

What Teachers Don't Know About the NEW SDA READERS

By Sally McMillan

How do you make a series of reading textbooks? Many teachers in Seventh-day Adventist elementary schools are familiar with the main ingredients of the new Seventh-day Adventist Readers: Life Series. The books were first introduced in 1983, and the final two books in the series (Levels 8 and 9) are available for use this fall.

Sally McMillan was Assistant Editor of the SDA Elementary Reading Textbook Program from 1980-1984. She is currently self-employed as a communications consultant, and writes from Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Selecting stories for the Life Series involved the work of dozens of people, the utilization of many resources, and the talents of many writers.

In a survey conducted by the North American Division Office of Education, teachers using the Life Series identified the up-to-date, high-quality stories as a positive element of the Life Series. Teachers also recognized the excellent skills-development activities in the reading program.

However, making a reading textbook series requires more than a simple mix of up-to-date, high-quality stories and skills-development activities. Each step in the process is enhanced by highly skilled individuals and high-tech

procedures that give the Life Series its professional and distinctive flavor.

Story Selection

Selecting stories for the Life Series involved the work of dozens of people, the utilization of many resources, and the talents of many writers.

The first step in story selection was identifying potential stories for inclusion in a reading textbook. The editorial staff began this process by examining all of the stories used in the Ginn Rainbow Reading System, which is the base on which the Life Series is built. Terms of the contract with Ginn and Company allowed the SDA readers to retain as many of the existing stories as were suitable for use in SDA schools.

Ginn stories were reviewed for content that harmonizes with Adventist philosophy. In most levels about one-half to two-thirds of the stories were retained in the Life Series.

In instances where Ginn stories were not appropriate, the editorial staff sought replacement stories. Some sources of new stories included the Review and Herald Publishing Association library, SDA periodicals such as *Primary Treasure* and *Guide*, personal collections of individuals who had an interest in the reading series, and public libraries—including the Library of Congress.

When no suitable stories could be found, writers were given guidelines and asked to write an appropriate story. These guidelines often included such details as a specific Christian theme to be emphasized, gender of the primary characters, length, and readability level of the story. Some of these stories were written by the editorial staff, some by free-lance writers.

Throughout the process of selection and production, stories were subject to several levels of review. The editorial staff met frequently to discuss potential stories. A reading steering committee, composed of 15 educators who represented geographical regions of North America, met at least twice a year during the story-selection process. They

also communicated frequently by teleconference—at one point, teleconferences were held every week!

Criteria

The steering committee developed criteria to guide the staff in selecting and writing stories.

These criteria focused on both editorial and graphic content. They specified that selections should reflect sex fairness, portray minorities and women in positive and nontraditional roles, include persons with handicaps in group representations, depict aging men and women in dignified roles, and show respect for people of all races, religions, and socio-economic status.

The criteria guided editors in selecting stories that portray a wide range of human experience.

reviewed by the consultants, the editorial staff incorporated recommended revisions into the final manuscripts and began the process of writing skills-development activities to accompany stories.

Skills Development

All ingredients of the skills program are incorporated in a five-step instructional cycle described in detail at the beginning of each Teacher's Edition. The cycle begins with *placing* the student at the proper instructional level in the program. The teacher can then use overview materials to *plan* long-range instruction. Specific objectives are identified for *teaching* each lesson. *Evaluation* materials enable the teacher to assess the pupil's *skills development* at the end of each unit. The Life Series also includes a

In most levels about one-half to two-thirds of the Ginn stories were retained in the Life Series.

Artists were also directed to illustrate stories with a sensitivity to these social concerns.

After establishing the criteria, the committee also reviewed each story, identifying the best stories for each textbook and suggesting revisions to improve both retained and new stories.

In addition to the steering committee, six individuals served as consultants to the project. These consultants had special interests or training that made them extremely valuable in judging accuracy and appropriateness of stories.

The process of finalizing content for a single textbook sometimes took a year or more. Members of the steering committee examined and reexamined stories to be certain that children learning to read from the textbooks would not only find the stories interesting, but inspirational and instructional as well. At times while laboring over the details of story selection, the steering committee and editorial staff felt as if "blood, sweat, and tears" were primary ingredients of the Life Series.

