

# **Tom Cruise: A Victim of Dick & Jane**

**By Samuel L. Blumenfeld**

For years I've been warning parents of how easy it is for a child to become learning disabled or dyslexic by the teaching methods used in most American public schools. Happily I've been successful in saving thousands of children from becoming dyslexic, as thousands of their parents have used my two books that prevent dyslexia—How to Tutor and Alpha-Phonics.

And so I was very much interested in what Tom Cruise had to say about his lifelong struggle with dyslexia in the July 21st issue of People Magazine. He writes that when he was 7 years old he was labeled dyslexic. Which merely means that the primary schools he attended used the looksay, or whole-word, or sight method of teaching reading—known as the Dick and Jane method—which creates reading disability and dyslexia.

That this method of teaching creates learning problems was known as early as 1929 when Dr. Samuel T. Orton wrote a landmark article, "The 'Sight Reading' Method of Teaching Reading as a Source of Reading Disability," for the February 1929 Journal of Educational Psychology. Dr. Orton had spent the previous two years investigating reading problems among school children in Iowa and came to the conclusion that the new sight or whole-word method was causing most of the problems. He wrote as diplomatically as possible:

I wish to emphasize at the beginning that the strictures which I have to offer here do not apply to the use of the sight method of teaching reading as a whole but only to its effects on a restricted group of children for whom, I think we can show, this technique is not only not adapted but often proves an actual obstacle to reading progress, and moreover I believe that this group is of considerable educational importance both because of its size and because here faulty teaching methods may not only prevent the acquisition of academic education by children of average capacity but may also give rise to far reaching damage to their emotional life.

Dr. Orton wrote that before the Dick and Jane sight method was adopted by virtually every primary school in America, with the result that we've had a precipitous decline of literacy in America and an explosion of learning disabilities and dyslexia.

Tom Cruise describes what it was like to be dyslexic: "I'd try to concentrate on what I was reading, then I'd get to the end of the page and have very little memory of anything I'd read. I would go blank, feel anxious, nervous, bored, frustrated, dumb. I would get angry. My legs would actually hurt when I was studying. My head ached."

This is what millions of children go through in American schools. They become adults whose lives are severely limited by their reading disorder. Not being able to read in this most literate of societies is quite a handicap. And many "dyslexics" try to keep it a

secret. Tom Cruise says: “All through school and well into my career, I felt like I had a secret. When I’d go to a new school, I wouldn’t want the other kids to know about my learning disability, but then I’d be sent off to remedial reading.”

The reason why the look-say method causes dyslexia is because it requires children to memorize the printed word by their whole configurations, like Chinese characters. When this way of looking at words becomes automatic, it becomes a conditioned reflex, which prevents the student from seeing the phonetic structure of our alphabetically written words. In fact, dyslexia can be defined as the inability to see the phonetic structure of the printed word.

The cure? Intensive systematic phonics in which the child learns that letters stand for sounds and is drilled in the vowel-consonant combinations until he or she develops a phonetic reflex, that is, the automatic ability to see the phonetic components, the syllables, of our written language.

Tom Cruise finally learned to read when a friend introduced him to Scientology, the religion founded by L. Ron Hubbard, which uses Hubbard’s Study Technology to teach reading and language development. Cruise says: “Many people had tried to teach me, but no one had taught me how to learn or how to study; I had been told I had all the symptoms of dyslexia, but no one had given me a solution.”

Of course, I have been offering a solution for many years, but the public schools are not interested. Despite the warning by Orton back in 1929, the public educators have continued to use faulty teaching methods in the schools. So, no matter how much money the public schools are given to “solve the reading problem,” it will not be solved because the will is not there.