56	4.4	93	7.5	127	5.5
59	1.2	96	3.7	128	9.1
61	1.6	98	4.9	131	9.1
64	7.5	99	6.3	137	12.0
66	6.4	100	10.0	142	7.1
67	8.8	101	7.7		
68	7.6	102	11.7		
72	2.5	107	7.7		
73	5.2	109	4.5		

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The Dog: 3.4; The Stage: 5.0; The Squirrel: 6.4; The Boy who Stole the Apple: 3.1; The Country Maid and Her Pail: 10.2; The Two Dogs: 10.7. The Partial Judge: 6.6; The Fox in the Bramble: 8.9; The Bear and the True Friends: 6.9; Questions for Henry: 4.2.

Only the sentences were examined for grade equivalent. The tables of individual words were not used in this study. This study was done using the 2003 Microsoft Word.

The Truth about Reading and the Spelling Approach
Excerpt from The Spelling Progress Bulletin: Winter 1968

by Leo G. Davis

WHOLE WORD APPROACH: Unquestionably the “w-w” (whole-word) experiment has turned out to be the most deplorable blunder in academic history. It not only produced countless youngsters who can’t read, but also saddled us with a crew of teachers, *few of whom have any practical knowledge of the fundamentals of alphabetical orthography*. Expecting a 5-yr-old to develop a lasting mental picture of a whole word is basically identical to the “turky-track” approach to literacy that has been a millstone around the Oriental’s neck for eons. But worse yet, under current practices the child is expected to “figure out” words to which he has never been exposed, and without any knowledge of what phonics we do have. Idiotic! With that kind of thinking (?) going into our school programs *it’s a wonder that any child ever learns to read!* As a natural result of the “look-GUESS” fiasco, current researchers are looking for “guessing” aids (clues) by which children may guess strange words. **They haven’t done enough research to discover that there were no guessing aids prior to the w-w debacle, because children were taught to SPELL the words before trying to read them.**

SPELLING APPROACH: Prior to the w-w fiasco there were no “reading” failures per se, because all up-coming, new words were listed as SPELLING exercises ahead of the narratives introducing them, and vocabularies of other texts were controlled to minimize the chances of children encountering strange words, until they had learned to use the dictionary, after which there was no instruction in reading (decoding). In the old-fashioned spelling class children were taught meticulous pronunciation, spelling, encoding, meaning, word recognition, self-expression (in defining words), **all in one course**. The initial “attack” on words was made in the SPELLING class, rather than in literature. Although we frequently forgot exactly how to spell a given word, we seldom failed to recognize it where it was already spelled. Thus there were **NO “reading” failures, just SPELLING failures, due to the idiotic inconsistencies of traditional orthography**. Current researchers seem to look upon spelling as the result of reading, rather than as the traditional approach there-to. They seem to expect children to “catch” spelling thru exposure, like they do the measles

See Ronald P. Carver’s 2000 *Causes of High and Low Reading Achievement* for a modern defense of spelling as a method of improving reading achievement.

For more information on the **Spelling Book Method for Teaching Reading and Spelling**, see my *Spelling Book Resource Page* on my web site www.donpotter.net