

The Rise, Imitation, and Fall of Dick and Jane

Johnny Can't Read (and it's Dick and Jane's fault)



In 1955, Rudolf Flesch published *Why Johnny Can't Read—And What You Can Do About It*. This investigation into the state of juvenile literacy in the United States prompted reading specialists and parents alike to reconsider the efficacy of the “look-say” reading method. Critics argued that the rudimentary readers failed to prepare children for complex literature, complaining that Dick, Jane, and their cohorts were one-dimensional characters and their activities lulled readers into boredom. As a result, reading methodologies shifted away from sight reading and back to phonics. In 1965, Scott, Foresman & Co. published the final book in the original *Dick and Jane* series, *Now We Read*.

Relegated to kitsch and nostalgia as casualties in the so-called “Reading Wars,” the *Dick and Jane* readers continue to hold a storied place in postwar Americana.

Rudolf Flesch

1900. Bettman. Getty Images.
<https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/rudolf-flesch-news-photo/514974538>