Sight-Words and Spam

A Serious Spoof on Dr. Seuss

By Donald L. Potter

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That Sam-I-am! That Sam-I-Am!
I do not like that Sam-I-am!

Do you like sight-words and spam?

I do not like them, Sam-I-am.
I do not like sight-words and spam.

Would you like them here or there?

I would not like them here or there.
I would not like them anywhere.
I do not like sight-words and spam.
I do not like them, Sam-I-am.

Would you like them in a house?
Would you like them with a mouse?

I do not like them in a house.
I do not like them with a mouse.
I do not like them here or there.
I do not like them anywhere.
I do not like sight-words and spam.
I do not like them Sam-I-am.

Would you read them in a box?
Would you read them with a fox?

Not in a box, Not with a fox.
Not in a house, Not with a mouse.
I would not read them anywhere.
I do not read sight-words and spam.
I do not like them Sam-I-am.

Would you? Could you? In a car?
Read them! Read them! Here they are.

I would not, could not, in a car.

You may like them. You will see.
You may like them in a tree!

I would not like them in a tree.
Not in a car! You let me be.

I do not like them in a box.
I do not like them with a fox.
I do not like them with a mouse.
I do not like them here or there.
I do not like them anywhere.
I do not like sight-words and spam.
I do not like them. Sam-I-am.

A train! A train! A train! A train!
Could you, would you, on a train?

Not on a train, Not in a tree!
Not in a car, Sam! Let me be.

I would not, could not, in a box
I would not, could not with a fox.
I will not read them with a mouse.
I will not read them in a house.
I will not read them here or there.
I will not read them anywhere.
I do not like sight-words and spam
I do not like them Sam-I-am.

Say! In the dark? Here in the dark!
Would you, could you, in the dark?

I would not, could not, in the dark.

Would you, could you, in the rain?

I would not, could not, in the rain.
Not in the dark. Not on a train.
Not in a car. Not in a tree.
I do not like them, Sam, you see.

Not in a house. Not in a box.
Not with a mouse. Not with a fox.
I will not read them here or there.
I do not like them anywhere.

You do not like sight-words and spam?

I do not like them, Sam-I-am.

Could you, would you, with a goat?

I would not, could not, with a goat!

Would you, could you on a boat?

I would not, could not, on a boat.
I could not, would not, with a goat.

I will not read them in the rain.
I will not read them on a train.
Not in the dark! Not in a tree!
Not in a car! You let me be!

I do not like them in a box.
I do not like them with a fox
I do not read them in a house.
I do not like them with a mouse.
I do not like them here or there,
I do not like them ANYWHERE!

I do not like sight-words and spam!
I do not like them, Sam-I-am.

You do not like them. So you say.
Try them! Try them! and you may.
Try them and you may, I say.

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Sam! If you will let me be,
I will try them. You will see.

Say! I hate sight-words and spam.
I do! I hate them, Sam-I-am.

I still won't read them in a boat.
I still won't read them with a goat.

I will not read them in the rain.
Or in the dark. Or on a train.
Or in a car. Or in a tree.
They are so bad, so bad, you see!

I will not read them in a box.
I will not read them with a fox.
I will not read them in a house.
I will not read them with a mouse.
I will not read them here or there.
Say! I won't read them ANYWHERE!

I do not like sight-words and spam.
No thanks! No thanks! To Sam-I-am!

Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

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This humorous spoof has a serious side to it. My associates and I are convinced that teaching sight-words apart from letter knowledge and phonics has the potential of creating whole-word guessers, who over rely on context, pictures, and the shape of words to guess. This is a highly inferior method of reading often associated with dyslexia.

Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham* is a great little book to give to young students to read AFTER they have completed a good basic phonics program, such as Hazel Loring's *Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics for First Grade*. It is fine to read Dr. Seuss TO young children. But as a method for getting student to memorize sight-words, we are totally opposed, believing that it has the potential of being detrimental to fluent reading.

This "Spoof on Dr. Seuss" is dedicated to Samuel L. Blumenfeld, Geraldine Rodgers, Edward Miller, Raymond Laurita, and Charlie Richardson.

In Dr. Seuss' own words: Dr. Seuss debunked that idea that he made up his stories with his own words in an interview he gave Arizona magazine in June 1981:

> They think I did it in twenty minutes. That ***** *Cat in the Hat* took nine months until I was satisfied. I did it for a textbook house and they sent me a word list. That was due to the Dewey revolt in the Twenties, in which they threw out phonic reading and went to word recognition, as if you're reading a Chinese pictograph instead of blending sounds of different letters. **I think killing phonics was one of the greatest causes of illiteracy in the country**. Anyway, they had it all worked out that a healthy child at the age of four can learn so many words in a week and that's all. So there were two hundred and twenty-three words to use in this book. I read the list three times and I almost went out of my head. I said, "I'll read it once more and if I can find two words that rhyme that'll be the title of my book." (That's genius at work.) I found 'cat' and 'hat' and I said, 'The title will be *The Cat in the Hat*.'

