

# Study Questions for *The Roadmap to Literacy: Waldorf Teachers and Waldorf Faculties*

Dear Waldorf Teachers and Waldorf Faculties,

The following questions are offered for study groups for *The Roadmap to Literacy: A Guide to Teaching Language Arts in Waldorf Schools Grades 1 through 3*. They can be taken up in faculty meetings or in small groups.

**Instructions:** Read one or more chapters of *The Roadmap to Literacy* and discuss one or more of the following questions. These questions will help guide your discussions and help you get maximum value from *The Roadmap to Literacy*.

**Note:** You do not need to answer every question. Use these ideas to facilitate a good conversation.

## Chapter 1.1: Why is Teaching Reading Such a Struggle?

1. Have you found teaching reading to be a struggle? Share your experiences. Highlight the areas that have made it difficult (or easy) to teach reading.
2. Do you speak a foreign language? Comment on the ease (or difficulty) of reading in that language compared to English.
3. How do you currently schedule practice for literacy skills? How is it working?

## Chapter 1.2: Cracking the Code: Reading and the Brain

1. Which stage is/are your students in: pictorial, phonological, or orthographic?
2. How easy or difficult was it for your students to recognize the alphabetic principle?

## Chapter 1.3: Why is English So Complicated?

1. English is a three-layered cake. Think of some examples of words for the Alphabetic Layer, the Pattern Layer, and the Meaning Layer.
2. Do you have difficulty with spelling (or did you have difficulty when you were a student)? If so, which layer(s) give/gave you difficulty and why?

## Chapter 1.4: How Students Recapitulate the History of Written Language

1. Compare and contrast the three different types of phonological awareness:
  - a. Word
  - b. Syllable
  - c. Phoneme
2. Why is it important to consider writing when planning to teach reading?

## **Chapter 1.5: The Roadmap to Literacy: The Five Phases of Learning to Read and Spell**

1. Explore the difference between each phase:
  - a. Emergent Phase
  - b. Phonemic Awareness Phase
  - c. Pattern Phase
  - d. Syllable Phase
  - e. Latin/Greek Phase
2. Make up a word family (see page 28). How would a student in each phase approach reading words in a word family? What are the drawbacks of word families in the Emergent Phase and Phonemic Awareness Phase?

## **Chapter: 1.6**

1. Before you read the book, did you have an opinion on which reading method is best (i.e., Whole Language, Phonics, Look-Say)?
2. What are the benefits of each type of reading method? What are the drawbacks?
3. How can using the phases help you determine which method(s) to use?

## **Chapter 2.1: The Wisdom of the Waldorf Approach to Teaching**

1. Discuss one or more topics (e.g., teacher and student as authors, etc.). How is this topic useful in the classroom?
2. Do you have an inner work program for yourself? (see chapter 2.1 #14) Share how it is going and discuss ways teachers can take up their own development (and why it is important to do so).

## **Chapter 2.2: Responsible Innovations and Sacred Nothings**

1. Share your experience with any sacred nothing presented in the chapter.
2. Discuss: How might sacred nothings develop and why do they spread?
3. Are there other sacred nothings you have encountered?

## **Chapter 2.3: The Waldorf Schedule**

1. What are the benefits (and drawbacks) of the Waldorf schedule in your experience?
2. Does your school have Practical Life Skills Blocks in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, long circles in any grades 1–3, or truncated schedules in grades 1 and 2? Discuss how they impact the curriculum.

**Chapter 2.4: Teaching Practices:** Which teaching practices have you used? Share your experiences.

## **Chapter 3.1: The Alphabet**

1. Why is the alphabet the beginning of learning to read and write? (How do other literacy skills such as sight words depend on mastery of the alphabet?)
2. Have you taught the letter A as AH! (Broad A)? How did it go?
3. Look at the archetypal vowels on page 80. Steiner says that the sounds are somewhat differently connected with feeling in English than they are in German. Which soul gestures do you think apply to English and which do not? If you think a sound has a different soul gesture, what is it?

4. Discuss one or more of the sacred nothings in chapter 3.1 #3. Which do you agree with and which do you disagree with?
5. Which words would make good anchor word for the letter D: drum, dog, duck, drip? Why or why not?
6. Consult Table 3.1.8. American English Vowel Sounds and Corresponding Emotions (page 94). Critique the table, especially if you speak Australian, British, Canadian English, etc. Add to it and strike out examples that do not apply.

