

The Blue Hotel [1899]

by Stephen Crane

The Palace Hotel at Fort Romper

was painted a light blue, a shade that is on the legs of a kind of heron, causing the bird to declare its position against any background. The Palace Hotel, then, was always screaming and howling in a way that made the dazzling winter landscape of Nebraska seem only a gray swamp-like hush. It stood alone on the prairie, and when the snow was falling the town two hundred yards away was not visible. But when the traveler alighted at the railway station he was obliged to pass the Palace Hotel before he could come upon the company of low wooden houses which composed Fort Romper, and it was not to be thought that any traveler could pass the Palace Hotel without looking at it. Pat Scully, the proprietor, had proved himself a master of strategy when he chose his paints. It is true that on clear days, when the great trans-continental trains, long lines of swaying box-cars, swept through Fort Romper, passengers were overcome at the sight, and the cult that knows the brown-reds and the subdivisions of the dark greens of the East expressed shame, pity, horror, in a laugh. But to the citizens of this prairie town, and to the people who would naturally stop there, Pat Scully had performed a feat. With this opulence and splendor, these creeds, classes, egotisms, that streamed through Romper on the rails day after day, they had no color in common.

As if the displayed delights of such a blue hotel were not sufficiently enticing, it was Scully's habit to go every morning and evening to meet the leisurely trains that stopped at Romper and work his seductions upon any man that he might see wavering, luggage in hand.



Chapter 1 | 294 Words

The Pen that's Mightier than the Word

Steven Donahue tests the merits of the ReadingPen,[™] an invention which scans words instantly, providing definitions and translations to language learners

Opening Language Doors

Angela picked up the pen, inserted the earplug into her good ear, and mimicked the word that had just been scanned on the paper, “dazzling.”

Which is pretty dazzling itself — considering that Angela is a profoundly deaf ESL student, struggling to be bilingual in her virtually silent world. For her, the ReadingPen has opened up a new door to learning English. In fact, Angela lived in a soundless backdrop until she immigrated to the United States four years ago from her native Colombia, underwent surgery, and heard the first sounds in her life. Since then, she has been re-constructing spoken language, and this semester the ReadingPen has made a tremendous difference in her comprehension of English at Miami Dade College.

But the reading pen has proven itself useful to scores of students on Miami Dade College's English as an Academic Program (EAP), where the hurdles to learning English, particularly its vocabulary, can be steep for new Americans. Angela, along with the rest of an advanced ESL reading class had just completed a rigorous pre and post test experiment to rate the merits of the ReadingPen.



Significant Improvement with ReadingPen

Students in a Control (B) and Experimental (A) class were given a pre-test consisting of 20 words derived from the beginning chapter of Stephen Crane's “The Blue Hotel” (figure 3). Later they were given the chapter, and then given a post test on the vocabulary. Students in the Experimental class were allowed to use the ReadingPen to help them understand the Blue Hotel chapter.

Results in the Experimental Class (A) were significant (Figure 1). The pre-test average vocabulary scores were 18 percent in the Experimental Class—and most students stated that they were “totally guessing.” Post test scores were not just better, but dazzling—with the average score being 88 percent. This is a whopping intra-grade 70 percent increase in vocabulary comprehension.

A second Control Class (B) was given the same experiment but

without the use of the ReadingPen. They were allowed to use the dictionary instead, and a few of the students even had electronic dictionaries. The results between the two classes were a stark lesson in how technology can boost the comprehension of second language learners. Class (B) went from 19 percent on the pre-test to only 24 percent accuracy on the post-test. A trivial gain of 5 percent. Meanwhile, Class (A) went from 18 percent on the pre-test to 88 percent on the post-test. This was a 64 percent differential in understanding the vocabulary on the passage between the Experimental and Control classes.

The “Magic Pen” to the Rescue

Student comments and use of the ReadingPen tell it all:

Ana, the mother of an autistic child, not only marveled at her ability to read the novel *Finding Forrester* in class, but was astounded how the pen helped her autistic child really focus on his assignments. Ana commented: “I have been using the ReadingPen for the last few days. It is an incredible device that allows me to scan words and sentences to know what they mean. This “magic pen” improves reading comprehension and motivates people to discover the fascinating world of wisdom and knowledge enclosed in books.”

Melissa, who came to America two years ago from Colombia rapidly, built up her comprehension of English vocabulary with the ReadingPen. Her goal was to read as well as her nine year old brother who was in the Miami Dade County public school system. She

was amazed that he took up the pen and rapidly improved his reading comprehension as well.

