



the Spalding NEWS

What's Inside:

LITERACY WATCH:
TOUGH CHOICES OR TOUGH TIMES
...TOUGH TALK ABOUT A NATION
STILL AT RISK
PAGES 2-3

SPALDING IN AUSTRALIA
LITERACY CATCH-UP
PAGES 4-5

Q & A: WE ANSWER YOUR
QUESTIONS
PAGE 5

CALLING ALL CERTIFIED SPALDING
TEACHERS:
BECOME A SPALDING TUTOR
PAGE 6

BOOKS TO TEACH, INSPIRE AND
DELIGHT
PAGES 6-7

SAVE THE DATE
PAGE 8



Spalding Education
INTERNATIONAL

Let's Hear It for Handwriting

In honor of National Handwriting Week –which commemorates John Hancock’s January 23rd birthday- a *New York Times* reporter began her column with the following observation: “These days the handwriting on the wall can’t be read.”

Increasingly, when the need arises for adults to communicate the old fashioned way, they resort to a strange mix of manuscript and cursive, having apparently never learned to write legibly in either one.

Penmanship among the missing

The time is long since past when penmanship was a staple of classroom instruction and penmanship awards were prized. In today’s world, where turning nouns into verbs is a common grammatical aberration, “keyboarding” creeps ever lower in the grades. Children are expected to absorb handwriting much like whole language reading, by osmosis. Instruction, if any, usually takes the form of tracing letters on worksheets, leaving it to the child to determine where to start and stop.

Few teacher education programs include handwriting instruction, Spalding being one exception to the rule. Cursive is still a rite of passage in Spalding classrooms and one children eagerly anticipate.

And missed

However, there are good pedagogical reasons for teaching handwriting. Mrs. Spalding knew that teaching first manu-

script, then cursive, forges a vital link to the world of language. Research has established that the brain breaks the letters of the alphabet down into curves and lines, just as Spalding teaches children to do with clock and line letters. Combining handwriting with phonograms links sounds to letters, the very skills beginning readers need.

A growing number of studies also suggest that systematically teaching handwriting and spelling helps students become better writers. Just as beginning readers can’t draw meaning from text they must struggle to decode, developing writers can’t organize their thoughts if they must switch attention to figuring out how to form a letter or spell a word.

A man to remember

Students might also like to know that John Hancock, whose name is synonymous with a signature, was more than a man of exemplary penmanship. In addition to being the first member of the Continental Congress to sign the Declaration of Independence, he commissioned future president George Washington as commander of the Army of the United Colonies, helped create a navy, and was governor of Massachusetts for 9 terms. As students strive to perfect their handwriting, they should know that the gentleman remembered by National Handwriting Week was quite a guy.



Tough Choices or Tough Times.....

Under the auspices of The National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), a prestigious group of academics and business leaders (the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce) have produced a blunt assessment of American education and appropriately titled it, "Tough Choices or Tough Times."

"Anyone who hopes to hold a job in the next several decades should read -- if not memorize--this extraordinary report." So said Norman R. Augustine, retired chairman and CEO of Lockheed Martin Corporation.

One group fitting that description, but apparently oblivious to the report's message, is profiled in a survey from the Pew Research Center. *Generation Next* reveals how the 18-25 year-old cohort of American young adults views itself and its prospects. Generation Nexters believe, for example, that compared to 20 years ago, they enjoy greater educational opportunities and access to higher paying jobs. They also identify "getting rich" as the dominant goal of their generation.

The NCEE Commission envisions a very different future for "Generation Next," and for generations to follow.

Tough Choices

This 169-page sequel to the 1990 Commission's report, *America's Choice: High Skills Or Low Wages*, emphasizes the message in the title of the earlier report. It warns that compared to overseas competitors in the global economy, the United States is losing ground economically and technologically. The same message was delivered in 2005 in a congressionally-requested report from a National Academies' Committee chaired by the aforementioned CEO Norman Augustine.

Each of these bodies finds other nations overtaking the US on a variety of educa-

tion measures, only some of which are recounted here.

