READING FOR UNDERSTANDING

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PREFACE

Every teacher of English is aware of the immediacy and the seriousness of the problem of comprehension in reading. A lack of reading comprehension is usually diagnosed by one or more of the following symptoms:

1. Inability to recognize words
2. Failure to approach new words with curiosity
3. Failure to grasp the meaning of words in new associations
4. Inability to glean facts
5. Failure to follow directions
6. Failure to read into the meaningful phrases of a writer or to interpret figurative language
7. Inability to gain the central thought
8. Inability to evaluate
9. Inability to reproduce the substance of what has been read

If we give a glance at the procedure of any skilful reader, we note that, perhaps, such a one reads with a purpose to find a definite answer to a definite problem, seeks to grasp the central theme and the arrangement of the author's ideas, pauses occasionally and questions the material read, is willing to add his own knowledge to what he is reading and to evaluate the author's point of view. He is willing to vary the rate of speed with which he reads depending upon the nature of the material; as, slowly for heavy reading, more rapidly for light reading. Finally, he is able to associate what he reads with his own problem. Any well-planned program of reading for students will keep these factors in mind and will work toward inculcating a willingness and an attempt to enrich the reading of the pupil.

Reading for Understanding considers reading as a tool, a skill employed for the sake of efficiency along many lines of school activity. The passages selected, therefore, are not necessarily chosen along literary lines, but, in the main, are taken from the subject-matter fields. Only through a knowledge of reading and through the ability to read can students succeed in grasping geography, history, science, mathematics, and the various arts which make up the program of their day. The material is simple and within the experience of students. The vocabulary is varied and of graded difficulty with a purposeful distribution and repetition of new words. Realizing that material which is sufficiently interesting and understandable will of necessity cultivate a receptive attitude toward reading, we have kept in mind, in selecting the passages, the fact that there must be a variety of appeals—realistic, imaginative, entertaining, scientific—to suit the various types of mind toward which the book is directed.

An Experience Curriculum in English, published by the National Council of Teachers of English, calls this type of reading, Work Reading. Work reading seeks information and is performed for the purpose of using the content. To quote the Curriculum:

> The work-reading section of the Curriculum should consist of experiences in work reading; but at once a difficulty arises. Work reading is distinctly a tool activity; it is always a part of some other activity and cannot be normally experienced in isolation. On the other hand, the teacher of English (or reading) cannot take time to conduct projects or set up problems which naturally require study reading. If the teachers of history, geography, science, etc. cannot stop to give guidance in the reading their work requires, they can sometimes hand over to the teachers of reading both the problems raised and the reading-matter bearing upon these problems. Occasionally doing their study reading under the supervision of the teacher of reading, the pupils soon initiate behavior

patterns, which daily study assignments may be counted upon to fix and polish.

Because different fields of subject-matter have their special vocabulary and other reading difficulties, each of the units here listed should include some material from each of the fields in which pupils have textbooks.

This is our defense.

Whether this subject-matter be historical in character, scientific in character, or purely literary, we as teachers of English desire primarily to develop in the student the power and habit of effective thinking. To a scholarly mind, thinking is a natural process. Regardless of the subject, that mind has the ability to follow ideas through to a logical conclusion, to form mental associations, and to recall parallel illustrations and allusions. For our students there is nothing harder than such mental activities. Left to themselves, they make no logical associations of their studies; there is no carry-over from one class to the next. It is our concern to bring about, with English as a core-subject, some consciousness on the part of students that knowledge is related. This book makes it easy for instructors to draw freely on all the types of experience which students are in the habit of meeting and to make them realize that the division into compartments which we know as subjects is merely conventional and for convenience.

