

**COMMON SCHOOL
SPELLING BOOK**

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Common School Spelling Book by Frances Squire Potter

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INTRODUCTION

American school children, from the descendants of the early colonists to the little immigrants of today, come from many races. These races do not attach the same sounds to the letters of the English alphabet. But if American children may see in the pages of their first spelling book the usual combinations of English sounds in words, if they are made to feel the strength and beauty and natural growth of these words, they will develop instinctively a kind of language patriotism. They will come to know that the languages of their parents are represented just as truly in the structure of the English language as their races are represented in the American people.

These different race-elements in our language have brought with them their conflicting systems of spelling. Nevertheless, in spite of this conflict, the majority of English words are fairly regular in spelling; that is, they are spelled according to rational principles.

A minority of English words, usually so introduced that they intrude upon the regular majority, are not spelled according to the usual analogies. But if these words are listed separately, if they are seen to be few and curious, they may be approached with interest, and the child in understanding them will be prepared for their rational simplification.

The Common School Spelling Book, while adopting no spelling which is not current, opens the way for changes which are inevitable in the near future. It makes the child so familiar with the basic phonetic laws of the English language that he naturally will apply these to later language work. The classifications of vowels and consonants are simplified from classifications adopted by the leading philologists of the world.

The training of the ear is accomplished through self-unfolding lessons on phonetics. Plenty of time is taken for concrete instances. Simple words are used in illustrations. These words, which are regarded as types, are presented so plainly and thoroughly that the child is given confidence in his own power to draw deductions from them. Generalizations follow easily and inevitably.

The training of the eye is natural and continuous. The words of the simple explanations have been chosen with care. The power of association has been invoked not only in illustration, but also by eliminating everything that might confuse the child's memory. For instance, pronunciation has been made plain by the use of assonance and not by recourse to the expedient of a wrong spelling in parenthesis, or by the intrusion of diacritical marks. Only so much attention is given to the latter as will make the dictionary intelligible.

Poetry has been used generously for the following reasons:—the poets rejoice in the full value of sound inherent in English letters; the rhythm of poetry is the most natural guide to accent; its rhyme is the most natural guide to pronunciation.

There has been no hesitation in introducing an occasional old form of word in a poem which has become classic. This is the simplest way of letting the child see how a living language is continually changing.

As the book advances from phonetics to word-building, poetry, by means of transitional lessons upon maxims, quotations, and the paraphrase, is largely succeeded by prose. The rhyme, alliteration, and rhythm of poetry are recognized in the assonance, alliteration, and rhythm of proverbial sayings. Echoes of these are heard to the end throughout the lessons which treat accent and syllabication. In no section of the book is the feeling lost that a deep instinct of the race has led it to record its experience in poetry.

Emphasis has been placed upon the vocabulary answering the common needs. The words chosen have been selected from lists used by experienced teachers. They are

the result of careful observation and selection extending over a series of years, tested by the systematized records of the author. Repetition, when used, is for some specific reason.

To supplement this practical vocabulary, original work on the part of the child draws him imperceptibly into forming the dictionary habit. This invaluable habit of using the dictionary is more important than is the mechanical memorization of an extended vocabulary, which at the best can be but arbitrarily selected. The methods suggested for interesting children in dictionary work were thoroughly tested by the author in her own class room and have been observed by her in operation under another teacher. The exercises are easy, but the habits formed from them are basic. Furthermore, these exercises meet the particular requirements of children who have varied interests in different localities.

The book falls into natural divisions which begin with Lesson 1, Lesson 106, Lesson 231, Lesson 311. The last division of the book takes up the race elements of the English language, word building, and syllabic analysis. The prose which accompanies these lessons opens to the child's mind the ever-widening vista of interest found in the rise and growth of a language.

The increasing inability to spell on the part of American school children has been commented upon by teachers in all parts of the country, and by business men who realize that it is a serious handicap in the world of affairs. In addition to the immediate disadvantage of bad spelling, our children are suffering a deeper loss,—that is, a deafness and blindness to the sonority and glory of the English language as it exists in an unrivalled literature.

The pathos of these deprivations is not lost on the experienced teacher, who knows how readily children respond to any method of teaching which reaches and illuminates their minds.

The teacher who notices the differing minds of children, and who seeks to approach each in a way to which it can respond, will find in *The Common School Spelling Book* an

efficient friend. Such a teacher will realize that a scientific foundation for spelling is also a foundation for the study of philology, poetics, and literature, and that no child of the common schools need grow up without at least a glimmering perception of the science and the art which are dependent upon written words.

Moreover, the habits of attention and of concentration which the book induces will lead the child to the acquirement of one of the greatest of all gifts, that of genuine observation. The normal mind finds in genuine observation an unfailing delight, and a method by which to test theories upon which it is asked to base its creed of life. Learning to spell is not without possibilities of learning to live.

Acknowledgment is due to Mary Gray Peck for suggestions and for textual help in the last section of the book.

FRANCES SQUIRE POTTER.

April, 1913.

Common School Spelling Book

SONG

Sing a song of seasons!
Something bright in all!
Flowers in the summer,
Fires in the fall!

Robert Louis Stevenson

LESSON 1

SINGING

The children sing in far Japan,
The children sing in Spain,
The organ with the organ man
Is singing in the rain!

Robert Louis Stevenson

VOCABULARY

the children sing far

COMMON SCHOOL

LESSON 2

VOCABULARY

singing	in	Spain	with
children	far	rain	song

LESSON 3

VOCABULARY

an	pan	organ
man	Japan	organ man

The *a* in *man*, *pan*, *Japan* has the sound of *a* in *an*.

LESSON 4

ā as in mān

man	ran	can	van
Japan	ban	fan	tan

Read in class *Singing* in lesson one.

LESSON 5

REVIEW WORDS

an	pan	van	song
can	man	far	with
fan	Japan	sing	rain
ban	organ	Spain	the
tan	organ man	children	singing

LESSON 6

ā as in tān

When *a* has the sound of *a* in *tan* it is called *short a*. The mark over the *a* is called a *breve*. It means that the *a* is short.