

**Can
you see
me?**



Yes, I See You:

Literacy Discussions Workbook
by Faith Borkowsky



**HIGH FIVE LITERACY
PUBLISHING**

Can You See Me?

YES, I SEE YOU

Copyright: Faith Borkowsky (2022)



Can you see me?

TEACHER



Yes, I see you.

I am in kindergarten. I hate school. Why does the teacher send me home with words that I have to memorize? It's so hard to remember the difference between "when" and "then," "for," "of," and "from," and "a" and "the." And mommy and daddy get so frustrated with me.

Blank lined writing area.

In most kindergarten and first grade classrooms today, children are encouraged to memorize high frequency words so they will recognize them on sight. The memorized words are then supposed to be reinforced using books containing predictable, repetitive phrases designed to assist the children in the memorization task and pictures to help them figure out unknown words. This type of instruction—telling children to memorize words or look at pictures and context cues to figure out words - is not really "teaching" children how to read. Time and time again, the method has proven a failure as, in later grades, the strategies no longer work when the words get longer and the pictures disappear.

I am trying to get better at using the pictures and the first letter of words in the books to figure out words I don't know, like the teacher tells me. I get so tired trying to read the words, I just want to put my head down and sleep. Then, the teacher wants me to write, too!

Blank lined writing area.

Can you see me?



Yes, I see you.



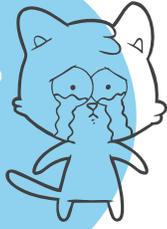
TEACHER

Not surprisingly, many struggling readers quickly become withdrawn or belligerent when they recognize that they are not keeping up with their peers. The literacy gap only grows if they are not explicitly taught how to read as soon as possible.

While some young children will develop as readers no matter how they are taught, a significant number struggle because they need explicit teaching of letter and sound relationships. A Structured Literacy approach that is rooted in evidence and what scientists and researchers know about how the brain learns to read should be used from the start. This includes explicit instruction in phonemic awareness (the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the smallest units of sounds in words) and phonics (a method of teaching reading and writing by demonstrating the relationship between letters and spoken language). Schools should revamp their English Language Arts curricula and follow the research and science in order to align instruction with best practices.

Parents should be knowledgeable about the research and demand better for all children.

Can you see me?



Yes, I see you.

The OT has me doing all sorts of hand exercises. She also says I have to build up my core strength. My classroom teacher is always getting mad at me because I slump in my chair and write with my head sideways on the desk. I don't form the letters correctly, and I don't start at the margin. Even when the OT tries to correct my grip, I go back to holding a pencil in a way that is more comfortable for me.

There is evidence that handwriting and reading ability develop together. Classroom teachers in the early grades should focus on handwriting "automaticity" – the ability to retrieve and write the letters of the alphabet automatically and legibly. Many children are not getting enough explicit instruction and practice in handwriting, and this contributes, in part, to their inability to get their thoughts down quickly. To get a child with handwriting difficulties to form letters correctly without any conscious effort, a partnership between the classroom teacher, occupational therapist, and parents should be formed. Lots of reinforcement with corrective feedback can have a powerful effect.

I am in first grade. I try telling a story about what happened to me, but I mix everything up. My speech teacher tries to help me follow directions and find the words that match what I want to say. She tries to help me tell a story in the right order. I have it in my head, but it comes out in a completely different way. I'm so stupid.

Even worse is when we try to work on listening for sounds in words. This is really hard for me, even when she slows her speech down and has me watch her mouth. I need more time and practice to move the sounds around in words.



Yes, I see you.

Children become frustrated with their inability to communicate and many begin to internalize these struggles in the form of self-loathing. A speech-language pathologist (SLP) can help children communicate more effectively. Language interventions should include work on proper grammar, articulation, building vocabulary, taking turns in conversation, and organizing thoughts. Parents and teachers should be aware of language disorders so they can get help before a problem impacts learning across school subject matter.

The SLP should also work on developing phonological awareness, specifically, phonemic awareness, so that children will be able to make the connection between letters and sounds in words.



