Young American Readers

The Charles and E. Jennifer Monaghan Collection of Books on the History of the Teaching of Reading in the United States

The Department of Special Collections
KENNETH SPENCER RESEARCH LIBRARY
This catalogue was compiled by Arlene Barry, selected and abridged from E. Jennifer Monaghan and Arlene Barry's *Writing the Past.*
Young American Readers

is an exhibition drawn from the first of several donations to the Kenneth Spencer Research Library from Charles and E. Jennifer Monaghan, of New York, that over the course of the next few years will total about 1,400 volumes. The books have been designated the Charles and E. Jennifer Monaghan Collection. With its focus on the teaching of reading and writing in Colonial America and the United States, the Monaghan Collection complements and extends the Spencer Library's already substantial holdings in this field. This library holds many similar volumes—books from this state and region of the United States, in the Kansas Collection—and books from across the seas, especially from Britain, in the Department of Special Collections. Now, much strengthened by the Monaghans' gift, these collections give the Spencer Library the opportunity to support in great depth those faculty and students who seek to learn about a most important part of the history of education . . . and to offer some delight to anyone who may wonder how our forebears learned to read!

Charles Monaghan describes how the Monaghan Collection began:

"We started acquiring pieces for our collection in 1975. Jennifer had undertaken to write a thesis on Noah Webster's spelling book, and had been looking at the textbooks written by his rivals. This made us aware of a wonderful, virtually unexamined universe of material. The first book we bought was a battered copy of a reader by Charles Sanders, which cost us five cents. Low prices were an inducement to collect old literacy textbooks. Since they were undervalued in the academic community, they were also undervalued in the market. The most we ever spent on a single copy was $75, for an old Webster speller with a woodcut of the author in it."
"As part of her research over the next two decades, Jennifer spent a lot of time at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts. As the years passed, she really became an expert in old literacy textbooks. In conjunction with trips to Massachusetts, we would visit book barns and antiquarian bookstores there, and also in upstate New York, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine. After each trip, we would come home with dozens of acquisitions. I began to keep track of our purchases on the computer, so we were soon traveling with a computerized list, which cut down on the number of duplicates that we were buying.

"At the time, I was working as a freelance travel writer. This took me on trips around the country. I would always visit the antiquarian bookstores in the area I was visiting, bringing along my updated computerized list. I found the bookstores by consulting the yellow pages in each area, under the listing 'Books, Used and Antiquarian.' I made numerous purchases of old textbooks in important publishing towns such as Pittsburgh and Cincinnati, but also in other cities, including New Orleans, Phoenix and St. Petersburg. I also attended book fairs and made buying trips.

"Family members and friends picked up on our enthusiasm for old textbooks, and we would occasionally receive a copy for a birthday or Christmas present, but nearly all the books were collected by ourselves.

"We gradually acquired some 1,800 books. They have been stored in every nook and cranny of our house. I sorted out the oldest and most delicate books, which we stored in their own bookcase in Jennifer's study. In our basement, we made a space to store the large number of textbooks written in the late 19th and early 20th century by women authors. Jennifer used this part of our collection as the basis for an article she did on women textbook writers for Publishing Research Quarterly and an entry on women textbook writers in The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States (1995).

"In keeping track of our collection, we noticed the large number of books published by Lindley Murray. This spurred my research, which culminated in the 1998 publication of The Murrays of Murray Hill, a study of the family and intellectual background
of Lindley Murray. This book establishes that Lindley Murray was the largest-selling author in the world in the first four decades of the 19th century.

"About 40 of our primers were microfilmed by Professor Richard Venezky, of the University of Delaware, as part of his microfilm collection of American primers. Our collection also became the basis for Writing the Past, edited by Jennifer Monaghan and Arlene Barry, and published in conjunction with a historical display of literacy textbooks at the 1999 meeting of the International Reading Association in San Diego.

