NEWS LESSON

Learning to Read at 46 Changed His Everyday Life



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What skill would make everyday life easier for you?
2. Why can asking for help feel harder than learning something?
3. Would you rather learn alone or with one patient teacher?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**unforgiving**	☐	A	to remove completely, as if it never happened
2	**workarounds**	☐	B	harsh and not patient with mistakes
3	**negotiate**	☐	C	kept something going for a long time
4	**sustained**	☐	D	something that blocks your way or makes progress hard
5	**obstacle**	☐	E	interrupted so that things cannot go on normally
6	**erase**	☐	F	a person who speaks in public for a cause or an organisation
7	**disrupted**	☐	G	clever ways to avoid a problem without solving it
8	**ambassador**	☐	H	to find a way through or past something difficult

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Peter Lloyd spent decades working around words he could not read. A trip to the supermarket in lockdown finally made him ask for help.

1 The trouble began in the dairy aisle. Peter Lloyd, a lorry driver from Lancashire, was trying to buy milk suitable for his wife and son, both of whom had allergies. Surrounded by cartons covered in information he could barely decipher, he realised how easily a routine errand could become a serious mistake. He was 46, with a job and a family, but he had spent much of his life covering up the fact that he struggled to read.

2 Partially deaf from birth, Peter had found the classroom an unforgiving place. Competing voices made lessons difficult to follow, and a move to another school failed to provide the support he needed. He left education at 16 without qualifications, carrying into adulthood a problem that society often treats as a personal failure. Yet his working life demonstrated considerable ingenuity. He learnt routes through visual memory, recognised landmarks and relied on technology and his wife's help to negotiate paperwork. Most people take reading for granted, and few notice the elaborate system of workarounds that sustained what looked like independence.

3 The supermarket incident occurred during the Covid lockdowns and stripped away the reassurance those strategies had provided. Peter could no longer brush aside the practical risks of not understanding written information. Encouraged by his wife, he contacted Read Easy, an adult-literacy charity, despite the disappointment of previous attempts to learn. He was paired with a volunteer coach, Alison, who offered regular one-to-one sessions and something Peter had rarely experienced at school: the freedom to progress without embarrassment.

4 Twice-weekly lessons began with fundamental reading skills. It was painstaking work, requiring him to confront difficulties he had spent decades avoiding, but small improvements gradually accumulated. He also set himself a concrete ambition: to finish the first Harry Potter novel. Choosing a book associated with childhood might have exposed him to ridicule. Instead, it gave the process a meaning beyond exercises and assessments. Three years later, he had read it from cover to cover.

5 The achievement did not erase his earlier experiences, but it changed his relationship with everyday life. Recipes became accessible, books became a source of pleasure, and tasks that once required another person's help could increasingly be handled alone. Peter has since spoken publicly as an ambassador for Read Easy and hopes to obtain an English GCSE before pursuing work that supports others. His willingness to discuss a previously guarded struggle is significant in itself, not least because so few people in his position are prepared to do so publicly.

6 Adult literacy is frequently misunderstood. People may have limited reading skills for reasons involving disability, disrupted education or inadequate support, none of which is a reliable measure of intelligence. The greatest obstacle can become the expectation that an adult ought already to know how to read, an assumption that encourages silence.

7 Read Easy offers support, but asking for it can still feel daunting. Peter's decision to speak openly may help someone else take that first step. Peter's story challenges the idea that learning follows a fixed timetable.

Sources: LiverpoolWorld. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. Peter's coping strategies became less dependable once the Covid lockdowns began. T F NG
2. The text suggests that Peter's difficulty with reading only began after he left school. T F NG
3. Alison had worked as a teacher before she volunteered for Read Easy. T F NG
4. Choosing a Harry Potter book carried a risk for Peter, yet it also made the lessons more meaningful. T F NG
5. The writer thinks adults should be expected to have learnt to read as children. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

accumulated	daunting	decipher	elaborate	hurdle	reassurance	ridicule	undermine

1. The signature was so messy that nobody in the office could _____ it.
2. He had built an _____ filing system, with coloured tabs, cross-references and an index of the index.
3. She avoided asking questions in class for fear of _____ from her classmates.
4. Over twenty years, his small savings had steadily _____ into a substantial sum.
5. Starting a new language at sixty can seem _____, but a patient teacher makes the first step easier.
6. The nurse's calm voice offered the _____ that the family badly needed.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The _____ of her improvised solutions impressed every engineer on the team. (INGENIOUS)
2. Repeated _____ can make adults reluctant to try learning again. (DISAPPOINT)
3. The committee described the new evidence as _____ enough to justify a full inquiry. (SIGNIFY)
4. Constant _____ from a patient tutor can transform a learner's confidence. (ENCOURAGE)
5. Reading difficulties often reflect _____ support in childhood, not a lack of ability. (ADEQUATE)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At this level, check punctuation as well as meaning. Albeit and whereas sit inside a sentence, notwithstanding often opens one, and hence follows a semicolon.

albeit	conversely	hence	lest	notwithstanding	thereby	whereas

1. The course was demanding, _____ rewarding, for most of the adults who completed it.
2. _____ the setbacks of earlier attempts, he decided to try again.
3. Adults with limited reading skills are often assumed to be less intelligent, _____ the evidence points to hearing loss, interrupted schooling or poor support.
4. Some adults hide the problem for decades. _____ , others ask for help as soon as they notice it.
5. Reading underpins most daily tasks; _____ even a small gap in skills can affect work, health and family life.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What would make it easier for an adult to admit they cannot read well?
2. Which everyday task do people underestimate until they struggle with it?
3. What should a good teacher do when a learner feels embarrassed?

9 Role-play: an invitation to volunteer

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the friend who volunteers

You help at a local reading group for adults. You need one more helper on Thursday evenings and you think your friend would be good at it. Persuade your friend to try one evening.

Student B · the friend who is not sure

Your friend has asked you to help adults who are learning to read. You like the idea, but you're busy and you're worried you won't know what to say. Ask questions and agree what you can offer.

Useful phrases

I'd love to help, but I'm not sure I'm the right person.

What if I say the wrong thing?

You don't need to be an expert, you just need to be patient.

I can't do Tuesdays, but I could manage Thursdays.

That's fair, let's try one session and see.

Would it help if we went together the first time?

Afterwards, tell the class what you agreed, and whether you both felt it was a fair deal.

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 B · 2 G · 3 H · 4 C · 5 D · 6 A · 7 E · 8 F

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 decipher · 2 elaborate · 3 ridicule · 4 accumulated · 5 daunting · 6 reassurance

6 Word forms

1 ingenuity · 2 disappointment or disappointments · 3 significant · 4 encouragement · 5 inadequate

7 Language focus

1 albeit · 2 Notwithstanding · 3 whereas · 4 Conversely · 5 hence

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