Whether a need for comprehension is stirred by a desire to know a certain formula in physics or chemistry, or by a curiosity concerning ratio and proportion, or by an investigation of the industrial expansion in the United States, or by a request to set the table properly in one's home, the reading procedures for securing information remain the same. The Council Curriculum offers certain procedures and objectives for acquiring skill in work-reading. We have planned this book for the most part in

accord with such of these objectives as are suitable for short units. For instance, the section entitled "Reading in response to a question" has these primary and enabling objectives:

1. *Primary Objective:* To look for the answer to a question in a specified paragraph whose main point is the answer.
2. *Primary Objective:* To look for the answer to a question in a paragraph whose main point and supporting details it covers.
   Enabling Objectives: To recognize the dependence of the details upon the main point of the paragraph. To recognize that details as well as main points are called for. To hold the whole paragraph in mind at the conclusion of the reading.
3. *Primary Objective:* To seek the answer to a question in a paragraph in which this is only a minor point.
   Enabling Objectives: To keep attention concentrated on the question. To recognize that the main point and the other minor ones do not belong to the answer.
4. *Primary Objective:* To seek the answer to a question in a group of paragraphs whose central point is the answer to the question.
   Enabling Objectives: To grasp the group of paragraphs as a thought unit. To see that the central idea is the answer sought.
5. *Primary Objective:* To seek the answer to a question in a group of paragraphs whose main point and supporting details it covers.
   Enabling Objectives: To see the relation of the subordinate fact or ideas each represented by a paragraph to the central idea. To fix in mind as many as possible of these supporting facts or ideas at a single reading. To glance rapidly from paragraph to paragraph to pick up any one omitted in the mental summary.

The make-up of this book with its grouping by different subjects and interests gives opportunity for variety and for choice. The teacher may make his selection from those sections of the book which most closely correlate

with the interests, the grade, and the ability of the group. An attempt has been made within each section to arrange the material from simple to more difficult. Vocabulary difficulties have been anticipated and met. The average difficulty of the words used has been measured by the *Thorndike Word Book*. The book is divided into two parts, each part following the same order of sectional divisions. The teacher may prefer to use together the passages for re-expression and the passages for comprehension in any one subject.

The main purpose of this book is to train pupils to understand and express what they read. Since it is desirable to develop speed as well as comprehension, however, the teacher is urged to make an effort to have reading rate and comprehension advance together. No specific reference has been made in the text to the time required for the reading or summarizing of each selection because of the wide variation in ability of students. Some will progress very slowly for, perhaps, the first ten lessons; they are learning how to think, evaluate, judge, conclude. With these, the teacher may well defer mention of speed until later in the term when some increase in reading power is noted. Other students, who find the material easily comprehensible, interesting, and challenging, can be urged to read with greater speed. The judgment of the teacher must dictate the amount of emphasis to be placed on rate. Especially in Part II, in re-expressing the thought, do students need time and practice in this difficult art of thinking and finding words to express a condensed version. The process, more difficult than merely comprehending, may be blocked or retarded by stressing speed at the outset. The great need is for constant practice, with increasing power of self-criticism and expression.

However, it is the belief of the authors that they have

contributed a number of *indirect means of increasing the pupil's rate of reading:*

1. By concentration of the pupil's attention through presenting him with an abundance of interesting material on familiar subjects
2. By training him in the use of aids such as the topic sentence, transitional and key words
3. By increasing his knowledge of words through constant emphasis on vocabulary
4. By prescribing reading with a definite purpose
5. By giving practice in anticipating meanings

Teachers who wish to attain more rapid advance in speed may do so by using these *direct means of increasing rate:*

1. By imposing a reading time limit for the selection, after which the student is tested without being allowed to refer to the material read
2. By reading to establish an individual rate record by having each pupil note the number of seconds taken to read a passage (His reading rate can be found by dividing the number of words in the passages by the number of seconds.)
3. By keeping individual and class graphs for a record of improvement

The scope of the book is definitely that of grasping the subject-matter. The physical disabilities which limit students' reading, such as too frequent eye-fixation, too lengthy eye pauses, regressive eye-movement, lip reading, too short a perceptual span, and so forth, have been scientifically studied, and exercises for their correction have been provided in numerous remedial reading pamphlets. We are taking for granted the physical mechanics of reading. The exercises in this book have been planned to improve certain essential techniques or skills. For this purpose, in Part I, devoted to Comprehension, will be

discovered a variety of types of exercises including multiple choice, short answer, completing, and differentiating the true from the false. In Part II, devoted to Re-expression, practice is provided for summary, selecting the central thought, discovering a proper title for the passage, eliminating the minor details, and grasping the general plan.

