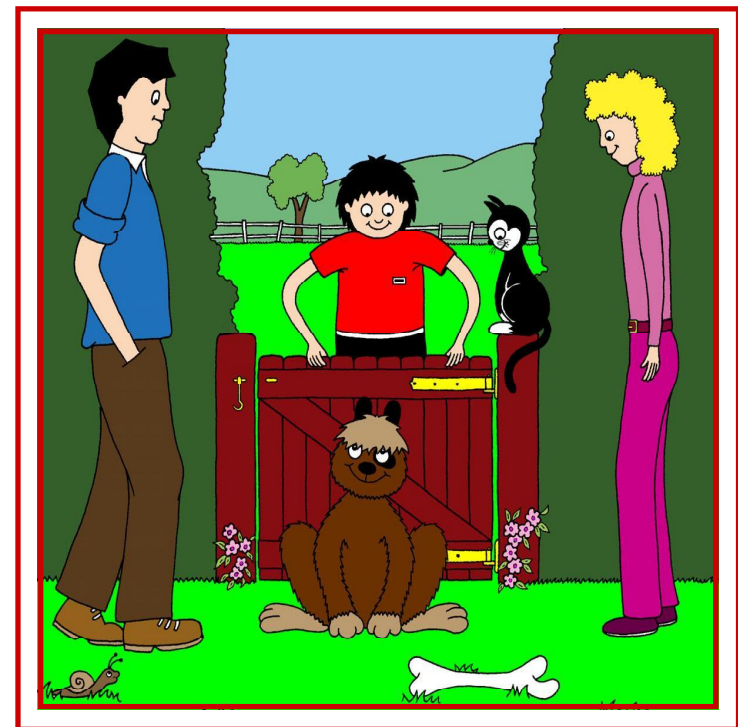




Words First

An Introduction for Teachers

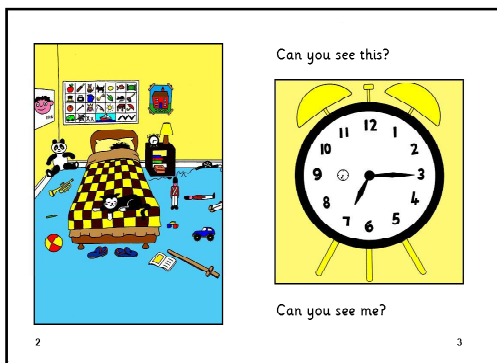
Colin Harris



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Words First

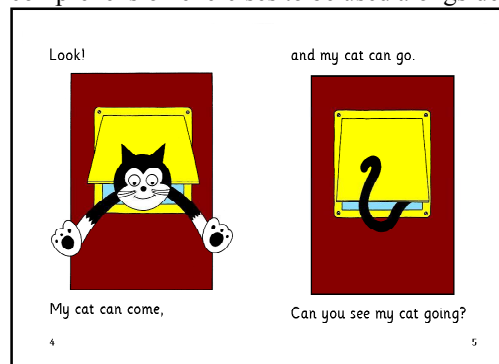
The 'Words First' reading scheme aims to teach the High Frequency Words prescribed by the National Literacy Strategy for England. Its starting point is the initial list of 45 high frequency words which are to be taught as 'sight recognition words' for Reception Year children.



Clearly, therefore, the materials are aimed at children in the Reception Year who are just beginning to learn to read. However, there will probably always remain a significant number of children in our schools who will not have mastered this difficult group of words by the end of Year 1 or later. So 'Words First' targets Reception Year children and beyond. The books can be used by Years 1, 2 and 3, and SENCOs may choose to use the materials for older children with reading difficulties.

All the materials are carefully written using a strictly controlled vocabulary, and the children never meet a word in any of the materials or stories for which they have not already been prepared. The words are used only in the strict order in which they have been taught, and if they have been taught properly and mastered thoroughly in the correct sequence, the children will be able to read each story or worksheet as it is given to them.

A wide range of approaches and materials have been included in the scheme, ranging from traditional flashcards to simple phrase and sentence cards, picture-matching cards, word-learning worksheets, worksheets using words in context, simple stories presented in both A5 format and big book format and simple written comprehension exercises to be used alongside the stories.



