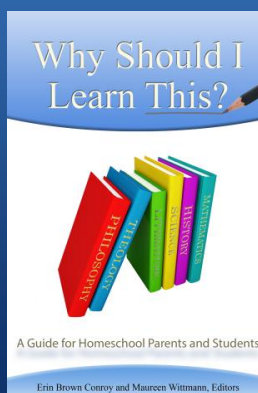


Why Should I Learn This?

Edited and Compiled by Erin Brown Conroy and Maureen Wittmann



What is *Why Should I Learn This?*

Maureen Wittmann

In my everyday work at Homeschool Connections, parents often ask why they should take time out of their busy schedule to teach subjects such as philosophy or formal logic. Students sometimes ask why they should dedicate their energy to learn subjects such as algebra or history. This is why I am excited about this book—it demonstrates the importance of learning specific school subjects. With 30-plus contributing authors, readers get a wide variety of homeschooling perspectives.

The purpose of *Why Should I Learn This* is not to tell parents how to homeschool. Nor does it dictate what program or curricula they should use. Instead, this book is designed to provide inspiration and encouragement in order to help parents create a homeschool where learning takes place in a vibrant environment.

Below is a sample chapter from *Why Should I Learn This*. Note that this chapter includes footnotes within the actual book.

Sample Table of Contents

Jean Hoeft, MA	Why Should I Learn Algebra?
Joseph Pearce	Why Should I Learn Shakespeare?
Carol Reynolds, PhD	Why Should I Learn Music History?
Jean Rioux, PhD	Why Should I Learn Philosophy?
Alison Stanley, JD	Why Should I Learn the Constitution?



If you'd like to purchase *Why Should I Learn This*, click here for the print book: [Behold Publications](#)

Click here for the eBook: [Amazon](#)

What are the reviewers saying about *Why Should I Learn This?*

“Here's the answer to many of the Why's you (or your children) have asked about education. Whether you homeschool or not, this book is a treasury of well-crafted answers that will leave you with answers and, amazingly, even entertained!”

—Sarah Reinhard, Author and Blogger, SnoringScholar.com

"*Why Should I Learn This* is a reminder that education is not merely a stepping stone into the work force, but a good in and of itself. Education is an important facet of encouraging our children to flourish as human beings made in the image of God. I found myself nodding along as the contributors articulate what makes the subjects I love so valuable. They also challenge me to look at the subjects I've never been inclined to with new appreciation. *Why Should I Learn This* will inspire you to dive into learning right along with your children."

—Haley Stewart, Author and Blogger, CarrotsForMichaelmass.com

“*Why Should I Learn This* is a treasure trove of information that can equip a homeschooler for years to come. I am impressed by the organization of the book, by the remarkable contributors, and by the depth of knowledge shared.”

—Rosario Reilly, founder AquinasLearning.org



Jennifer Fulwiler
Author and Blogger
ConversionDiary.com

“Every homeschooling parent has faced the question: “Why are we doing this?” Whether it's asked by a grumpy child or simply a feeling that lingers in the air at the end of a frustrating day, it's inevitable that sometimes you (or your children) will wonder if what you're learning really matters. That's why this book is such a great resource: With beautiful writing about the relevance of each subject, *Why Should I Learn This* will rekindle the passion for education—not just for your students, but for you, too.”

Great Authors!

Why Should I Learn This is a compilation of over 30 authors: Christian Ohnimus; Ana Braga-Henebry, MA; Alison Stanley, JD; Ed L. Rivet II, MPA; Joan Stromberg; Phillip Campbell III; Allison Gingras, MEd; Emily Henry; Irma Luz Schmitt, MEd; Suchi Myjak, MS; Mary Ellen Barrett; Nancy Carpentier Brown; Henry Russell, PhD; Dayspring Brock, MHum; Cay Gibson; Joseph Pearce; Jean Hoeft, MA; Mary Gildersleeve; Carol Reynolds, PhD; Michele Quigley; Margot Davidson, MEd; Erin Brown Conroy, MA, MFA; Robert Gotcher, PhD; Jean Rioux, PhD; Dave Palmer, MTS; Mary Daly; Matthew Watkins, MS; MacBeth Derham; Monica Ashour, MTS, MHum; Gary Michuta; Mike Aquilina; Alicia VanHecke; Lisa Mladinich; Maureen Wittmann.



