

How I Taught My Son To Read

Using Manicure Scissors

When my son was barely three and said to me, "What does that word say, Mom?" I knew it was time to get out the manicure scissors and teach him to read.

First we stapled together 14 sheets of typing paper turned long ways. The "cover page" of this book said, "Matt's Wonderful Words" in

GREAT

BIG

HUGE

PRINT.

While he decorated the cover by tracing this lettering with sniffy markers, I fetched a glue stick, some Scotch tape, a couple of magazines and the manicure scissors.

Just as I sat down with the goodies, Matt said in shocked tones, "Mom, there aren't any WORDS in this book!" I had been reading to him since the day he popped out, so this must have been horrifying to him.

"No, no yet, Matt. But soon it will be filled with Matt's Wonderful Words!" He beamed. We sat side by side and looked through the magazine until he came to an ad and he said, "Jell-O". I handed him the sharp pointy manicure scissors and he cut out the word. Page after page, he scoured the magazine for words he knew so he could use those dangerous and desirable manicure scissors. After he had a small pile of a half dozen words on the table, I asked him, "How should we arrange this book? Should we put all the food words on one page and toy words on another page? Or

should we put them in ABC order?"

He chose the latter, so at the top and bottom outside edge of each page I wrote Aa, Bb and so on in huge red letters. He waited eagerly to put his new wonderful words on the page. The first one he tried, he glue stucked the "face" instead of the "back" so ended up using the Scotch tape. He happily glued words onto the "mother pages" as he called them. That first session yielded eight words!

Next day, he again said "the magic words" and I again produced the coveted manicure scissors from their secret hiding place. He found six words. After he glued them in, I suggested we read his book out loud. By the time he got to Dd, he began reading the letters *and* the words as I held my finger under each. Then he used his own finger and we were off and running, plunging headlong into early literacy.

In addition to adding new and interesting words to his Wonderful Book each day, we read five or six "real" books. Then one day he said "I want to say a story and you write it". So we did: one sentence to a page in big red letters. He drew the pictures.

I made the cover with fancy letters and sat with him in my lap reading aloud while he pointed to each word. If he went the wrong direction, I read it that way and he quickly said, "Oh!" and started the line over on the left.

We made homemade books often, some four pages, some much longer. We wrote "Vegetable, Vegetable What Do You See?" based on Bill Martin, Jr's classic "Brown Bear Brown Bear", but we used pictures out of the Burpee catalog. We penned a story about the day he sliced open his finger on a bag at McD's and almost had to get stitches, adding a Band-Aid™ at the back of our version of the Little Golden Book, "Dr. Dan the Band-Aid Man".

He made up a story about a bear named Matt whose tummy got all the fur rubbed off so he grew new fur using honey and fur seeds. He glued dill seeds on the page. We made a copy of the book for each grandmother, complete with seeds and autograph.

One day, he said in frustration, "Mom, I can't read this!" and handed me "The Rainbow Goblins", which he knew practically word for word.

"Of course not, Matt! They made the print too small." So we rewrote it, in big print, a one sentence summary under each beloved picture of the greedy color-gobbling goblins, Scotch taping Matt's version over the too-small text.

We doctored many of his favorite stories this way, always with suitable complaints about the silly old publishers making the print too small. Then, one day he came upon "Frog and Toad Are Friends". He opened it. He stood up clutching the book in both hands like a treasure map.

"Hey! I can read this!" And he did, cover to cover. From then on, he'd open a book to see if his inexperienced eyeballs could process the print and if not, he put the book back.

We started "The Books I Have Read" list that day. Soon it was filled with dozens of stories, all with large print. "The King Who Rained" by Fred Gwynne was an all-time favorite because it had my name on the cover as well as huge print and hilarious pictures.

From that day to this, Matt has been a dangerous kid to

take to a bookstore. He hated giving his beloved stories back to the library so we bought many of them. In first grade, if things got boring, he just kept going in "Ramona the Brave" which he had stashed in his desk.

He never lost his early love of reading, and until he was ten, he never knew where I hid the manicure scissors.

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