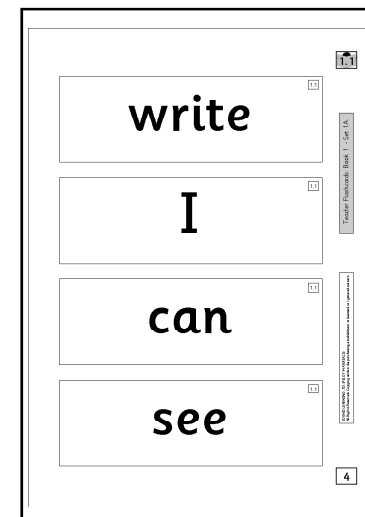
Teachers can therefore 'pick and mix' from the variety of materials available, and can differentiate by using a narrower range of materials for those children who are learning quickly, and a wider selection for those children who need more support.

The Words - Series 1

The National Literacy Strategy document makes the teacher's task clear. The 45 high frequency words are to be learned by sight so that they are quickly recognised both in and out of context.

Sight recognition

The first objective, that of sight recognition, is relatively simple. The traditional use of flashcards and allied apparatus will help to teach the words in isolation.



Meaningful context

Teaching the words in a meaningful context which the children can read independently, is a different matter. If the words appear in context, yet are surrounded by a variety of supplementary words which the children do not recognise, we have to ask ourselves 'What skills are we actually teaching?' We are simply expecting the children to recognise individual words within a mass of unintelligible text. In other words, they are still reading the words in isolation, not within a meaningful context, and they are certainly not making any sense of what they are attempting to read. For children who are experiencing difficulties, this may well erode any hard-won feelings of success and self-confidence engendered by learning the words in the first place.

If the children are really going to read these words successfully in context, and if they are going to make sense of what they are reading, the answer is clear - they should be able to read the majority, and preferably all, of the words in any particular passage they are given to read. This is especially true in the early stages when the children only recognise a very few words, as well as for those children who are already having, or are likely to have, difficulties.

'Words First' seeks to provide enjoyable and entertaining stories which will hold our pupils' attention, make complete sense to them and involve them in the various complex skills which make up the process of real reading, whilst using only the words contained within its teaching programme.

Three extra words

Despite the temptation to add a comparatively large number of 'extra' words to make the task of reading the initial words in context less problematic, it was decided to keep any extra words to an absolute minimum. The final materials contain only three extra words which were taken from later lists in the NLS document.

The three additions extend the list to 48 words and are:

- 'write' - because the children are expected to write, as well as read, the words in isolation and context from the very beginning, and an 'instruction word' was required to enable this.
- 'not' - because this increased the number of statements it was possible to make, simply by allowing negative as well as positive statements.
- 'do' - simply because this was such a useful word it forced itself in, suggesting it should have been included in the list in the first place!

Capital letters

Although all the words in the NLS word list are printed entirely in lower case, it is clear that as soon as these words are used in context, we need to consider the problem of capital letters. Conventional text is written in sentences and sentences begin with a capital letter.

There seemed to be only two possible options in tackling this problem:

- a) to teach all the words both with and without an initial capital;
- b) to strictly limit the number of words used to begin sentences and to teach only these with an initial capital;

On balance it was felt that the second option would do a disservice to the children as they were sure to meet further words from the list in other contexts which would start with an initial capital. So all the words are taught both entirely in lower case and with an initial capital letter, even though some of them may only be capitalised in specific situations (such as 'And' which often occurs in direct speech - "And another thing ...!") The only exception to this is the word 'I' which only occurs as a capital.

How the word list is organised

The final list of 48 words has been subdivided into four separate sets of twelve:

Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Set 4
and	cat	all	a
can	come	at	am
get	for	away	are
I	go	big	day
is	going	dad	dog
me	it	like	he
see	look	mum	in
this	my	of	she
you	no	on	they
do	said	play	up
not	to	the	was
write	yes	we	went

The four sets of words above represent the broad "learning units" within the scheme. However, smaller units are created by sub-dividing each set of twelve into three further sub-lists or subsets of four words each.

The font

It probably goes without saying that early reading materials should have a consistent and legible font. 'Words First' uses the Sassoon Primary Infant Font throughout. This font is also used by some of the NLS support materials and has been adopted by many primary schools for school-produced materials.

The following forms of the letters f and k are used:

f k

and the full alphabet is as follows:

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Within most teaching groups there will be some children who know some of the words already, so it is important to establish which words these are, otherwise you will have no baseline from which to judge future progress.

For teachers who want to keep a permanent record of the actual responses (including wrong responses) that individual children make, the initial assessment materials should be used.