SAMPLE CHAPTER

Why Should Your Child Learn to Read with Phonemics?

By Erin Brown Conroy, MA, MFA

Reading is critical—to our child's learning, to performing well in school, and to succeeding in life.

If you want your child to learn to read faster, smoother, and with 100 percent comprehension, then this chapter is for you. Though it's a little longer, the information here is what you, as a parent, want to have in your understanding of reading, to teach and serve your child well. It's not an exaggeration to say that what's in this chapter is the absolute, critical foundation to teaching a child to read to the best of his or her ability.

I strongly believe that every single child can learn to read well—and if our child struggles, then the problem is not with the child. And parents, it's not with you, either; it's not your fault. You can only teach what is handed to you and what is available. The problem is with the curriculum and teaching methodology. As a curriculum developer for decades, I can be that harsh (because that essential assessment is on me, too). Children's lives can be devastated from not learning to read with competency and good feelings attached. And when we don't have the materials that reflect what truly works, then shame on us, curriculum developers. Parents and children deserve more.

I don't believe that any of us would argue: Reading is critical—to our child's learning, to performing well in school, and to succeeding in life. In case we have the urge to skim over the seriousness of learning to read with confidence...

- “Millions of children and adults in the United States have trouble reading, and these difficulties can lead to short- and long-term problems in other areas.”
- Illiteracy and crime are closely related.
- Low literacy is strongly related to unemployment.
- “Approximately 36 percent of the nation's fourth graders cannot read at a basic level . . . [while] most poor readers never catch up over the years.” Why can't over a third of the children read at a basic level? Read on and you'll understand why. (And as I said, it's not their fault.)

Reading struggles hijack academics—and kids' attitudes toward learning—as a whole. If you have a child who is struggling (or has struggled), you know what I mean. When struggling with reading, confidence and self-esteem plummet—holding the potential to harmfully influence a child's entire future of learning. Because of its huge impact on the future, if your child struggles with reading today, then now is the time to do something about it. If your child hasn't started reading yet, then study this chapter for what you need to know, to help your child succeed right from the start ... because so much rests on reading

(and the attitudes developed toward reading).

Not all reading curricula are created equal. As a curriculum developer, I'll tell you, there's a lot of junk being passed off as good teaching material and it simply isn't. (Statistics speak for themselves, don't they?)

So how do I know what's good and what isn't? The first step is to know how reading works—so that you can identify what's true and what isn't, in the reading materials that you consider for your child.

Teaching reading is about two things: content (the actual how-it-works) and methodology (how to present the information to the child). Content is about getting the correct information. Correct information is critical. A great body of research exists today, showing what works. Unfortunately, many (if not most) reading curricula haven't caught up with what we know to be true. I want you to know the correct information. But before you read on, I have an important, foundational question.

Do you know how we learn language? We learn language by sound. Little children first learn to speak a language by listening. When we first hear language, it's a blur—one continuous string of sounds. But as we develop and grow, we learn to hear sounds in separate groups and pieces. Then, slowly, we decode the sounds into meaning. We learn that mama is our source of love, the center of our universe. Then we learn to imitate the sounds that represent her: Mama becomes mmm or mmmaaaa. Eventually, we speak, mama. As each separate representation in our language becomes clearer, we divide the long string of sound into its little pieces: words. Language sound-based.

“What is this word, phonemics?” Phonemics is about studying the structure of language in its pieces of sound. A phoneme is the smallest, most distinct unit of sound in a language. For example, the word man has three distinct sounds: /m/, /a/, and /n/. Each letter in the word man represents a sound, or a phoneme. At its base, teaching reading means learning to decode

English first by sound, by 1) identifying (hearing) a sound and 2) matching a letter (or letter combination) to that sound.