- At least seven nations, including Korea, the Slovak Republic and Sweden produce more high school graduates as a percentage of population. (Researchers report that nearly one out of three American public high school students won't graduate.)
- 30 years ago, the US accounted for 30% of the world's population of college students, today that number is 14% and falling.
- According to comparable studies of international achievement in mathematics, science and general literacy, US students' international counterparts are not only getting more education, they are getting a better education. "Fewer than one-in-three college graduates can successfully perform tasks such as understanding and comparing the view points in a newspaper editorial, interpreting a table with data about blood pressure and physical activity, or computing and comparing the cost per ounce of different food items."
- Perhaps most disturbing, "nearly one in five college graduates score at only the Basic Literacy level, which means they have trouble with tasks like consulting reference materials and calculating the total cost of items ordered from a catalogue."
- The number of engineering degrees earned in the US is down 20% from 1985. Some 34% of doctoral degrees in natural sciences and 56% of engineering doctorates in the US are awarded to foreign nationals.

The Commission blames America's outdated education system: "The core problem is that our education and train-




ing systems were built for another era in which most workers needed only a rudimentary education." The system is also faulted for fostering a work averse student ethos. "The current system does not motivate most students to take tough courses

The Spalding News

In 1986, Romalda B. Spalding established the Spalding Education Foundation (now Spalding Education International, or SEI) to perpetuate her Method, and to maintain the principles and procedures which have made *The Spalding Method* so effective.

Through ongoing professional development, SEI provides the highest quality literacy instruction to public, private and home educators, and ultimately to all students. Today, SEI trains teachers and accredits schools in *The Spalding Method*, which continues to be validated by current research about the way children learn.

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Tough Talk About A Nation Still At Risk

and work hard. Now many students just slide through high school, because they know that all they have to do is get passes in their courses or a satisfactory score on an 8th-or 9th grade level literacy test to go to college.”

Tough Times

These are the same young people who must increasingly compete against highly educated and motivated peers in other nations for those “high paying jobs” referenced in the Pew survey. The Commission explains, “The vast majority of the workers in our workforce 20 years from now will be the people who are already in our workforce.” In this scenario, unless many, if not most, Generation Nexters upgrade their skills, it seems unlikely that they will realize their optimistic projections.

The commission predicts: “If we continue on our current course, and the number of nations outpacing us in the education race continues to grow at their present rate, the American standard of living will steadily fall relative to those nations, rich and poor, that are doing a better job.” They foresee more jobs moving overseas and other countries surpassing the US in innovation, especially in the sciences and technology. They warn that it will not be long afterward that investment capital follows.

The Commission describes a world in which routine work is done largely by machines, and the best employers everywhere seek employees who are able to learn quickly and adjust to frequent labor market changes; abilities that require a strong educational foundation in English, mathematics, science and technology, as well as historical and cultural literacy. The commission concludes: “There is not enough money available at any level of our intergovernmental system to fix this problem by spending more money on the system we have. We can get where we must go only by changing the system itself.”

Recommendations

Space does not permit a full account of the commission's recommendations which include:

Putting states, not school boards and districts in charge of school funding, teacher quality, pay and recruitment. Districts would hire independent contractors to operate their schools. Contractors whose students fail performance expectations would not have their contracts renewed. Parents would use published performance data to select the best schools for their children.

Putting a high stakes examination system in place, (one that truly measured what has been learned) beginning for most students in the 10th grade. “The standards will be set at the expectations incorporated in the exams given in the nations that do the best job of educating students.” Examination results would determine students’ next educational level, whether high school completion, community college, trade school, or university. Excelling students could leave high school early to pursue their studies in college. It would be an open system (and financial provision made) so people could retake examinations at any time during their lives and qualify for additional education or training.

Ending the monopoly now enjoyed by colleges of education. A state agency would draft performance contracts with organizations that train teachers. The organizations whose teachers meet demanding performance criteria would win the right to train more teachers which the state would then credential.

Rewarding teachers through a merit-based compensation system to enlarge and upgrade the pool of talented teachers.

It is doubtful that the Commission's recommendations will be enacted in “the strong, coherent, and mutually reinforc-

ing system,” they propose. Killing the patient to cure the illness may appear to many to be a dubious prescription.

However, the consequences of failing to address the problems outlined in this and the reports that preceded it, are beyond dire. It is frighteningly clear that the nation can no longer afford a system that lurches from one failed fad to another—whole language, fuzzy math, open classrooms, middle schools, lax college admissions and ideologically driven courses (and the list goes on); confuses equality of opportunity with equality of outcome and discourages excellence; a system in which some schools go so far as to reject athletic contests and valedictorian awards to avoid identifying any individual or group as excelling.