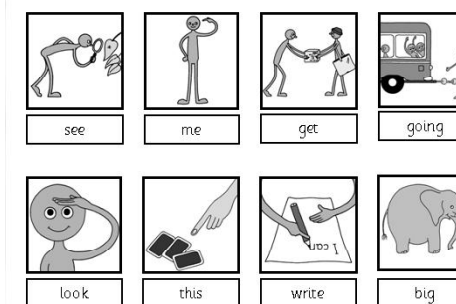
	Set 1: Scores	Set 2: Scores	Set 3: Scores	Set 4: Scores	Total Scores
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
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write	I	see
can	this	me
not	you	is
get	do	and
See	Can	Write
I	Not	You
This	Me	Get
And	Is	Do

These sheets will then become the teacher's permanent record of the child's progress throughout the scheme.

For teachers who would also like to keep a summary of how all the children in the group are progressing, the group record sheet will be useful.

Experience has shown that children learn and remember words linked to a picture more quickly than those which are not. Just over 75% of the words are linked in this way, and some of them are shown here.

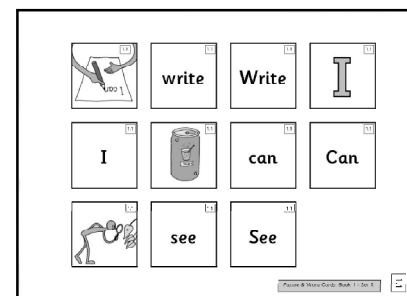





Picture-word matching

Some discussion will be required for many of the pictures. The aim will be to encourage the child to say the correct, single word in response to each picture, as if it were the word itself. Once this has been established, each picture can be gradually linked to its word.

Using the materials within the pack, this can be done in two ways:

- using one of the 2 word-learning worksheets provided with each subset.
- using the picture-word matching cards.



Name _____	Date _____	Page _____	Class _____	
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block;"> this This </div>			
<p><u>Write</u></p> <p>this this this _____</p> <p>This This This _____</p>				
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block;"> me Me </div>			
<p><u>Write</u></p> <p>me me me _____</p> <p>Me Me Me _____</p> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">I can see this.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">_____</p>				

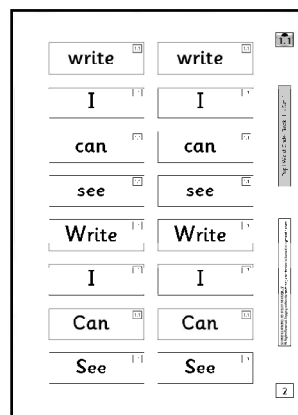
Flashcards

As soon as the children become familiar with the written words, the individual flashcards can be introduced, which are for the child's personal use.

Each photocopiable sheet contains two sets of these words. It is recommended that one set should be kept by the child in the classroom, and the other set should be kept at home; and that a parent should be encouraged to go through them with the child on a regular basis.

The flashcards can be used in more than one way. The child can simply read them; can match the lower case versions of a word to upper case; can use the two versions of each word to play 'Kim's game', and, as more and more words are learned, compile simple phrases and sentences by joining different words together.

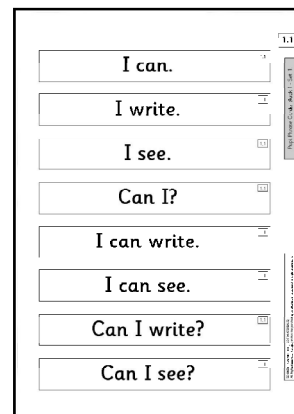
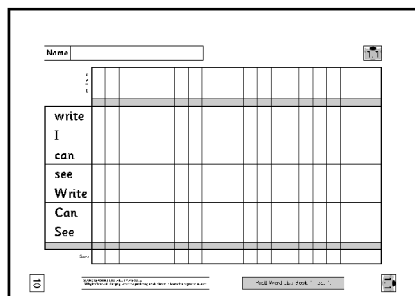
Running alongside this, the teacher will now be going through the same subset using the larger flashcards.



Checklists

You are now at the point at which the first checklist can be introduced.

These checklists are designed so that one can be kept at school and one can be taken home. They should read from a randomly shuffled set of flashcards. Correctly read words can then be ticked and the total score entered in the boxes at the bottom of each column.



