



To the Top

Climb the Mountain of Reading

A Free
Phonics-Based
Program from
MomDelights.com



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Introduction

(Read this if you have a few minutes)

Do you have a child ready to climb the mountain of reading?

That's what we call it around here; a *mountain*. For some of our children, especially, climbing that mountain has been quite the trek!

As a homeschooling mom of 15, I've had some who taught themselves to read by the age of six, and others who struggled until they were in their teens.

A few only needed a few phonics directions and they took off, but most had lesson after lesson after lesson and they still couldn't get but a few inches off of the ground.

For years this puzzled me. What was the key to helping the strugglers take flight? Dyslexia was one of those words that floated about in my thinking, but the information I gleaned about the problem didn't help me much with the solution.

Thankfully, I had some knowledge that gave me power over dyslexia: I knew the literacy rate of our country way before the word was ever used. During the times when there weren't any public schools, when

children scraped together what they could to learn with, **our country enjoyed a 90% literacy rate!**

You read that right. Somehow children learned to read and write with things like hornbooks, and oftentimes without proper pencil or pen.

Being a great fan of classic books and old-time learning materials, I came across a common theme: Every child had to learn their “lessons.” This meant they were given certain rules to memorize so they could read and write with proper diction, grammar, and spelling.

Then I started noticing my own children. They stuttered and sputtered over simple sentences, but they easily rattled off ad slogans. Why? Because they heard these slogans repeated over, and over, and over again.

Yes, this was the “rote learning” I was taught to shy away from. True, there are times when rote learning can be stultifying, but there are other times when rote learning is the ticket to more freedom. Kids who can’t read or write can’t experienced the delights of immersing themselves deeply into the areas of their interests.

And here is the key to the whole castle; while some children are fliers, others are climbers. Some take off into the great, blue yonder, others have to wear hiking boots and take the arduous way to the top.

To the Top is dedicated to the children who must carefully and systematically hike their way up the mountain of literacy.

This is not a little hill, it’s Everest. As true mountaineers will tell you, you have to pack your supplies carefully and make sure you have

loads of energy-filled snacks for the trek.

You also need good equipment like ropes and pitons and carabiners.

Training is paramount. Sometimes it takes practicing three or more times a day. As I have told my children, each letter sound they master is like adding granola bars to their rucksacks. Each skill is like another foot added to their ropes.

However, before a child takes the first step up the mountain, he must grow into his hiking shoes!

We often hear the stories of kids learning to read at the ages of three or four and we feel concerned our child is behind. **Most little ones are not ready to begin close book reading by those ages, but they can begin preparing for reading later on.**

Here are some ways you can begin to prepare them:

First of all, talk, talk, talk with your child. Tell him stories about your childhood, ask him open-ended questions (the ones with answers that require more than “yes” or “no”).

Next, read aloud to him. Picture books are a great start, but don’t miss out on some of the most important ways to build reading readiness:

- **Nursery rhymes**
- **Folk and fairy tales**

These have been around for ages for a reason. Besides being interesting to little ears and hearts, they follow patterns that aid them in understanding the English language.

Rhymes introduce word families through the rhyming lines. They also help children associate rhythm with language.

Folk and fairly tales teach children about the narrative. After a number of these stories they intuitively understand there must be a beginning, middle, and end.

These important prerequisites give children an intimate relationship with the written word and help them anticipate words in sentences based on their familiarity with well-written language.

There is usually a point when your child will not be satisfied with being read to. They will want to try it out for themselves. This is when you will know your child is ready to take on the big climb to the top of Reading Mountain.

Remember, the main principle of To the Top is:

Over familiarity builds confidence.

This is so simple, but so important.

Children who struggle do not do well with just a few minutes a day. In order to obtain satisfactory results, they must be totally immersed in the first part of this program for a number of weeks.

When I started with this plan I took index cards and made decks like the ones I suggest here. I began showing them and repeating the sounds not once, but at least three times a day.

