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Reading Bear, a Free Online “Systematic Phonics” Tutorial, Launches

Resource Edited by Wikipedia and WatchKnowLearn Creator Larry Sanger

October 31, 2011 – An innovative, systematic phonics tutorial, free to all, made its debut online today. Reading Bear (ReadingBear.org) was unveiled by its Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Larry Sanger—best known as co-founder of Wikipedia—after nearly a year of development.

The site is a nonprofit project of WatchKnowLearn (WatchKnowLearn.org) and supported by an anonymous benefactor via the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi (CFNM.org). This benefactor has a long-standing goal to use technology to better the education of poor children.

Reading Bear is the first free reading site online that takes students systematically through all—not just a selection—of the main phonics principles, using innovative multi-media presentations. The presentations are a novel hybrid of videos, PowerPoint presentations, and ebooks.

“Highlighting text as sounds are pronounced and using lots of examples and visuals allows students to infer phonics rules naturally and painlessly, without inflicting worksheets or unnecessary jargon on them,” Sanger said. “I think their pronunciation will improve as well.”

About 50 presentations are planned and should appear in the coming months. These will give the Reading Bear treatment to over 1,200 words and introduce all the main phonics rules.

Unlike some phonics programs, Reading Bear focuses heavily on word meanings. For each word, the presentations show a picture, a sentence, and a video, all helping to explain the word’s meaning.

Each presentation comes in seven different versions, the longest being around 15 minutes. Among the optional settings are videos of the word spoken as they are displayed and read.

The project was supported by a generous in-kind grant of media from Shutterstock, Inc. Volunteers from around the world also helped edit the content.

The project had its start when WatchKnowLearn’s benefactor saw a video of Sanger’s son, then four years old, reading at a very advanced level. He asked Sanger to create a free online reading program.

“Reading Bear is a digitized version of the flashcard method I used with my son,” Sanger said.

“While it is mainly intended for kids learning to read at the normal ages of 4-7, the simplicity of the program has allowed me and others to use Reading Bear with younger children.” The flashcards Sanger used with his son are available free on his blog (<http://www.larrysanger.org/reading.html>).

What’s up next for Reading Bear? “I hope to use it as a platform to create a free multimedia encyclopedia for little kids,” Sanger said. “I’m amazed at what tiny tots are capable of learning.”

Related items of interest:

- [Introductory video](#)
- [About page \(includes Credits\)](#)
- [Getting Started \(includes Q&A\)](#)

Items of personal interest:

- Blog post: "[Why build a site that teaches children to read?](#)"
- [A video of my son reading at ages 2-4 \(Reading Bear is a greatly souped-up version of the flashcards I made for him, starting at age 22 months\)](#)
- [My essay on "baby reading" \(from last December\)](#)