The next sub-sets

As soon as the four words in the first subset have been mastered, the child can go through the whole of the previous sequence again, and then once again until all twelve words have been learned. The new set of materials can be sent home, including the new checklist, though you can choose whether to send a checklist which contains only the new words, or words from the previous set/s.

Word-learning worksheets

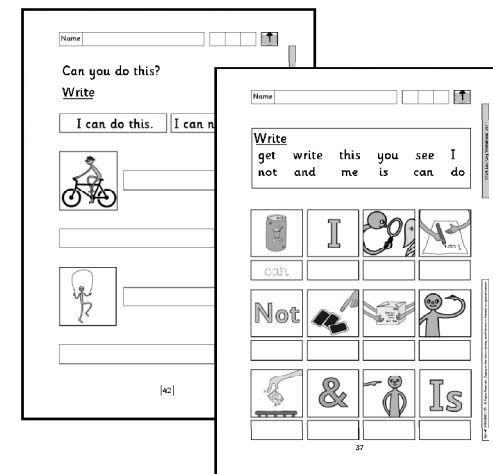
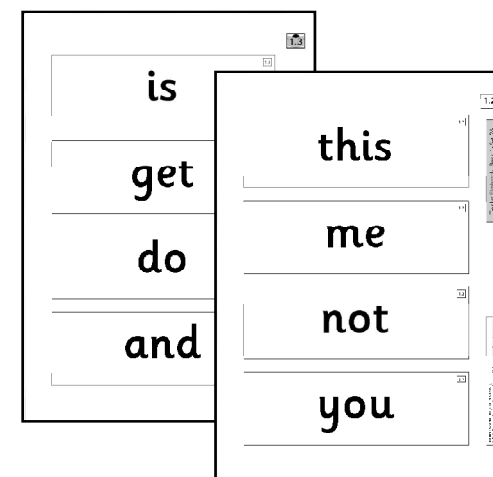
When all 12 words have been mastered, the remaining word-learning worksheets can be introduced.

These involve the child in reading, writing and responding to the first twelve words, both in and out of context, and with and without an initial capital letter.

Phrase cards

At the same time as the checklists are being used, the 'Pupil Phrase Cards' can be introduced.

These present the words being learned in context by using simple phrases and sentences. Again, it is highly recommended that the children are provided with a set for their personal use at school, and a set to take home.



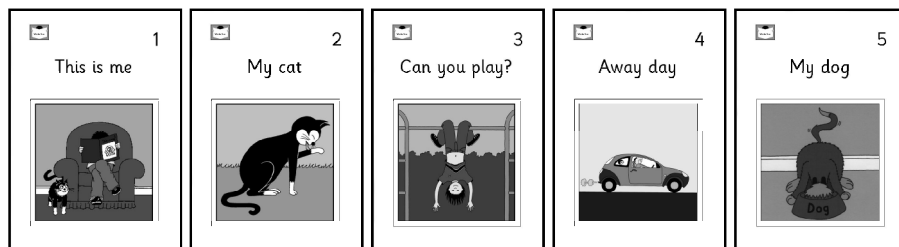
When all the words have been learned

As soon as you are sure that the child has securely learned all 12 words in the set, the child is ready to move on to the next stage. But please do be sure that the word-learning has been thorough and that the children have convinced you that they really do know all the words by reading them to you accurately over a number of consecutive occasions.

If the children do know the words, they will certainly succeed when they move to the next stage - reading the story books.

Using the story books

Series 1 has five story books. These are all printed in full-colour.



The books come in an A5 format for the children to read and use independently.

For many children, reading the stories will be seen as a real reward for all the hard work they have put into their word-learning, and to be able to read a whole book at the end of it will be a real joy.

For those who need a more tangible reward, the certificates which can be awarded for each 12 words learned may give some satisfaction!



The storylines

The storylines have obviously been dictated by the words. As the main nouns are 'mum', 'dad', 'dog', and 'cat', it was virtually impossible to avoid writing stories about a fairly conventional, nuclear, pet-owning family. The initial family can perhaps be accurately described as middle class and white, but later stories include friends and neighbours who add a cultural balance to the scheme.

However, a quick look at the stories will show that a small degree of universality has been achieved: mum drives the car and does the decorating while dad makes the breakfast, and the main character, the boy, exhibits many of the universal traits we associate with all children, he is clumsy and accident-prone, he can move quickly from laughter to sulking and onto tears, his bedroom is untidy (but his personal hygiene is good!) and he loves his pets.

