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By Bellen Joyner

Do you have an elementary or middle school-aged child who has difficulty reading? If so, let me tell you about a free, fun, online reading tool that has really helped my child.

Approximately two years ago, my youngest son Franklyn had started fifth grade and I had just come to work for PEATC. He and I were invited to be a part of a literacy pilot program jointly developed by PEATC and the Helen A. Kellar Institute for Human Disabilities at George Mason University (GMU). The mission of LiteracyAccess Online (LAO) was to develop, test and refine a universally accessible, web-based literacy learning tool for students with disabilities ages 9 through 14. LAO is available at no charge to anyone with a computer and Internet access. Located at [www.literacyaccessonline.com](http://www.literacyaccessonline.com), the site is rich with information and instructional material for you to browse at your leisure.

### LAO Story Builder

In this article, I am going to walk you through Story Builder. This is the part of the site that was of particular interest to my son. Story Builder lets you and the reader create a story to use with the other tools in LAO. A story can either be completely original with scanned in pictures or it can be copied and pasted from other websites.

Because Story Builder allows you to choose the topic and content, you can build a story around a subject that is meaningful to you. content If the reader wants to learn to read using a story about Michael Jordan or Mia Hamm, he or she can create a story about Michael Jordan or Mia Hamm themselves. This

## Be a Story Builder!

authentic learning aspect makes LAO extremely flexible and appropriate for all ages. For example, a 14 year old boy who is learning to read may not want to read stories at the second grade level. He can create his own story with Story Builder about whatever he chooses.

### Here's how to get to Story Builder:

- Go to [www.literacyaccessonline.com](http://www.literacyaccessonline.com) and login (if you are a first time user you will have to join before you can access Story Builder)
- Once you are logged in to the site, select "Literacy Explorer" from the top navigation bar and then choose "Story Selector" from the new navigation options
- Scroll down the page and select "Build A Story" and that will take you to the start of Story Builder
- From here you can choose to build a new story or to review stories that you previously created.

If you choose to create a new story, Story Builder will first let you see the basic structure the story will follow. It gives you word and sentence per page limits. There is also a reminder to save pictures to a separate file on the hard drive to be submitted along with the final story. Story Builder is very user-friendly and has clearly marked input areas for information about the story you are creating.

**You can get help with:**

- Searching for story content on Web  
This option offers help to those trying to find Web pages with text and graphics to use in your story
- Including pictures in your story At this location you learn how to include pictures in your story that you may import from anyplace on the web by using Story Builder
- Copying and pasting reading content  
Where you choose to learn how to copy and paste reading content from any web page into the Story Builder.



The whole site is amazing. The instructions are clear, concise and easy to follow. The many things to do to enhance the stories like computer programs for sounding out word meanings are quite helpful. Instruction on how to make the computer do what you want it to do, like "copy" and "paste" are great practice for use in other parts of the computer where everything isn't spelled out for you. And, most important, moving around the site is easy and non-threatening. Not once in my exploration was I jettisoned off the site to have to find my way back nor did I get locked out of where I wanted to be. I remember my son liking this part when we worked together on the pilot. Now, I understand why. This site is educational, exciting, interesting and enticing --all at the same time!

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