

Letters to the Editor



Dear Orangevale Parks and Recreation
Would you kindly consider putting in an Archery Range? Little John's is no more.

It would truly be a blessing for hunters, archers, young people and seniors. It could possibly be a gateway for some troubled youths. I also would like to see a shooting range for the boys to shoot their BB guns. This would allow the boys to shoot their guns in a safe manner. After all boys will be boys. Thank You for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Clark

Blind Response

I am writing this in response to a letter to the editor which I have chosen not to publish. It's tone is, essentially that I am a mindless, frustrated ex-high school English teacher in my criticism of the controlling role of the media and how that, in turn, has the potential to control the minds of middle America. Thank you, sir, for your comments.

I am not a mindless, frustrated ex-high school English teacher. I am a retired teacher of English, Business, and Technology on middle school, high school, and college levels. There is more, but I think that is enough to establish my credentials. And I have earned the right to criticize my journalistic peers by over 40 years in the business of writing, advertising, and publishing.

My criticism is based on the media mind set that "Sensationalism Sells!" and one of the things in basic journalism classes that says that the best way to "sell" a story is to find something to create an air of conflict and stir up the reader. I prefer to be presented with a basic story—without political or editorial bias—so I can make my own decisions.

And, quite often, the "important" news is often a non-story. The "Breaking News" is a perfect example. How often do we hear about an event (usually in the most emotionally-gripping headline words possible) only to hear the announcer say, "These has been a serious accident on Highway xx between x-ville and y-ville. At this time, we don't know how many cars were involved or if there were any injuries or deaths. We have a team on the way, and will bring you more details as they become available."

So if my wife or son was coming home from x-ville, I can spent my time worrying if they might be involved.

My criticism is based on the tendency of the media to rush to judgment on almost everything. I prefer the good news, and I will leave everything else up to the panic pushers.

Solving the Problems of ...

Getting Students Ready to Learn

Today, more and more families are opting for alternative education environments. Home teaching, tutoring groups, peer-tutoring, charter schools, and innovative practices within traditional classroom change teaching methods which have dominated the education community for nearly a century. Many children—some estimates as high as fifty percent—need additional assistance (outside of the traditional classroom) to master state standards and prepare for the high-stakes standardized tests. This is true, across the board, and especially true in the critical areas of literacy and reading.

Everyone teaching students to read has been looking for classroom-tested techniques to expand their inventory of tried-and-true methods and tools in their "teacher's toolbox." The hardest part of learning how to coach a subject as broad as literacy, or even the less-broad subject of "reading," is knowing where to start.

The sages have repeatedly given us the only real answer: "Start at the very beginning..." with the fundamentals and moving upward. It does not to be rigidly structured—it simply needs the reading coach to learn and apply easy-to-understand, step-by-step research-proven reading activities for students and coaches to do together.

Teaching Reading: The Great Debate

A bit of historical perspective. The best ways to teach reading have been argued about for well over a hundred years. In their books, well-known researchers discuss the merits of various approaches.

Perhaps you learned to read Dick and Jane, look-say books. The look-say method was a whole-language technique popular when Jeanne Chall wrote *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (c. 1967) Educators were divided into two camps; one whole-word and the other phonics, or a code emphasis.

As early as 1955, Rudolph Flesch initiated a campaign against children being taught to read with look-say sight methods as he pushed for a return to phonics. In look-say, children were taught to memorize whole words through flash-card drills. Many phonics believers thought this method was an educational disaster. The issue today is meaning-first vs. phonics first.

For most of the last (20th) century, people argued there were only two ways to teach reading. You use whole-word, reading for meaning processes or you use phonics, teach of the alphabetic code by associating sounds to letters. The pendulum swings, depending on one's perspective, test scores, and politics of the time.

Learning to read is a complex process and, in my opinion, no one has ever been able to describe the best method for teaching students (children or adults) to read. There is a tremendous amount of research available but so many factors are involved there is no one method or reading program—nor can there be—that can teach all students with the same success. So we must be flexible in our approach and take into account the needs and interests of every emerging reader.

Most reading specialists do agree, however, with the recent National Reading Panel's conclusion that there are five key areas which must be addressed in learning to read. These include: Phonemic awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension

This closely relates to most state standards. The only place where I differ is in the methodology; I think a balanced reading program with skills and whole-language activities is optimum. The current narrow focus on code may not be the best for every student.

What is reading, anyway? Reading is more than the ability to pronounce words correctly. Four main components in the process include: Word perception, Comprehension of the ideas represented by the words, Reaction to those ideas, and Integration of those ideas with previous knowledge

Finally, seeing this as a summary of knowledge which better prepares students for formal education, it is important to understand that the more experiences a student brings to the printed symbol, regardless of the base language, the better the chances for reading improvement. It is necessary to know, and take advantage of, the reader's background and relate it to the printed word.

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