

# **THE MCCLOSKEY READERS, PRIMER**

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The McCloskey Readers, Primer by Margaret Orvis McCloskey & Charles Copeland

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**MARGARET ORVIS MCCLOSKEY & CHARLES COPELAND**

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**PRIMER**

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McCLOSKEY PRIMER

BY  
MARGARET ORVIS McCLOSKEY

ILLUSTRATED BY  
CHARLES COPELAND



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TO  
JAMES C. McDONALD



## PREFACE

Practical results and realized ideals depend, in beginning reading, almost wholly upon the selection and the arrangement of material which combines in the highest degree power to attract, technical simplicity, and literary value.

The material which best combines these three essential characteristics is the cumulative tale,—the tale that repeats at each step all that has gone before. This curious type of literary structure is highly dramatic and richly human. It is usually overflowing with humor, and it moves with delightful celerity. These are the qualities which, with the amusing repetition, justify the place of the cumulative tale as an unfailing source of children's love and laughter. Moreover, the fact that among all races and for many ages these tales have satisfied child hunger for romance and for wonder, is convincing proof of their power to meet some special need and to make an everlasting appeal.

In mechanical structure the cumulative tale is so admirably adapted to the needs of beginners in reading as to suggest that it might have been invented for the express purpose of saving children from the stultifying effects of a struggle for mere reading symbols. The simple, logical steps of the story save all strain upon the memory. The vocabulary of the shorter tales is extremely limited: the rhyme of "The Kid" contains only twenty-nine (29) words; "The Kid and the Cabbage," only fourteen (14) that are

new, and after a brief introduction this vocabulary increases more slowly than that of the traditional beginners' reader. The repetition is abundant, and it is, fortunately, a sane repetition, for while the symbols repeat, the story bravely marches on. A consistent extension of this reasonable repetition is secured by placing in proper order a series of tales closely related in thought and in form. In this way this primer provides efficient drill, with no break in the continuity of thought and interest.

The great educational value of this kind of material — material developed by a childlike people to meet a universal need — has long been recognized, and the great German writers on this subject from Herder to Rein, Dr. Harris, Dr. Hall, and a host of others have urged that it be substituted for the trivial, diluted stuff so freely and generally imposed upon the innocent and the helpless. In their power to interest, to develop emotional life, to stimulate the rhythmic sense, and to nourish the imagination, these rhymes and tales are unexcelled. Although given in the form of play, their content is rational, and the succession of events is usually so logical that they are an efficient means of learning a chain of cause and effect. Because these tales furnish general types of character and situation, because they give shadows as well as high lights, because they relieve all situations by the tonic and relaxing properties of humor, because, in short, their highest purpose is to give joy, they are, of their kind, well-nigh perfect in æsthetic and ethical values.

As a foundation for future literary study these rhymes are excellent, since they give in the simplest form types of character and situation which are found in higher

literature. "The Song of the Kid," for example, typifies, by a form easily within the grasp of a little child, the law of retribution, — he who does wrong suffers wrong, — whereas a profound and elaborate treatment of the same theme is found in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

A specific value of this particular collection is that the study of the different versions of "The House that Jack Built," as they are told to the children of other lands, affords at the outset a basis for comparison; and it foreshadows the conception and the love of universal literature. No small degree of importance is attached to the fact that in broadening the child's mind to include some idea of his brothers across the sea, his attention is fixed upon similarities rather than upon differences, and that his first feeling is not one of racial prejudice, but, instead, a feeling of sympathy and kinship.

The rhymes and stories in this volume are classic illustrations of seven universally popular cumulative types. Five of these type themes are represented by widely current English tales, and the other two are illustrated by Norse variants, because, in this instance, the Norse versions are simpler and more attractive. The remaining seven tales are Hebrew, French, Scotch, Gaelic, Russian, and Greek variants of two prime English favorites, "The House that Jack Built" and "The Old Woman and her Pig." Thus the two best known cumulative tales are repeated a sufficient number of times to give a fair idea of their modification in different countries and of their remarkable diffusion in all parts of the world. Regardless of their deeper significance, these foreign rhymes merit the emphasis here placed upon them, for they have finer poetic and dramatic