After stories had been approved by the steering committee and

broad range of materials to *reinforce/enrich* the pupil's learning experience.

Three core skills development strands—*vocabulary*, *comprehension*, and *decoding*—are systematically and sequentially developed throughout this five-step cycle. These are the essential reading skills, and pupils receive repeated instruction in them. Skills developed in these strands are tested at the end of each textbook unit.

Four application/enrichment strands—*study skills*, *creativity*, *language*, and *literature* are also developed within the five-part cycle. Creativity, language, and literature activities arise naturally in relation to the content of each selection. Study skills are developed more independently.

Curriculum development specialists working with Ginn and Company identified these seven strands of skills development. Extensive field research was used to appropriately sequence the introduction of skills and to identify specific activities used in skills development. The skills-development program in the Life Series builds on this research base, retain-

The process of finalizing content for a single textbook sometimes took a year or more.

ing the professional approach to skills development while adapting specific activities so that they correspond to story content and reflect SDA philosophies and themes.

Each lesson plan includes four sections—*preparing for reading, reading and discussing the selection, interrelated activities, and developing reading skills*. In these sections, the teacher's manual suggests additional activities that are appropriate for individual activity or class preparation and discussion.

This four-part structure of the lesson plan is also based on research conducted by Ginn and Company. Individual lesson plans have been adapted as necessary, but always with the effort to retain the skills-development procedures whenever possible.

Each of the 15 levels in the reading textbook series required many months of staff time reviewing and rewriting skills-development materials in Teacher's Editions, Skilpaks, and Studybooks. The steering committee and consultants also reviewed these materials and applied their expertise in Adventist education to assure that the Life Series

Throughout the process of selection and production, stories were subject to several levels of review.

has a high-quality skills-development program with an Adventist flavor.

High-Tech Procedures

The use of computing capabilities enhanced both the speed and accuracy of the editorial staff as they developed stories and skills materials.

A computer program that identified the readability level of each

story was developed by the General Conference Information Systems Service. The program used five different readability tests to determine the grade level of each selection. Not only could the program identify stories that were too easy or too difficult for the level, but it could also identify specific problematic passages. Using the program, editors could rewrite passages to increase or decrease the readability level.

While it is possible to hand calculate readability levels, the computerized process improved both the accuracy and speed of readability analysis. Many selections were revised numerous times as part of the review process, and the readability was re-analyzed after each revision. Hand calculation of readability scores would have been far too cumbersome to allow for this continual re-analysis.

The editorial staff also used computers to track vocabulary. This high-tech application was especially important in the early levels of the reading series. The Ginn system of vocabulary building includes many rules about the introduction of words to students who are learning to read. Because the Life Series builds on the Ginn system, it was necessary to follow these rules, which include stipulations about repetition of new words, number of new words per story, level at which syllabic patterns are introduced, and so on.

The computer was used to identify every word in every story and to assure that all rules for vocabulary building were followed. This system required keeping a massive cumulative record of words as well as developing a system for noting frequency of word use, tracking subsequent uses of words after their initial introduction, and other specific aspects of vocabulary development.

Often an editor would write or revise a story with the word list and vocabulary rules in hand.

Other editors and consultants might review the selection and not find problems in the vocabulary development. However, when the story was subjected to computer analysis, flaws often appeared—and were corrected.

High-tech computers will probably never replace the highly skilled people who apply their knowledge and experience to curriculum development, but high-tech procedures were an important part of the process of making the Life Series.

Details

Understanding the philosophies of story selection and skills development can help the teacher better

Members of the steering committee examined and reexamined stories to be certain that children learning to read from the textbooks would not only find the stories interesting, but inspirational and instructional as well.

appreciate the quality of material in the Life Series. An overview of the high-tech procedures illustrates the value of computers to fine-tuning the procedures for the teaching of reading. But there are still other aspects of textbook production that lie deep beneath the covers of the books. The details involved in producing textbooks are so many and varied that to understand them all would require spending several months with the editorial team watching them perform an unending repetition of seemingly mundane tasks.