Melissa wrote about the ReadingPen: “I study English as a second language. The ReadingPen is a fascinating practice tool for people who are learning English like me. With this pen, you can find the definition faster of any word than by looking in the dictionary... when you find the word you can hear the word, translate the word from English to Spanish and view the syllables, definitions, and synonyms.”

Ledy, a 17 year-old high school graduate was distressed to having been placed in the ESL program despite an American diploma. During class breaks she texts messages with her thumbs in a

NO. ANSWER

- 1 color
- 2 wailing
- 3 grassy plain
- 4 joys
- 5 beauty
- 6 wading bird
- 7 scenery
- 8 disgrace
- 9 required
- 10 unsure
- 11 bright
- 12 rocking
- 13 make helpless
- 14 sympathy
- 15 passed through
- 16 owner
- 17 tracks
- 18 within
- 19 luxury

Control and Experimental Classes

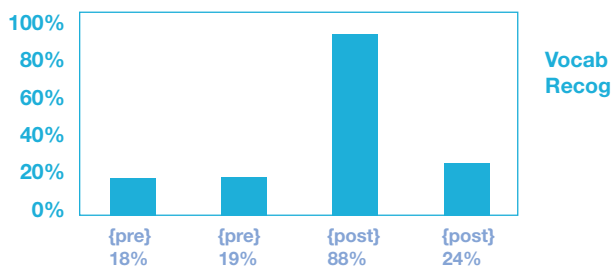


Figure 1 Test Results

flurry of movements ‘talking’ with friends. She took to the pen like a duck to water and remarked, “Why couldn’t I have had this years ago?” She remarked, “This pen is a great invention for all people who don’t speak English. It helps you to know the definition of many words.”

Renier, a new American from Colombia, examined the advanced features of the ReadingPen. He managed to download all the words he had looked up to his computer, and set it up for a left handed user.

Elsa wrote: “I think the reading pen is a very good reading device because it is fast, is easy to carry on because is really small. The word definitions are very specific and clear. In conclusion, I think that everybody who is studying English or any other language has to have one.”

Juliette wrote, “The ReadingPen is better than a dictionary because you don’t have to type the word for knowing the meaning.”

The ReadingPen also becomes a family affair. Yanet wrote: “On Saturday morning I was doing homework and my father saw the reading pen. He read some words and definitely he likes it. Another student’s mother, who is in the VESOL program found the pen a God-send for learning English vocabulary.

Alejandro, a young student from Colombia, summed it up and said, “The ReadingPen is the only pocket-sized reading device that helps increase comprehension.”

Conclusion: Don’t Read Without It

Angela, doubly encumbered by having to learn a second language with a learning disability is a testament to the usefulness of the “magic pen.” After several weeks of using the pen, she seamlessly scanned, listened, and parroted the new words in her reading.

And my Level 5 Reading Class was transformed. A classroom of students effortlessly scanned and gained vocabulary as they finally began to comprehend the texts we had in class.

Students no longer fumbled with heavy dictionaries or became frustrated at mistyping new words into their electronic dictionaries. In fact, with the ReadingPen, this is the most productive reading class that I have ever had. **X**

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Name _____ Date _____

Vocabulary

**Directions: Read the first word in each line.
Draw a circle around the other word or words in the line
that means about the same as the first word.**

NO.	TERM	WORD 1	WORD 2	WORD 3	WORD 4
1	shade	ditch	color	window	tray
2	howling	wailing	trapping	carrying	finding
3	prairie	frozen lake	swamp	forest	grassy plain
4	delights	beaches	clubs	joys	riddles
5	splendor	beauty	fruit	age	location
6	heron	poisonous snake	ridge	stone	wading bird
7	landscape	prince	scenery	office	music
8	shame	disgrace	purpose	material	anger
9	obliged	mended	hoped	required	yelled
10	wavering	unsure	shallow	poor	necessary
11	dazzling	loyal	bright	guilty	afraid
12	swaying	looking	chasing	singing	rocking
13	overcome	become old	produce	Make helpless	remember
14	pity	pain	sympathy	size	appearance
15	swept	looked around	missed	tripped	passed through
16	proprietor	student	owner	friend	visitor
17	rails	tracks	songs	clouds	hills
18	through	below	away	within	near
19	opulence	work	garden	nest	luxury
20	feat	mistake	skillful	act	injury

Figure 2 Test Instrument