Children appear to have no difficulty in identifying with him, and so far there has been universal amusement at the state of his bedroom floor, which is highlighted on the first page of the first story.

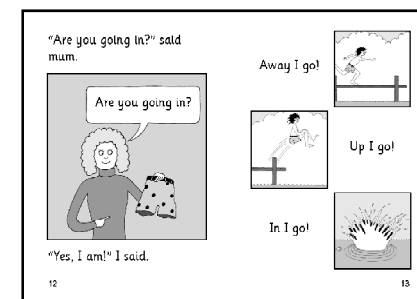
Because of the highly restricted vocabulary the boy has no name. He is the narrator, and refers to himself throughout as either 'I' or 'me'. The same limited vocabulary has meant that in Series 1 his friends have not appeared - they are introduced in later stories.

The illustrations

The colour illustrations aim to have a 'comic book' feel. These are not real people and the pets are clearly not real animals. All the characters wear the same clothes throughout so that they are instantly recognisable.

However, the illustrations are pivotal to the understanding of the stories, because they must compensate for the lack of richness, and sometimes precision, in the vocabulary.

Many of the illustrations contain a wealth of detail and it is worth discussing this with the children.



The text

The stories contain only the words which have been taught from the 48 word list, and each of the first four stories is based on the four sets of 12.

The fifth story acts as an extra reward. The children do not have to go once again through the gruelling word-learning process in order to read it. It simply revises and consolidates the 48 words they have already learned!

Reading the stories

Hopefully, all your pupils will get the chance to read the story to you. You may well have already discussed the need to take note of, and respond to, formal punctuation when using the Phrase Cards, and it is even more important that the children 'read' the punctuation as they read the stories

However, as an extra aid, the spacing and layout has been designed to help the children to decide where sentences both begin and end.

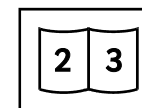
Encouraging comprehension

Much extremely valuable comprehension work will be done orally. Children will want to discuss the illustrations and situations, predict what might be going to happen next and talk about how they might feel if they find themselves in the same situation as one of the characters.

However, there is also a place for quiet consideration of the stories, and for beginning to learn to make written responses to simple written questions regarding the illustrations or the text, so very simple comprehension worksheets have been provided for each of the books.

Once again, these materials use only the words from the 48 word list, and the children are largely asked to select how they write their answers from a choice of statements which are provided on the sheets.

As a general rule, there is something to do for every double-page spread within the story books, and the pages to be looked at are signalled by page numbers printed in a little open-book icon which forms part of the worksheet.



The exercises themselves are very simple. They may ask the child to simply look at a picture, like in this worksheet from story book 1.

They may involve a simple cloze procedure or they may ask the child to fill in a 'speech bubble' or answer a simple question.

Some worksheets ask the children to use their fine discrimination skills by looking for differences between very similar pictures.

And, of course, the extra advantage of these worksheets is that they also reinforce, revise and consolidate all the words the children have worked so hard to learn!

Series 2A

Series 2A introduces a further 100 words, almost totally based on the second list of high frequency words which are to be learned between Years 1 and 2. Eighty-nine words have been taken from this list.

A further 7 words are made up of compound words - 'cannot', 'forget', 'into', 'onto', 'someone', 'somewhere' and 'today'.

The remaining words are:

'why' and 'Why' - because this is such a useful 'question' word and it is difficult to understand why it is not on the high frequency list in the first place (though it does occur on the subsequent N.L.S. medium frequency list);

'answer' - because it will become a useful word in later comprehension work (this word also occurs on the medium frequency list);

'things' - because this is a useful substitute for the continuing scarcity of nouns on all the N.L.S. lists.

The 100 words are subdivided into five separate sets of twenty. These are numbered Sets 6 to 10 respectively, as they are linked to story books 6 to 10 which form the backbone of Series 2A.

Set 6	Set 7	Set 8	Set 9	Set 10
be	back	about	as	after
down	bed	boy	called	another
good	but	can't	don't	answer
help	But	did	Don't	because
make	came	from	forget	cannot
one	house	girl	got	door
One	next	have	his	first
people	Next	home	just	here
put	out	into	love	Here
some	so	last	new	how
someone	So	now	our	How
these	that	Now	ran	if
things	That	old	saw	little
what	them	school	somewhere	live
What	there	then	too	much
when	today	Then	us	night
When	very	time	want	off
who	were	where	why	onto
will	with	Where	Why	two
Will	your	Who	Your	These

Assessment and Recording Materials

The Series 2A materials are based on the firm assumption that the pupils have already learned all the words introduced by Series 1.

