

# Dyslexia WA Newsletter

*harness the gift*  
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Newsletter of Dyslexia Correction Service trading as Dyslexia WA; Contact (618) 9591 3482; 0439 698 587; 0479 121 163. email dyslexiacorrectionwa@gmail.com. Annette Johnston: Licensed Davis Facilitator

## Senior Australian of the Year a dyslexia champion

Frank Johnston

Jackie French, author of over 140 children's books, has been awarded a top Australian honour for her work and dedication to inspiring students to become excited about reading.

She wrote her first published children's book, Rainstones, in 1991 while she was living in her shed and struggling to pay the bills.

Since then, Jackie French has written around 140 books and, as a dyslexic herself, she's become a tireless advocate for children with learning difficulties.



Author Jackie French with one of her most popular books. Photo: Janie Barrett

"I really hope this (award) can be a platform to do things which are absolutely desperately needed," Jackie said in an interview with ABC reporter Michael Brissenden.

"To actually bring forward the realisation that every child can read and there are no excuses.

"In the programs I've been associated with, there has not been a single child who has not learnt to read.

"There is no such thing as reading difficulties, only teaching challenges."

Jackie highlights the limited range of strategies available for teachers to help children learn to read.

"One little girl that I've been associated with this year, she has been through six schools and she is only 8 years old... and people think, OK, kids learn at different rates or they just let them go on to the next grade without actually checking what their literacy levels were.

"Now, I'm not saying this is easy for every child, I wish I could say there was one fantastic way you could all learn to read but there isn't."

Which is why teachers need a wide and varied range of teaching strategies to minimise the chances of some students moving through grades without making acceptable progress.

The Ron Davis program is one of those highly effective strategies for students with strong visual skills.

Promote reading wherever possible is a Jackie French principle:

"If you want an intelligent child, give them books. If you want a more intelligent child, give them more books. "



## Spelling follow up...

Frank Johnston

Not that I want to decry Spelling as an important tool in school and in academic development... , however as the article in our last newsletter of 2014 asked... just how important is Spelling?

Certainly we have developed 'accepted' ways of spelling words which are emphasised and highlighted as 'correct' by dictionaries, although English spellings may still differ from country to country.

However, accepted means of spellings are still simply the popular or traditional spellings - personal preferences - and are not defined by any scientific principles which set spellings in stone.

To the question... why is ... spelled that way? our answer may well be, 'just because'. It's a habit we have formed over decades or centuries and people are used to it. The

dictionary does not define spelling so much as reflect how people have come to accept certain arrangements of letters and blends.

Teachers are locked into teaching certain patterns of letters and blends, not because they are scientifically correct, but because that's the way we like them... uh huh!

So, how did you go, from the last newsletter, with alternative spellings of 'fish'? Traditionally we recognise that thing that swims in the ocean and we eat with chips on Friday night as 'fish', spelled using the 3 accepted sound - letter parts of the word.

I asked if readers could find other ways of spelling 'fish' using other accepted letter(s) to make the same 3 sounds.

Here's some other 'f' sounds...

gh (rough), ff (ruffle), ph (photo), ffe (gaffe), lf (half), eu (lieutenant). Along with 'f' that makes 7 possible letter substitutes for the first sound of our word.

For the middle sound of fish, you could have y (gym), o (women), ui (built), u (busy) as well as i ; that's 5 middle sounds.

The final sound-'sh' - is even more fun: s (sure), ss (issue), sci (conscience), si (pension), ce (ocean), ch (machine), ci (special) ti (nation)..., that's 9 possibilities and I know I have not exhausted all the sh sounds, you may find more.

Now, if you start blending the possibilities, you can have ghysh, ffohs, lfusi... instead of fish. Same sounds, different spelling, but to the ear, no different.

The possible combinations of sounds so far to make the word 'fish' come to  $7 \times 5 \times 9 = 315$  different spellings for the word 'fish'. And that list is not complete. We haven't even touched on accents, dialects or regional variations that can add other possibilities to the mix!

I hope I haven't given any students ammunition with which to torture others, especially teachers! Sorry!



# Dyslexia a common diagnosis among creative stars.

**“I thought I wasn’t smart” - Jennifer Aniston reveals battle with dyslexia**

This article comes from: <http://www.msn.com/en-gb/health/healthconditions/%E2%80%99Ci-thought-i-wasn%E2%80%99t-smart%E2%80%9D-jennifer-aniston-reveals-battle-with-dyslexia/ss-BBdtXhH>

The condition of dyslexia which can go undiagnosed for years, leaving many sufferers feeling stupid and frustrated, which is exactly how actress Jennifer Aniston felt while she unknowingly battled dyslexia as a child.

“I thought I wasn’t smart. I just couldn’t retain anything,” she tells the latest edition of *The Hollywood Reporter*. “(When) I had this great discovery. I felt like all of my childhood traumas, tragedies, dramas were explained.”

The actress added, “The only reason I knew (I had dyslexia) was because I went to get a prescription for glasses.

“I had to wear these Buddy Holly glasses.



Photo © Getty Photos

One had a blue lens and one had a red lens. And I had to read a paragraph. And they gave me a quiz, gave me ten questions based on what I’d just read, and I think I got three right.

“Then they put a computer on my eyes showing where my eyes went when I read. My eyes would jump 4 words then go back 2 words, and I also had a little bit of a lazy eye,

like a crossed eye, which they always have to correct in photos.”

Jennifer’s story mirrors experiences of many creative people of the art world, actors, musicians, architects or entrepreneurs as well as sports people and those gifted with an ability to view the world in a more global and visual way than most.



## Robert Toth Remembers

Robert Toth is an American artist and sculptor. This article comes from edition 111 of the *Dyslexic Reader*, Volume 67, 2014.

**Robert Toth repeated the fourth grade three times.**

As a child he often felt awkward. He didn’t learn to read until he was twelve, and he was diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD. Fortunately, his parents were very supportive, and his mother, an artist, particularly so.

Toth recalls, “My mom was the making of me. She gave me clay at age five and said, ‘You can make many toys with clay and when you get tired of one, squish it around and make another.’

That was the beginning of divergent thinking for me, which continues to this day.”

By his mid-teens, Toth began to realize that although he struggled in school, he had artistic talent, and that focussing on that talent was very important for him.

“I found I didn’t have an attention disorder when I could focus my attention on what I liked most, and with that came the enthusiasm to hyperfocus.”

Toth is in fact a highly talented sculptor and painter. His works of art sit in private and public collections around the world – the Smithsonian Institute National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., the Vatican Museum in Rome, Italy, the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh, The Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City. His works are in far too many prestigious locations to list here.

Toth contacted Ronald Davis earlier this year, (2014) to let him know that he’s read *The Gift of Dyslexia* and appreciates his work:

“I pulled out your book, and it compelled me to write and share my

story, which you have been very much a part of for many years. My dyslexia was the gift that you describe in your book, and I have that gift. People like you, your devotion and research, getting the message out there, have helped me. Many thanks to you for the work you do.”



Toth has often been interviewed about his childhood challenges over the years.

He tells parents and schools, “The whole point is, in the educational system, we have to look at kids in a new way and say, hey, they have different learning styles. They’re visual people, maybe; or they have scientific brains. Some of them excel in sports, some of them in art – like me – some in math.”

Toth wisely says, “If people look at their own lives, when there is disruption, and you stay with that disruption for a little while, you’ll find something of value there.

“That’s why a pile of junk can be an inspiration, and how creative imagination can see opportunity.”

