



REED'S
INTRODUCTORY
LANGUAGE WORK

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1st grade

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INTRODUCTORY

LANGUAGE WORK

A SIMPLE, VARIED, AND PLEASING,
BUT METHODICAL,
SERIES OF EXERCISES IN ENGLISH
TO PRECEDE THE STUDY OF TECHNICAL GRAMMAR.

BY

ALONZO REED, A.M.,

AUTHOR OF "WORD LESSONS," AND JOINT AUTHOR OF "REED AND KELLOGG'S
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LANGUAGE WORK IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES.

A Talk with Teachers.

Should Language be Taught Directly, or only Incidentally?—Careful and intelligent experiment has of late cleared away much of the fog of conflicting theory and method surrounding the subject of language teaching, so that it is now beginning to take definite form and to receive rational treatment.

The theory that language is best taught indirectly through a series of "information lessons" is giving place to the conviction that the chief business of the language teacher is with the adaptation of the expression to the thought. It is impossible to carry on a course of object lessons and a course of language lessons together and make both consecutive and progressive. One must be sacrificed to the other, and it is invariably the language work that gives way. It is comparatively easy to make a series of object lessons continuous or to fill up the time of recitation with general information, while it is extremely difficult to bring oral language lessons within any well-defined plan or purpose.

That there are forms and principles of language which may be presented at an early age and made to govern the

pupils' practice through life, and that such forms and principles should be taught directly, systematically, and persistently, are conclusions now quite generally accepted.

Is Oral Teaching Methodical and Permanent?—

The fact that teachers after years of experiment have become dissatisfied with the very uncertain results of oral instruction is evidenced by the growing demand from our best schools for a text-book suitable for the pupils' use and for class-room drill.

Without a drill book in the hands of the pupils there is necessarily a serious loss of time in getting written exercises before the class, and in repeating instruction to bridge over breaks caused by lack of attention or by irregular attendance. But with the best effort of both teacher and class, young pupils find it almost impossible so to hold their oral instruction in memory as to be able to look back over the successive steps and get a bird's-eye view of the different lessons in their proper relations.

A successful teacher will give much oral instruction, and will throw his own personality into his work. The importance of bringing the instructed mind of the teacher into direct contact with the uninstructed mind of the pupil should not be undervalued. But unless oral work is supplemented by a rational text-book, it must lack continuity and permanency. Besides, getting instruction from the printed page is an essential part of language training.

Matter and Method of the Language Book.—The more thoughtful teachers are beginning to question the wisdom of those courses of language study in which

spelling, pronunciation, technical grammar, pictures for imaginative stories, poetry for memorizing and paraphrasing, information lessons, and other miscellaneous matter are prescribed, with no line of connection, no beginning, no middle, no end.

Why should the study of our mother tongue be made the one exception to Burke's motto, "Good order is the foundation of all good things"? And is it true that language books must needs be filled with the odds and ends of various subjects because there is so little to be done in the study of language proper?

Spelling and Pronunciation.—Since "language lessons" are supposed to deal mainly with related ideas, why should a language book be interlarded with lessons in pronunciation and spelling, when these subjects are amply provided for in two other text-books of the same grade—the "reader" and the "speller"?

Technical Grammar.—All instruction that aims chiefly to lay a foundation for technical grammar is out of place in the primary grades. There are, however, certain grammatical forms that should be brought to the pupils' notice as early as possible, and worked into practice by constant repetition.

Pictures for Stories.—Pictures to aid in imaginative story-writing may, for occasional exercises, serve a useful purpose; but when they are introduced into the language book and kept constantly before the pupils as composition lessons, the story-writing loses the very important element of freshness and surprise. Such exercises are much more

interesting and successful if the picture is first presented by the teacher at the hour of recitation. There is danger of overdoing this feature of composition work.

Poetry.—The reproduction of stories found in poems is an exercise of extremely doubtful utility. When we remember that the story is one of the most remote of the poet's purposes, and that the noblest poems of our language drop into insignificance when reduced to "plot" or "argument," it will be seen how positively harmful it must be for the young student to get the impression that his feeble story reproduction is in any sense a measure of the beautiful thought of a great poet.

