

Steps along Readwell Road – reading books for adult learners by Linda Hoole

	Entry level 1 Step 1	Entry level 1/ 2 Step 2	Entry level 2/3 Step 3	Entry level 3/ level 1 Step 4
A shop	The Shop	The Shop must Shut	The Shop is Saved	The Robbery
B Pub	The Topcat	Peg and the Pub	Romance is in the Air	A Proposal
C No. 1	Jim and Nan	Poor Old Jim	Student Gardeners	A surprise for Jim and Nan
D No. 3	Wil and Lal	The Babysitter	No Football for Jon	Teenage Tantrums
E No 5	Helen and Adam	Coffee and Cake	A Heating Problem	Helen Smells a Rat
F No. 7	Mick and Lin	No Job for Mick	A Perfect Job	Fire
G No 6	Susan	Jack is Ill	A Panic for Susan	Mad Kay
H No. 2	Sam	Sam is in love	Another man?	The Stag Night
I No.4	Pat and Ben	Pat and her Pal	A shock for Ben and Pat	Our Baby (not written)
J No. 8	Ann	A Doggy Problem	A Bad Dog	A New Home for Max
K No.9	Dot	Dot's Problem	Messy Students	Students at the Fair
L No 10	Les	A Very Old Man	A Fall	Mystery at no. 10

Please note that titles will appear gradually on www.skillsworkshop.org – starting with Step 1 stories and activities.

Author's notes

As a teacher of basic skills in literacy for adults, I found that there were few books to consolidate the learning of my students when they were at the early stages of learning to read. Those that were available were either uninteresting or the vocabulary was too advanced and unstructured for an early reader. “Steps along Readwell Road” is a series of graded books that will assist a tutor to guide any student in basic skills to improve their reading skills and to achieve a level of reading, at the Adult Basic Skills Curriculum, level 1.

These books are not intended as a reading programme where students have to read every book at every stage. They are designed to be fun to read and to increase a student's confidence in reading. They also provide a useful tool for tutors within the classroom and when assessing progress.

In my writing I have drawn on my own experiences of teaching literacy to adults and children. There has, over the last few decades, been much argument about which is the best method of teaching reading and I am convinced that, in early stages, the phonetic method is the most successful, especially when the material meets the interests of the students.

Some students learn to read successfully using visual memory and contextual skills but, in my experience, those who have failed to learn to read by the time they are adults need some structure to their learning. If an adult has failed in reading the words they see in their everyday lives a “learning by osmosis” or “flashcard” approach is not going to help them. Much of the material available to tutors of basic skills literacy stimulates interest but the complexity of the text is off-putting to students who have often failed in the past as the progression is too swift and daunting and relies heavily on visual memory.

In “Steps along Readwell Road”, the early vocabulary is based on phonics and phonemes and a limited number of sight words. Many of these are used regularly in the stories and are easily decoded. A tutor using these books as a teaching tool will be able to extend the student's reading ability by using the word lists provided and thus the student will gain confidence in attempting to read unfamiliar texts.

The characters in my books live in a small community which could be situated in either an urban or rural environment and they represent a cross-section of society.

At every stage I have consulted colleagues both in adult education and special needs teaching to confirm and criticise my writing and the structure of progression and interest. My books have been very well received by both students and tutors and have proved to be an invaluable tool in teaching adults to acquire literacy skills.

Readwell Road in practice

The strengths of the scheme are:

- It is accessible and relevant to all students in the early stages of learning to read.
- It is appropriate for adults of all ages.
- It has the interest factor of a television soap opera.
- The characters and their lives reflect society.
- The vocabulary is graded steadily throughout the steps and word structure is carefully selected.
- Further activities are suggested for the tutor.
- Student development can be easily matched to the National Curriculum and therefore progress can be formally monitored.
- The stories are fun to read.

Most students do not need to read every story in each stage but can select the ones that interest them and follow characters through the steps.

Many of the stories and characters are interlinked; therefore the concept of an interactive community is conveyed.

Structure of the Books

There are four stages (steps), each increasingly more complex and challenging for the learner, but building on the reading skills developed in the previous stage and continuing a strand of interest in the characters encountered therein.

The vocabulary is carefully selected and the use of phonetics and sight words is embraced. At the end of each book is a list of the vocabulary introduced, and suggested discussion points drawn from each story. I also intend to develop photocopiable worksheets for each story and will match the activities to the relevant elements in the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum.

The stories are very short so I envisage putting three together in each book, possibly with simple illustrations. The characters involved in the stories within each book will interact with each other throughout the steps; students, therefore, will be able to select those stories that appeal to them. As aforementioned, I have written twelve stories at each level but as Readwell Road has no definitive length, I can extend this scheme at will, introducing new characters of various ages, social group, marital status and ethnic origins as appropriate.

The stories

STEP 1

The student is introduced to the main characters in the road. The vocabulary is limited to a selection of words from the “Dolch” list plus a few words that are specific to these books. There are also many CVC words, offering an opportunity for the tutor to extend learning through games and exercises.

Within each book the situation of the characters could generate the exploration of a social issue and further discussion and research as a group activity.

Some suggested activities will be included at the end of each book.

STEP 2

These books are written in the viewpoint of the characters introduced in step one. The reader learns more about them and often a problem is introduced which will be further developed and resolved in later stories. The vocabulary is more complex but most of the words from step one are used again. Some digraphs and blends are introduced at this level. These will be listed at the end of each book and further exercises to consolidate reading and spelling skills.

STEP 3

More word blends and digraphs are used at this level but there is repetition and consolidation of the vocabulary encountered in the earlier steps. The stories become more complex and the student will learn more about the characters and their lives.

STEP 4

At this level, the stories become more exciting. The vocabulary is still appropriate for an early reader but the storylines are more complex and should open lots more opportunity for debate and further exploration of the issues raised in each book.

Steps along Readwell Road – reading books for adult learners by Linda Hoole

Readwell Road map – for teacher and student reference

<p>No. 9 Dot Lives alone, husband left her Takes in students: Kevin, Dan, Gavin, Tim.</p>	<p>Readwell Road</p>	<p>No. 10 Les; old man Goes to live in a care home Disabled man, Mike, moves in</p>
<p>No. 7 Mick and Lin Mick is out of work They buy fish and chip shop</p>		<p>No. 8 Ann Lives alone Has problem with dog, Max</p>
<p>No. 5 Adam and Helen One son, Tim Big house, but money problems</p>		<p>No. 6 Susan Teacher, single parent Son Jack</p>
<p>No. 3 Wil and Lal Teenage kids and baby Wil is stepfather to teenagers</p>		<p>No. 4 Pat and Ben Ben, car mechanic Twins Alan and Jess</p>
<p>No. 1 Jim and Nan Elderly; cannot cope with garden Try out students Conrad, Nan's lost son arrives</p>		<p>No.2 Sam Divorced from Jen Loves Peg Works in pub</p>
<p>The shop Pam and Ron Threatened with closure Robbery Max the dog</p>		<p>The Topcat Pub Peg owns pub Sam is lover They marry</p>