



ARTICLES BY BETTY WARD CAIN

Phonics Comes First

There has been a lot of controversy about should I do phonics or should they learn sight words or where do I start. When I taught kindergarten I found that beginning with phonics and then adding in the sight words to be the best way. I had success with highly gifted students and mentally challenged students. It just takes more patience with the slower learners, but they need to feel successful as well.

When I began teaching kindergarten, because of lack of finances, we were not given curriculum materials to use. We had to develop them ourselves. I developed a very successful phonics program that I used with my students. It has colorful animal characters doing some unusual things such as Patty Panda who patches pants or Quincy Quail who quilts quickly. Most programs at the time used one word to teach letter sounds such as apple for A, or ball for B, etc. With the alliterative sentences, the students were able to catch on quickly, especially when we sang the songs that go with the letter.

The first year I used these characters, I made a homemade book with pictures of all the characters and the letter associated with them. I placed it in our reading center. One day I heard a student doing the picture charts and sounding just like me—"this is an R and the sound

of an R is “er” as in Randy rabbit rides rapids.” I was thrilled that a student was doing this on their own. I turned to see who it was and could hardly believe my eyes and ears. It was a mentally challenged student who was repeating kindergarten. He was “reading” all the sentences just as I had done them. Before the year had ended, he was deciphering simple words and reading sight words. I suppose this was one of the highest points of my career!

Well, I guess I am rambling. Now back to the skill at hand. We are ready to begin learning the sounds of letters. Singing the songs in my *First Phonics* program is one of the simplest ways to teach the sounds. However, if you don’t wish to purchase this DVD, you can still help your child learn.

Begin by taking each letter one at a time and talking about the sounds. It is best to start with the easier sounds like: B, D, J, K, P, T, V, and Z. Let your student try and think of words that begin with the sounds, write down the words and add to the list as they think of other words. It is best to do only one letter at a time until you are sure they know the sound really well before going on to another letter. Some students can master the sound within a few minutes or a day and some students need to work on one sound for a week. Let them work at their own pace. You can then play a game such as the Bear in a Box game.

When the student has mastered the easier letters, do the same things with the more difficult sounds such as C, F, G, H, L, M, N, Q, R, S, W, X and Y. You can then play a game such as the Monkey Signs game.

Next, do the same activities by trying to think of words that end with the letter sounds, or words that have the sound in the middle of the words. Make up some games to play with this activity or check back to this site periodically because I will be adding new games or send me your e-mail address and I will notify you when new games are available for download.

Now about the vowels. I taught the long and short sounds for each

vowel. There is a story I used and am not sure where I got it, but I will send you a copy of the story. Just send me a request for the Mother Vowel story. There are some vowel games on the *First Phonics DVD* which you can soon purchase or check back to the website. I will be working on some vowel games you can download.

The student has mastered the sounds—they are ready to read!