Concerning the use of poetry for written paraphrase, Laurie says: "A more detestable exercise I do not know. It is an impious and unholy use of pen and ink."* Bain, after quoting one of the best attempts at paraphrasing poetry, remarks: "It has stripped the passage of its poetical beauty, and has not made a good piece of prose. It is an operation without assignable result."†

The translating of poetry into prose by simply changing the order, supplying ellipses, and revoking poetic licenses, is a profitable exercise for grammar grades.

In the primary grades, all pupils able to write should occasionally copy from the blackboard and memorize short selections of poetry. The teacher's chief aim should be to help the pupils to see the beauty of the word-pictures,

* "Lectures on Language and Linguistic Method," delivered in the University of Cambridge, England.

† "On Teaching English."

to appreciate the rhythmic flow of the language, and to get into sympathy with the sentiment. Here the textbook can be of little aid. The teacher certainly does not need to be told when and where he can best find opportunity to introduce such general exercises.

Plan of this Book—Observation and Practice.—Extreme reaction from abstract and formal methods has popularized the theory that precision in language comes only from practice, and that the child should constantly be exercised in expressing his own thought in his own language. How progress is to be attained by confining him to the feeble, commonplace expression of his own feeble, commonplace thought does not appear.

Excellence in language is attained through *observation* and *practice*.

In his lecture, "On the Study of Literature," Morley says: "So far as my observation has gone, men will do better if they seek precision by studying carefully and with an open mind and a vigilant eye the models of writing, than by excessive practice of writing on their own account."

Pupils should occasionally write original compositions—frequently, if the teacher can give the individual attention that will make them helpful. It has truly been said that we cannot know that we possess language, or anything else, till we can *use* it. It is equally true that we must acquire language before we can use it.

Distinguished masters and students of style are agreed that good language is got chiefly by the careful study of

good models. "Exhaustive observation," says Spencer, "is an element in all great success." This all-important feature of language training has been most strangely neglected.

In the following lessons will be found a connected and progressive series of exercises in *observation* and *practice*. Most of the drill work will be found under the two heads, *What to See* and *What to Do*.

The Sentence and the Paragraph.—The sentence, the unit of language, is examined with regard to its meaning, its written form, and its relation to the paragraph.

Very early in the work the paragraph is presented as a part, or division, of the story, and its content and its form are carefully noted.

Pupils are led to use the imagination in making word-pictures from outlines—dressing up the bare statements of a story or a description by adding appropriate helping words and phrases. They are taught to combine and arrange these statements in various ways, so as to secure a natural and easy flow of thought. Their attention is called to the importance of keeping up interest and of holding the most important things for the final outcome.

Chief Parts and their Helpers.—In connection with this work, and as an essential part of it, the sentence is examined for its chief parts. The forms and the relations of these parts are taught by easy, informal exercises in *seeing* and *doing*.

Around the chief words the pupils are taught to group the different helping words and phrases, not as a work of

formal analysis, but as a simple process of noting what words do and mean as they are used in the sentence.

There is nothing within the whole range of language study more profitable than this. When the pupil has acquired the habit of noting the chief words of a sentence at a glance, he has laid the most solid foundation for regulating his own language and for observing the language of others.

Cobbett says that half of all grammatical errors come from not ascertaining the nominative. But going beyond the mere matter of grammatical correctness, this work of noting what words and phrases do furnishes the only intelligent means of learning how to get ideas into good arrangement—a difficulty, as Bain suggests, greater than all other difficulties put together.

The Thought and the Language of the Exercises.—Although these lessons deal primarily with expression, the expression is considered in its concrete relation to the thought. The aim has been to present such exercises as will incidentally convey information and stimulate original thought. Some of the lessons designed for composition work will lead the pupil into sympathy with nature, and with what is noble and heroic in character.

The language employed is intended to be in advance of the pupil's own language. The child enjoys the effort of reaching up for what is a little above him, but is disgusted with attempts to talk down to his level.