Then I went on to develop games with the cards so that things would not become monotonous. We practiced and practiced and practiced together until they knew each deck backwards and forwards and upside-down. I did this by putting reading instruction as a priority for a number of weeks and months.

I took these decks of cards with us when we ran errands, at the park, while we were sitting and watching a movie and there was a

commercial break.

Yes, there were groans, but I reminded of our goals and how we were helping ourselves by gaining skills and energy to make it to the top.

The enthusiasm I showed helped them over the hump and gave them a vision so that they were willing to continue.

Within six months they were able to read their lessons on their own, and a year later they were reading chapter books with little or no difficulty.

Amazing? It seemed so to me! But it truly isn't, **it's simply the outcome of a systematic program based on centuries of proven methods.**

You can take advantage of these proven methods by using the program created for you here.

On the following pages you will find lists and suggestions. These should give you enough material to keep you busy teaching your child(ren) basic reading for a number of months.

The lists have been turned into If you don't want to print them out you can make them manually (this is what I did) by taking some index cards and writing on them with a permanent marker (a regular Sharpie works fine).

I found that my children had problems in specific areas, such as differentiating between the digraphs sh, ch, th, and ck. I also found they repeatedly mistook d for b. This is why I made specific decks targeting these areas.

Another shaky spot was switching between the short and long vowel

sounds (especially the sound differences between i and e). Hence the deck for these.

The alphabet deck is very basic. I actually think it is best to begin with a deck that includes pictures representing the sounds (found easily at a dollar store or other inexpensive outlet).

The “say it slow, say it fast” (incorrect grammar, I know) exercises are an absolute MUST! The idea for these is not original, but found in the book *Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons*. (I think this exercise is almost the only reason I put up with the silliness of *100 Easy Lessons*, although the left-right arrow is also a great idea. The pages are also filled with a lot of extra text and other distracting information, which is another reason I abandoned this as a tool for my struggling readers.)

Part 2 is where we start reading actual words. The first set is made up of “training wheels” words that use specific letters and follow a specific pattern. This helps a child practice sounding out without making him remember too much else at the same time.

For instance, the first card is a list of short-voweled words that begin with d and end with either d or b. Familiarity with these sounds makes it easier to concentrate on saying each sound separately and then blending them together.

The second set is a collection of words which start with d and end with d or b, and the rest of the cards go along gradually introducing more sounds until the end of the alphabet is reached.

If your child is doing pretty well in sounding out, you can go faster and faster, or even skip a few and move on...

Next, we encounter cards which include words seen in everyday

reading that follow similar patterns. These cards are bigger because they include a number of words on each. There is actually a rule for these that can be read aloud over and over again.

After this we come to the introduction of long vowel words. In keeping with the theme of simplification (which struggling readers need so much at first) we are keeping to only three patterns.

Important:

A lot of struggling readers tend to be “guessers.” Oftentimes they are in a hurry to learn to read so they want to brush over important details and move on (which leads to more frustration and discouragement). This is why you MUST make them do the exercise with each and every word even though they may already be able to read the word without sounding out. In this way they will not make the repeated mistake of reading a word as short-voweled when it should be long, and vice-versa.

Part three is when we start introducing patterns of words which are not strictly phonetic but do follow certain patterns. These are helpful in reading actual sentences, and it is at this point that you will want to be introducing the lessons in the McGuffey’s Pictorial Primer or the free primer included in this program.

More on the Pictorial Printer:

There is an excellent pictorial primer written by William Holmes McGuffey and published by Mott Media. If you can get ahold of it, it would be a marvelous addition to this reading program.

However, I have found that many of us either don’t have the time or the extra finances (I know that some of us often struggle to find the extra money for homeschooling materials) to purchase the book.

Some of us even live in other parts of the world where purchasing such a book is nearly impossible.

That's why I sensed the Lord leading me to create a little primer so that children could try out all of the nifty principles they are learning.