Education as Destiny

The Pew profile of *Generation Next* reveals that the seductive assurance of success for all (after 12 or more years of education in self-esteem) has been successfully implanted. It also reveals that all is not well in Nexter land. By large majorities, Nexters view themselves as more likely to engage in self-destructive behavior compared to 20 years ago - more likely to resort to violence, binge drinking and use illegal drugs.

The Nexters will be the first generation to suffer the consequences of the mismatch between the global economy and the US education system. Only prompt action and system-wide change, as suggested in these reports, will make them the last. ✨

Spalding in Australia

Literacy Catch-Up 2006

by Helen Grant

Editor's Note: *Helen Grant was Head of Ascham Junior School for twenty-one years until her retirement in 1998. She introduced Spalding to Ascham in 1996, qualified as a Spalding Certified Teacher Instructor II in 1998 and has taught eleven teacher courses and thirty-one parent courses to date. She would be very happy to communicate with fellow Spalding teachers via email sphgrant@optusnet.com.au or through the Spalding Education office spaldingaust@optusnet.com.au.*



Having discovered Spalding only three years before my retirement, it was inevitable that, when I left Ascham, I needed to offer these Spalding skills to some of the many underachieving children in the community not lucky enough to have daily Spalding lessons at school. Initially my plan was to help non-fluent Grade 2 and Grade 3 children but found there were many grade 1 children who were non-readers and many older children and also adults who were non-fluent readers and poor spellers. Since Spalding begins at the beginning anyway, the age-range was not a great problem. I have now completed four courses and Course 5 begins in June 2007.

To be effective, the course has to be supportive, encouraging and enjoyable, with active class participation for understanding, and regular practice sessions at home for success. I have two retired, totally committed, former Head teachers who assist me, but the children's main help comes from the parents who participate as students. Parents sit with their children initially, have the same exercise books and do identical work during once-a-week, three-hour morning sessions (for twelve weeks). I ask for a commitment to attend each of the twelve sessions and to do a minimum of 15 minutes' practice each day between the sessions. The parents' involvement both during the lessons and daily during the week is crucial for the child's success. They are aware of this and are grateful to be given the informa-

tion and understanding to enable them to help their children.

After three sessions, as the children gain confidence, most parents move to the back of the classroom, but Grade 1 children need parental help each session and – dare I say this? – some older boys work better if a parent is sitting close by.

The parents purchase the textbook and a set of phonogram cards and I supply all stationery requirements. The textbook serves as an excellent model for the Ayres words and I give relevant page numbers to direct the parents' additional reading each week. At the beginning of the first session, the children are given a *Morrison-McCall* Spelling test as a pre-test and this is repeated in session 11 as a post-test. The parents' books with the last completed lesson serve as models through the week if children need extra time to catch up anything missed or to correct any errors. The children have separate homework books for daily phonogram reviews, and for writing relevant words and a daily sentence. If there is time in any day for an extra practice session, then the child becomes the teacher – this strategy is a great motivator!

The initial sounds are introduced with the features, clock-face and line letters and handwriting principles in Session 1. These are immediately put into simple 3-, 4- and 5- letter words plus the words "con tent ment" and "mag ni fi cent" to illustrate the ease of writing long words using syllables and finger cues. This

practice continues in later sessions, with dictation and marking of a variety of words relating to each new set of phonograms. This is a powerful way of building confidence and maintaining interest level and motivation when coping with a wide age-range and the need to make faster progress in a limited time. By Session 7, when all phonograms have been introduced, additional words involve contractions, homonyms and perennial spelling 'demons'.

After the first lesson, each session begins with a review of the previous week, sharing of a selected homework sentence and a short 'brag' session to indicate any improvements or other successes at school. (Many of the children's class teachers sent in positive comments and two actually came to observe a morning lesson). Oral and written phonogram reviews follow, then new phonograms are introduced. Dictation of A-G page 1 of the Ayres words begins in Session 2 – with page 2 completed for homework, using the textbook as a model. Over the twelve sessions, the goal is to enter the 500 words to the end of Section K (in class and at home) and the parents are encouraged to continue dictating beyond K after the course ends. Reading for spelling is a key skill here.