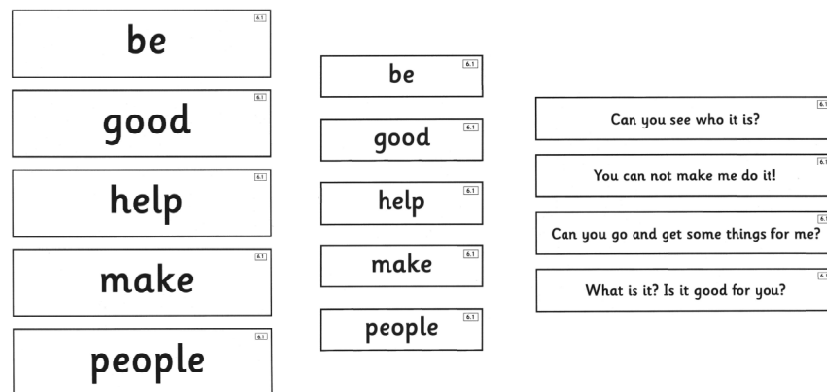
However, it is strongly recommended that you establish a baseline from which you can accurately judge the children's progress with regard to Series 2A. This involves finding out which 2A words the children know already. For this reason, the assessment and recording materials provided with Series 2A follow almost exactly the same pattern as those which accompanied Series 1.

Learning the Words

The main difference between the word-learning approaches of Series 1 and Series 2A is that the words are no longer linked to individual illustrations. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, many of the words are very difficult or almost impossible to illustrate and secondly, but more importantly, it is felt that as the Words First programme progresses some of the 'props' to learning should be reduced or removed.

This means that the children will now rely on the individual word cards, sentence cards, teacher flashcards and word-learning worksheets in order to learn the words (plus, of course, any additional materials or games which their teachers produce).

Quite how you introduce the words is up to you, but it is suggested that you start by introducing the words individually, either by means of the teacher flashcards or the pupil word cards:



When all ten words have been learned and are fairly secure, the sentence cards can be introduced, so that the children can meet these words in context as quickly as possible.


Once the first sub-set of ten words has been thoroughly learned, the second sub-set can be introduced, and the same pattern of learning followed. When all the words have been learned, the word-learning worksheets can be completed. These materials simply use the twenty words in further simple sentences, often in multiple-choice contexts:

Name:


Write: Yes, we will see one.
 No, we will not see one.

When will we see one of these things?

Will we see one when the day is like this?





Will we see one when the day is like this?




Name:

Write: One cat and no dog.
 One dog and one cat.
 One dog and no cat.





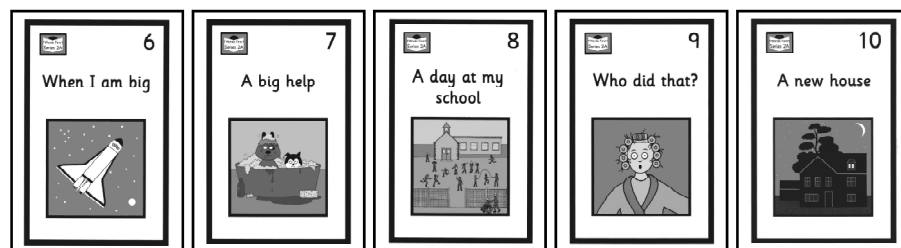


If you are satisfied that the child has absolute mastery of the twenty words, you may wish to send these worksheets home as homework, so that the child can get on with reading the next story. In any event, once these worksheets have been completed, the children can begin the next story book.

If the children have truly learned the words, then they *will* succeed when reading the story book - and nothing succeeds like success!

Using the Story Books

There are five story books in Series 2A - each one containing twenty more new words.



In many ways the story books provide a tangible 'reward' for all the hard work in word learning which has gone before. However, they also provide an excellent opportunity to fulfil the second expectation of the National Literacy Strategy - to read all the words learned in a meaningful, continuous and extensive context.

The stories continue to explore the daily activities of a boy, his parents and his pets - but now the range of characters is extended to include classmates, teachers and ordinary members of the public.

