

**STORY AND PLAY
READERS, VOL. I**

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Story and play readers, Vol. I by Anna M. Lutkenhaus & Margaret Knox

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ANNA M. LUTKENHAUS & MARGARET KNOX

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VOLUME I

SIXTH YEAR



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*T*O all the Boys and Girls
who in the great public
school system of America are
reading the literature of all
lands this book is dedicated,
with the hope that through its
pages a deeper love for read-
ing will be inculcated and a
greater desire to read to others.

MARGARET KNOX,

ANNA M. LÜTKENHAUS.

INTRODUCTION

What to read and how to read it,—these are the problems that confront the teachers of the grammar grades. For the primary grade teachers these matters are easily settled. Our little children's desire to read the printed page is enough impetus to carry them successfully through book after book even though the content be of little value as literature. It is when this period of teaching the mechanics of reading is past, that both teacher and class lose interest in the effort to master the printed page, and our children's reading deteriorates. The reading period is usually a dull uninteresting time, when the children, in careless, slovenly manner, run through page after page of text, which makes little or no impression, however literary it may be, because of the lack of vital interest that is aroused in the child's mind.

It may be that most of us feel, that once the child has learned to read, there is no further need for oral reading except for practice, occasionally, in pronunciation, punctuation, and in the more difficult and obscure formalities of the text. Reading, now, is to be left to the children themselves for the pleasurable acquiring of knowledge, and for acquaintance with literature.

But, we, as teachers, must not allow ourselves to get into the habit of making the reading period a resting place in the busy day. We must remember that *reading* in itself is the most important of all subjects, because through it, language, our means of intercourse with all peoples in all subjects, is developed.

Through reading we have our opportunity to teach our greatest moral and ethical lessons, and to build up, through the appeal to the emotions, the fine well-rounded character of the cultivated man and woman. Does not the teaching of reading really mean teaching our children to understand all the mighty thoughts of the world, whether they be expressed in music, or poetry, or art, or in the characters of the heroes of literature?

If reading is understanding, let us not push it aside then, as unimportant, in the rush and hurry of our modern life; but let us take up this lost art again, and really learn to read. Let us go back to the age when to be the reader of a community was to be the teacher. When books were scarce and reading was not a general accomplishment the one who could and would read, commanded the respect and admiration of all the countryside. We hear of neighborhoods in our grandfathers' day where the farm laborers were held in thrall by the reading of a little girl of twelve. She used to borrow the *Waverley Novels*, and these men and women, tired by a day of hard toil, would sit around an open fire on the hearth in the evening, while one of their number held a blazing pine knot as a torch to shed its light on the pages of her book, and listen, all eyes and ears, to the dramatic reading of the thrilling tales, by this girl.

Do we not find this repeated in our own experience today, when, during a holiday time or a day of leisure, we can snatch a quiet evening to stay at home? What greater pleasure can there be than to gather about the open fire and while we sew or knit or employ our hands in some light task, listen to a good reader and live with him through the scenes of the good old books?

But, then comes the criticism: "How few people read

well! How few people speak well! Most people pronounce badly, enunciate poorly, have unpleasant voices!" They close their lips and shut in their voices so that the discordant sounds emitted are annoying and make the hearer long to run away. Read Hamlet's advice to the players. How adequately Shakespeare has set forth the requisites of a good speaker or reader. We cannot all have the "golden voice" of a Julia Marlowe, or the smoothness of speech of a Forbes-Robertson; but by careful drill we can acquire a well modulated voice, and by constant practice all can achieve perfect enunciation. It takes years of practice to acquire the technique and expression of the skilled pianist or violinist. This same practice would make the precious instrument that we all have, a trained organ under our control, that would richly repay us for the labor, in the pleasure we give to others by our speaking voice and by reading aloud.

And so, with the old-fashioned notion strongly before us that reading means not only getting the thought from the printed page, and widening our knowledge of literature, but giving this thought expression in beautiful language:—the words pronounced correctly and enunciated clearly, with voice well-modulated, full and rich, and the soul given an opportunity to express itself in the sympathetic rehearsing of the writer's thoughts;—we have gathered, in this series of Readers, a number of selections suitable for oral reading.

We believe thoroughly that the reading text-books in the pupils' hands should contain a wealth of good literary selections that will acquaint them not only with the style of the various writers, but also with the biographies of great and good men and women and stories of the interest-

ing lives of history and legend, thus giving opportunities for study of character; but we feel that a Reader should go a step further.

We fall back upon the psychology of modern teaching and hold that no matter what effect a fine bit of literature has upon the child mind, at the time of reading, there is little or no lasting impression made unless there is an opportunity for expression. We desire to give all the children of the classes using these books an opportunity not only to read for themselves in order to get the thought, but that they shall give it back in well expressed oral reproduction of the story. In other words, we want our young people to tell the stories again and again, to play the play again and again, and in this way, not only to gain knowledge of literature and to receive pleasure themselves, but to give pleasure and instruction to all who hear them. For the time being, they become the characters and live the lives which they depict. This will not make actors and actresses of the children, but in living these characters, they will learn how to act in their own lives.

The teacher should conduct these reading lessons in such a way that every child in the class will take part. Now one and now another may take the rôle of leading characters, while all those, not having a speaking part, may be occupied as chorus or mob or populace, or in some capacity, as supernumeraries.

It is this spirit of coöperative rivalry in producing the play well that will teach children to speak our language correctly and beautifully, as well as to read well.

I speak from a long experience with elementary school children when I say that there is no better training in intelligent reading and in clear expression of thought than this use of dramatic selections for class exercises and it is