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This Honey Bunny Ain't So Funny

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Writing Process

This assignment consisted of recounting an experience or time when you learned either a primary or secondary literacy. After a few brief brainstorming exercises including a five-minute free-write, my mind was instantly drawn to an experience I had when I was younger. This experience stuck out in particular, not only because it was the foundation of my ability to read, but also because it was my first known embarrassing story. Once I decided on this topic, I began jotting down as many details from that time as possible. I eventually pieced together my thoughts and began composing the narrative, adding details as they came to mind. Overall, the most difficult part about this writing process was revisiting the unfortunate scenario from my youth. Other than that, it was a fairly smooth process from start to finish

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This Honey Bunny Ain't so Funny*

My heart was racing so fast, I could practically feel the thumping in my head. The only sound louder than my speeding heartbeat was the thundering echo of a classroom of kids laughing and pointing at me. The world was moving in slow-motion as I panicked and attempted to conjure up a way to climb out of the grave I dug myself. For the first time in my young seven-year-old life, I was experiencing the unforgiving sensation of embarrassment, and I was sure there was no possible way anything good could come from it.

First grade generally was not a difficult period in my academic career, as is the case for most people. Singing songs, coloring pictures, taking mandatory naps—this was the extent of my scholastic résumé thus far. Though this was a comfortable learning stage, remaining at this spot forever would prevent this anecdote from ever being written. Still, my reading and writing abilities did not form overnight; an ongoing literacy journey has, and continues to, propel me forward. I began my ascent into literacy in an extremely unique way that I will never forget.

The foundation of my ability to read was set one infamous day when my class was given a responsibility it had never previously been entrusted. We were to pick a story we enjoyed, learn how to read it, and present it to the rest of the class on the selected day. I found the first half of the task exceptionally straightforward because I already had an undisputed favorite book, *Honey Bunny Funnybunny*, by Marilyn Sadler. I had heard this story a ridiculous amount because I constantly pestered my mom into reading it to me whenever she got the chance. As a result, I had

never taken the time to actually learn to read it myself. This Dr. Seuss-esque storybook is around twenty pages long and, despite its deceptively intellectual title, is only ranked at a beginner's reading level. Being within this recommended seven to ten age range, I figured I could surely decipher the book and figure out how to read it proficiently. For this reason, coupled with the fact I was a self-proclaimed expert on this particular tale, I concluded this was not a pressing matter and it was not necessary to dive into it right away. I simply thought, "I'll just do that later. I've got more important things to do." So I forgot about the task and retreated back to the much larger concern of my regularly scheduled neighborhood *capture the flag* and *freeze tag* tournament until sunset.

Many similarly carefree days passed by as the due date steadily advanced. In typical fashion, I did not start addressing the assignment until the night before. When I finally got into it and glanced through the hardcover, I realized I knew the story, but had no idea what most of the words said. With the exception of a few familiar terms here and there, I was not able to read what I had set out to. Unfortunately, my problem-solving abilities were not up to par and not once did it cross my mind to choose a simpler book. Panicked thoughts flooded my head as I asked, "What have I gotten myself into?" I began contemplating how I should approach this project and somehow reasoned my way into believing I could get through it without learning to read the actual book. I thought I would be able to just pull everything from memory and make things up as I went along. I knew the overall sequence of events and was confident I could wing it and no one would know the difference. In preparation for the next day, I set out my uniform, zipped up my backpack, and braced myself for what was to come when I woke up.

The morning arrived, as it always does, and soon it was finally time for the class to begin sharing our beloved books. Volunteers were taken and most of my friends got up and presented

theirs without any problems. Eventually, I was chosen so I strutted up to the front of the classroom and settled into the stool facing the audience. I was ready to go, but as soon as I opened to the first page, my mind went completely blank. After a lengthy pause filled with nothing but silence, I began speaking. Without even knowing what I was saying, words started frantically spilling out of my mouth—“Honey Bunny...Uh...Was...Great.” I stared at the illustrations on the different pages and tried to remember what was occurring in the plot. In all reality, I don’t think I made any sense and was probably not close to telling the real story at all. It was a valiant effort, but my reputation around the first grade was about to go down in flames and I had a front row seat to experience the disaster.