In 'Working with Words' children apply the Spalding skills and gain confidence as they begin to understand how the English language works. They are encouraged to verbalise, explain, discuss and answer
(Continued on page 5)



★ Q I just bought the 3rd-grade *Teachers' Guide*. I notice that the lesson plans begin by reviewing words in Sections M-N. On the *Morrison-McCall Spelling Scale*, my child began missing words in Section K and quite a few in Section L. Do I ignore the *Morrison-McCall Spelling Scale* score, and start with the Guide? -

A The *Morrison-McCall Spelling Scale* identifies where most third-grade children should begin writing words in their spelling/vocabulary notebooks. The

Spalding Scope and Sequence (Planning page 19) shows that third-grade students review difficult words in previous sections. Beginning on Academic Day 1, the spelling objectives review phonemic awareness, phonograms 1-26 with handwriting, and syllable division, pronunciation, spelling, and the Spalding Marking System using review words from Sections M and N. Add additional words that have difficult phonograms or rules from Sections L and M during Academic Days 1-5. Then on Week 2, begin dictating Section O words because all rules are reviewed with each new set of words all year. In that way, your students will catch up to where they should be.

Q How long do you continue to do daily OPR and WPR? The entire year or until mastery only? Do we cut back to weekly reviews at some point?

A Most kindergarten to second-grade children need reviews three or four days a week all year. For third-grade and

above, those who have had Spalding in the primary grades quickly review all phonograms. Divide them into two piles and review all phonograms missed and those that are in the weeks' spelling words. When children can consistently say and write 70 phonograms, review once a week, then once a month to maintain them in long-term memory.

Q How much time should I spend on manuscript writing with third graders? Do I really have to spend a lot of time making them do it exactly right? I will have a lot more impact helping them with their cursive.

A Review feature and letter formation and all manuscript letters for two weeks because correct cursive is based on correct manuscript formation. The *Third-Grade Teachers' Guide* introduces cursive on Week 3 using the procedures described on WRTR 32-33. From then on the focus is on cursive. ★

Spalding in Australia-Literacy Catch-Up

(Continued from page 4)

questions as they work. In this way they learn to think about their responses; rules and procedures begin to fall into place and an understanding of grammar develops. In later sessions, cards requiring oral responses to rules, word endings, meanings, spelling, parts of speech, etc., are used to offer the maximum practice in the minimum time. The children move around as they collect a card, explain it to the parents and go back for the next card. Parents can note any concepts that need further practice.

The concepts of sentence writing are introduced early in the course and the children are asked to write one sentence each day as part of their practice homework. I collect the homework books after the second to the last session and award prizes for the best/most improved of these.

As an overview for parents, paragraphs/narrative and informative writing concepts are explained and mental actions for comprehension are demonstrated with the children (with guidance) participating orally. Although it is not possible to spend time developing these concepts, the parents gain an understanding of how to help their children.

Nineteen children (11 girls and 8 boys, Kindergarten to Grade 5, from fourteen different schools, with one family doing a round trip of over 200 kms for each session!) and one adult completed the 2006 course (approx. 30 hours' tuition). Of these, twelve improved between 12 and 24 months, seven between 6 and 8 months and one, four months. A six-year old grade 1 initial non-reader topped the class with 24 months' gain and the adult gained 23 months (and sufficient confi-

dence to change jobs to one requiring the writing of quotes!) At the beginning of the course, thirteen of the nineteen children were performing below grade average. At the end there were only four from the older classes still not at grade level but two were close and all were much more confident.

This is a 'full-on' course with high demands on everyone concerned, requiring a great deal of planning and organization to cover a great deal of ground in the limited time. Watching, over a mere twelve lessons, a mixed group of under-achieving students grow in confidence and feel success, perhaps for the first time, has provided me with some of the most rewarding teaching experiences of my career. All this has been possible without compromising basic Spalding procedures in any way. Spalding is indeed amazing! ★

☆ Calling All Spalding Certified Teachers: Become A Spalding Tutor

Spalding News is pleased to share a letter from Spalding Authorized Tutor Karen K. Bell who resides in Tucson, AZ. We do so in the hope of encouraging other Spalding Certified Teachers to become tutors. The need is great. SEI receives many calls and emails from worried parents whose children need help to succeed in school and in life. As Karen explains, it is a very worthwhile and immensely gratifying thing to do. SEI would add that tutoring can also be a welcome source of additional income. Spalding Tutors set their own fees and are independent of SEI. SEI's only role is to ensure that they are fully prepared (Spalding Authorized) to teach this wonderful method. Editors Note

She writes:

"This is my annual letter to continue active status as a Spalding Authorized Tutor for another year.

