

THE MOTHER WHO WASN'T

Puzzle by Theo Halladay for the Simplified Spelling Society. Also see www.wertheliving.org, Theo's website.

Introduction: This is a game in which the object is to locate and mark as many as possible of the spelling patterns that depart from the norms of English writing. That is they are uncommon, the kind you are usually not shown until 3rd grade or later when learning to read. I have used 6 different oddities in this story.

The story itself, about a baaahd mother sheep, is based partly on a documentary I watched about sheep in Scotland, which was aired in 2003 on CBC Television.

The story is divided into sections. You will be looking for a different set of odd spellings in each section. The oddities are as follows: 1: o or ou as short u [something, young]. 2: silent b [lamb]. 3: ea for short e [breakfast]. 4: f sound written as ph [microphone]. 5: long u written as o [move]. 6: gh written but not sounded.



“Total oddities” only includes these 6 types. You may be able to find others, such as the unneeded h in school, but don't count them.

Section 1. O OR OU FOR SHORT U SOUND [some, young] . Take a piece of paper, title it Sec.1, and make a slash mark for each of the [10] words in Section 1 in which O or OU are used for the sound of SHORT U as in plug. **Mark each word even if it is not the first time that word has appeared.** Leave unmarked the word /of/, which we aren't counting.

No credit given for /was/ or /what/ even if you pronounce it as wuz and whut, since not everyone does. Stick with just O and OU spellings meant to be pronounced with short /u:/ as in cut.

Another option would be to copy the whole puzzle onto a blank document, and instead of riting the odd words on paper you can change the color of each one right in the Ms., then count the colored ones.

THE STORY, Section 1 [written in traditional “school” spelling]:

“Some years before the atom bomb was invented, a young boy named Ralph lived on a farm on the shore of Vancouver Island, on the west coast of Canada.

One spring morning at breakfast Ralph thought of something he would love to do. It was while he was listening to the bleating of the sheep

coming from the farm above. A large flock covered the hillside of the neighboring farm. His mother and father had bought Ralph a tape recorder for his eighth birthday, and he could hardly wait to record some sounds with the microphone. (24 total all oddities, 10 using o or ou for short u sound).

Section 2, SILENT B. *Put another heading, labeled Sec.2, below the first. This time make a slash for each silent B in this section, i.e. letter B not pronounced [limb]. .*

"Could I go to Parker's and record the sheep?" Ralph asked.
"I guess so," answered his dad. "When I get through chopping up those limbs we brought in, I'll be heading over there. Get a move on, comb your hair, do your chores and you can come along." In the end Ralph's mother and brother went too.

When they reached Parker's, Ralph carrying his treasured tape recorder and microphone, there was a surprise they had not known about. A ewe with a lamb in her womb was giving birth, uttering cries of pain. Ralph was ready. He knelt down beside her and switched on the sound. Although this was not one of today's streamlined lightweight recorders, and the microphone was not built-in, it was nonetheless good enough to be a fair match for what you can buy today for a beginner.
(25 total oddities, 4 using silent b).

Section 3. EA FOR SHORT E SOUND. *Mark all the examples where EA in a word is used to represent the sound of short E [steady]. Do you think the extra A in those words could be dropped out?*

Their neighbor Hank Parker was doing what he could to steady and comfort the mother sheep. In spite of her endeavors she was having a tough time. When the lamb finally emerged, it lay still on the ground for such a long time that Ralph and his mother and brother, who were watching with him, began to wonder if it was dead. Hank too was worried.

Finally they saw a slight movement, and as they watched the little body took its first breath. But the trouble was not over yet. Although the youngster showed a measure of improvement, struggled to its feet and began to nuzzle its mother looking for a teat, the ewe would have none of it. Failing to show mother love or to acknowledge her obligation, she shoved the lamb roughly away and would not let it feed. Ralph held the microphone close to record the pitiful bleating of the frightened lamb, and the hostile baa-ing of the mother as she moved away from it.
(Total oddities 39, 5 using ea for the sound of short e as in fed.)

Section 4. F SOUND RITTEN WITH PH. *Mark all the words containing PH. If you were given the option of changing that PH to F, would you take it?*

Hank sighed. "She's rejecting it," he said. "I already lost one lamb; I don't want to lose another". Now what am I - hey, I know what I'll do." "What?" Ralph's dad asked. "I'll give this lamb to the ewe that lost hers last night. She can have this one instead."

Although this was a bright idea, it proved difficult to carry out. Ralph picked up his microphone and recorder and went on with his family, leaving Hank and Phil, his hired helper, to handle their problem.

Days later they heard the rest of the story. The other sheep, the one that had given birth to a dead lamb, emphatically rejected the living one, even kicking and injuring it; she wanted only the one she already knew. (Total oddities 24, 5 using ph for sound of f.)

Section 5. LONG U RITTEN WITH O. *Mark all the Os, Ous and OOs which make the sound of LONG U "OO" as in /rule/. Leave the folloing UNMARKD, since they don't make a long U sound:*

a) the words where OU makes a different sound of U as in /put/: /would, could, should/.

b) the words /today, together/, in which the U is so short that it's questionable what the sound is. (But do mark /to/)

But Hank was not to be done in. He skinned the dead lamb and tied its skin around the abandoned lamb. This improved the situation. Since the abandoned lamb now smelled like her own, the second sheep finally accepted it instead of the dead one. But for a couple of days she had to be tied in a stall with the wounded but recovering youngster, or she too would have moved away from it. Later Hank was able to remove the dead lamb's skin that had covered the live one.

A few days later Ralph took his recorder to his school, in the little Vancouver Island town of Metchosin. There he played the sound tape and told the story for his schoolmates, who included all eight grades. Afterwards they discussed it. The teacher asked the group, "Do you think it proved to be worth the effort to save the lamb?" (Total oddities 35, 16 using o, ou or oo for the sound as in rule.)

Section 6. GH RITTEN BUT NOT SOUNDED. *Mark all the GH spellings in this section.*

Most thought it was the right thing to do. At the end of the discussion the teacher summarized the group's thoughts. "I wonder if this has taught us something", she said. On the blackboard she wrote these words, which the class read aloud together: "This story proves that we

ought not to treat the world of nature too worshipfully. We humans ought to help nature along and to intervene when it is cruel."
(Total oddities 16, 6 using gh not sounded.)

Scoring: [Sum people, looking for eesier spelling for students, have proposed new systems. The riting from heer on is in one of them, calld IHS [Interim House Stile].]

If u found the required number of od spellings in eech section, you pass. The way to rase yur score abuv passing is to find mor examples of the required spelling by looking in uther sections. Mark them thare as wel in the same way u markd them first in only one section. For example the last section contanes /something/, wich uses O for the sound of short U, the spelling u lookd for in Section 1. Yur scor combines the first set of marks with yur later discuverys.

Our resident expert found a total of 163 od spellings of the kynd calld for in the 6 sections, counting each repetition of the same word as one point. If u found mor than 150 examples, hire urself out as a professional proofreeder! If u found 120-149, giv yurself the title Reformer of the Word. A scor of 90-119 makes u a Hawkeye. 60-89, u'l be at home in the spelling revolution & shoud join it. 31-59, u are not as skeptical as we ar of the way things ar ritten. 30 or fewer, u'v been taking English spelling and its od ways for granted too much. Loyalty to tradition is fine, but English needs an update!

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