

**WHEELER'S GRADED  
READERS: A  
FIRST READER**

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Wheeler's Graded Readers: A First Reader by Gail Calmerton & William H. Wheeler

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## A FIRST READER

BY  
GAIL CALMERTON  
AND  
WILLIAM H. WHEELER



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## PREFACE

ALL teachers, especially Primary teachers, should remember that education neither begins nor ends in the schoolroom. Education begins with

“Only a little brain, empty of thought;  
Only a little heart, troubled with naught;”

but it lasts to the very end of life. So early does it begin that we do not know, we cannot say, just when a child takes its first step on the road to knowledge. We know that the babe rests best in its mother's thrilled and thrilling arms; that it is lulled to sleep by mother singing soft and low; that it looks with wide and wondering eyes at the commonest things of life; that it is taught by want and wish and contact with the things that touch its dimpled flesh; that it is “lured by light and flame and color's wondrous robes”; that it “learns the use of hands and feet, and by the love of mimicry is beguiled to utter speech”; and so through years of sun and shade, of day and night, — tasting, — feeling, — seeing, — hearing, — smelling, — this little gleaner gathers knowledge through all “the five gateways of the mind.”

In his own way — just a little every day — this faithful little gleaner learns more, perhaps, during the first four years of his life than a student does in a four years' college course. In six short years he learns to speak a language, and to understand it when it is spoken by others. Within the narrow range of his limited vocabulary he can express his wants and wishes and understand the speech of others. Thus equipped, he is sent to school to take his first lessons in learning to read, — learning to get thought from the crooked and curious marks upon the printed page.

It is of the utmost importance that a child's first steps in reading should be taken in the right direction. A child does not learn to speak a word by hearing it once, and he will not learn to recognize the printed form of a word by seeing it once. He acquired his colloquial vocabulary slowly at first and by the aid of constant repetition. In this way, and in this way only, will he learn to recognize words in print. It should not be forgotten that in the early years of his training the child is forming habits of reading and of thought by which he will be aided for the rest of his life, or of which he will by and by have to cure himself with painful effort.

The end of learning to read is the ability to read great books, but what shall the child's first reading book be? Some of our educational wise men say that it should be filled with classic literature, and that it should contain

nothing which is not strictly classic. This sounds well, but these wise men have failed to produce the strictly classic First Reader.

Beautiful little poems and pieces of noble prose of an appropriate character should be read to children who are too young to read such literature themselves. Just as soon as the child has acquired some facility in reading what is printed in colloquial style, he should be required to read selections from standard authors. These literary selections should be graded in such a way as to bring those containing the fewest words outside of the colloquial vocabulary into the lower books of the series, the difficulties being gradually increased as the child grows towards maturity. But teachers should remember always that there is a very marked distinction between learning to read and reading to learn. The child while learning to read will gain some information, but the principal thing is to get such skill in reading that a whole lifetime's reading for information will be a pleasure. There are too many children who never form reading habits because they never really learn how to read. All through life they take no interest in reading and get no enjoyment from it because of the stress of attention and expense of energy necessary to get at the thought. Reading is not so much an end in itself as a means for the acquirement of all human knowledge. Children find little pleasure in reading until they can read with ease; they read best what they like best.

This little book is the second of a series of "Graded Readers." It is to be read by the children and not to them by the teacher. The authors believe that a First Reader should be very simple indeed; that the vocabulary should be small; that each word should be repeated often; that the words used should be largely those which are already familiar to the child in conversation; that it is unwise to require the child to learn many new words at the same time that he is learning to recognize the printed forms of the words which are already near and dear to him; that the sentences and the paragraphs should be short; that there should be frequent reviews; that the pictures should be what children call "cute and cunning," and should be of the story-telling kind, clearly within the child's world, but still of the very highest artistic merit; that a good black and white picture is much better than a crude picture in colors; that a color picture with purple grass and a green sky has no educational value; and that the very first "Stepping Stone to Literature" is to acquire some skill in reading.

The authors hope that this little book will prove to be a series of "Easy Steps for Little Feet."

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H. Le Jeune.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS.

THAT'S THE WAY. (MEMORY LESSON.)

Just a little every day ;  
That's the way  
Seeds in darkness swell and grow ;  
Tiny blades push through the snow.  
Never any flower of May  
Leaps to blossom in a burst.  
Slowly — slowly — at the first ;  
    That's the way !  
Just a little every day.

Just a little every day ;  
That's the way  
Children learn to read and write,  
Bit by bit and mite by mite.  
Never any one, I say,  
Leaps to knowledge and its power.  
Slowly — slowly — hour by hour ;  
    That's the way !  
Just a little every day.

—ELLA WHEELER WILCOX.