M. A. B.
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CONTENTS

PART I

READING FOR COMPREHENSION

Reading is taken by most persons as a gift from the gods. Perhaps from the devils. That depends on what you think of it. But, in any case, practically every one takes reading for granted. It is one of those familiar activities, like breathing, and sleeping, and walking, which most of us never try to understand. It does not so much as occur to most of us that there is anything about these activities to be understood. Naturally, our chief concern is with the practical problem of how to read efficiently. But, as an approach to that problem, it will be helpful to inquire into the nature of reading. After all, what is reading? What does a writer do when he writes? What does a reader do when he reads?

Reading is one form of communication. There are others. You can think of a number off-hand. Doubtless in the history of our race, reading is one of the newest forms of communication. We, as a race, are just trying it out, so to speak. What a fascinating story,—what an illuminating story,—the account of its early beginnings would be. But, alas, the story is one that will never be told. The account of how reading began could have been preserved for us through the ages only in written records. And until there was reading, there was no writing. The two grew up together.

PART I

READING FOR COMPREHENSION

THE average young person reads very poorly. Watch your companions on the street cars. Go into the reading room of a public library. What do you see? There are some who nod over a newspaper, some who are idly turning the pages of a book with an air of indifference, some who are silently moving the lips as, word by word, they plough through the printer's lines. Look around at your friends in the study-hall. Are they really bending their minds to the task at hand? Try asking your friends who are apparently absorbed in the daily news, "What's interesting?" And note how often the reply will be, "O, nothing! There's nothing in the papers these days!" Ask some one who is deep in a book, "What's the story?" And you will be rewarded by some garbled account of "He" and "She" or "I don't know, yet." Once in a while, the reply may be, "It's a *grand* story!" But to try to get an account of the grand story—ay, there's the rub!

Frequently you read with only half your minds. You read to pass the time, or because you are bored, or to escape from reality, not for active pleasure, nor for increasing your knowledge. Nor are you willing to think over what you have read. You assume that without further trouble you can make thoughts and ideas of other minds your own. There are, however,

certain types of reading which demand that you train your minds to seek the exact information, which demand that you use all your "engine-power" to comprehend.

Open any textbook to the pages assigned for your next recitation. Suppose it happens to be that section in American history dealing with the arrival of the Dutch in America. Take any passage from that assignment. Suppose it happens to read:

About the time the English were planting the settlement of Jamestown, the Dutch East India Company employed Henry Hudson, an English navigator, to sail in search of a shorter passage to India. Holland was then one of the greatest commercial countries in the world and, like the other European powers, desired to find a shorter route for the eastern trade that was making her people rich.

With the hope of reaching the Far East by sailing in a westerly direction, Hudson crossed the Atlantic with a crew of twenty men, in his ship, the *Half-Moon* (1609). He believed with other people of his time that the East Indies could be reached by a shorter route through North America, which was supposed to be a narrow continent. But after he had found the river which now bears his name and sailed as far as the present site of Albany, he could go no further, and gave up his plan. Although he did not find a short passage to the Pacific, he discovered the Hudson River, which became a great waterway for the Dutch fur traders who came later. He also won the good-will of the Indians. It was worth much to the Dutch that Hudson came to the Indians as a friend.

American History—Beginnings in Europe and America, Part I — WILBUR F. GORDY, FREDERIC ERNST

What idea remains in your mind after one reading? Is it the English settlement of Jamestown? Is it the discovery of a shorter passage to India? Is it a description of the *Half-Moon?* Is it the accidental discovery of an important river?

Looking again at the passage, we find that whatever is talked about took place *about* the time the English were settling Jamestown. This idea is, however, for this paragraph, subordinate to other more important thoughts. Is it the discovery of a shorter passage to India? A more careful reading of the paragraph tells us that Henry Hudson sailing *in search of a shorter passage* went in a westerly direction, thinking he could reach the East Indies through North America. No evidence is given, however, of a shorter passage being discovered.

Our third question— Is it a description of the *Half-Moon?*—is easily answered on a second reading by seeing that the *Half-Moon* is just mentioned as the name of a ship in which Henry Hudson sailed.

Our fourth question— Is it the accidental discovery of an important river?—is answered in the sentence:

> Although he did not find a short passage to the Pacific, he discovered the Hudson River . . . etc.

Suppose accurate knowledge of the contents of this particular paragraph is called for. Shall you attempt to learn it by rote, or will you choose a *thinking plan?* Without reference to the text of the paragraph, choose the correct completion for the following: