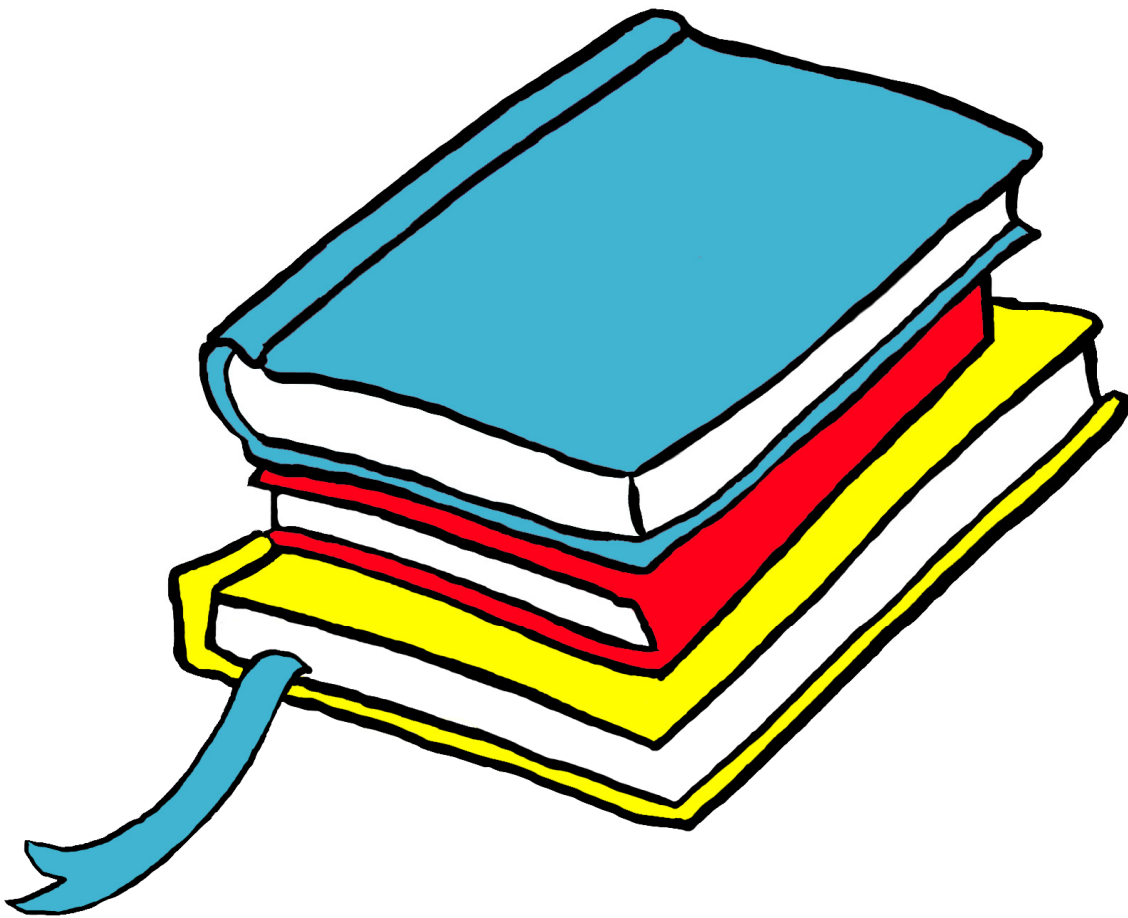


# First Stage Reader



Expanded Teacher's Edition

Thomas A. Velasquez and Ruth Lind Velasquez

*Dedicated to people entering the world of print  
where education, adventure, information and the  
past and future are waiting to be explored.*

**FIRST STAGE READER  
EXPANDED TEACHER'S EDITION**

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# The First Stage Reading Program

## Research reveals that:

1. Reading depends on visual processing.
2. The ability to identify the sounds represented by the patterns of the letters in words is important when learning to read.
3. When the letters and the process of reading are taught explicitly and systematically, even slow learners can successfully learn to identify new words.
4. Skillful reading develops through understanding the relationships of letters in words in the context of sentences and paragraphs.
5. Context is only meaningful when words have been recognized and understood.

## The First Stage Reading Program was developed according to the following hypotheses:

1. The significant rules of reading can be learned quickly and accurately in the time required for most students to memorize key sight words.
2. Structural organization is essential in a beginning reading program.
3. Starting with long vowels in open syllables is an effective way to teach reading.
4. Writing and spelling are necessary adjuncts to the reading process.

Students who complete *The First Stage Reading Program* become proficient, independent readers who read at the level of their maturity. Their interests will determine their choices of reading material.

**Origin** *The First Stage Reading Program* was modeled on the Roman method of teaching reading. The Romans taught reading by teaching the consistent patterns of vowels and consonants in Latin words. In Latin, the words *littera vocalis* (vowel letter) means "sounding letter," and *littera consonans* (consonant) means "letter sounded with a sounding letter."

Like the Roman alphabet, the English alphabet has two types of letters: vowels and consonants. The English language is also comprised of two types of words: those with one syllable and those with two or more syllables. The secret of reading English words is based upon learning to interpret the patterns of the vowels and consonants that represent the sounds that make up words.

The patterns of some words do not follow the generalizations of English spellings that are taught in the First Stage program. Some words in the English language have come from other languages such as Greek or Latin and were originally pronounced or spelled differently in English. For this reason, the authors of dictionaries developed *phonetic spellings*, which indicate to readers how words should be pronounced. A version of the dictionary phonetic system is used throughout *The First Stage Reading Program* to help students learn how to pronounce words.

**Dictionary Phonetic Spelling** The Norman French conquered England in 1066 A.D. In an effort to clear up confusion about the printed letters of the English alphabet, Norman French scribes made changes to English. Until the 16th century, no organized system of spelling in English was generally accepted. Spelling varied from writer to writer, but educated English speakers began to use fairly consistent spelling patterns. Many began to be concerned about their spelling. Richard Mulcaster addressed this problem when he wrote the first English dictionary, entitled *Elementary on the Right Writing of Our English Tongue* and published in 1582.

Phonetic spellings found in dictionaries are consistent. For example, the phonetic spellings of the words *by*, *bye* and *buy* are identical: (bī). The line above the vowel that is seen in (bī) is called a *macron*. A macron indicates that the vowel underneath is pronounced with a long vowel sound. When there is no macron, the short vowel sound is represented as in *bit* (bit), *bat* (bat) and *but* (but). *The First Stage Reading Program Student Reader* uses phonetic spellings to help students pronounce words when they are first introduced.

**Vowel Letters** The vowel is the dominant sound of the syllable. The simplest syllable is the single vowel, such as the (ō) in *so*. Single vowels represent long vowel sounds, which happen to be the names used to refer to the vowel letters (ā, ē, ī, ō, ū). The vowels “a” and “I” stand alone as words.

Understanding that the names used to refer to the vowels are the long vowel sounds can help beginning readers to understand that vowel letters are symbols that represent sounds. Learning that the letter referred to as “a” represents the long vowel sound (ā) as in *cake* (kāk) is easier to understand than first being taught that “a” represents the short vowel sound (a) as in *cat*.

**Consonant Letters** Consonant letters indicate how the lips, teeth, and tongue are used with the breath in conjunction with vowels to articulate words. In English words, consonants appear in conjunction with vowel sounds and not in isolation. The ability to read words aloud requires the understanding that consonant letters represent the formation of the lips, the placement of the tongue and teeth, and the use of breath in creating sounds in words. Provide hand mirrors to help students to see how their mouths are formed when they make sounds.

Some students are taught to assign vocal values to consonants. For example, students may be told that the letter p represents the sound “puh,” the letter t represents “tuh,” the letter b represents “buh,” etc. Unfortunately, the method of assigning vocal values to consonants, although well intentioned, can confuse students. Such vocal values are inconsistent and rarely applicable when reading words. The words “Peter Pan” are not pronounced (Puh·ē·tur Puh·an). The letter p simply tells us to put our lips together while expelling a strong puff of breath and then saying the vowels that immediately follow: (Pē·tur Pan). The full pronunciation of the letter p is determined by the vowels and consonants that immediately follow.

**Homophones and Homographs** The words *by*, *bye* and *buy* are examples of *homophones*, or words that have the same sound although they differ in meaning and spelling. For example, pronouncing aloud the sentence “I bought a pair of pants. Then I ate a pear,” illustrates that *pair* and *pear* are homophones.

Words such as *bow* (bō) and *bow* (bow) are *homographs*, words that are spelled the same but have different meanings and may be

pronounced differently. *Tears* is a homograph, as evidenced when reading the sentence, "A baby cries *tears*, but a child *tears* paper."

When homophones and homographs are being used in a sentence, context enables the students to differentiate the meanings and pronunciations of the words.

**Comprehension** Reading conveys information. The order of words in each sentence and the order in which the sentences appear in each paragraph are important to the reading process. Sentence patterns in a paragraph are as important for comprehension as letter patterns are in words. The context of a sentence or story contains information that a student can use to decode unfamiliar words, or homophones and homographs, and to correct illogical assumptions.

Questions stimulate thinking and may often be answered in a variety of ways. Answering questions requires formulating thoughts into words. Developing comprehension questions about a subject can help to build students' speaking and reading vocabularies. Analytical questions can help students to interpret and retain what they are reading. It is beneficial for new readers to build comprehensive and analytical abilities and techniques early in the process of learning to read.

**Lessons** *The First Stage Reading Program* is developed according to the theory that reading should be introduced through simple patterns of organization, progressing from syllables and words which reflect predictable pronunciations to those which are not predictable. The program teaches students to read with full comprehension in a short period of time.

Students are taught the basic symbol-sound generalizations of English as it is written. The lessons introduce letters and words in a specific order so that students learn the generalizations that determine how the vowel sounds and consonant letters form words. The program is cumulative. Each generalization is added to and integrated with the previous lessons. Because each lesson builds on the information contained in the preceding lesson, the lessons should be introduced in the order that is presented. A new lesson should be taught when the student fully understands the previous lessons.

The students are introduced to the traditional Alphabet Song at the beginning of the program, where the letters appear in the conventional order. For the rest of the program, however, the vowels and consonants are presented in the order that is most useful for teaching according to the generalizations that are at the core of the program.

In *The First Stage Reading Program*, the students first learn the long vowel sounds. They then learn several consonants and generalizations that summarize how specific patterns of long vowels and consonants represent certain sounds in syllables and words. Next, the short vowel generalization is introduced. The words are presented in the context of short stories in order to aid the students in comprehending the information.

Each lesson in the *Student Reader* contains a list of Vocabulary Words as well as phrases, sentences or stories that contain those words and similar words in context. Sight words and words that do not follow the generalizations are enclosed in boxes and identified by an icon (see "The Activity Key," page x). When a new pronunciation is introduced, the dictionary phonetic spelling is often included.

Each lesson in the *Teacher's Edition* is complete with an objective or objectives, and suggested activities. Some lessons include sample questions, provided to increase student comprehension. Sample spelling tests with sentences to provide context are occasionally included. All of the skills of the language arts - speaking, listening, writing, and reading - contribute to a student's ability to learn how to read.

**Presentation of Lessons** The activities of the lessons may be adjusted to meet your students' needs. Some may complete all of the activities in one session while others may require more time to become familiar with the new concepts being presented. Working in groups of two or three provides each student with opportunities for individual reading of the material presented. If a student makes a reading error, do not indicate the error, but do pronounce the word or words correctly. Later, explain the pertinent generalization and ask the student to read the word(s) aloud again. Providing a picture dictionary can help students refer to words that they may not have encountered before. Dictionaries can be found online as well as in printed form.

Learning how to write and spell is important while learning to read. Writing on whiteboards or chalkboards is helpful when students are learning and writing letters and words because the words can be easily corrected, with no record of mistakes remaining. If some students have difficulty writing their letters, have them form three-dimensional letters with clay or chenille wires. They can also trace stencils or make models of the letter forms with their bodies.

In *The First Stage Reading Program* comprehension of the lessons is obtained by requiring students to generate and answer questions about the words and the stories. The stories in the program do not represent any specific school grade level. Once the students have completed the program, they will be able to choose reading materials of their own interests and at their individual levels of maturity.

**Journaling** The students may keep individual journals in which to copy the specific letters and Vocabulary Words that they are studying. In addition, they may complete the writing, drawing, and art activities that are suggested in the reading lessons and create special pages for their favorite words. At the end of the school year, the student may keep his or her journal as keepsakes.



# A History of the English Alphabet

**Ancient Historical records** indicate that humans once conveyed “written” messages by engraving or painting pictures on caves and walls. Today those iconic messages are called *pictographs*.



*An example of a pictograph that may be interpreted as “A merchant took two days to get his llamas to the center of the village.”*

Those messages required large amounts of space, were difficult to interpret consistently, and could not be shared with others very easily. Then, about 5,000 years ago in Sumer (modern day Iraq), the idea of communicating was conceptualized by imprinting pictures of the sounds of words in clay.

**Clay Tablets** The Sumerians developed wedge-shaped symbols for the vowel sounds **a**, **e**, **i** and **u**. They did not, however, develop consonants. Instead, they used symbols to represent the syllables of words. For a long time, writing on clay tablets was considered the best way to keep records and relate accounts of heroic deeds. It was a major improvement over writing messages on the sides of caves and buildings. Many Sumerian clay tablets still exist today.

**Egyptian Papyrus** Centuries later, Egyptian women began writing with kohl, a mixture of soot and other ingredients, on processed leaves called papyrus. This method was more convenient than writing on clay tablets because the papyrus leaves were lighter than clay and did not break when dropped. Although the Egyptians actually had 24 symbols that represented the sounds of consonants, they had no vowel sounds. As a result, they had a difficult time reading their writings. Therefore, they continued to carve, draw, and paint pictographs that we call *hieroglyphics* (priest writing) to convey messages.

**Phoenician, Greek, and Roman Alphabets** The Phoenicians developed what linguists consider to be the first full alphabet. It was comprised of vowels as well as consonants. For a long time, it was a secret code that the Phoenicians would not share. Then, a Phoenician named Cadmus revealed the code to the Greeks. The Greeks added improvements, including some vowels that the Phoenicians did not have in their alphabet. The Romans adopted the Greek system. Then added the letter **C**. The Roman alphabet still did not include the letters **J**, **U** and **W**, nor did it include lower-case letters.

**The English Alphabet** The letters **J**, **U** and **W**, as well as English lower-case letters, punctuation marks, sentences and paragraphs were developed by an English scholar named Alcuin. He taught his writing system to monks in France during Charlemagne's reign in the 8th century. Alcuin's system was so well developed that even today we can read the messages that he wrote. Those who read and write in English have continued to improve on Alcuin's progressive alphabet and have added words to it since his time.

**The Alphabet** Today the English alphabet is a widely used aspect of global communications. Through billboards and books, emails and text messages, ideas are communicated and information transmitted throughout the world. Learning to read through *The First Stage Reading Program* makes it possible for students to access the world of reading and writing in English with understanding and interest.

## About The Authors

Thomas A. Velasquez is a linguistic scholar and Professor Emeritus of the City College of San Francisco, where he taught reading and Language Arts for over 20 years. The First Stage Reading Program was developed for his Master of Language Arts Degree at San Francisco State University. He has been a member of the International Reading Association for over 25 years, and he developed the First Stage Reading Program to teach students who may have struggled to learn to read using traditional reading programs. This method has also been successful with elementary, middle, and high school students who were learning English as a second language.



Ruth L. Velasquez worked as a Professional and Curriculum Development Specialist for K-12 students at the San Francisco Unified School District. She primarily taught early childhood and Kindergarten as well as Elementary and Middle School students for over thirty years. She has a B.A. in Education and an M.A. in Administration and Supervision from San Francisco State University. Her work with the Learning Centers provided her with extensive experiences that helped her create the lessons and activities for the First Stage Reading Program.

Both Ruth and Thomas live in Cotati, California and continue to work with educators through their involvement with the California Kindergarten Association.