

How Does One Select a Beginning Reading Program?

Nancy Nicholson

First, one would surely desire that the program be Catholic and phonics-based. Despite the proven superiority of phonics over whole-language look-and-guess, there are still a number of whole-language programs being marketed to homeschoolers. Using the look-and-guess method, a child literally has to memorize each word in the English language to master reading and spelling. With phonics, he is given the tools for 'word attack' which enable him to break down unfamiliar words into parts; thus, he is able to both read and more accurately spell unfamiliar words.

Little Stories for Little Folks introduces phonics and then builds the child's decoding skills, using continual repetition and exercises which actively engage the child in discovering phonics patterns.

Some early-reader's series have been developed by secular firms and, while having a sound phonics base, contain stories with witches, New Age and antifamily themes. If the parent must censor and omit lessons, the phonics program becomes incomplete and inadequate. If stories in a secular program remain uncensored, the phonics are gained at the expense of the child's faith. All the *Little Stories* revolve around Catholic family life or ideals, teaching phonics while building up Catholic values as well.

Other beginning reading programs have been prepared by anti-Catholic publishers, for whom we pray, but whom we have no desire to support by purchasing their products. Again, how much better to have access to a Catholic series which teaches phonics alongside the Corporal Works of Mercy!

Then there are the reading programs that attempt to update and improve upon the 19th-century-semi-phonics-light-speed-ahead McGuffey's readers, but end up being poor imitations which still use archaic language that the child doesn't understand. The end result is that the student neither learns phonics nor comprehends what he has just read. *Little Stories* uses language with which the child is familiar, aiding in comprehension.

Some beginning reading programs are advertised as being phonics-based, but introduce both short and long vowel sounds

together, which is a recipe for confusion and frustration. Only short vowel sounds are used in the first level of *Little Stories for Little Folks: Catholic Phonics Readers*; the child does not encounter long vowel sounds until second level, after he has mastered short vowels and has some proficiency in reading.

Finally, there are the phonics programs which are all drill and no story. These teach only the consonant and vowel sounds, sometimes with individual words, but unconnected to any sort of story line or even complete sentences. To the young child, these exercises appear to have no connection with reading and can seem absolutely purposeless and excruciatingly boring.

Children see Mom and Dad absorbed in books and sit eagerly at their elbows, listening to those alphabet letters spring to life - they want to read, too. The *Little Stories* provide motivation because they capture the child's interest particularly when little ones discover with the very first story that they can actually read a whole 'book'! Little ones can recognize their own experiences assisting at Holy Mass, First Holy Communion, or rescuing the baby (and a birthday cake) from disaster. Children like these sequential, phonics-based stories!

