



A. Sterl Artley, Last Surviving Author of Dick and Jane, Dies

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Editors' Note: Word was recently received from Judith A. Toalson, daughter of A. Sterl Artley, concerning the death of her father, who died July 7, 1998. Her letter in part stated, "It was his wish that I contact you upon his death. . . I know that his involvement with the *History of Reading News* was most meaningful in his life as an educator." The following are excerpts from his obituary and from an article published in *The Kansas City Star* ("Dick and Jane" author dies in Overland Park, July 9, 1998).

Dr. A. Sterl Artley, 91, Mission Hills, KS, died Tuesday, July 7, 1998. Dr. Artley, professor of education emeritus at the University of Missouri, Columbia, was internationally recognized as an authority on child reading techniques and the only surviving author of the *Dick and Jane* reading primer. A native of Pennsylvania, he is survived by three children, John W. Artley, Judith A. Toalson, and Jan A. Goodman. Dr. Artley received the B.A. and the M.Ed. degrees from the University of Pittsburgh and the Ph.D. degree from Pennsylvania State University. Dr. Artley taught psychology at Stephens College in Columbia until 1946, when he joined the teaching faculty of the University of Missouri in the area of reading and language arts as a Professor of Education.

Dr. Artley was the last remaining author of the popular *Dick and Jane* reading primers, which were used in the schools from the 1930s to the 1970s. Nationally recognized as a leader in reading methodology, Artley was hired by Scott, Foresman in the late 1940s to revise the *Fun with Dick and Jane* reading series.

Along with William S. Gray of the University of Chicago and May Hill Arbuthnot of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Artley crafted the curriculum used by most schools to teach children to read. He wrote the teaching manuals that accompanied the series, which focused on three children who lived in a typical house in a typical neighborhood in post-war America.

During the height of the series' popularity, about 80 percent of American school children read about Dick, Jane and Sally. Eighteen words were used in the first primer. In the second book, those words were repeated and 21 others added. No page introduced more than one word, and no story introduced more than three words.

In his later years, Artley endorsed whole language, although he continued to favor the structured method of the *Dick and Jane* series, said Richard Robinson, a professor of curriculum and instruction at the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Education.

Robinson, who described Artley as a "major figure" in the field of reading, came to MU in the early 1970s for the chance to work with Artley, who at one time was president of the International Reading Association.

After he retired in the 1970s, Artley periodically dropped by the MU education school. But in recent years, fewer faculty members recognized the man who helped write the books that taught them to read. And that was all right with Artley, Robinson said. He shirked the limelight, preferring to be known as a pre-eminent teacher of teachers, a man who personally directed the studies of 46 doctoral students and 289 master's students.

Artley couldn't escape the legacy of *Dick and Jane*. In later years, as he continued his work on the lecture circuit, Artley composed a little response to the frequent questions, "Whatever happened to Dick, Jane, and Sally?" Artley would tell audiences that Dick became a politician. His slogan? "Run, Dick, run." Jane married and became an ardent advocate for women's rights : "Help Jane win equal rights for women." Sally became a primary teacher with a room full of admiring children. She frequently said to them, "Jump, children, jump. Jump high in the air."

Artley considered his work with Dick and Jane secondary to his calling as professor, but he became attached to the characters he spent so much time with, said his daughter Judy Toalson. "These little characters just took on a life of their own," she said.



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