



Phonics Road to Spelling and Reading

By: Barbara Beers

www.thephonicsroad.com

I've had this curriculum since the beginning of the school year and have hesitated in writing a review for it, not because I didn't like the program, but because I wanted to be able to do it justice and not just glide through it. This is an excellent phonics program, and it is extremely thorough. There is absolutely not a question in my mind that if you use this program with your kindergarten or first grade student, they will learn to read and to read well. If you use it with your older student that is struggling, my assumption is that they will not struggle nearly as much once they've completed this course!

Let me preface this review by saying I am only reviewing year one of what will be a four- year program. This program is designed to be able to lead right into Mrs. Beers other product called The Latin Road to English Grammar, which someone else has already capably reviewed on this site. The Phonics Road to Spelling and Reading is a K-4 program, with the last year being a "bridge" year to jump over to the Latin Road program.

The Phonics Road is a complete phonics program. It is based on The Orton-Gillingham method, and Mrs. Beers learned under Romalda Spalding who wrote The Writing Road to Reading. The program uses the parts-to-whole concept, which all of my children have excelled at. To call this simply a phonics program would be doing it a huge disservice, as it is really comparable to only a very few other programs.

The children learn how to write down the sounds used in spoken English as they are combined into words. As a result, they can pronounce any printed word by sounding out the parts already learned. Through the use of hearing, seeing, and writing down the sounds, the children learn to read. This "parts-to-whole" method really works! Not only are my children excellent readers as a result of this, I myself learned this method when I was in first grade, and it has helped me to excel in spelling and reading all the way to adulthood. If I could get a hold of my first grade teacher and tell her how thankful I am, I would! Even way back then, this was considered a 'radical' method. Maybe it was radical, because it worked then, and it works now!

The problem with this method, however you wrap it up, as far as home-education goes, is the intense work that goes into teaching the teacher, as most teachers were not taught in this way. To be able to turn around and teach your kids, you must be able to understand how and why this method works. Most proponents of this method, wrapped under different names, would have you going to 3 to 5 day seminars to learn how to teach. Not so with this program, here is one of the ways this curriculum shines! Mrs. Beers has used the technology of DVD's to show us how to teach the program. She has gone through EVERY STEP with her in front of the camera teaching as if we were the classroom. All you have to do is watch the DVD's and follow Mrs. Beers' style! The instructions are also in the book, but to have the gift of watching a wonderful woman teach this is amazing! I love having this at my fingertips! Unlike a seminar, you can replay any part of the seminar you didn't catch or didn't understand!

The first year program that I have is complete on ten DVD's. It's a little time consuming to watch, but the power of this program will outshine that and you won't mind once you see it in action.

The program is all about learning the letter sounds, not the names and the letter team sounds. Some examples of letter teams are ph, th, oa, wh, etc. Mrs. Beers will explain how to speak each sound, how to correctly write each sound, and how to read each sound. The program really is amazing in it's ability to help the student master each letter and letter team. It's designed to take a year to go through the book I have, year one, and it moves at a pretty fast clip, but you could easily slow it down if necessary. The sounds don't have to be mastered before you move on, as they come up again and again throughout the year. The student will write

down the spelling rules as he learns them also, so he will have an understanding of why sounds do what they do!

The whole program is set up like using the analogy of a carpenter. The student book is the apprentice's building manual, and it contains all the forms and papers the student will need for the year. The teacher's manual is the Foreman's construction guide, which contains the above mentioned DVD's as well as lesson plan schedules, ideas, and activities for drilling and learning the letter-teams, spelling rules as well as tunes to sing the rules to. On the DVD's Mrs. Beers sings the spelling rules for us as we come to them, so we can hear how they are meant to be sung.

The program also comes with a handy-dandy clipboard, so the student can practice tracing and writing the letters and letter teams. There are tool-cards (flashcards) with the letters and the letter teams written on them. The student earns them as he masters them. Starting around week fifteen, the student will read short stories, illustrate them, thus creating his own books to read over and over again. This is a great idea, since most kids love to draw!

There is so much to this program that I could go on and on about it's virtues. There isn't too much wrong with it, in fact! I am convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that this is the best way to teach reading, phonics, spelling, and almost all language arts components. There has been so much emphasis on whole language lately, or sight-reading, or other strategies that just don't work! Mrs. Beers has a really interesting introduction to her program that explains basically why these other methods came about, and why this one works over the others.

Take a look at the website, and don't get overwhelmed. There is a lot to this program, but remember you've got a master teacher sitting right beside you showing you how to do it through the use of her DVD's. I guess if I had to find a fault with this program, it wouldn't be with the methodology or the components, it would be with the price, as it is pretty pricey, and most homeschoolers are already living on one income. You have to look at it as an investment, and if you have more than one child, it will pay for itself, as the majority of the program is non consumable.

I'm thrilled to be able to review this program, and I wish I had found it years ago before I struggled through other programs that use the same methodology but are much harder to teach. My children are all reading now, and I know that's a result of this parts-to-whole methodology as well. You won't be disappointed. Check out Mrs. Beers' website, and order a sample to try out at home. You can get a sample of the DVD as well...

Good luck on your adventure!

-- Product Review by: Holly Cameron, The Old Schoolhouse Magazine