Difficulty with motor skills can be recognized easily, but such problems are often overlooked in schools, misunderstood, or misconstrued as just clumsiness. When children do not receive intervention for their developmental delays, it can cause problems with focus and attention. These are the kids who tend to rock in their chairs, fidget, and cannot complete tasks without constant reminders. Physical therapy should also be considered a necessary part of a child's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

(Sigh)... Another pull-out from my class. It is so hard to keep going in and out of my classroom. Now they are trying to help me with balance and coordination! My physical therapist is working on my posture and helping me to build up my core strength. I was born with "hypotonia" which is low muscle tone. This makes it harder for me to complete tasks at school. I hate being reminded to sit up straight with my feet on the floor and to get my head off the desk. I like to sit with my legs spread out in a W formation. I guess that is not a good thing.

It takes me forever to complete my homework. I cry and scream. My mother gets angry and runs to tell my father. My father gets angry and runs to tell my mother. Both of them hate homework more than I do! It is really stupid. I read the same book over and over again until I know it by heart. My mother tries to encourage me to read other books from the library. If the pictures can't help me figure out the meaning, I can't read them. I know my parents love me, but I can feel their frustration with me.



A child's academic difficulties will impact the health of the entire family, and many parents seek out others who share their frustrations and concerns. Social media groups on platforms like Twitter and Facebook can give parents a voice, and many become fierce advocates for their children and others. If a school or district does not have a Special Education Parent-Teacher Association (SEPTA), parents can start a group, participate in SEPTA at another school or district, or coordinate SEPTA groups in the local community. Information and knowledge are powerful tools, and it's helpful for affected parents to have support from others and a strong, unified message.



I am in third grade. The school psychologist is testing me. It is such an effort for me to read. I try to read the words slowly and that doesn't work. When I read in my head, I skip words and lines. I have no idea what I am reading. When she has me read out loud, I leave out sounds or add in sounds that are not there. I leave off endings and substitute words. I don't even realize what I am doing. She is giving me words I can't spell. She, too, will soon know that I am stupid. It is getting harder and harder to hide my problems. This is making me so nervous that I am blanking out and can't do anything right now. I just want to run and hide.

We must prioritize early detection and effective educational interventions for children with dyslexia or language-based disabilities. One study found that 89% of suicide notes contain dyslexic-type spelling errors (Journal of Learning Disabilities, Vol. 30, 6: pp 652-659, 1997). Perhaps because spelling is not valued in our schools anymore, particularly in the lower grades, such a pattern has gone widely unnoticed. But ask any parent of a struggling reader and he or she will tell you their child's mental health is at stake. We know that anxiety and depression put children at a higher risk for self-mutilation and suicide. How can writing samples be used to help determine a child's needs, academically and emotionally?

I am in fourth grade. The teacher called on me to read my written answer. I ended up writing short sentences because I couldn't think of anything to write. I stumbled over my words and heard some of the kids laughing at me. It is so embarrassing when I mix up words and can't get my thoughts out. I tried to rip up my paper before the other kids saw it. Too late. How humiliating... Nobody wants to be friends with a dumb kid.



As the years pass and the workload and expectations on kids increase, the deficiencies that were once invisible or believed to be temporary become glaring. Written expression becomes even more challenging than reading. Children who write poorly and only use simple words that are in their sight vocabularies are not going to be able to keep up in English and content area subjects such as science and social studies. Just as reading needs to be taught with a structure and a sequence of skills that build cumulatively, writing should be taught systematically as well. Is it assumed that children will just pick up writing by looking at well-written books and studying text features? Or is there a coordinated effort across the school building to improve writing skills?

Faith Borkowsky is the founder of High Five Literacy and Academic Coaching and is a Certified Dyslexia Practitioner with thirty-five years of experience in literacy instruction - as a classroom teacher, reading and learning specialist, regional literacy coach, administrator, and tutor. Ms. Borkowsky provides professional development for teachers and school districts, as well as parent workshops, presentations, and private consultations, on science-based literacy practices. She is the author of the award-winning book, *Failing Students or Failing Schools? A Parent's Guide to Reading Instruction and Intervention*, and the "If Only I Would Have Known..." series of books, conceived as a roadmap for literacy readiness and success for parents of young children. In 2021, Ms. Borkowsky was a finalist for the World Literacy Foundation award for her significant contributions to literacy.