About midway through the train wreck, my teacher, whose name I no longer know as result of either time or repression, stopped me. Before twenty-five of my peers, she called me out point-blank asking, “Are you really reading that book? Or are you just making up a story?” Naturally, I lied and assured her I definitely was reading. In response, she very astutely highlighted the fact that I spent circa two minutes “reading” one page that had, give or take, ten words on it. I regretfully accepted defeat and, simultaneously, the whole room erupted into laughter. Picture a scene out of any kid’s television show where the protagonist has a dream that he is in school with nothing but his underwear on, and then apply it to this situation—that’s what it felt like. It was almost cliché having a room full of kids losing their minds laughing at the embarrassment of another. Nonetheless, this was really happening to me. Utter humiliation flowed through every inch of my body and it was the most gut-wrenching experience I had ever endured.

Still, to my great misfortune, the suffering did not end there. When I got home, my parents were not particularly pleased about the lengthy note detailing the incident that was

stapled to my assignment book. For the next week, my mom and I would study my old pal, *Honey Bunny Funnybunny*. This time, however, I was the one who had to do the reading. We started going through the book word by word, sounding it out and I absolutely detested it. I was so young, but it felt like I was being patronized, reverting back to an exercise I thought I left in kindergarten. Although this was my favorite book, the process of spending hours on end simply trying to make sense of an arrangement of letters printed on a couple pieces of paper made me despise it.

On the grounds that I did not hold an overwhelmingly positive attitude about this method of studying, my mom tried to find more effective ways for me to learn. After some thought, she made flashcards for every term that appeared cover-to-cover. She constructed a game to see how many expressions I could recite correctly in an allotted amount of time. I was so engaged in the competition, it did not occur to me that I was starting to recognize the words and their meanings. Motivation came in the form of my mom, who worked with me throughout the whole process, and wanted me to be able to read more than I did myself. She was patient with me whenever I grew frustrated from failing to read a word correctly. I was constantly persisted by her to examine the cards and play the game as often as I could. I sometimes grew annoyed with her incessant badgering, but in retrospect, I think she knew this was the only way I would actually practice.

Once I was able to complete the deck of flashcards void of mistakes, my mom made me revisit the once cherished storybook and read it aloud to her. To my utter surprise and delight, I did it. The first time around, there were a few minor bumps and pauses, but I got through it and actually understood what I was saying. I went back over the book again and again until I was confident I could articulate each sentence without hesitation. My mom, of course, said she knew

I could do it all along and suggested I ask my teacher for a second chance. The next day at school, I was bestowed the opportunity to redeem myself and read it to the class—for real this time. I gracefully completed the job and felt a rush of relief as I sensed I could truly show my face around school again. I was proud of myself, but it was even more satisfying when I received a warm, supportive reaction from my friends. All of my classmates clapped and gave me encouraging words of congratulations. They were happy for me that I finally conquered the assignment, but at the same time, most of them were probably just glad to sit back and listen to me talk instead of doing class work. The positive reception from my friends solidified that I had achieved my goal. It gave me the confidence to set a new goal and continue to read other books down the line.

All in all, learning to read that story was one of the first milestones in accomplishing the primary literacy of reading written text. As time progressed, the process of reading books became drastically easier. I owe it all to my mom, who used techniques that were best suited for my learning style to teach me how to read. She forced me to work at it until I achieved the goal that had been laid down. The situation was in no way ideal, but in hindsight, I'm glad my mortification debut was put to good use as a significant step towards achieving primary literacy.

* This essay received the Barbara Farrelly Award for Best Writing of the Issue