### **Chapter 3.2: Handwriting**

1. Why does handwriting matter, in your opinion?
2. Discuss when a students should type and the use of technology (computer, tablets, cell phones, etc.).
3. What is your experience of using art supplies such as colored pencils and crayons for writing? (Have everyone try writing with stick crayons and then graphite pencils. Discuss.)
4. Choose one or more sacred nothings and discuss if you agree or disagree with it and any experiences you have had.
5. Have you ever tried to improve your handwriting? Discuss.

### **Chapter 3.3: Phonological and Phonemic Awareness**

1. Do you have full phonemic awareness for each sound in a word? Try segmenting these words into their separate phonemes and then discuss:
  - a. Eight (2)
  - b. Grind (5)
  - c. Schlep (4)
  - d. Deceive (5)
  - e. Though (2)
  - f. Tricked (5)
  - g. Ghost (4)
2. Try 1–3 exercises from table 3.3.2 (e.g., hand spelling, finger spelling, etc.). (page 130)
3. Try stretchable fabric with the following three words: fish, lap, boot. What did you notice? Rank the three words in ease of stretching.
4. Phonemic awareness is the most important thing for students to develop. Discuss why.

### **Chapter 3.4: Encoding and Decoding**

1. Why is it easier for beginning students to encode than decode?
2. Why are phonics rules for the middle of the Phonemic Awareness Phase and not the Emergent Phase or the beginning of the Phonemic Awareness Phase?
3. Why can't you just start teaching phonics rules at the beginning of 1<sup>st</sup> Grade?
4. Contrast the types of decoding in the Phonemic Awareness Phase and the Pattern Phase (see tables 3.4.4 and 3.4.6). (pages 156 and 159)

### **Chapter 3.5: Symbol Imagery**

1. Some people can use symbol imagery and some cannot see the letters. Can you? If so, how many letters can you see? (Try imagining the word *encyclopedia*.)
2. How does symbol imagery help spelling?
3. Why is symbol imagery more important in English than in German or Italian?

### **Chapter 3.6: Sight Words**

1. Why does English have sight words?
2. Contrast different sight word lists such as the Dolch list and the Frye list.
3. Make up your own sight word chant or sight word song and share it with the group. (Note: you can use familiar melodies such as Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.)

### **Chapter 3.7: Concept Imagery**

1. Discuss your mental pictures (concept imagery) for a beloved children's book you have all read (ex. *Little House on the Prairie*, *Huck Finn*, *Anne of Green Gables*, etc.) Discuss how it was if you saw the movie before or afterward.
2. Use the structure words in table 3.7.1 to describe a scene from the book in question one. (page 196)
3. Play a round of Grandmother's Suitcase (page 198).

### **Chapter 3.8: Language and Reading Comprehension**

1. Make up factual recall questions for a popular fairy tale or book. Then make up HOTS questions.
2. Do a free rendering for a story. Limit yourself to 10–15 minutes. Describe how it was for you, both to do the free rendering and to have to do it in a limited amount of time.

### **Chapter 3.9: Spelling**

1. Try spelling a word using the four types of spelling (page 216): chanting, encoding, visualizing, and encoding meaning. Suggested words: television, universe, neighborhood.
2. Why is it necessary to teach spelling?

### **Chapter 3.10: Speech**

1. Does speech help the development of phonemic awareness? How?
2. What are the pros and cons of a class play? Should they be part of grades 1–3?

### **Chapter 3.11: Grammar**

1. Why should students learn grammar?
2. Why can't Waldorf teachers in English-speaking schools use Steiner's indications for grammar?
3. What is your relationship to grammar? How were you taught grammar? How well do you know it?
4. Use the word *blanket* as a noun, verb, and adjective. Discuss what makes it a noun, verb, or adjectives in the context of each sentence.

### **Chapter 3.12: Vocabulary**

1. What is the difference between the spelling list and the vocabulary list? Why can't they be the same?
2. Explore an idiom such as *A New York minute* or *monkey business*. What is the difference between its literal meaning and its figurative meaning?

### Chapter 3.13: Kid Writing

1. Have you had any experience with kid writing or invented spelling? How did it go?
2. How does kid writing help literacy.
3. Teach a mini lesson around this kid writing assignment: *Mi brudr is not kid. He pokt me!* (Translation: My brother is not kind. He poked me!)
4. Which phase is this student in? How can you tell?
  - a. *Dad fod me in the kn* (Translation: Dad found me in the kitchen.)
  - b. *Trace is my best frend and I love her!* (Tracy is my best friend and I love her!)
  - c. *The elf had to lepe over the scairy brige of deth and cross to the majic kingdom.* (The elf had to leap over the scary bridge of death and cross to the magic kingdom.)

