

**THE CHILD'S OWN
SPELLING BOOK**

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The Child's Own Spelling Book by W. Franklin Jones

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The Child's Own Spelling Book

— BY —

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C H I C A G O, U. S. A.

PREFACE

If there is any subject in the common school whose teaching has been a disappointment to teachers themselves, that subject is spelling. In spite of new and improved methods of teaching spelling, in spite of more time spent upon spelling, and in spite of efforts to reform English spelling, students throughout the eight grades of our public schools continue to disappoint us in their spelling. Then, too, the high school graduate seems about as likely as ever to mar his thesis by frequent misspelling; the letters of business men are far from satisfactory in spelling; and, finally, the college graduate continues to show us that he is by no means a master of spelling. This is a formidable array of evidence against our teaching of spelling, and from every quarter comes the cry, "What is the matter with our spelling teaching?"

The answer to this question may come from either or both of two sources; namely, (1) our spelling material, or word lists, may be at fault, and (2) our methods of teaching these lists may be bad. But when we note the different methods that have been used in teaching spelling in the last few years, and apparently with no great difference in ultimate success, it would seem that it is time for us to investigate our spelling material. Are the spelling lists which we are giving our students good or bad? Are these lists made up of words which children actually use, grade for grade, in their own free written speech? Or are they full of words which are as far beyond these children as our reading and arithmetic materials once were? It is this significant question that prompted the author of this book to conduct an eight years' research in the field of spelling material. Since this spelling book is based on the results of that *research, a brief description of the same is here given.

One thousand fifty (1050) grade students, approximately one hundred fifty (150) students per grade above the first,

*A bulletin setting forth this research in full detail may be obtained free by addressing the secretary of the Faculty, State University, Vermillion, South Dakota.

RESEARCH

were asked to write daily themes on topics of interest to children. This theme writing was continued, with widely varying topics, and all words carefully listed as they came in, until each student's writing vocabulary was approximately exhausted. The number of themes per student ranged from 56 to 105, the students in the higher grades usually requiring both more and longer themes in order to drain their word wells. The total number of themes examined was a little over 75,000, and the themes averaged a little less than 190 words. The total number of words recorded from all themes, counting each word as many times as it appeared, was approximately 15,000,000.

These word lists reveal the following facts of extreme importance in the teaching of spelling:

1. While there were 15,000,000 words used by the 1050 students in writing 75,000 themes of about 190 words each, only 4500 different words in all were used.

2. Nearly all of these words were repeated many times, and practically all of them were misspelled by some one or more students.

3. The total number of different words in the writing vocabularies, grade by grade, and the average number per student, are as follows:

| Grade | Total number of different words used in the grade | Average number per student |
|-------|---|----------------------------|
| 2 | 1927 | 521 |
| 3 | 2396 | 908 |
| 4 | 2838 | 1235 |
| 5 | 3270 | 1489 |
| 6 | 3695 | 1710 |
| 7 | 4114 | 1926 |
| 8 | 4532 | 2135 |

4. No student misspelled as many as 100 different words, and the average number misspelled was forty-eight (48).

The forty-five hundred different words used, grade by grade, are found arranged in the graded spelling lessons that

follow. There were 524 of the second grade words which were used by fifty (50) per cent of all the second grade children, 655 additional words were used by forty (40) per cent of the third grade, 754 more by thirty (30) per cent of the fourth grade, 769 more by twenty (20) per cent of the fifth grade, 750 more by ten (10) per cent of the sixth grade, 578 more by six (6) per cent of the seventh grade, and 502 more by two (2) per cent of the eighth grade. (No word was recorded unless used by at least two per cent (3 out of 150) of the students of some grade. It is the foregoing distribution of words (524 for the second grade, 665 for the third grade, etc.) that is used in this spelling book.

The most astonishing thing about these grade lists is the fact that over 1900 of the forty-five hundred words were used by the second grade children. When, however, we note that the second grade students averaged only 521 different words, it becomes at once evident that it is not desirable (neither is it possible) to teach second grade students to spell all of these words.