Common Errors.—Special effort has been made to aid pupils in forming correct habits of language where there is most danger of falling into bad habits. Forms liable to

misuse are noticed incidentally till the development of the work gives opportunity for treating them thoroughly.

Frequent repetition of correct forms, and reasons reached through simple processes of observation, are both employed to secure right habits. The sentences given for repetition are, for obvious reasons, colloquial, rather than literary, in their character.

Abstract Terms.—Abstract and technical terms are here generally avoided. They frighten young children, and make the natural and easy seem unnatural and difficult.

Letter-writing.—Letter-writing receives extended and careful treatment. Models are given for copying. Important points are emphasized and different forms impressed, by searching observation lessons, and for everything thus taught the pupil is held responsible in the dictation exercises.

Opportunity for Work.—As a means of getting thought, as well as of expressing thought, systematic training in the observation and practice of language cannot begin too early nor continue too persistently. There certainly can be no lack of legitimate work for the language teacher.

It is not claimed for this series of exercises that they will enable the pupil to overcome all the difficulties of language. When we have put the young child's feet in the right path and given him an impulse in the right direction, we have done much.

A. R.

To the Teacher.

SUGGESTIONS ON THE USE OF THE FOLLOWING LESSONS.

Exercises under the Head of "What to See" may be read in the class, one pupil reading a question and another giving the answer, and so on. The remarks found with these questions should also be read and discussed. The teacher should see that every form or principle in the illustrative exercises is impressed. The pupils may be stimulated to closer observation by being assured that, after closing the books, they are to write similar sentences.

Copied exercises may be exchanged, and corrected from the book by the pupils.

Oral Composition Lessons should generally precede the written. Each pupil should be called upon to tell some part of the story, or to put in different language what has been told by another. The clearest and neatest of these sentences should be put on the board.

The teacher should use every effort to secure a smooth flow of thought from one sentence to another, an easy transition from one paragraph to another, and a natural outcome for the whole story or description.

The Correction of Written Compositions is most effective when done in the presence of the pupils at the time of recitation. The teacher, certainly, has no right to unfit himself for his duties in the

classroom by giving all his leisure hours to the correction of compositions.

While the pupils are writing their exercises, the teacher can pass from one to another, making corrections and helpful suggestions. The slower pupils may need to rewrite their work after the recitation hour.

Some of the compositions should be read in the class. General errors should be corrected and explained by the aid of the blackboard.

If the work of one "Lesson" cannot be well done in the period for recitation, let the "Lesson" be divided.

For Additional Exercises in Composition the teacher may read to the class short stories or selections. As each paragraph is read, the pupils should tell what it is about. The outline thus obtained should be put on the board. The whole selection may then be read the second time, and the pupils may reproduce it in paragraphs to correspond with the outline.

It is better, for obvious reasons, that these selections for reproduction should not be in the pupils' language books.

Sentences to Guard against Common Errors are given in the full and correct form for repetition. Thus the eye, the tongue, and the ear are trained together. For tests, these exercises may be put on the board or dictated with blanks to be filled.

By questions and various devices the teacher should create occasion for continuing the use of those expressions in which he finds his pupils liable to err. He should, with unremitting vigilance, correct all errors made by the pupils in conversation or in recitation. Reasons and references to the text-book should be given as soon as the pupils are prepared for them.

INTRODUCTORY LANGUAGE WORK.

PART FIRST.

To the Teacher.—It is important for the teacher to see that the following lessons form a connected course of instruction, that the relation of a topic or a principle to what precedes or follows determines its place of introduction, and that, instead of formal **reviews, composition and observation exercises** are so designed that the different principles presented are kept in constant application.

The four different kinds of sentences and the three terminal marks are introduced in the first ten lessons as a necessary foundation for intelligent composition work. As subsequent exercises repeat and continue the instruction given in these lessons, to extend this introductory work beyond a simple and clear presentation would be bad economy.

LESSON I.

Statements — Capitals — Period.

To the Teacher.—If the pupils are allowed to copy this outline of the aut, and to talk about it and about the statements below, it will give a keener interest to these exercises. A valuable oral lesson is here suggested.