Yes, reading is a code. The code is about assigning pictures (letters or groups of letters) to sounds. The most logical and pedagogical way to teach reading is to make a sound, teach the child to hear and copy the isolated sound

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(phoneme), and then teach the “picture” that we “draw” for the sound (the letters on the page that, together, correspond to the sound).

The picture of one or more letters “stuck together” represents a sound. Once a child understands how language works, we can reverse the process into what we call reading. We have taught the sound; we have assigned the sound a “picture” that represents the sound; and we can look at “pictures” on the printed page (letters or groups of letters) and decode the pictures to their sounds. Please note: Reading is not memorizing whole words, as what many baby reading programs do (which is actually highly damaging to a child’s correct way of thinking about how English works). Baby reading programs that memorize whole words may “work” for a while, but our mind can only memorize so many whole words before it starts substituting and messing with reading in its entirety. No, reading is not memorizing; reading is a logical decoding (and encoding) process.

There are three special rules to sound matching centering on something that I call Sound Pictures. Sound Pictures are either single letters or a group of two or more letters representing a sound. For example, the letter “a” is a Sound Picture. The group of letters “ou” is a Sound Picture. And the group of letters “ough” is a Sound Picture. One letter, two letters, three or four or five...such groups of letters are the foundation for reading. Based on the idea of Sound Pictures, there are rules—or keys—which your child needs to know, in order to learn to read.

1) Sounds can be drawn (written down, or represented) with one letter or many letters. Understanding the idea of Sound Pictures—knowing that one letter or many letters can represent a sound—is a critical concept that a child needs to understand, in order to read well (because it’s a significant part of how English works). We have to be able to know that the clusters of letters exist as one picture, to be able to “see” (visually clump together) letters that represent only one sound, to fully decode what’s on the page.

It may sound like I’m beating the idea of Sound Pictures into the ground, but more than half of the problems that I encounter with children all across the nation and world are about not recognizing Sound Pictures. Children read whole words. Whole words do not serve our children’s ability to decode unknown words. Whether a Sound Picture has two or four letters, when your child reads, he or she must be able to look inside a word and “see” all of the letters that make up the pictures for the sounds of the word.

2) Sound Pictures can be shared among sounds. In other words, one picture (a letter or group of letters) can be used for many sounds. Imagine that a family has three children but only one computer. The kids would have to take turns using the computer; only one child would be “on” the computer at a time. The same thing happens with Sound Pictures (letters or groups of letters): one Sound Picture (computer) is “used” by different sounds (kids) at a time.

For example, let’s imagine that the letter “a” is the computer. The letter “a” can represent (use the sound) /a/ as in “apple”; /o/ as in “father”; A as in “baby”; /e/ as in the name “Evan”; and /u/ as in “America.” Though many sounds can use the “a” picture, only one sound can use the letter at a time.



Meet the Author

Erin Brown Conroy, MA, MFA is a mom of 13 children and has been homeschooling for 30 years. She has taught students individually and in classes, in private colleges and universities, and online in writing, research, leadership, strategic management, interpersonal communication, fine arts, and wellness.

Erin is an author of several non-fiction books, including *Simplified Writing 101: Top Secrets for College Success* and *Twenty Secrets to Success with Your Child*; is the Master Teacher of *Homeschool Connections’ Aquinas Writing Advantage* program.

Erin has a bachelor’s degree in education and master’s degree in rehabilitation from Western Michigan University (WMU). She also has a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative Writing, Genre Fiction, from Western Colorado State University (WCSU), where she’s now completing a second concentration in Screenwriting.

Erin also authored *True North Reading: The Complete Mastery Reading and Spelling Program*—a research-based, hands-on, five-level multisensory learn-to-read program for children ages two to sixteen.

Erin lives in Michigan, homeschooling her youngest four children, who are teens. Online, you can find Erin at www.erinbrownconroy.wordpress.com.

