

Reading Challenges and...

Many Strategies for Learning to Read

Deb Coates

BEFORE YOU READ: What was it like for you to learn to read? What strategies have you used?

When I was in grammar school, I only learned how to read three- and four-letter words. I had to repeat two grades, but I did graduate 8th grade. I am not sure how. Even then, all I could read was three- and four-letter words. I felt like a failure.

Why didn't I get more help from the teacher? Looking back, I think she taught two grades combined. She had a lot of students with different needs. I wonder if it was too much for the teacher. Maybe she was overwhelmed by too many students.

I didn't get my driver's license until I was 27 because it was so hard to read the manual. On the day that I took the test, my examiner's wife was in the hospital having a baby. Her name was Debra, the same as mine. Well, I got four wrong on my test, and you were only allowed to get three wrong. My examiner passed me anyway. He said it was my lucky day, and he told me why. So, do you think that was lucky or what?!

I got married and my husband tried to teach me how to read better. He did the best he could, but where I really learned was a show called Shepherd's Chapel. This show had closed captions. The pastor read from the Bible, and the words showed up on the bottom of the screen. I followed along with him. That's how I learned to read some new words. Now, closed caption is available for any show to teach you the words.

When I turned 72, a friend showed me how to join a class on Zoom at The Literacy Project. I



didn't have to leave my home to learn. I feel safer in my own home than out in public. This helps me focus. When I got onto Zoom, I was nervous until I met my teacher. She made me feel at ease.

She taught me how to break down words and how to pronounce them. I learned about verbs and nouns, so I could write full sentences. And that led to writing short stories. I wish I had a teacher like her when I was a

kid. If I had learned to read and write, I could have gone further in my life.

For my whole life I have *bluffed my way through*, telling people I forgot my glasses so that they would read for me.

I feel like I am in a new world now that I can read. I have a new life. I can read newspapers, books, and lots more. If you are having a hard time reading, I hope my story will help you. Try different strategies until you find something that works for you.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What strategies did Deb use to learn to read? What has worked well for her?
2. What does it mean to *bluff your way through*?

Deb Coates is a student at the Literacy Project in Amherst, Massachusetts. It feels good to be able to read now!