Within Series 2A, *all* the new words introduced for each story are contained in that story and in *all subsequent* stories and *no other words* are used - either in the main text or within the illustrations. This control ensures that all the words are continually revised and consolidated as the reading programme progresses. The only exceptions to this, of course, are the words previously taught in Series 1. All 48 lower case versions of these words occur in all five stories of Series 2A.

The illustrations continue to be pivotal to the storylines in that they must compensate for the lack of richness, and often precision, in the highly restricted vocabulary. There has been a determined attempt to make the illustrations 'child-friendly' by the use of clear, simple lines and a concentration on primary colours in order to create a 'comic book' or 'cartoon' feel without descending to caricature.

The illustrations sometimes include tiny, sometimes humorous, details which aim to keep the children engaged and alert. The children should be encouraged to discuss the pictures with each other and with the teacher, either in terms of specific detail or in trying to predict what might happen next.

Encouraging Comprehension

As with the Series 1 stories, much valuable comprehension will come as a result of verbal discussion of the events and incidents. However, simple written comprehension exercises and activities will help the children to take in the stories a little more slowly and perhaps appreciate some points they had missed on first reading. Equally importantly, it further reinforces and revises the reading *and the writing* of all the words they have learned because, once again, these materials are subject to exactly the same vocabulary control as all the other 'Words First' materials - so any word read or written is a word revised!


In Series 2A, the activities remain comparatively simple, but as the children's reading vocabulary gradually increases so will our ability to ask more searching written questions.

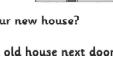
Name:

What was it that mum said to dad?

What was his answer?

Write: Yes. No.

There is no 

There are tv 

Do I like our new house?

Is there an old house next door?

Is there a school next door?

Is there a new house next door?

Do people live in the new house next door?

Do I want a boy to come to live there?

Do I want a girl to come to live there?

Series 2B

‘Series 2B’ comprises the third part of the ‘Words First’ Reading Programme and continues to introduce words from the high frequency lists.

‘Series 2B’ - completes the learning sequence by presenting all the remaining words on the Years 1 to 2 list, plus a very small number of ‘extra’ useful words. The list includes all the common ‘colour’ words, and the written numbers ‘one’, ‘two’ and ‘three’. It does not include the remaining numbers to twenty, the days of the week and the months of the year which are also prescribed in the ‘Years 1 to 2’ list, as it was felt that they would not fit easily into the existing *Words First* story format without substantial distortions to the story-lines.

The materials follow the pattern already established in Series 2A. However, as would be expected, the stories and materials become ‘denser’ in nature (ie more words per page), and the comprehension materials move away from cloze activities and towards straightforward single and multiple-choice questions. As before, a strong emphasis has been placed on the continued use and revision of the words introduced earlier in the scheme.

The learning formula remains the same - if the children thoroughly learn the words first, *they must succeed* when they meet them in the stories, for these stories, and all the associated materials including the comprehension questions, contain only the new words they have learned, plus the words learned previously in Series 1 and 2A respectively.

The Words

Series 2B introduces a further 80 words, some of which are also shown twice to include those words which are also used with an initial capital. The majority of these words are taken from the Y1 and Y2 high frequency list, and include the following: again, an, ball, been, Boy, brother, by, call, could, dig, had, half, has, her, him, jump, Just, laugh, lived, made, man, many, may, more, must, name, once, or, over, pull, push, seen, should, sister, something, take, than, their, three, took, tree, water, way, would, Would
(and added to these are the two compound words ‘playhouse’ and ‘goodnight’)

The following common ‘colour’ words are also included:

black, blue, brown, green, Green, orange, red, white, yellow

A further fourteen words are taken from the list of medium frequency words which are to be learned in Years 4 and 5:

any, ask, asked, children, didn’t, friends, garden, happy, heard, I’m, know, never, something, think

Finally, a further eleven words were included which were simply useful in terms of moving the stories along:

anything, done, give, Jess, Josh, Mr., Mrs., say, thing, well, Well

Not included in Series 2B are the more ‘specialist’ words which also form part of the high frequency words - days of the week, months of the year, and numbers from four to twenty, as it was clear that these did not lend themselves to the existing *Words First* story format - not least in terms of ensuring their frequent repetition and revision.

The complete list of words covered by Series 2B is shown below.

How the Series 2B word list is organised

The 80 words are subdivided into four separate sets of twenty. These are numbered Sets 11 to 14 respectively, as they are linked to story books 11 to 14. Story book 15 contains no new words - it is entirely revisional in content.