Since the original McGuffey's have been bought up and republished by Mott Media, I had to be a little creative. The challenge was to find another reader that followed the same, gradual phonetic introductions while being in the public domain.

Finally, I came across *The Union Primer*. It was actually published around the same time as the McGuffey readers and was written with the same phonetic progression and emphasis.

It wasn't perfect, but it was close enough to be usable with just a few tweaks. The pictures were pretty awful and I wasn't sure about the legalities of copying them directly from the Google Books scans to put into my version, but I believed this could be overcome.

All I needed do was search the Net for free vintage images. It ended up that The Graphics Fairy and Clip Art Etc. were the best sites for all of the graphics needed. I tried either to find a picture to fit the words and sentences or changed the words and sentences to fit the most suitable illustration I could find. I used a table in Microsoft Publisher and merged cells where needed to layout the lists and pictures so they fit nicely together.

As you are beginning to read the primer, make sure and do some copywork to go along with it. I have pages for this purpose on my blog, MomDelights.com, or you could purchase *The Lesson Book*

Level One from Amazon.com. You could even use a composition book or other primary-lined notebook (search on my blog for more ideas concerning this).

One of the best ways to go about this is to use a highlighter and write out the word first so the child can trace it directly on the paper with his pencil. I like to draw a little box next to each word and/or sentence so they can draw pictures to represent what they have written. Some of my most treasured keepsakes are the notebooks my children filled at this stage in their lives.

Please note:

Some of the words in the last deck are what we consider to be “sight words.” This generally means these words are not phonetically read, but they appear quite often in regular speech.

I have found that struggling readers tend to get these words all confused and jumbled up, especially if they look similar to each other, such as *where* and *were* or *the* and *they*.

If you find your children making these types of mistakes, simply take the word-cards that cause them confusion and drill them over, and over and over again (that’s over breakfast, over lunch, over dinner, and over bedtime).

Remember:

It is not at all wrong to review older cards even after they have been mastered. I have found that **a lot of what makes these kids struggle is their lack of ability to memorize letter symbols and patterns.** Just

keep in mind how easy it is for these same kids to memorize ad slogans and keep at it until it sticks.

You will need some practice books. My recommendation is the *Reading-Literature* set by Margaret Treadwell and Harriette Free. These books are actually simplified versions of children's folk tales, such as *The Little Red Hen* and *Three Billy Goats Gruff*. This is exciting to young children because 1), they are already familiar with the stories which makes them easier to read, and 2) they know they are actually reading a "real" story and not something made up that is so dumb and boring they can hardly stand it.

Thankfully, the Reading-Literature readers are easy to find, both in their free, digital format (via Google Books, which can be read on the Google Books app on any smart phone) and as printed books (the primer through the third reader are available from Yesterday's Classics).

Our girls loved them!

Of course, you can also add in Dr. Seuss and books by Roald Dahl, in particular *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*.

It is our greatest pleasure to equip homeschoolers so they can in turn give their children the best education possible using quality free or nearly free materials.

In that spirit, we hope you enjoy these free reading materials. May they give you and your children great pleasure and freedom.

Because of Jesus,

Sherry Hayes

Mom of 15 and owner of MomDelights.com

Quick Guide

This reading program is made up of these parts:

- Directions
- Flash card decks
- Games
- Primer

If you have the time, these directions will help you understand how to use all of the different components to their best benefit.

The flash cards are the main part of the program. They can be either:

- Created manually using index cards and a sharpie or other black marker and the word lists for each deck.
- Printed out from the ones we have created for you.

Keep each deck bound up separately with a rubber band and all decks handy for quick retrieval whenever you find time for drill.

The card decks are meant to be used sequentially. One deck should be mastered before going on to the next one.

Keep the mastered ones for review or to help get over a bump in the road (such as when the b and d confusion shows up unexpectedly).

The suggested games can be used to break up the monotony of continual drilling and insert some newness when things become dreary.

Part One

Preparing to sound out

Use these suggestions to put in place the bits and bobs your child will need for the next step, “sounding out.”

Remember, it’s just as easy as learning commercial jingles if you keep on practicing, practicing, practicing in every moment you can find...

Phonics Flashcards Lists

Deck 1

All of the letters from A to Z, both lower and upper case

Example:

A a

Deck 2

The phonograms ch, th, sh, and ck, two of each (in order to play games with them—two of each).

Example:

ch

Deck 3

The “trouble” letters “b” and “d” so they can be used to play with (at least three of each).

Examples:

b

d

Deck 4

The short and long vowels with their symbols so they can be differentiated. Put stickers on the opposite sides so you can play the memory-match game with them.

Examples:

ă	ě	ĩ	õ	ũ
ā	ē	ī	ō	ū

sh

sh

th

th

ch

ch

ck

ck

sh

th

ck

ch

b

d

b

d

b

d

b

d

b

d

b

d

bid

bad

bed

bub

bib

bud

bob

dab

dub

deb

dod

dib

Aa

Bb

Cc

Dd

Ee

Ff

Gg

Hh

Ii

Jj

Kk

Ll

Mm

Nn

Oo

Pp

Qq

Rr

Ss

Tt

Uu

Vv

Ww

Xx

Yy

Zz

ā

ā

ě

ē

í

ī

ō

ō

ū

ū

Reading and Phonics Games

Game 1— Say it Slowly, Say it Quickly

Take a word from this list and say it slowly, drawing out each sound, such as “fffffaaaaattt” as you move your finger under each sound. Then say it quickly, such as “fat.”

Then say the word slowly and have your child say the word quickly. Do only 3-4 of these words daily.

fat

had

log

him

man

nod

fin

fun

leg

pen

sit

sam

mat

rat

rip

Game 2 Vowel Driving

Take the short vowel cards and practice driving them according to these tracks (use lots of motor sounds)

Examples:

ă

ě

ĩ

õ

ū

ā

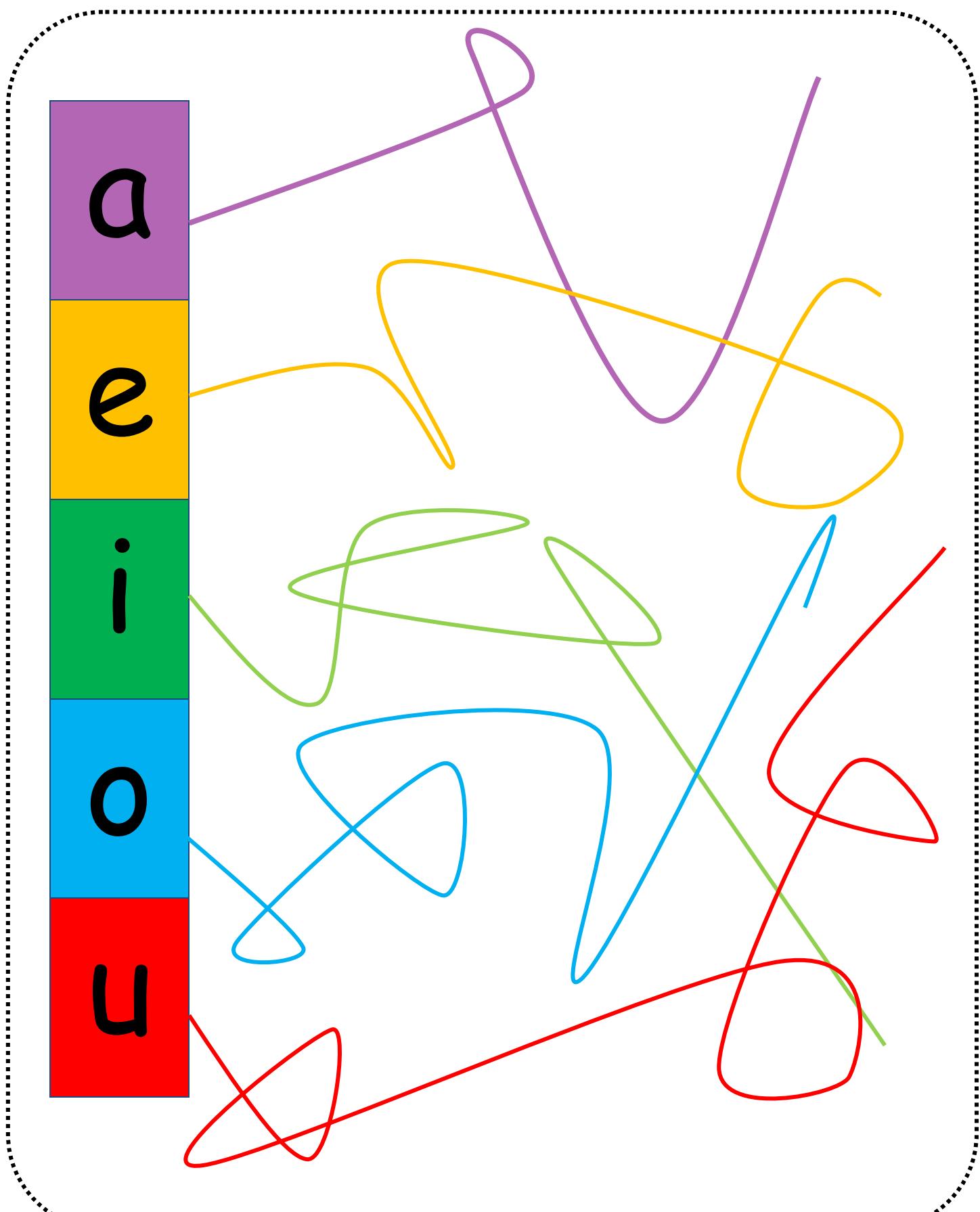
ē

ī

ō

ū

Game 2 Vowel Driving



Reading and Phonics Games

Game 4—Guess it

Put a “b” card in one hand, and a “d” card in the other. Place your hands behind your back and switch the cards over and over between your two hands. Tell your child to guess which hand has the “b” card and which hand has the “d” card. If the child guesses correctly, give him the cards. When the child has won all the cards, he has “won” the game. You can make many variations on this using different decks of cards.

Use the same game with the sh, ch, th, ck sound cards.

Game 5—Climb the Stairs

This one works if you have a flight of stairs in your home. Have your child stand on the lowest stair. Flash an alphabet card or vowel sound card and have them say the sound. If they say the sound correctly, they can go up one step, if they say it wrongly, they move down one step (if they do get the sound wrong, make sure they practice saying it correctly to reinforce the right sound before you move on).

Or...

You can use a penny as a marker and put it on the stairs on the next page (you can use the colorful or the more ink-saving version):

Reading and Phonics Games

Game 6—Vowel Sounds Memory Game

Make cards marked like the example below (or use the ones included on the previous pages):

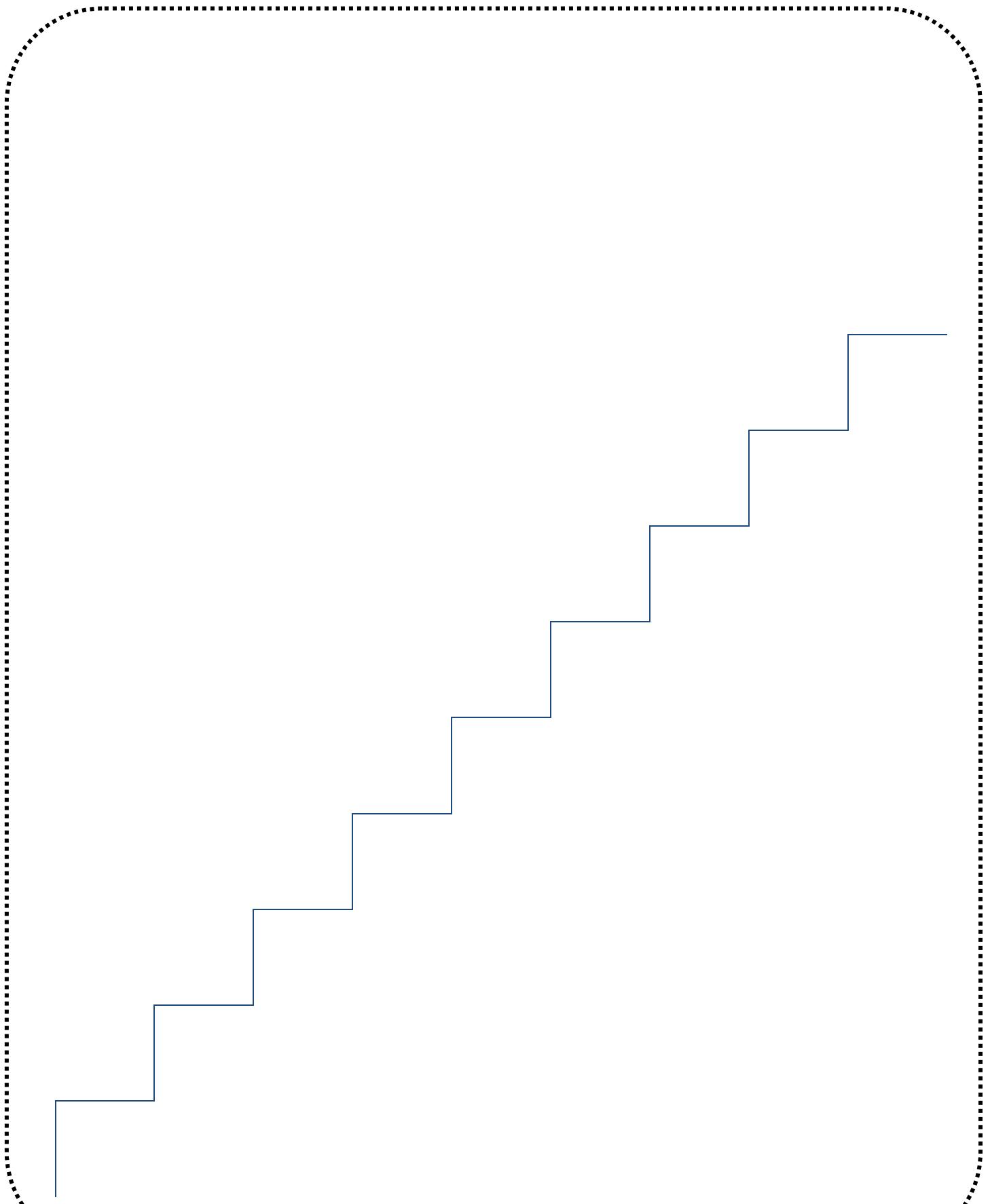
ă	ā
ě	ē
ĩ	ī
õ	ō
ũ	ū

Turn them over and arrange them randomly but in a grid pattern.

Have your child pick up one and try to match it by picking up another. If matching is not accomplished, both cards are to be placed back exactly where they were found. Then another card is to be picked up and another match is to be attempted. Have your child repeat each sound out loud as the game is played. Continue until all cards are matched.

Game 5—Climb the Stairs

Game 5—Climb the Stairs



Part Two

Sounding Out

Since we have the basics all mastered, let's take the next step where we put all of the amazing sounds together!

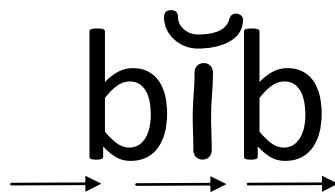
NOTE:

This is a great place to introduce the original McGuffey Pictorial Primer (the brown one originally printed in the 1830's). If you don't have access to the pictorial primer, I have created an alternative which you can download and print out for free from my site, MomDelights.com.

The lessons in this book give some actual practice with whole sentences that will bring great happiness :).

Deck 1: One-syllable, Three-letter Words

These are like “training wheels” words that use the letters and sounds we have been practicing. Let the excitement build and make sure and celebrate each accomplishment, no matter how small.



Use your finger to run in the direction of the arrow under each sound individually (do not say “buh” for “b” or your child will say the word, “buh-ib”). Then have him read the word slowly, emphasizing each sound just as you did in the “say it slow, say it fast” game. Then run your finger quickly under the sounds in the word as you say the word quickly, putting all of the sounds together.

Remember, **overfamiliarity** will get your child over every hump (even dyslexia). Practice in every way possible, including adapting some of the games mentioned in the first section (such as climbing the stairs).

It may be necessary to continue to practice with the decks of cards from the first section while you are learning to sound out.

Either print out the cards on the following pages or create your own. Pick one or two words from a card at first, then work up to more—and watch with amazement as the lights begin to turn on one-by-one :)

bab bed

bib bid

bob bud

dad dab

deb did

dob dud

cab cad

cob cod

cub cud

fad fed

fid fib

fob fub

gab gad

gid gig

gag gob

fog fag

fig cog

dog

bag beg
big bug
dig dug

hub had
hid hug
hog hag

job jig
jag kid
jug keg

leg lad lug
lid log lag

mud mid
mad gum
bum dim

jam hem
him ham
hum him

nab nod

nag ban

bun nun

can fan

din fun

den fin

man men

kin gun

pig pan

pop peg

pod pad

cup cop

nip cap

pin pen

up pun

map lap

mop lip

quip quid

rib red
rap ran
ram rag

rod rip
rig rib rid
red

rub run
rug rum

sad sob
sag sip
sap sin

his has
sop gas
sod

tab tin

tap ten

tan top

bat cat

fat not

net nut

quit lit

rat rut

pit quit

net lot

jet cot

hot sit

but fit

pet pat

cut let

sat hit it

set bit

sat it hit
bit set

van vat
vim wag
web wed

win wet
wig wit
win

lax fix six
tax mix

box wax
nix fox

zip zest

Deck 2: One-syllable Words Ending in a Vowel

If you haven't introduced "syllables" to your child, this is a great point to do it. We like to call syllables "claps." We take words of various lengths and practice clapping them out. Here is a short list for you to try:

dog	yellow	Martha	automobile	degree
kiwi	organization	elbow	underneath	underwear

Next, you can discuss how the last card of words were all one-syllable. Then you can tell them the rule for the next set of words:

One-syllable words ending in a vowel usually have a long-vowel sound.

Use the following cards to practice. Master one card at a time.

be	he	me	she	we
the	by	try	my	why
fry	pry	fly	dry	cry
sly	sty	so	go	no

be he me she
we the

the

The sometimes sounds like “thuh”

by try my why
fry pry fly dry
cry sly sty

so go no

do

This is an exception to the rule

Deck 4: Short and Long Vowel Word Sounding Out Practice

Short, one-syllable words usually follow this pattern:

Consonant-Vowel-Consonant

Or

CVC

This pattern is seen in words such as

cat, bag, and fun.

Long vowel words, however, typically follow these two patterns:

Consonant-Vowel-Consonant-Vowel

And

Consonant-Vowel-Vowel-Consonant

Or

CVCV

And

CVVC

This pattern is seen in words such as

bite, rake, and seed

Sometimes it is hard for early readers to tell whether a vowel in the middle of a word should be short or long. One way to help is to have him take short words and mark them and use this procedure:

Deck 4: Short and Long Vowel Word Sounding Out Practice (cont.)

The word is:

rake

1. Circle the vowels.
2. If there is one, mark it short
3. If there are two, mark the first one long and strike through the second one because it is silent.



Now the word can be sounded out.

Another example is the word *seed*:



This method can also help find out which words include short vowel sounds. One example is the word *fat*.



The following chart is made up of lines containing three words each. Have your child take each line and practice the procedure of circling the vowels, counting them, then marking the first one and, if necessary, striking out the second one. There are also cards created to make the practice easier.

Deck 4: Short and Long Vowel Word Sounding Out Practice (cont.)

1	mix	seem	seat
2	wipe	yam	flag
3	tin	reel	shake
4	vat	tip	fix
5	cure	rule	time
6	back	yoke	ten
7	sane	real	fuse
8	wake	pass	his
9	wade	vase	peck
10	tax	yell	side
11	bag	meat	nail
12	fake	cute	pen
13	quail	fad	dill
14	deep	nine	nag
15	cod	nap	pave
16	dot	kin	nut
17	tub	hush	mill

make
seem
mix

flag
yam
wipe

shake
reel
tin

fix
tip
vat

cure
rule
time

ten
yoke
back

real
sane
fuse

his
wake
pass

wade
vase
peck

tax
yell
side

bag
meat
nail

fake
cute
pen

dill
fad
quail

deep
nine
nag

cod
nap
pave

dot
kin
nut

tub
hush
mill

vain
case
raids

ram
pike
shade

feed
pill
rush

reap
led
hum

hit
it
kid

kite
pipe
dim

robe
hop
Jim

am
beet
cot

gate
dog
bug

beg
lid
is

sail
meal
job

rip
lead
heel

sat
map
bone

Part Three

Sight Words and Word Patterns

Studying these words will keep early readers from being frustrated when they come up in sentences.

Deck 1: Sight Words

Here are all the “extra” words a child needs to be able to decipher sentences. Below you will find them in one list. There are actually two sets of cards that follow: One with the words in groups for easy recall, and the other so that each word can be studied and flashed separately.

do	two	you	of	come
there	to	where	one	were
does	goes	done	gone	buy
could	build	would	busy	should
what	when	how	who	was
one	once	want	come	some
our	are	saw	they	for
off	of	Oh!	their	they're
said				

come
some

what
want

gone
done

could
would
should

one
once

does
goes

there
where

where
were

there
their
they're

was
saw

the
they

come

some

what

want

gone

done

could

would

should

one

once

does

goes

there

where

where

were

there

they're

their

was

saw

the

they

said

Deck 2: Words With Definite Patterns

These are the words which are not necessarily phonically spelled, but they do have a definite pattern in common. They are also quite common and come up frequently in written language. The following is a list, then after the list are the cards.

our	few	old	day
out	new	gold	play
brown	grew	sold	say
cow	chew	told	may
now	mew	car	or
boy	grow	far	for
toy	mow	star	nor
joy	sow	jar	
	row	tar	

Deck 2: Words With Definite Patterns

girl	know	gnat	high
twirl	knew	gnu	sight
her	knock	eight	light
burn	knee	weigh	might
word	knot	weight	knight
earth	write	neighbor	room
phone	wrote	book	soon
Philip	wrong	look	moon
	wrap		boot
door		cook	
floor	locked	took	monkey
	loved		
		action	turkey
	lifted		
		vision	donkey

ou
our
out

ew
few new
grew chew
mew

old
gold
sold
told

ay
day play
say may

ow
brown cow
now wow
how

oy
boy
toy
joy

ow
grow mow
sow row

ar
car far
star jar
tar

or
for
nor

ir = girl, twirl
er = her, over
ur = burn, fur
or = word
ear = earn,
earth

ph-f
phone
Philip

kn = kn
know knew
knock knee
knot

~~wr~~ = wr
write wrote
wrong wrap
wring

~~gn~~ = gn
gnat
gnu

eigh
eight weigh
weight
neighbor

igh
high sight
light might
knight

ed
locked (+)
loved (d)
lifted (ed)

ey
key monkey
turkey
donkey

tion sion
vision
action

oor = ō
door floor

oo = œ
book look
cook took

oo = œ
room soon
moon boot

ed
locked (t)
loved (d)
lifted (ed)

ey
key monkey
turkey
donkey