The detail work includes obtaining permission to use copyrighted material, working with artists and designers to assure that illustrations are not only appropriate for

Continued on page 35

present and eternal interests of each student.

Complaints have reached church headquarters of swearing, drinking, and intimate fraternizing between married supervisors and students of the opposite sex. Carelessness in church attendance and Sabbath observance, and crude and tasteless behavior and conversation by employees and supervisors at school industries and departments have also been alleged. If teachers, administrators, or pastors were guilty of these indiscretions, such behavior would not be considered acceptable. How can we allow lower standards for other employees who share the responsibility for shaping young lives?

In hiring what we sometimes call support personnel, should we not consider more than good management skills, craftsmanship, and the ability to get the work done? Should we not carefully check their character references, including calling their pastor to verify a faithful relationship to the church?

When we interview maintenance and industry workers, we should require as clear a statement of Christian commitment and mission as we do from teachers. Since these workers have a special opportunity and responsibility to show students how Christianity translates into practical life, we must expect such employees to uphold the highest Christian standards.

Recently Christian institutions have been accused of unnecessary discrimination when they require religious qualifications of those whose jobs are not strictly religious in nature. Adventist schools have traditionally asserted that religion is incorporated into every class and activity.

A 1984 decision of the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that good standing with the church is a *bona fide* occupational qualification for employment in a religious school. Likewise, the U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled that church institutions may use religion as a criterion when hiring employees.

Such decisions must, however, not be regarded as simply legal permission to discriminate. They

should be viewed rather as a recognition by intelligent judges that a school cannot be religious or Christian unless it is so *throughout*. These rulings affirm the absolute necessity of a school's choosing *only* workers who share the goals of that institution. In no other way can our schools expect to achieve their mission.

Let us as Adventist educators and administrators determine to keep our schools what they profess to be—Christian. This will require the application of high standards for selecting and supervising every person in every department of our schools. □

NEW SDA READERS

Continued from page 17

the selection but also meet the criteria established by the steering committee. And the art has to match the stories. If the story says that the man was sitting in his car at the gas station, the illustration mustn't show him standing inside the office!

Production includes constant vigilance to be certain that every individual from the editorial assistant who types manuscripts to the clerk who ships the finished books to SDA schools stays on schedule. Conversations with publishing personnel, designers, and artists were documented and records kept for future reference.

Checking—Again and Again

Time-consuming details included the sheer number of times a story had to be read by every member of the editorial team as well as by the steering committee and consultants. The editors practically wore out a Xerox machine producing the thousands of pages necessary to supply copies to all the people who needed to read each story.

Each story was read initially to determine whether it should be included in the textbooks, reread and edited to be certain that it met the criteria, checked for readability and read again, checked for vocab-

ulary and read again, read by both the editorial staff and designer to determine appropriate illustration, typeset by the printer and read for errors that might have been introduced in the typesetting, placed on the appropriate page with illustrations and proofread again before the final printing.

Workbooks and Teacher's Editions had to be checked carefully for accuracy. Changing a single word in the Pupil Text (particularly if it was a vocabulary word) produced a domino effect, requiring revisions in every component, including testing materials.

An editor checked each component again after printing to be sure the art had been reproduced properly and to see if any errors had crept in.

This description shares a few of the "hidden ingredients" in the Life Series reading textbooks and enables the teacher to recognize the solid base of research and technology on which the series is based. Each task from the most sophisticated to the most mundane is an essential ingredient in the making of a reading series. □

Legal Update A PRIMER ON NEGLIGENCE

Continued from page 19

crucial point in recognizing when that duty is being breached. If teachers become knowledgeable about tort law and legal responsibility they will be better able to prevent lawsuits. But more important, they will become more conscious of their responsibility to ensure that classrooms are safe places for children.

A future column will offer some suggestions about preventing lawsuits based on negligence and intentional torts.—Mark K. Brooks. □

REFERENCES

¹ *Alferoff vs. Casagrande*, 504 N.Y.S. 2d 719, 122 A.D. 2d 183.

² Restatement, Second, Torts, Section 282.

³ 162 N.E. 99 (N.Y. 1928).