It has been my joy to tutor four special children, ranging in age from kindergarten through seventh grade, this year. They have been tutored from one to two times a week for one half to one and a half hours depending on age and attention span. The kindergartner has needed quite a bit of enforcement. The good news for her is that she attends Gallego Basic Elementary, a *Spalding Method* School.

What a rewarding year this has been introducing *The Spalding Method* to parents who are concerned about their children. A great opportunity this summer resulted in helping a concerned mother

with a son in fifth grade this fall. Her husband is in the military in Iraq. She lives in Sierra Vista so I was not able to tutor her son. I decided to give her information about how *The Spalding Method* works. She was so interested in it and read every article I gave her. Her son is not the only one benefiting from her excitement. She is starting with her six-year-old daughter learning the phonograms and rules. She and another woman work as aids in an elementary school. They find this information quite handy with the students that are having difficulties.

It is a great opportunity for me to introduce and reinforce *The Spalding Method* to many people. For children to grow with a strong foundation will be a great benefit to them their entire lives." ☆

Sincerely,
Karen K. Bell ☆

☆ Books to Teach, Inspire, and Delight

In keeping with Mrs. Spalding's determination to introduce children to quality literature early in their lives, *Spalding News* brings to our readers' attention two books that should be part of every teacher's library. They are, *The American Reader*, *Words that Moved a Nation*,¹ originally published in 1991, and now available in paperback, and *The English Reader*, *What Every Literate Person Needs to Know*,² a new release in 2006. Both anthologies are edited by researcher and education historian Diane Ravitch and her son Michael, a freelance writer and critic.

Experience tells us that the opportunity to acquire new vocabulary (outside of formal instruction with the Ayres words) occurs most frequently when reading or being read to. Research tells us that reading comprehension is enhanced when

children are able to connect what they read to what they already know.

The American Reader includes 200 poems, speeches, songs, essays, letters and documents that have shaped this nation and with which all children should be familiar.

From the Mayflower Compact to Abraham Lincoln's House Divided speech to Ronald Reagan's speech at Moscow University and the poetry and songs in between, it is the kind of book that teachers will find themselves referring to time and time again.

The English Reader, *What Every Literate Person Needs to Know*, can best be summarized by citing the first paragraph of the authors' introduction.

"The English Reader is an invitation to browse through some of the greatest pas-

sages of English literature. Here are words that changed the world, words that have inspired revolutions and empires as well as lovers, dreamers and singers. These poems, speeches and essays have survived because they are historically significant or exceptionally beautiful, and in some cases, both."

Beginning with Queen Elizabeth and ending with Winston Churchill, this book provides a collection of some of the best language and ideas of the English-speaking world along with brief but fascinating biographies of each writer.

These two books provide an excellent antidote to the paucity of imagination and narrowness of view that describe the selections in use today.

(Continued on page 7) ☆

Books to Teach, Inspire and Delight

(Continued from page 6)

Researcher Sandra Stotsky, in a recent article,³ points out that the quality literature once read in middle schools and high schools has been replaced in part by "a genre called 'Young Adult Literature'- short and easy to read novels about young teen-agers coping with such problems as drug addiction, teen-age pregnancy, alcoholism, domestic violence....." and by "culturally relevant literature - texts that appeal to students' ethnic group identity on the assumption that sharing the ethnic group identity of the lead character will motivate them to read. However, there is no evidence from any source (e.g., NAEP test scores, SAT verbal scores) that either 'culturally relevant' reading fare or 'young adult' literature has made boys or girls eager readers, never mind better readers."

Stotsky finds no relief from this dismal fare in the English Standards promulgated by most states. In *The State of State English Standards*,⁴ by Stotsky and Finn, state standards are found to be "content free" and devoid of suggested reading lists. The authors write, "The standards do a better job of addressing skills, strategies, and processes than literature and cultural content. The study of American literature is not required in about half of the states. Few offer illustrative titles, authors, literary periods, and literary traditions as indices of reading growth and literary quality, or examples of milestones in the history of the English language."