Set 11	Set 12	Set 13	Set 14
again	an	any	ball
asked	ask	anything	blue
brother	black	been	Boy
garden	call	by	brown
had	could	didn’t	children
her	goodnight	green	dig
Jess	happy	Green	done
Josh	him	half	friends
made	jump	has	give
may	Just	heard	lived
once	laugh	I’m	man
over	more	know	name
push	must	many	orange
say	or	Mr.	pull
sister	red	Mrs.	think
something	should	never	water
thing	take	playhouse	well
way	their	seen	Well
would	three	than	white
Would	tree	took	yellow

Assessment Materials

The Series 2B materials are based on the important assumption that the pupils have already learned all the words introduced by the previous two series.

However, it is strongly recommended that you establish a baseline from which you can accurately judge the children’s progress within Series 2B. Initially, this involves finding out which 2B words the children know already. For this reason, the assessment and recording materials provided with Series 2B follow almost exactly the same pattern as those which accompany Series 2A.

Learning the words

The pattern of word-learning established by Level 2A is continued in Level 2B with the same array of individual word cards, sentence cards, teacher flashcards and word-learning worksheets (plus any additional materials or games you produce). Quite how you introduce the words is up to you, but it is suggested that you start by introducing the words individually, either by means of the teacher flashcards or the smaller pupil word cards:

again	again	made	made
brother	brother	once	once
had	had	push	push
Jess	Jess	sister	sister
Josh	Josh	thing	thing

When all ten words have been learned and are fairly secure, the sentence cards can be introduced, so that the children can meet these words in context as quickly as possible:

Mum said I was good because I made my bed.	My dad made a new door for our house.
My sister is a little girl, called Jess.	I once had a dog, but now I have a cat.
My brother is a big boy, called Josh.	Dad said that school is a good thing.
I did it once, but I will not do it again.	I got here first, so don't you push in!

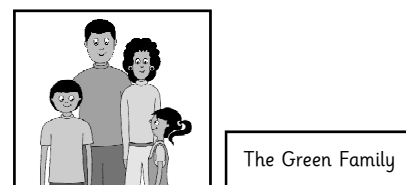
The story books

There are five story books in Series 2B. Books 11-14 contain twenty new words each, but Book 15 can be read straight after Book 14 as it revises and reinforces the words learned so far.

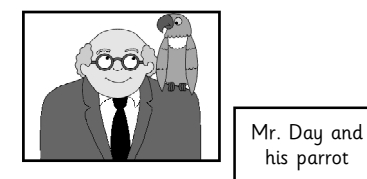


The books continue to explore the everyday activities of the boy who was the hero of the previous stories, but now a new twist emerges as the range of characters is extended to include the new neighbours who move into the house next door. This family includes a girl and her brother, and the 2B stories explore and demolish several of the stereotypes some young boys have regarding girls, and to a large extent the new girl replaces our original hero; she certainly becomes the prime mover, and arguably the heroine, of all the succeeding stories. These stories go on to explore some of the other themes that affect young people, including fear of the dark and of the unknown, and the final story tackles the problem of bullying and how the children face it, and how they come to understand that the bully is perhaps to be pitied rather than feared.

Story book 11 introduces four new characters - Mr. and Mrs. Green, their son Josh and their daughter Jess:



Story book 14 introduces the next door neighbour on the other side - an old man called Mr. Day, who owns a pet parrot:



Story book 15 introduces the school bully, who likes to be called 'Mr. Big', together with his mum, and a pet mouse which belongs to Jess, called 'Boy'.

Encouraging comprehension

As in the previous series, a range of comprehension activities is offered, including multiple-choice responses, but there is now a sustained effort to move towards straightforward questions, and previously used techniques such as cloze procedures are rarely, if ever, used.

Summary

By the time the children have completed the last question for the last story book, they will have met the full total of 276 words contained within the first three series of the *Words First* materials in a variety of contexts and many numbers of times. Reading the story books *alone* will have involved the child in reading over *twelve and a half thousand* running words. The materials should have encouraged thorough learning not only in speedy word recognition, but also in understanding that words communicate meaning.

Because these words, *by definition*, will occur with relative high frequency in *all* the future reading materials they are likely to meet, the children should now have gained sufficient confidence to move onto new reading materials in the sure knowledge that these materials *must* contain a high proportion of words they can instantly recognise and understand.