"We are donating our collection to the University of Kansas because of the presence there of an outstanding young scholar named Arlene Barry. We hope she will be able to make use of these textbooks as part of the reading education courses that she teaches."

Jennifer Monaghan received her B.A. from Oxford University, Oxford, England, an M.A from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, a second M.A. from Oxford and her Ed.D. from Ferkauf Graduate School, Yeshiva University. Dr. Monaghan has published three literacy-related books, Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America; Reading for the Enslaved, Writing for the Free: Reflections on Liberty and Literacy; and A Common Heritage: Noah Webster's Blue-Back Speller. The book on Noah Webster was an outgrowth of her dissertation for which she won an "Outstanding Dissertation Award" from the Society for the Study of Curriculum History in 1983. Additionally she has published numerous book chapters, journal and encyclopedia articles, reviews, and a catalog. She founded the International Reading Association's History of Reading Special Interest Group in 1975 and has actively served on its Executive Board for 26 years. Dr. Monaghan has functioned as both editor and coeditor of the Special Interest Group's newsletter, History of Reading News since its inception in 1976. Other awards were granted by the Society for Historians of the Early Republic, the American Studies Association, the History of Education Society, Cambridge University, and the American Antiquarian Society. Dr. Monaghan is currently a Professor in the English Department at Brooklyn College of City University New York.
Charles Monaghan came to his scholarly interests after a career in journalism. He worked for *The New York Times* in Paris and New York from 1962 to 1968, after which he was managing editor (1968-70) and then editor (1970-72) of "Book World," the Sunday literary supplement of the *Washington Post* and *Chicago Tribune*. During those years, "Book World" was the largest book review section in the country, with a weekly circulation of almost 2 million copies. Mr. Monaghan also edited *Retirement Living* magazine (1972-75) and the library reference publication *Facts on File* (1975-76) and was managing editor of *Travel & Leisure* magazine (1977-1983). As a freelance, Monaghan contributed some 500 articles and book reviews to national publications including *The New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, *Smithsonian*, *American Heritage*, *Town & Country*, *Money* magazine, *Bon Appetit*, *Food & Wine*, *Commonweal* and the *National Review*. He has also reviewed for the *History of Education Quarterly* and the *Journal of American History*. Mr. Monaghan is currently working on a book on Lyman Cobb (1800-1864). Charles Monaghan has a bachelor’s degree in history from Manhattan college and an M.A. in English from New York University.
Case I: Following in the footsteps of our English forebears: the alphabet method reigns supreme (1640-1840)

The books we give children to help them learn to read have always represented our cultural, ethical and religious values. In 17th century New England, those values were Christian, Protestant, and Puritan. There was a standard sequence of reading texts throughout the colonies. The colonial child began with the hornbook, then moved into a primer, the Psalter, the New Testament, and then the entire Bible.

Hornbooks

Really not a book at all, the hornbook usually consisted of a single sheet of paper containing the alphabet, a shortened syllabary, the invocation, and the Lord’s Prayer. It was pasted to a board or stiff card and covered with a translucent layer of horn (or varnished) to protect it. It was the child’s first introduction to Christianity.

1. a. An alphabet on ivory, ca. 18th century.
   b. A leather-covered hornbook containing a paper alphabet from the late 16th century.
   c. An alphabet on horn, ca. 17th century.
   d. A roman-letter, leather-covered oak hornbook from the 17th century. Facsimile
   e. A black-letter, uncovered oak hornbook. Facsimile
   f. A roman-letter, uncovered oak hornbook. Facsimile
   g. A cardboard hornbook from the early 19th century. Facsimile
Battledores

By the beginning of the 19th century, the hornbook had evolved into a cardboard structure folded into three. It is usually referred to as a “battledore,” although in fact the term is better applied to the more substantial hornbook itself which could be and was used as a bat in a primitive form of badminton.