### Chapter 3.14: Composition

1. What are some of the key differences between composition and kid writing?
2. What are the benefits of teaching rudimentary paragraph writing in third grade?
3. How could you transition from kid writing to composition?
4. Why is it so critical for Waldorf students to have composition skills before starting fourth grade?

### Chapter 3.15: Reading

1. What are the academic, social, and economic consequences of reading problems?
2. Why do English-speaking teachers have to take a more proactive approach to reading than German-speaking teachers?
3. Why are reading groups better than whole class readers in grades 1–3?
4. Try writing your own decodable text. Brainstorm rhyming words using the Rhyming Rime Machine (table 3.15.2 page 342). Then star brainstorming plots as a group. (Bonus: Write a short reader as a group or as homework.)

### Section Four: Phonics Rules (Chapters 4.1–4.4)

1. Why wait to teach phonics rules? Why not do it at the beginning of first grade?
2. Why should you introduce a new phonics rule when 80% have mastered it 80% of the time (80/80 rule)? Why not wait until 100% have it?
3. Why do students need symbol imagery of at least four letters for phonics rules such as Silent E?
4. Why is it a best practice to teach inflection endings multiple times and in different ways in different phases?
5. Explore the uncommon vowel teams in Table 4.2.3. Discuss which you think are worth teaching and why. (pages 398)
6. Explore homophones in Table 4.2.5. Which are worth teaching in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade? Come up with an example of a creative way to teach a homophone. (page 402)

7. Explore the six types of syllables on page 421. Identify the syllable types in these words: po-ta-to; whif-fle; lac-tose; par-ti-cu-lar.

### **Chapter 5.1: Planning a Curriculum**

1. Discuss the idea of preparing an entire curriculum over the summer (pages 426–427).
2. Do you have a truncated schedule? If yes, how can you change it? How can you make due in the meantime and still get in daily practice?

### **Chapter 5.2–5.4: First through Third Grade Curriculum Plans**

1. In your opinion, which block would it be best to start with in each grade: math or language arts? Why?
2. Discuss the Home Surroundings Block. What could you bring from your area? (Keep in mind that Home Surroundings will become the foundation for local history and geography in 4<sup>th</sup> grade.)

### **Chapter 5.5: Working with Stories**

1. Discuss the difference between the four types of stories in Chapter 5.5 #1. (page 459–460)
2. Try creating a story as a group. Choose an academic concept story (see chapter 5.5 #4) (page 462) or a Home Surrounding story (see chapter 5.5 #5–7). (pages 463–472)
3. Try imagining and describing a nature spirit (see list on page 469). Think about possible plots for this character in a 1<sup>st</sup> grade story for Home Surroundings.
4. Compare and contrast Home Surroundings stories for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. How are they the same? How are they different?

### **Chapter 6.1: Introduction to Assessment**

1. What is your opinion on assessments?
2. What kinds of assessments have you used? How do you like them?
3. How do you record your assessments? How is it working out?
4. Explore the benchmark in table 6.1.4. (pages 492–494) Pick one language arts skills (e.g., symbol imagery). Discuss the benefits of having benchmarks for all three grades.
5. How does your school communicate assessment results to parents?

### **Chapter 6.2: What Phase are Your Students In?**

1. Identify the phase of the students from these kid writing samples. Be sure to include whether it is beginning, intermediate, or advanced.
  - a. Bradn is mi dog (Brandon Is my dog.)
  - b. When I grow up, I'm going to be a polition and live in the governers mantion.
  - c. I cud not beleve whut you sed. (I could not believe what you said.)
  - d. The kids jumpt over the rope and playd tag.
  - e. He said unkind things about my litle bruther so I punched him.
2. Why do split phases exist?

### **Chapter 6.3–6.5: First, Second, and Third Grade Assessments**

1. What kinds of assessments made by educational testing groups are available to you?
2. If you have used DIBELS or AIMSweb, discuss your experience.

3. Discuss your school's end-of-year reports for: ease of writing, ease or reading, clear communication of current level of a student's skills. Would a rubric help? If so, what should be in it?

#### **Chapter 6.6: Working with Remedial Issues**

1. Does your school have a remedial program or a process to follow when a student has trouble learning? Discuss.
2. Have you given a student more time to resolve a learning challenge? How did it work out?
3. Describe the difference between accommodations and modifications (page 538). Think of some examples of each.
4. Discuss Table 6.6.1: Maslow's Expanded Hierarchy of Needs. (page 542) Describe a student at each level, 1–5.
5. Have you ever referred a student for an IEP? Did it help?

#### **Chapter 6.7: Final Thoughts**

1. How can you improve language arts instruction in your Waldorf school as an individual teacher and as a faculty of teachers?