LEARNING TO READ
A COMPARISON OF METHODS
By Tammy R. Arp

The basic methods to teach reading today can be divided into three main groups: **Look/Say, Whole Language and Phonics**.

LOOK/SAY
HISTORY: The Look/Say method was developed in 1837 by Horace Mann to teach deaf students how to read by memorizing words from their appearance. It was discarded after 6 years as a failure for the deaf. It was later picked up by John Dewey at the University of Chicago and Arthur Gates at Columbia Teachers College. During the 1940's and 1950's, it became the universal method in our public schools.
(see: The Right Choice: Homeschooling, by Christopher J. Klicka, page 32-33)

METHOD: Words are slowly introduced to a child through repetition and exercises, often with graduated readers, gradually buidling vocabulary until the child has memorized approximately 24,000 words by the 4th grade. This is done through flashcards and cheerfully memorized stories that the teacher "reads" with the children. Memorization by word families (i.e. mat,cat, fat etc.) is used extensively wherein the wholesale task of memorization is eased by like pattern families.

SUCCESS RATE: Very Poor.   (See Klicka again, as well as numerous studies and reports).

WHOLE LANGUAGE APPROACH
HISTORY: A hybrid of Look/Say after it was recognized for its failures. (See the Orton-Gillinham study in the 1960's). Whole Language has been used almost exclusively in public schools here in our local districts.

METHOD: Usually defaults to Look/Say with high volume reading. It provides a cursory teaching of very basic alphabet sounds (long/short) and a few letter patterns, usually two vowel patterns of the long sound of the first only. (First vowel goes walking, it does the talking.) A couple of incomplete spelling rules may be added. Drill is done almost solely by family pattern memorization. Reading is done with the emphasis of using context clues to figure out new or forgotten words. The emphasis is always on moving through letters and words allowing volume repetition to cement concepts believing comprehension will come as well.

SUCCESS: Very poor unless a child is a very strong visual learner. Most children can't tell the difference between similar words, and memorizing all words in the English language is daunting. They repeatedly toss in a familiar word for an unknown one (since for science). Few children go back and fill in misunderstood words but instead read for the simple action missing a lot of the story. Children balk at higher reading levels since they can't decode well. Vocabulary is usually not easily memorized. Spelling is haphazard. Most children are sadly reduced to Scan and Skip and Guess and Go choosing to stick with simpler books and overall hating to read. The industry has provided a lot of kid friendly easy reading books to accomodate the volume necessary.

PHONICS APPROACH
HISTORY: This is the method that our forefathers found tried and true and which dominated our public schools until sometime near the 1920's when Dewey's system took over.

METHOD: To recognize our language as a sound based language with those sounds represented by letter symbols. The student learns and practices these sound/letter associations (the phonograms) and then applies them to "sound out" the words she/he is reading. Most phonic programs recognize anywhere from 44 to 70 different phonograms in the English language and adds a few rules and patterns regarding spelling.

SUCCESS: Superb. Proven in research and personally attested by my own children and from 10 years of teaching ESL reading. I've seen how phonics makes use of the auditory library we have in our head (all those words we know first by speaking and listening from babyhood) and then translates it into the words on our page.

PHONICS METHODS
 To understand the differences in phonics methods, one must first understand three basic components of reading and spelling:

  READING is the process of **DECODING**, putting sounds to the letters you are seeing, **sounding the words out.** An invaluable and necessary tool in order to read. This requires thorough memorization of the individual phonograms and ALL the sounds each make.
Example ea= long e, long a, short e......(ee, ay, eh)

 SPELLING is the opposite and is **ENCODING**, putting letters, phonograms, to the sounds you are hearing. This is trickier and requires an understanding not only of sound to letter patterns but also their frequency of occurrence. Once this is achieved, spelling is greatly improved. Practice is done by memorizing the group of phonograms that produce the same sound as well as some various spelling rules which help in matters of occurrence and common use.
 Example: long a= ai/ay, a-e, ei, eigh, ea, ending ey.

COMPREHENSION is understanding what you have just read. All good programs will teach more than just the mechanics of sounding the words out. Comprehension can be assessed with simple questions posed to the child after he/she has read a story and then having the child retell it back in his/her own words (**NARRATION**). Reading good books to your children with strong vocabulary and positive, richly written stories, and then discussing those stories will increase their "head library" and will tremendously aid their comprehension of the stories. It will also give them a well of information to draw from when they mechanically sound out a word. They will later draw from this well to recognize the words and their meanings.

