



## Hal's Reading Diary - January 2006

Article Author:

[Roger Mills](#) [1]

[156](#) [2]

Article Category:

Hal's Diary and Baby Diary

Byline:

**Roger Mills** on Hal being taught to read.

**Hal is now nearly five and is being taught to read. While debate about different methods continues to rage, how is Hal faring? His father, psychodynamic counsellor Roger Mills, explains.** <!--break-->

Hal moved from nursery to primary school this autumn. It has been a big change in all sorts of ways, but one of the most obvious is that at the new school he is now learning his letters in earnest. The method Hal is being taught is 'Jolly Phonics'\* (which I think is the front runner in early reading learning these days). I remember next to nothing of my own earliest experiences of literacy (apart from an embarrassing reminiscence of trying to outdo another child in reciting the alphabet). But I am absolutely sure that they were very unlike the Jolly Phonics approach Hal is learning now.

Jolly Phonics looks pretty complicated at first sight. The kids focus not just on the letters of the alphabet, but also on the sounds in English, 42 of them in all. So as well as learning 'o' as in cot, you learn 'oo' as in boot. Along with each sound the children also learn an accompanying gesture. The gesture for 't' for example is moving your head from side to side as if watching a tennis match. The idea is that the gesture helps to embed the sound in the child's mind.

How is Hal doing with all this? Well, it is obviously very early days. He has started with letters like 's', 'a', 'p', 'i' and 'n' which allow you immediately to make simple words like 'sat' and 'pin'. And the pushy parent bit of me would love to be able to report that he has sailed effortlessly through the early stages and is hungrily asking for more letters and sounds.

But the fact of the matter is that he is only moderately interested. When we read before bed these days Jo or I will often try to get him to identify letters, for example in the title of a story. Sometimes too, we will read the kind of children's books that are structured around the alphabet to get him focusing on letters. Hal will go along with this a certain distance, and when he wants to identify letters he doesn't seem too bad at it. But he quickly gets bored and starts asking for a proper story. Letters are moderately interesting but a proper story like **Little Tim and the Brave Sea Captain\*\*** wins hands down.

Which raises, for me, the question of whether perhaps all this is happening a bit too early. Hal is not even five yet (his birthday is just after Christmas). If Hal were a little German boy he wouldn't be going to primary till he was six. If he were a little Swedish boy, I've been told, he wouldn't be going to school till seven. No doubt there are some small boys who are eager to read at early ages. And I think it is generally agreed that at this age girls are keener to get on with literacy than boys are. But given the way they do things in other countries, it is tempting to feel that we are pushing kids into literacy before they are really ready for it.

Another of Hal's recent learning experiences perhaps illustrates the point. In the early summer Jo and I tried to get him riding a bicycle, pushing him up and down the garden while hanging on to the end. It didn't work and we gave up. Two months later, after spending many long hours on a two wheel scooter, Hal tried again. This time he picked it up in about 15 minutes. He was ready for it and off he went. Hal, like a great many children, takes to things when the time is right.

And I have a strong suspicion that the bicycle experience will be repeated when it comes to reading.

\* Jolly Phonics is a structured reading programme which uses synthetic phonics with some gaiety added through games.

\*\* **Little Tim and the Brave Sea Captain** by Edward Ardizzone is published by Frances Lincoln (1 84507 456 4, £10.99 hbk).



[Hal November 2004.JPG](#) [3]

Hal - November 2005

Page Number:

13

---

**Source URL (retrieved on Jan '20):** <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/156/childrens-books/articles/hals-diary-and-baby-diary/hal%E2%80%99s-reading-diary-january-2006>

**Links:**

[1] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/roger-mills>

[2] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/156>

[3] [http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/Hal November 2004.JPG](http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/sites/default/files/Hal%20November%202004.JPG)