The picture to the left is outside the door of my tutoring room at the Odessa Christian School, where we all enjoy celebrating Dr. Seuss's birthday on March 2. Every child should have the should have the opportunity to hear his great stories and eventually learn to read them. But the stories should NEVER be used to teach sight-words with mere look-and-say techniques.

Donald L. Potter, Odessa, TX: www.donpotter.net and www.blendphonics.org

A Little Further Explanation

The *Sight-Words and Span: A Serious Spoof on Dr. Seuss* probably seems like an enigma to some readers so I will give a little background information.

Green Eggs and Ham was written to meet a challenge by Bennett Cert, the editor of Random House, that Geisel could write a book with just 50 words. Bennett Cerf's wife, Phyllis, had worked with William Spalding of Macmillan Publishing to create a list of 379 scientifically chosen high-frequency (sight-words) from which children's authors were to choose 200 plus 20 easy-to-pronounce words of their own to write look-and-say readers to prepare student for the look-and-say (Dick and Jane) readers in the public schools. The first book Geisel wrote for Cerf was *The Cat in the Hat*. It was written from 200 words from the Spalding-Cerf list of high frequency words that they wanted pre-schoolers to learn read by sight before starting school plus 20 easy-to-pronounce words that Geisel was at liberty to add in order to facilitate the construction of the story. It is quite difficult to write good stories from restricted vocabuarlies. Since the educational publishing companies had failed to come up with anything better than the artificial, watered-down, Dick and Jane type readers. Spalding turned to Random House, a successful commercial publisher, who had access to accomplished authors.

Rudolf Flesch claimed in his 1955 blockbuster, *Why Johnny Can't Read,* that kids were reading poorly because they were not being taught to read with phonics in their look-and-say (guessing) readers. Spalding wanted to counter Flesch's claim and prove him wrong by creating attractive look-and-say readers that parents could use to teach their children how to "read" by look-and-say BEFORE going to school or being taught the letters of the alphabet. The "experts" felt that learning the alphabet would hinder facile recognition of words by shape and context and hinder getting-to-the-meaning.

Mr. Edward Miller theorized that memorizing sight-words via sight-word readers would create a holistic reflex leading some children to view words holistically (by configuration). He believed this caused the children to read subjectively by guessing the meaning from the context, instead of reading objectively by processing all the letters and spelling patterns as representatives of the sounds of spoken speech. He further theorized that this holistic reflex would work against the students learning to read "objectively." He developed a test to prove his theory consisting of two lists of words: 50 sight-words and 50 phonetic-words. By comparing the speed and accuracy of students reading these two lists, he believed he could measure the amount of damage that had been caused by memorizing sight-words in the sight-word readers. It was no accident that he chose the 50 words from *Green Eggs and Ham* for the sight-word (holistic words) portion of his assessment. From reports of my friends, who have extensive experience with Mr. Miller's assessment, his theory appears valid and has guided our day-by-day work with students since 2002. Mr. Miller also developed an advanced assessment of 420 words consisting in 210 sight-words (the vocabulary of *The Cat in the Hat*) and 210 simple one-syllable phonics word from the first thirty-eight phonics Exercises in Rudolf Flesch's *Johnny*. Our experience giving the test to hundreds of students leads us to suggest that the test is valid and deserves scholarly attention.

The following links will give you more information.

Can Dyslexia be Artificially Induced in Schools by Samuel Blumenfeld

http://donpotter.net/pdf/miller_blumenfeld_dyslexia_.pdf

"Miscue Analysis Training Normal Children to Read Like Defective Children" by Samuel Blumenfeld.

http://donpotter.net/pdf/miscue-analysis.pdf

Edward Miller Assessment for Artificially Induced Whole-Word Dyslexia.

http://donpotter.net/pdf/mwia.pdf

"A Critical Examination of the Psychology of the Whole Word Technique" by Raymond Laurita.

http://donpotter.net/pdf/laurita_critical_exam.pdf

"A Proposal for a Phonics-First Framework for the Diagnosis of Teaching of Educational Factors" by Donald L. Potter

http://donpotter.net/pdf/dangers_of_sight_words.pdf

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