

**Now he wants to read**  
**by Joyce Goldmanis**

GARETH, aged seven years three months, came up into my group of seven-to-ten-year-olds with the reputation of being unable to read. On trying him out on a very simple book, I found that his reputation was only too well-founded. He stumbled and stuttered, made wild guesses, and when he did succeed in reading the right words, the sense seemed to mean nothing whatever to him. He was totally uninterested in reading and only tried the troublesome business to oblige.

For the first two weeks of term I studied him carefully. He had a most intelligent and enquiring mind, full of pertinent queries and ideas about History, Literature, and Bible, and in Maths made quite a reasonable scale-plan of his table and contents. Although quiet and shy, he was a very friendly little boy when one made contact. There was just this block over reading; after every reading session we both felt disheartened. There must be a way of overcoming this disability, I thought.

I asked myself, 'Why can't an intelligent boy of this age read?' and the answer seemed to come to me, 'Because subconsciously he sees no point in it, and has no desire to read. His lively imagination gets all the sustenance it wants from stories that are told him, and picture books he likes to study.' I remembered from the far off days of my training college the maxim, 'The mind is incapable of learning what it does not wish to learn, consciously or unconsciously'. The remedy seemed to be, 'Then make him wish to learn' and so the idea came to me.

I would write a little book for Gareth, about Gareth himself, having various adventures. Then perhaps he would really want to know what happened next, and then the ability to read would come.

First I found out all I could about Gareth's home background. He lived with his mother and little sister in the neighbouring market town; Father was dead, and there were no animals in the home. His best friend at school was Andrew, who lived on a farm, and had horses, ponies, and dogs. These facts could be made relevant to the story I would write for him.

So one evening I sat down to my typewriter and began the first chapter of 'Gareth's Adventures'.

When his turn for reading came the next day, I put before him Chapter One which began: 'Gareth lived in R .... with his mother and sister; in the town a market was held once a week, and that was where his first adventure started.' I explained that this was the beginning of a whole book about him, and perhaps he could help to write it as well as read a new bit each day. Gareth's solemn little face lit up, and his eyes sparkled. He read about how he went to the Market with sixpence to spend, and chose a tiny brass pot badly in need of cleaning. When he got home he sat on his bed and began to polish up the little brass pot; there was a flash of green light and a Magic Hare appeared before him, ready to take Gareth anywhere he liked in time or space. The Hare was soft and furry and lovable, and Gareth trusted him from the start. The real Gareth sitting beside me at the table was delighted, and read  
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better than I had expected. When his reading turn was up, I let him design a cover for his Book, and draw a picture of Mr. Hare on the page I had left blank.

The next day in Chapter Two, Gareth read how he called up the Hare again by rubbing

the little brass pot, and asked to be taken to visit his friend Andrew at his home ten miles away. First though, he cautiously enquired how he would get home again, and was told by Mr. Hare 'Just rub the pot and say "Home", but if you ever lose the pot, to get home you must stand in front of the nearest bush and say "Mr. Hare, Mr. Hare, please come out, if you're there" and I will come and take you home safely.' Gareth was told to shut his eyes and when he opened them he found himself outside the pinkish house in the Forest where Andrew lived. (I had of course asked Andrew the previous day all about his home, grounds, and animals.)

When the real Gareth had read this chapter with great interest, I asked him where he would like Mr. Hare to take him next. 'I would like to go back to Norman times', Gareth replied promptly.

So that night I typed the next chapter in which Gareth and Mr. Hare flew backwards till they reached the eleventh century, and Gareth found himself a charcoal burner's boy with the Saxon name Gurth. They were in the New Forest on the day when the royal hunting party came by, and Sir Walter Tyrrell the Norman knight shot the fatal arrow and killed William Rufus.

Gareth helped Sir Walter to escape the other Normans by catching and holding his horse for him. The other charcoal burners threaten to beat Gareth for helping a Norman, so Gareth prudently flies back to 1970.

And so our daily reading sessions were full of interest, and progress in fluent reading was the result.

Soon I told Gareth that next time *he* could tell *me* about his next adventure, and I would write it down and type it just as he told me. Gareth unhesitatingly dictated to me how he had visited Mr. Samuel Pepys during the Fire of London. Together they went to report to King Charles II, who exclaimed (according to Gareth) 'I *thought* I could smell something burning on the fresh night air', which I felt was a very telling sentence.

Gareth much enjoyed the next day reading his own words duly typed into the fast-growing book. Each day he re-read again silently a part of the story and did some more illustrations.

His reading really was improving steadily, and the teacher with whom he did 'Extra Reading' from another book was quite surprised at his progress.

At the Half Term weekend I told Gareth I would try to do another instalment although I was going away for two days. 'Oh yes,' said Gareth firmly, 'Two chapters I should hope.'

The time came at last for the book to end, it might well have gone on for a year, but I felt I was perhaps giving too much time to one child at the expense of the others. So we had a grand Finale when Gareth went into the future, and found himself in Windsor Great Park just in time to save Her Majesty the Queen from being kidnapped by Communists. Gareth hurled his little brass pot at the man with the revolver and hit him so hard on the nose that he dropped his gun, and the Duke of Edinburgh arrived just in time to avert the kidnapping. However, Gareth had lost his little

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brass pot in a thicket, and had to resort to the magic rhyme Mr. Hare had taught him in order to conjure up Mr. Hare and return to the present.

The end of the book was Gareth and Mr. Hare saying goodbye to each other, as Mr. Hare now had another little boy to look after, 'And, do you know, he is older than you Gareth, but he can't READ.'

The real Gareth gave a rather superior smile as he read these last words.

A great moment of triumph for us both was when Gareth asked for a history book to read to himself; he came sidling up to me with the book in his hand and pointed to two words—'I THINK this says JOHN MILTON'—and it did! At last he had found a reason for learning to read, it helps you to find out more about things and people you are interested in.

There was an amusing sequel to our term's achievement. The book, having been properly bound into a stiff cover by me, and illustrated by Gareth, featured in our end of term Show of Work for the Parents. The mother of Gareth's friend Andrew, who had featured in the first adventure, was so enchanted to find her son in Gareth's book that she said she would borrow it and make some more copies for herself, and other interested parents. I am hoping that she will present me with a copy, as I did not keep a duplicate!

I am very conscious that there is nothing specially original in the way I found to help Gareth with his reading, it has probably been done often before by other teachers faced with the same problem. But to me it was a new idea, and I felt I would like to pass it on just in case it came to the eyes of someone who had not thought of trying it.