

# WHY JOHNNY STILL CAN'T READ -- OR WRITE

by

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## Chapter Outline

Chapter One - WHAT'S HAPPENED TO LITERACY IN AMERICA? The paradox of the world's most advanced nation with free compulsory schooling for all, suffering from a decline in literacy. Symptoms of the decline: falling SAT scores; falling reading scores in city schools all over the country; disintegrating academic standards. Universities complain about students unable to read or write adequately. This chapter will contain interviews with professors, newspaper editors, book publishers, booksellers, corporation heads, personnel department heads, etc., so that the reader can grasp the extent and scope of the problem.

Chapter Two - THE WORLD OF THE FUNCTIONAL ILLITERATE. Who are the functional illiterates? Some experts estimate that 50 percent of America's adults are functionally illiterate. Interviews with functional illiterates and parents who are suing schools. How functional illiterates get through high school, and how they cope in a society that assumes you can read proficiently if you've gotten a high school diploma. Degrees of functional illiteracy. The shrinking vocabulary of the younger generation. The inability to express anything but the simplest ideas. The switch from the written word to the audio-visual media as the main source of ideas, information, learning, and entertainment.

Chapter Three - HOW THE PROBLEM STARTED. The classroom origins of functional illiteracy and reading disability. The gradual switch from the alphabetic (phonics) method of reading instruction to the hieroglyphic (look-say, whole-word) method. Origin of the look-say method as a means of teaching the deaf to read. Its adaptation to normal children. An early experiment that failed. A short history of reading instruction. The early look-say reformers: Horace Mann, Thomas Gallaudet, Cyrus Peirce. The first look-say critics.

Chapter Four - HOW LOOK-SAY TOOK OVER. Progressive educators in the 1930's adopt look-say as part of their program. The rise of Dick and Jane, Janet and Mark, Alice and Jerry. The revolution in primary education. The professors of education remake the primary school curriculum and write the new textbooks. The concept of the "sight vocabulary." The techniques of getting textbooks adopted. The emergence of a powerful vested interest in look-say.

Chapter Five - THE RISE OF READING DISABILITY. Look-say creates the "reading problem," and the remedial reading industry is born. Look-say authors become "experts" in curing the disease they create. Parents begin to complain. Growing public awareness of a "reading problem" among school children. Why look-say causes reading disability. Dr. Orton's warning. The rise of "dyslexia" and other exotic educational maladies. The insidious growth of educational malpractice.

Chapter Six - ENTER RUDOLF FLESCH. Publication of Why Johnny Can't Read in 1955 makes public aware for first time of a teaching revolution in primary schools. Flesch identifies look-say as the cause of the reading problem. The book arouses parental indignation toward the educator but is unequivocally denounced by the educational establishment. Look-say authors organize the International Reading Association, which becomes a powerful lobby for look-say. The IRA tightens its controls of reading instruction in America, and all attempts to reform reading instruction are thwarted. Interview with Rudolf Flesch.

Chapter Seven - PHONICS VS. LOOK-SAY: THE PROTRACTED STRUGGLE. For twenty years since the publication of Flesch's book, phonics advocates have waged guerrilla warfare against the strongly entrenched establishment. The Council for Basic Education, the Reading Reform Foundation, and The Orton Society represent the three most active groups fighting for phonics. Arrayed against them is virtually the entire educational establishment. Meanwhile, academic standards begin to decline in the high schools and colleges as products of look-say make their way up the academic ladder. School libraries become "media centers" as reading deficiency becomes widespread and teachers grow to rely more and more on audio-visual instructional equipment.

Chapter Eight - THE CHALL REPORT. The publication of Jeanne Chall's book, Learning to Read, The Great Debate, in 1967, written under a Carnegie Corporation grant, renews the phonics-look-say controversy. But matters are now made more complicated by the rise of psycholinguistics. The linguists confuse the issue by affirming the alphabetic principle as opposed to hieroglyphics, but reject phonics or the articulation of isolated sounds. New concepts and a new vocabulary are introduced into reading pedagogy under the cover of which look-say techniques continue to be used. Teachers and parents are now more confused than ever as various groups make conflicting and contradictory claims. But the look-say establishment maintains full control of the primary school curriculum.

Chapter Nine - ANTI-LITERACY IN THE SCHOOLS. Reading failure is now so widespread that a new anti-literacy philosophy has developed among educators who claim that literacy is not really that important after all. There is now a new audio-visual literacy utilizing motion pictures, tape recorders, and television. All of this has made the written word obsolete. The new technology has superseded the written word which belongs to an earlier age in man's development. This chapter will include interviews with educators who hold these views. The Black English controversy is part of this problem. Third worlders attack standard English as a form of cultural imperialism.

Chapter Ten - WRITING: WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GRAMMAR? With the decline in reading skills has also come a loss of interest in good writing. Grammar is no longer taught. Free expression is the order of the day, with no concern for legible handwriting or grammatical form. Correct spelling, punctuation, rules of grammar, paragraphing, and traditional writing conventions have been discarded. Cursive writing has been replaced in most cases by print-script. Formal instruction in cursive writing is no longer given in most schools.

Chapter Eleven - READING ON THE POTOMAC. The reading problem becomes a federal problem. Right-to-Read program created by HEW. This chapter will delve into the federal program and find out why it has had so little positive effect on the overall national problem. Interview with head of Right-to-Read.

Chapter Twelve - THE PRESENT STATE OF READING PEDAGOGY. Look-say still dominates reading instruction in America, with psycholinguistic modifications. Professor Kenneth Goodman is now the leading spokesman for the look-say lobby. Meanwhile, some new phonics systems have been developed and are being used mainly in private schools, back-to-basics public schools, and remedial programs. But look-say is the mainstay of the Open Classroom, and reading disability has become a permanent on-going problem of American education. The obstacles to reform increase as educational theory gets more complicated and the behavioral psychologists try to establish control over academic and disciplinary chaos.

Chapter Thirteen - THE BIG BUSINESS OF LEARNING DISABILITIES. Widespread reading disability has lead psychologists to believe that vast numbers of American children are afflicted with a wide variety of learning disabilities. Nothing is done to test the validity of the prevalent modes of instruction. Instead, all of the blame for failure is put on the student. This chapter will show how children are being abused by behavioral psychologists and school administrators who have no way of dealing with classroom induced learning disabilities except through drugs, psychiatric therapy, and prolonged remedial programs. Educational malpractice is now the rule.

Chapter Fourteen - THE RETURN TO LITERACY. Can we restore literacy to America? What is literacy? The case for intensive phonics. Successful schools that promote literacy. The back-to-basics movement grows. Can the public schools be diverted from their present anti-literacy course? Does television help or hinder? Sesame Street and Electric Circus: good or bad? Methods that work, and where they are being used. How to create an avid reader: by making reading easy and pleasurable. The wonders of the printed word. The superiority of written literacy to the so-called TV-cassette "literacy." The written word as the repository of human knowledge. The need for greater freedom of choice in education. The need for teachers who really care about literacy. A plan of action that any community can embark on to improve literacy.