The Phonics Methods can be distinguished from each other by the following categories:
BLENDING METHODS:

WORD FAMILIES
METHOD: Initial blending (and sometimes much of the "phonics") is taught in sound families (not to be confused with the sound patterns mentioned above). Example: mat, cat, sat, etc. Depending upon the program the emphasis upon individual phonograms is slight to intensive.

PERSONAL COMMENT: I've personally noted that the eye tends to memorize the last half of the word (the family part) rather than reading the sounds from left to right in a normal reading pattern (which can be very distressing to the dyslexic-inclined). It might also encourage the reader to see patterns were none exist; example *mat vs. math.* Some children seem to really respond quickly to this method, although often the learning curve slows tremendously once the simple word families fall away and the student enters advanced or multisyllable vocabulary (especially if individual phonograms are taught only slightly in the program). However, many popular and successful phonics programs start this way. Look closely at each program to check how much actual individual phonogram learning comes into play after the initial first word family blending. The program should move onto individual phonogram instruction significantly or it will be a revamp of Look/Say.

MAJOR CURRICULUM: Bob Jones; Eagles Wings; Abeka (secondary approach after letter ladder beginning blends—see below); Samuel Blumenfeld's AlphaPhonics (teaches initial reading by word families but also has a strong phonogram component and a ladder component); Play N Talk; Hooked on Phonics.

LETTER LADDERS
METHOD: Initial blending is taught in a "ladder approach" after the basic consonant and short vowel sounds are taught. The student learns to say: m-a; m-e; m-i; m-o; m-u. In most programs three letter words are then soon introduced: mat, met, mix, mop, mud.

PERSONAL COMMENT: This is my personally preferred approach. The eye is continually trained to follow the proper left/right sequence. No confusion arises when the student moves from mat to math to mathematics and onward. The common argument is that what comes after a vowel determines its sound more than what comes before, but if you are learning the phonograms properly, you recognize the two or more letters as one sound in the left/right sequence; and when you deal with the silent e producing long sounds, you still must read the word left to right after noting the e at the end. It's also beautiful to hear the word literally spill out of the child's mouth after the ladder + consonant approach....ma-t, ca-b. This is not achievable with the word family. One still must return to the beginning sound and then go left to say the word or pronounce stilted, unnatural words...m—at, c--at, s--at.

MAJOR CURRICULUM: Christian Liberty Press including their updated Noah Websters Reading Handbook, Adventure in Phonics Series; Horizons American Language Series (published by Mile-Hi and/or Alpha Omega); Sing, Spell, Read, Write; Phonics Pathways by Delores Hiskes; Abeka (Abeka uses ladders as their initial approach before switching to word families),

PHONOGRAM LETTER/SOUND METHODS:
After the initial blending differences, another way to group phonics programs is by how they teach the phonograms. This can be broken down to Individual Phonomgrams, Sound Pattern Groups; Rule Patterns, and Visual Symbols. I believe the methods should not be an either/or situation as some programs suggest. A blending of all approaches is useful to teach reading (decoding) and spelling (encoding) effectively.   While out of necessity one approach may be emphasized at one given time, all should be explored to insure a balanced and strong foundation of skills.

INDIVIDUAL PHONOGRAMS:
METHOD: The letter/sounds of the English language are broken down into individual phonograms. Each phonogram is individually drilled by ALL the sounds it makes.
Example: ea= long e, long a, short e (eeh, ay, eh)

PERSONAL COMMENT: I use this approach first. It helps the child to understand the letters and their individual sounds as they are encountered in words. Learning the options each phonogram gives and then applying the correct choice through an organized approach is the most natural and effective way to "sound out" words. I belive this best taps into that auditory library of a child. He/she sees a new word. They sound out the phonograms the first way; then the second way, and possibly third until the child recognizes having heard that word (from the library of words in his head). The child realizes that word makes sense in this sentence. This approach really seems to cement word retention the fastest in my experience.

MAJOR CURRICULUM: Riggs Institute, Spaulding's Phonogram Flashcards, Rod and Staff. Writing Road to Reading is a full curriclum based off of Spaulding's cards. I have even developed my own phonics cards with personal notes over the years. I developed an easier pattern of memorization than Spaulding with a more modern dialect usuage like Riggs (lily is lilee not liluh).

SOUND PATTERN GROUPS:
METHOD*:* The phonograms are presented by groups according to sound made.
Example: sound of long a= ai/ay; a-e; ei/eigh; ea; ending ey.

PERSONAL COMMENT: This is the second half of the puzzle that many seem to make an either/or choice.   A good spelling program must include a sound to letter approach and drill what group of phonograms produce the same sound. This may be a little confusing to some if you are trying to use it for focusing on the decoding skills for reading (letters to sounds) as it may not be apparent what all the sounds a single phonogram are if individual phonogram drill is not done.