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The one-picture-used-across-many-sounds dynamic happens all over the English language. The group of letters “ou” can be an OW sound, as in “found”; an O sound, as in “soul”; an OO sound, as in “you”; and an /u/ sound, as in “double.”

Another example: The group of letters “ough” can represent the AW sound in “brought”; the OW sound in the word “bough”; the O sound in “though”; the OO sound in “through”; and the UFF sound in “tough” (which is really the “ou” as /u/ and the “gh” as a picture for /f/). When seeing a two letters physically together, side by side on a page, the reader must be able to imagine the two letters as connected into one piece—and then he or she must be able to know the sound that the picture represents. Or, in the case of many letter combinations, be able to know which sound to “try on,” to figure out a word.

3) One sound can be drawn in many different ways. For most of our Sound Pictures, our language doesn’t have a one-to-one correspondence. That means that one sound doesn’t have only one picture assigned to represent it. One sound can be drawn multiple ways.

For example, depending on how a program groups letters into a Sound Picture, the sound for A can be drawn 13 different ways: “a” as in “lady”; “a-e” as in “cake”; “ai” as in “rain”; “ay” as in “play”; “ae” as in “sundae”; “aigh” as in “straight”; “ei” as in “vein”; “eigh” as in “eight”; “ey” as in the exclamation “hey”; “et” as in “ballet”; “ea” as in “great”; “e” as in “Grande Jette” (as in the title of the famous painting by George Seurat); and “ee” as in “Renee.” That’s a lot of pictures for the A sound! Teaching Sound Pictures under the one heading of a single sound (e.g., “these are all of the pictures for the A sound”) is a logical way to teach reading because it flows directly into spelling.

Did you notice the Sound Pictures (above) for the A sound that came from France? Most phonics programs don’t include sounds from other countries. But in our global society, now more than ever, words from different global regions cross over into English. When we teach reading through a visual phonics approach, it’s almost impossible to remember all of the exceptions to the rules, and these foreign pieces, if taught, don’t show up until the upper grades because they don’t “fit” with phonics rules.

With all of its rules, exceptions, and circular approach that doesn’t teach like-sounds together, by the time a child reaches middle-elementary school, phonics is confusing (especially if a child is a movement-oriented learner and not a visual memorizer). But, if we teach all of the Sound Pictures for A together, then your child will remember the sounds and their Sound Pictures as one group—and be able to retrieve the combinations of letters easily, for both reading and spelling.

Does this make your head spin? It does to beginning

readers, too. But it doesn’t have to. There’s a different way to teach reading that makes so much more sense—and research bears it out.

“How do we learn to read, really?” Well, the problem with a phonics approach is that it’s a VISUAL approach. Phonics approaches reading by teaching the picture first, and then saying that the picture “makes a sound.” That’s not true. If it were, then we wouldn’t have all of the exceptions, as above. Aha! This is why we have all of the phonics “rules”! The visual approach breaks down—creating multiple rules and pieces to learn.

So know this: Teaching by phonics is, at its base, backwards. Any reading system that starts with teaching the name of a picture and then assigns a sound to the picture is backwards (because the way that human beings learn language as a whole is from sound to picture, not picture to sound). We need to teach reading the same way that we learn language: Through teaching sounds first, and then assigning Sound Pictures that represent the sounds.

We’re back to the foundation: Our language is made up of phonemes, or letters representing sounds. Learning to read is all about learning to decode different letter combinations, or Sound Pictures, that represent a sound.

“So—is phonics different from phonemics?” Yes. The faster and more correct way to teach reading is to teach a sound (“this is the sound, /a/”) and then to teach the picture for the sound (“this is how we draw the sound” . . . and you draw the letter “a”).

“Why do people struggle with reading?” Aside from the approach being backwards (from a visual approach, not a sound-based approach), here are some more reasons that your child may struggle to read:

- **Problem #1:** The Sound Pictures are not grouped together in easy-access groups. As shown above, it’s important to teach like sounds together, at the same time. If your program teaches the way to draw the A sound in grade one (e.g. “ai” in “rain”), then another way to draw the A sound in grade two (e.g. “a-e” as in “cake”), then another way to draw the A sound in grade four (e.g. “ei” in “vein”), then the learning is spread out too far; your child does not have an easy-access memory group from which to organize and recall the sound (and its picture). If at all possible, teach all of the ways to draw one sound together, at the same time. And have a way to visually organize and remember the Sound Pictures together.

- **Problem #2:** The teaching is all visually presented. Most reading programs are visually presented. But not only do we learn through our eyes (what we see)—we also learn through listening and talking (auditory ways) and our bodies (kinesthetic, with vestibular, proprioceptive, and tactile ways). If your program is all about charts, pictures, flashcards, and pages, then your program is teaching visually. We need to make learning hands-on, with a multi-learning style approach—using the eyes, ears, and body movement. Don’t believe the lie that your child needs to work with paper and pencil, in order to read (or “do

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school correctly”). Using manipulatives and moveable pieces, and incorporating talking and playing games, is actually the key to higher memory. Teach and practice concepts away from pencil and paper.

- **Problem #3:** The teaching is not broken down into small enough tasks. If your program puts too much information out there too soon, then your child becomes overwhelmed and gives up. Even the smallest signs of overwhelm (discomfort, aversion) need our attention. When we present learning in little right sized pieces that make sense, our child will not feel overwhelmed. He or she will truly understand the concept and will be open to—and excited about—learning more Sound Pieces, words, and strings of sentences.

- **Problem #4:** The new learning isn’t repeated enough. We need to repeat the information in many different ways, through our eyes, ears, and body (with fun!) and not move ahead until a piece is comfortably mastered. Too many how-to-read books and programs don’t provide enough simple practice before moving on to a new concept. If your child doesn’t fully understand an idea—and doesn’t show mastery in immediate, confident recall—then don’t move on. Find more ways to practice the concept.

“**Are we teaching reading right?**” No. Most programs are not. On top of everything listed above ...

- Most reading programs teach capital letters first. But look at this page. How many letters are capitals, and how many are lower case? Most of what we read is lower case. So why are we teaching capital letters first? (It doesn’t make sense.) Teaching capital letters first actually slows down your child’s learning—and reading. Teach lower case letters’ pictures and sounds first.

- Most reading programs teach beginning letter sounds with “uh” on the end of the letter—buh, cuh, duh—which hinders the ability to blend sounds together. Teach pure sounds—without an “uh” sound on the end.

- Most reading programs don’t work with fluency. Fluency is the ability to read sounds together without stopping or hopping along in bursts of sound, for blending a word. It’s important to first know that when learning to blend sounds, holding out the sounds as long as possible (not “hopping” with saying the sounds in short bursts) is important for fluency later on. And second, we actually read by seeing Sound Pictures within words (the groups of letters that represent a separate sound) first—and then blending the sounds together. So fluency is influenced by your child’s ability to see the Sound Pictures within words. So a good reading program allows your child to practice seeing Sound Pictures in a word before moving forward.

And there’s more. Fluency isn’t just about learning words and then sticking them together in a string to read.

(Eating one bite of a meal is quite different than taking 20 bites.) Fluency has a process. First, fluency is learned through stacking words in successive amounts: one word, two words, three words, and so on. Second, fluency is gained by using all known, decodable words in a row, building competency with confidence by now having any “surprise” words that we have to “decode” by guessing, using “context clues.” Because non-soundoutable (or not-learned-the-Sound-Picture-yet) words break the how-language-works rules, and our brain has to stop and search for answers with “reading in context.” Reading with the “context clues” method does not build decoding competency or fluency at an early age (when fluency is so important to reading confidence).

To gain fluency, it’s important to read sentences with words where your child has already learned the Sound Pictures (he/she is able to decode all that’s on the inside of the words). Introduce Sound Pictures in single words, practice competency, and then string those words together—without “new” words.