2. a. An early Battledore, varnished and backed with gaudy Dutch paper. Facsimile
   b. A later Battledore printed on both sides. Facsimile

Primers

The word Primer originally meant a book of prayers for the laity, and was perhaps related to the monastic service of Prime. It came to mean an introduction to reading and later an introduction to any subject.


Item 3

Common to all these editions of the *New-England Primer* was the poem of the Protestant martyr, John Rogers. A few days before he was burned at the stake by the Catholic Queen Mary in 1554, he wrote this poem for his family:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{GIVE Ear my Children to my Words} \\
& \text{whom God hath dearly bought,} \\
& \text{Lay up his Laws within your Heart,} \\
& \text{and print them in your thought.}
\end{align*}
\]


**Spelling Books**

These were introduced into the colonies at the turn of the 18th century. Their objective was to teach spelling, reading, religion, and morality. Until the time of the Declaration of Independence, all spellers printed in the colonies had been reprints of imported British works. The war for American independence made British texts much less acceptable. An early speller written by an American, published on an American press, was the work of a young patriot, Noah Webster.

7. Noah Webster. *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language . . . Part I.* Hartford, Conn.: Hudson & Goodwin, for the author, 1783. (Modern reproduction) Webster spent his own money to pay for the publication of his speller. He claimed that he would teach the country a uniform system of pronunciation that would unify the new nation.
8. Noah Webster. *The American Spelling Book*. Boston: West and Richardson, 1817. Criticized for the cumbersome title of the 1783 version, Webster revised and reissued it in 1787 under its new title, *The American Spelling Book*. Webster’s *American Spelling Book* was the undisputed best seller of introductory reading textbooks in the United States until the 1820s, when it began to look old-fashioned and was revised in 1829. Next called *The Elementary Spelling Book* (but soon dubbed the “Blue-back speller” because of its blue covers) the new version became another success.


10. Noah Webster. *The Elementary Spelling Book*. New York: American Book Company [post 1908]. By 1908, Webster’s speller had been published for almost seven decades. The fables that bring the book to a close were old favorites.

11. B.D. Emerson. *The National-Spelling Book, and Pronouncing Tutor*. Boston: Richardson & Lord, 1828. Spelling books continued their role as introductions to reading for many years, focusing their efforts on what we now call decoding.

Readers: Old Style


At this time, a form of schoolbook called a "reader" was designed for children who could already read. It consisted of essays written for adults. The owner of this particular book found Webster's lessons so boring he pasted in "The Detective's Story" by Charles Dickens (pp. 12-13).


The most widely-used of these readers in our country was one titled the *English Reader*, which did not contain a single work by an American author. It did, however, reflect ideas of liberty and equality. Abraham Lincoln called the *English Reader* "the best schoolbook ever put in the hands of an American youth."


The stories of *The Village Reader* are deeply moralistic or informational.
Case 2: The great period of experimentation in introductory reading instruction (1826-1883)

Readers: New style—the Focus on Meaning
The old spelling books, with long lists of incomprehensible words accompanied by long essays, came under criticism. In response, educators created a series of books, also called "readers," which graded material according to its difficulty. Additionally, the readers included instructions to the teacher: prereading activities, comprehension questions, stories that were interesting for children, and the suggestion that teachers teach complete words before analyzing them. The best known series from this genre of new readers was the Eclectic series of William Holmes McGuffey (first published in 1836). Total sales of the McGuffey Readers are estimated at 120 million.

By the 1830s groups of educators began to advocate change. One group was interested in presenting words as wholes. They argued that children learned from whole to part (not from part to whole, a feature of the alphabet method) and began to experiment with the introduction of whole words with pictures and concrete experiences.

In addition, several different types of "phonic" readers were emerging. They all adopted the use of letter sounds instead of letter names. Four main categories emerged: (i) phonic/spelling approaches; (ii) refined, augmented or invented alphabets; (iii) diacritical markings on the traditional alphabet; (iv) synthetic phonics.