MAJOR CURRICULUM: Christian Liberty Press' Adventures in Phonics; Noah Webster's Reading Handbook. Also see Rod and Staff. Some Abeka Spelling Books, Alpha Omega LifePac Series 100 (their beginning reading series).

RULE APPROACH

METHOD: Depending upon the program, individual phonograms may still be taught and/or sound patterns, but the bulk of the emphasis is on the rules.

PERSONAL COMMENT: Rules can help cement phonogram behavior and make them easier to remember, However, this method can become very cumbersome and confusing if there are a LOT of rules because the phonogram structure is weak. We found having a stronger phonogram system alleviated the necessity of too many "exception" rules. Review any "rule" program to see how many "exceptions" are needed and how clear and simple to remember the rules are.

MAJOR CURRICULUM: Horizon's American Language Series.; Carson Della-Rosa's The Big Book of Phonics Fun. Some of Christian Liberty Press' Spelling Workbooks ; Eagles Wings Phonics (over 600 sight words to memorize together with spelling rules and poems)

VISUAL CLUE- SYMBOL APPROACH

METHOD: There are various programs which use special characters and markings usually combined with the actual phonograms to show visually what is happening phonetically.

PERSONAL COMMENT: This approach may be very helpful for those who like to "see" what is happening. However, we personally found this to be disastrous if you have a sequential child who wants to get it right the first time and "ets in concrete." This made it very upsetting when special markings are removed. Our son needed to relearn it all and argued about the changes! However, we have friends who swear by the 100 Easy Lessons as working wonders with their child

MAJOR CURRICULUM: Teach Your Child To Read in 100 Easy Lessons; Alpha Omega's Color Phonics. Distar Method.

READING METHODS AT A GLANCE

<u>*LOOK/SAY (SIGHT APPROACH)*</u>

on flashcards: memorized poem which is "read" together

omitting words in turn

the	**Up and down the lane,**
fox	**The fox ran in the rain.**
ran	
rain	

BUT is it   haybale or hyperbole? Barge or barrage?

<u>*PHONICS APPROACH (Letters and their Sounds)*</u>

LETTER LADDERS

ma	**ma+d**	**mad**
me	**me+t**	**met**
mi	**mi+x**	**mix**
mo	**mo+p**	**mop**
mu	**mu+d**	**mud**

    ma+t…..ma+th….ma+the+ma+tics.

(It all works in a left to right sequence from initial blending to upper reading levels with syllables.)

    ma+d+e…..made.(e noted to make a sound long then read right to left)

    mai+d…….maid. (the ai was recognized as long a by phonogram and still read left to right)

WORD FAMILIES

-at		-un		
m+ at	**mat**	**s un**	**sun**	*Danger of reversing reading*
c + at	**cat**	**f un**	**fun**	*direction and subsequent*
p + at	**pat**	**r un**	**run**	*syllable problems if eye tracks the*
h + at	**hat**	**b un**	**bun**	*ending family first and tacks on the*
				beginning consonant as an afterthought"

But is it mat+he+mat+ics??? Individual phonograms and syllable rules must be introduced for "harder" words**.**

<u>*INDIVIDUAL PHONOGRAMS—especially good for reading decoding.*</u>

ea= ea, ea,   ea (long e, long a, short e:my order)   **(Spaulding method order)**

    meat, steak, bread   **ee, eh, ay…meat, bread, steak**

Personal Note: We taught our children this poem to help them remember all the sounds of a phonogram team:

    Two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking, or the other (the second letter)

    They may talk long, they may talk short, or make the sound of another.

We then taught our children to try: the first letter long, second long, first short, second short, or known other to sound it out.

<u>*PHONOGRAMS by SOUND PATTERNS METHOD...especially good for spelling encoding*</u>.

long a= a-e; ai/ay; ei; eigh; ea, ending ey.

RULES METHOD: Rules carry the phonograms (Can help cement tricky phonogram behavior. _Watch out for Either A LOT of rules or a FEW rules and LOTS of memorized exceptions_**.)**

Two vowels go walking, the first does the talking. (If no further rule...LOTS of exceptions)
Vowels i and o may be long before 2 consonants
Eagles Wing's Phonics teaches by rules with lots of rule poems (can be fun, or confusing depending upon the child).

VISUAL CLUE-System METHOD: (Visually seeing what is happening...godsend to some, but a stumbling block to others**)**

> **tim**e   Look at "Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Days" for a full viewing of mark ups.