If now any teacher would like to discover some of the vital weaknesses of our spelling teaching, let her compare these lists of words which children actually use in their own free written speech with the lists given in our most popular spelling books. A few of the facts to be noted in this comparison are as follows:

1. Spelling books commonly contain 15,000 words; that is, more than three times as many words as are used by 1050 grade students together.

2. Since by far the greater number of words commonly found in spelling books is not found in the writing vocabularies of children, we have been liberally wasting time in our school by having children study thousands of words which they do not use, while we are not succeeding in teaching them to spell the 4500 words which they do use.

3. Many of the words which children commonly mis-spell are not found in the popular spelling books.

4. In studying the usual spelling book no child knows

the words which he uses from the thousands which he does not use; and since he spends most of his time on the unfamiliar words, his study is not well directed and economic, to say the least.

SUGGESTIONS ON THE TEACHING OF THE SPELLING LISTS FOUND IN THIS BOOK.

The primary aim in the spelling exercise today is not testing, but teaching; not finding spelling errors, but preventing them. We are no longer to teach children "desk made" lists of words which even few adults ever use, or which we guess they will use; but we should teach them to spell the words, grade by grade, which they actually use. We are therefore to center our efforts on the prevention of misspelling of useful words. We have so few words to teach now that the teacher may wonder what she is to do with the spelling period, hence a few suggestions on methods of *teaching spelling are here in place.

There are three factors to be taken into consideration in teaching the child to spell any word; namely, (1) the meaning; (2) the pronunciation, and (3) the spelling. Tests which have been made show that it is never safe to take any one of these three factors for granted. If a child does not know the meaning of a word, then he cannot use it and he has no need of spelling it. If he mispronounces it, he is likely to misspell it. It thus appears that both meaning and pronunciation enter into the spelling task.

There are very few words in the following lessons whose meaning and pronunciation are not familiar to most of the students in the grade to which they are assigned. There are some words there with which some children are not familiar. Then, too, an isolated word may have no meaning, or it may have many meanings. The teacher therefore should not assign

*An excellent article on "The Teaching of Spelling," by Dr. Henry Suzzallo, is published by Teachers College, Columbia University, New York City.

any lesson for study until she has gone over the list of words with the class and has had the children use the words orally in sentences, so as to fix the meaning and pronunciation. The child may then attack the spelling task safely, and the teacher may test him during the following class period to see if he can use the words, correctly spelled, in expressing his own thoughts in writing. It is conceded that some work in oral spelling may be well in place, but it is not conceded that oral spelling should be the main spelling test. Experiments show that students are often able to spell words correctly, especially orally, when the attention is centered on the spelling of the isolated words, and yet the same words may be freely misspelled when the attention is on the thought to be embodied in the sentence. Whether the student is an optile (eye-minded) or an audile (ear-minded) or a motile (motor-minded) or any of the other ideational types, the ultimate spelling test is his ability to write the word in expressing his own thought. This, then, must be made the final test.

The teacher of spelling will then need the usual fifteen or twenty minute class period (1) for testing the ability to spell the words (assigned the previous lesson) in free written speech, (2) for making sure of the meaning and the pronunciation of the words to be assigned for the following lesson, and (3) for dealing with any special difficulties that may arise in learning to spell any word. The old twenty-words-a-day lesson is to disappear, for the two reasons that (1) we no longer have words enough to last a year if given in such overdoses, and (2) we cannot handle so many words in efficient spelling teaching.

It should be further noted that troublesome homonyms (deer, dear; waste, waist) do not usually appear in the child's written vocabulary at the same time. Often they appear years apart. Experiments in teaching homonyms have been made by the department of education in the University of South Dakota, which show that homonyms should not be brought together until the second one of the pair appears in the child's vocabulary. This often gives time to fix the meaning and the spelling of the first member of the pair before the second one