“The reading exercises are selected from the best compositions of the model writers in our language” (p.2). The fourth reader includes rules on elocution, words to be spelled and defined, and comprehension questions.

Ward produced a popular set of readers at the turn of the 20th century that made extensive use of diacritical marks. The tale of “Little Silver-Hair” and the three bears is still recognizable.

Cyr used a synthetic phonics approach, marking the new words diacritically before each story. She was the first woman to have a major series marketed under her own name. The *Children’s Readers* were soon retitled the *Cyr Readers*.

According to the authors, the stories were a mixture of “entertaining narratives” and “valuable information” (p. iv). Children were to pronounce the words listed at the beginning of the story and also those defined at the end of it. In the “Boy and the Crow,” Carl’s cheese is stolen by the crow while he is chasing a butterfly: it is a lesson against taking what is not yours (p. 23).

In this series, children were taught all the sounds of the letters before moving into text. The pronunciation chart associated letters with sounds that had no relation to a word:
the pronunciation of ch/tch is shown by a picture of a train ("ch, ch, ch"); a woman who is hard of hearing says "eh?" (short e) (pp. 9-10).

21. A Member of the Order of the Holy Cross. *The Metropolitan Fourth Reader: Carefully arranged, in Prose and Verse* . . . New and rev. ed. New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1873. At one point it was said that one child in every seven attended a Catholic school. Readers designed for these children differed in content, but not in methodology, from the mainstream texts. Here a lesson on extreme unction is followed by a poem in which a mother is using birds as metaphors for Christian characteristics (p. 209).

22. Lyman Cobb. *Cobb’s Juvenile Reader No. 3.* Baltimore: Joseph Jewett, 1831. The reader includes factual materials, such as short accounts of chocolate, opium, printing, and the porcupine.

23. David B. Tower. *The Gradual Speller and Complete Enunciator.* Boston: Sanborn, Carter, Bazin & Co., 1845. The Spelling Book was formerly the only text used in teaching a child to read. This Spelling Book now appropriately gives the learner the spelling and pronunciation of the language (p. 7).


25. Swinton’s Word Primer. New York: Ivison, Blakeman, Taylor, [1883]. [title page missing.] The first month of the school year was to be spent learning useful “sight” words such as parts of the head. In the second
month children were asked to pronounce and spell words on the basis of their phonic similarity.

Several 19th-century educators believed that the only logical and scientific way to begin instruction to reading was with an alphabet that had a one-to-one correspondence of letter to sound. There are several explanations for the introduction of the 36-character Deseret alphabet to Utah in 1852. The Mormons wanted to make it simpler for children to learn to read and spell; they wished to address the needs of converts converging on Salt Lake City from many different countries; and Brigham Young, the Mormon leader, was reportedly a terrible speller. Page 5 reads as follows:

*Lesson II. The Pen.*

*We rit with a pen. The pen iz ov grat yioos.*

*We kan mak non owr thawts, bi th yioos ov the pen.*

*Hwen we wish too tawk with our frendz hoo liv far awa, we ma sit at hom, and tawk with them bi menz ov the pen, and tel them al we wish them to no. Hwen we hav lurnd to red, we shud also lern to rit.*

From Item 26
Case 3: Literature first:
sentence and story methods (1883-1925)

By the 1880s, educators had become concerned about emphasizing understanding in beginning reading instruction. They were convinced that this could only occur by using sentential text in silent reading activities. In response, "sentence" and "story method" readers appeared.

Another important influence on textbook content was Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard University, who attacked readers for their lack of literary merit. "I object to them because they are not real literature; they are but scraps of literature . . . ." His campaign significantly influenced the content of readers, which now turned to fables, myths, and fairy stories for the early grades, and more advanced literature for the later grades.

This sentence-method reader states that "This little book . . . is to be read by the children and not to them by the teacher" (p.3).