In general, they found that the stan-

dards reveal "an unwillingness or inability to make professional judgments" with the result that a sequenced and coherent curriculum is lacking.

Yet, (see Literacy Watch) as literacy in America declines, the standard of literacy necessary to survive in today's world is rising.

What has been lost to American students is what reading specialist Jeanne Chall called 'world knowledge' and what Professor E. D. Hirsch calls 'cultural literacy.' It is the background information called upon to engage in intelligent conversation or read a newspaper with comprehension.

In Hirsch's words, "To grasp the words on a page we have to know a lot of information that isn't set down on the page. ...The comprehending reader must bring to the text appropriate background information that includes knowledge not only about the topic, but also the shared attitudes and conventions that color a piece of writing."


Mrs. Spalding's emphasis on fine literature, beginning the very first day of school, stems from her understanding that reading requires more than a set of techniques and strategies taught through modeling and practice. It requires fostering intergenerational understanding of the human experience which can only be achieved through judicious selection of the books children read.

Gathered in these two volumes are the writings that illuminate our past and present. In *The English Reader* are the

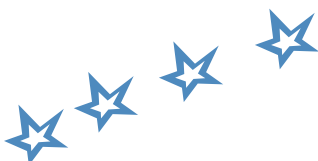
most memorable poems, songs and essays that shaped England, America and democracies around the world.

The American Reader takes us on a journey through the American experience, our common ideals and the efforts made to live up to them. It shows the contributions Americans of all creeds and colors have made to our shared history.

On the subject of the American experience, failing to mention David McCullough's "1776,"⁵ (now available in paperback), would be a serious omission. This is a book almost guaranteed to captivate upper-grade students. His account of that single most important year of the Revolutionary War has a stirring relevancy and immediacy that makes readers realize how close the poorly equipped and outnumbered colonists came to losing to the British, not once but several times.

That such books have the power to enrich and ennoble students' lives is reason enough to purchase them. It is also true that whatever the economic consequences of enforced ignorance, (described elsewhere in this newsletter), it is unimaginable that a democratic society, in which people must make intelligent judgments and informed decisions, can be sustained unless the concepts and values that forged it are known and understood. 

1. Harper Perennial, Harper Collins
2. Oxford University Press.
3. Connections between the K-12 Literature Curriculum, the Gender Gap, and the Decline in Reading: What Research Suggests - EDNEWS.org
4. The State of State English Standards <http://www.edexcellence.net>
5. Simon & Schuster, 2006



"Why did it seem plausible and attractive, after three thousand years of teaching reading by sounding each letter, to do just the opposite and encourage guesswork about the 'shapes' of words...this asinine substitution has massively failed as it deserved..." 1971, Barzun, op. cit. Schooling: Quotes Without Comment By David W. Kirkpatrick Columnist EDNEWS.org





Save the Date

Has Spalding, Does Travel

Our roving good will ambassador, Jim Sexton, is roving again. (We did let him stay home for Christmas.) You can find him and the Spalding Booth at the Core Knowledge Conference in Washington, D.C. February 21-24 at the Washington Marriot Wardham Park.

He will also attend the Charter School Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico on April 24-27 at the Albuquerque Convention Center.

Attention:

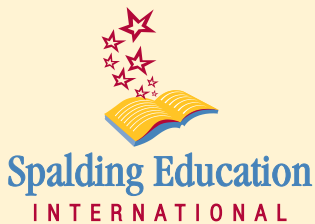
All Spalding Certified Teacher Instructors (SCTIs)

It's a little soon to start packing, but lest anyone forget, this comes under the heading of "Plan Ahead."

The SCTI Seminar this year is on May 10-12th at the Black Canyon Conference Center in Phoenix, AZ. In addition to being an opportunity to earn those all important Continuing Education Credits, obtain course updates, and preview new teaching aids, it promises to be a memorable occasion.

2007 marks the 50th anniversary of the 1957 publication of *The Writing Road to Reading* by Romalda Bishop Spalding.

The Friday night banquet will feature video clips of Mrs. Spalding teaching in Hawaii and Arizona, and other memorabilia from her long and productive life.



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Take The Writing Road
to Reading success