- Most reading programs are presented through pencil and paper (or a computer screen). However, your child (and every child) learns best through play and games, not by sitting in front of a worksheet or screen. Games and fun trigger emotional connections that give our child a joy in reading. Many children hate to read because it’s downright boring—and I don’t blame them one bit. Young children learn best (and remember more) when using sand trays, pudding, whipped cream, and any other sensory medium. Older children also learn better (faster and with higher memory) through hands-on manipulation of objects, texture, sound, and games. Even when teaching students in graduate level programs, I’ve seen time and again how changing only-visually-presented material into sound and hands-on movement helps the information to stick. Especially for individuals who are physically oriented, we need to incorporate movement and play into the teaching of reading.

So if your child struggles to read, there’s a good chance it’s not your fault. You must find a reading program that uses the phonemic—or sound based—approach, an approach that is sensitive to your child’s learning style (using more than just pencil and paper), and is void of the errors above. There are only a handful of programs out there that are complete and use research. Aside from True North Reading, there’s a program in the UK that uses many research-based concepts. And other programs, such as Reading Eggs, use small parts of the correct methods of teaching.

You may be wondering, why did my child start out reading just fine, but now he’s struggling? Because he or she does not know how to decode fully, most children who struggle have memorized whole words. There are only so many whole words that our mind can memorize, before it starts substituting words that look like the original word but are slightly off. Such substitutions are warning signs that your

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child isn't decoding English correctly—that he or she doesn't completely know the code or the Sound Pictures. To solve substitution issues, back up and teach your child the Sound Pictures, and have your child use a finger to keep his or her eyes on the words to decode sounds in order (not to look at a whole word).

Phonics also notoriously breaks down around the late-second grade and third grade level. Especially if your phonics program isn't complete, your child's struggles may show up then.

Finally, children who don't understand one of the three key rules to how reading English works can fake their way through a few grade levels. But as the new knowledge piles onto the old, shaky foundation, the child's misunderstanding increases with time. It's like trying to build a house of cards on a flimsy foundation. At some point, the card house falls. So, again, get your child into a sound-based program that helps your child understand how reading truly works—and presents reading to your child in a way that he or she will truly understand. We have fabulous minds, created by God to understand—and if your child is given the chance, he or she will learn.

That is, unless your child is discouraged ... because discouragement turns into, I won't try anymore. Have you seen your child give up? Children who have "failed" at something don't want to go back and work more on an activity that brings more "failure." (We all respond to failure that way, don't we?) The child who holds an emotional aversion to reading is a hurt child, fearful of failing again. So re-learning reading the right way, teaching your child in little

steps, with a great amount of success, builds confidence that leads to the enjoyment of reading again. If you teach using the methods outlined here, your child should feel competent and get back a spark for learning.

And, one last thing: I don't have a child who struggles with reading . . . but she can't spell! What's going on?

Reading and spelling are two different skills: Reading is decoding and spelling is encoding. Students who read well but can't spell have, most likely, memorized words. Struggling spellers, too, need to go back and learn the relationship between a sound and its Sound Picture. A child who understands the 13 ways to draw the A sound can choose one of the Sound Pictures; the choices are finite. But if he or she doesn't know what Sound Pictures to choose from, then spelling becomes pure memorization.

Memorization is boring and, for spelling, ineffective. "Copy these words 20 times" has only a fraction of the effectiveness of "sound this word out by its Sound Pictures"—while using hands-on, game-based learning that's emotionally enjoyable.

Okay, I see now how to teach reading the best way. But my child started with phonics; can I switch over to a phonemic approach? Absolutely! I've seen older teens and even adults relearn reading phonemically—and the results have been phenomenal. It's never too late to do the right thing, for your child's sake. And phonemics works. All across the globe, I'm hopeful that new sound-based programs will crop up, sparked by Diane McGuinness and others' research. I encourage you to be discerning, to find out more, and to make learning to read a priority this year—so that every other part of learning falls into place.



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