Arnold also demonstrates the sentence approach. A picture (a red apple) is presented to the class for discussion, followed by a printed statement on the blackboard: "This is a red apple." Sentences are then examined by words (apple, see), then examined by letters (a, s).

The methodology of this series is implied in its title. This is an early example of colored illustrations, for which a limited palette is used.

This series makes early use of full color for many of its illustrations.


The story method undergirds this work, but it is one of the first readers to feature a “vocabulary” of words at the end of the book—to be learned as sight words. There are no longer any vocabulary restrictions.

Norton was convinced that selection of content, not methodology, was the primary solution in teaching beginning reading. The aim of the Heart of Oak series was to nourish “the growing intelligence of the child...with selected portions of the best literature” (p. vi).

There are no children in this “companion” primer. All the stories feature talking animals. The stories are rhythmic and repetitive. (Today we would call them “predictable.”) The primer is an example of the story approach.
The *Heath Readers* offered easy, interesting, and carefully graded reading material, the "best and most suggestive pictures," and verses for memorization known as "memory gems."

Teachers were told how to drill children on the recognition of words (by position, by comparison). Once these were learned as sight words, the guide introduced phonetics.

The Progressive Road series invoked the progressive educational movement in its title while using the "classics of childhood" as its texts. The first reader has nursery stories with repetitive refrains.

The directions to teachers provide an early example of a whole word to phonics approach still in use in many basal reading series today. Flash cards were an important feature of the procedure. The directions accompanying the story of the "Little Red Hen" (one of the most frequently used stories of the period) instruct the teacher to teach the sound "p" from pig.
Case 4: An Example of Textbook Evolution: Dick and Jane

The evolution of readers from about 1914 to the 1940s is best seen in the basal series published by Scott, Foresman. This series became the most widely used reading series for another three decades. One feature of the series was the reduction of the number of words children learned at each grade level.

39. William H. Elson and Christine Keck. Elson Grammar School Reader: Book Four. Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1909. This series contained a blend of traditional stories (to elevate taste and judgment) along with the civic concerns of the Progressives. The traditional component is evident here with the inclusion of Longfellow’s “Evangeline.”


42. William S. Gray and May Hill Arbuthnot. Basic Readers: Curriculum and Foundation Program: Streets and Roads. Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1946. In the 1930s, Gray took over from Runkel, and in the following decade was joined by May Arbuthnot, who would go on to author a well-known book on reading and children’s literature.
SPOT'S KITTENS

Spot is my cat.
She is black and white.
Come, Spot, come!
I like Spot.
Spot likes me.


44. Lina M. Miller. Play Days with Billy and Betty. Chicago: Lyons and Carnahan, 1933. Compare the use of silhouettes and limited color by Lyons and Carnahan to the more expensive colored illustrations used by Scott, Foresman.

“This book is based on the belief that interesting material is the most important factor in learning to read” (p.5). A word list is included in the back of the book, and the teacher’s guide contains scripted lesson plans that include telling a story, dramatizing the story, and developing words and sentences. “Phonetics” consists of linking sounds to letters. Spot first appears as a cat.


In 1930 Elson teamed up with Gray to produce a totally packaged basal reading program.


This commemorative booklet was published as part of Scott, Foresman’s centennial. It has excerpts from several of the primers.


Since the basal reader market was a lucrative one, other basal series were developed. Few demonstrated the mass appeal and consistent strength of the Scott, Foresman series.

The Curriculum Foundation Series led the way for many of the postwar generation of readers. These series contained teachers’ guides, workbooks, and related and supplementary texts.


The 1960 National Society for the Study of Education yearbook noted Gray’s death. In that same year, Hugh Foresman, the remaining founder of Scott, Foresman died also. Their shared legacy remained.


Just as with the Deseret alphabet developed a century earlier, the Initial Teaching Alphabet (i.t.a.) was also developed to make it simpler for children to learn to read and spell.

