cluding the model after the discussion in the Summary. In addition, many of the illustrative examples have been deleted as well as some of the specific program recommendations.

Unlike my experience with condensed books, the Summary is very well done. If any reasonable criticism exists about the Summary it is that it may not leave educators wanting more because one comes away from the reading feeling one's knowledge is complete. Educators are advised that the Summary only helps one begin to learn about beginning to read.

Schwartz: Like my condensed books, teachers report the Summary is easy to read—engaging yet not very time consuming. Unlike my condensed books, it may not leave you with the notion that there is a lot more out there you may need to know.

Both documents should have a major impact on the way children are taught to read. If the activities of science can have an impact upon educational practice, then this book is the type of document that can make a difference. However, that impact can either be facilitated or impeded by the reaction from the field of reading. Historically, we as a profession have yet to agree about many basic reading principles. We do children, our ultimate consumers, a disservice by not reaching consensus within our own domain. Sufficient guidance is provided within these documents to enable reading educators to clarify reading instruction goals for the public, specify teaching strategies, guide basal textbook development, provide teacher training, and drive future basic and applied research. It is time to reach a consensus. We must reach a consensus in order to facilitate the impact of these documents.

In conclusion, Adams has written a major work of importance. Where the book may be difficult for some educators, the Summary provides an excellent alternative for gaining a portion of the information contained in the complete text. Like my condensed books, teachers report the Summary is easy to read—engaging yet not very time consuming. Unlike my condensed books, it may not leave you with the notion that there is a lot more out there you may need to know. So put the Summary on your bedside table for easy reading, but remember that The Winds of War offered more in its original form.

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In their letter to me requesting that I write a critique of Beginning to Read and the Summary, The Reading Teacher editors asked me "to examine these works as objectively as possible before formulating your judgments about them." This seemed to me to be a curious request, particularly from reading experts. Can you forget your past and beliefs when you read? On the other hand, it was a form letter (at least, I hope it was) and all would-be critics were asked to be objective (no food for my voracious paranoia), but on the other hand, I was being asked to contribute to this special section (I suspect) because of my anticipated response. Does anyone else see my dilemma here? Just how does a critic remain objective when it's his or her subjectivity that directs his or her work and attracts requests for opinion? Such are the trials and tribulations in the life of a critic.

My solution to this paradox is to ignore the contents of the books about which I'm suppose to be objective (others in this section are better qualified than I to comment on them, and you're probably tired of reading about the contents anyway). Instead, I want to discuss the explicit politics surrounding Beginning to Read and its subsequent digestion into the Summary. To begin, both were funded by the federal government of the United States which during the last two administrations has made no secret that it favors phonics in the classroom. The government's apparent lack of enthusiasm for Becoming a Nation of Readers (also funded by the federal government) was based primarily on Anderson et al's cautious advocacy for early phonics instruction. As you may recall, that report placed several qualifications on the need for formal phonics instruction and the segmentation of reading.
into a foundation of decoding and a superstructure of comprehension. Former Secretary of Education, William Bennett, and other employees and consultants of the U.S. Department of Education found this tentativeness unnecessary in *What Works, First Lessons* and in many speeches delivered across the country (see, for example, Bennett's *Our Children and Our Country*). Finally, Ed Zorinsky, the late Senator from Nebraska, authored legislation commissioning a report on phonics.

With this in mind, it should have come as little surprise that the study and promotion of phonics would figure prominently in the Request for Proposals to become part of or to remain in the U.S. Department of Education’s Reading Research and Education Center. In his foreword to *Beginning to Read*, P. David Pearson acknowledges that the University of Illinois Center for the Study of Reading’s funding depended upon proposing (“we could not ignore these issues”) and then delivering a report on phonics. To make a long story short, the Center received its funding and the government received its report on phonics, *Beginning to Read*.

But the report was “scholarly” (read esoteric), “highly technical” (read qualified), and “lengthy” (read heavy—in excess of two pounds). It seemed unlikely to please the authors of *What Works* and the like for these very reasons. And so before hearing any complaints from frustrated readers (the *Summary* was actually available before the book itself), the Center for the Study of Reading dropped the other shoe, so to speak: That is, they prepared a “little book” (*Summary*, p. 1), a simplified, streamlined, and perhaps simplistic (see P. Cunningham’s review in *The Reading Teacher*, May 1990) version which the Department of Education had sought for the last five years. Think about it. If the investigation and not the promotion of phonics instruction were the intention of the Center’s involvement, then why was the *Summary* needed? Surely those educators interested in literacy could work their way through *Beginning to Read* because, as Pearson states, “Adams has a special talent for explaining complex theoretical concepts” and “she uses examples, analogies, and allusions generously.” If not educators, then who is the intended audience for the *Summary*? Certainly William Bennett, who complained about dumbed-down textbooks while advocating phonics, can’t be happy with the mixed message sent by the Center in this little book. (Perhaps we should be grateful that the *Summary* is not accompanied by workbooks.)

This short lesson in the politics of reading research—Pearson implies that the Center’s bias toward comprehension research was stimulated by previous Requests for Proposals—should make us reconsider reading researchers’ complacent claims of objectivity and neutrality in their work. It should cause reading researchers to wonder who sets our agenda for research. But, I am afraid, this is not the only political lesson reading educators will observe and perhaps experience from this enterprise. Although Adams and Osborn reported at the 1990 IRA meeting in Atlanta that some phonics advocates are still unsatisfied (“We didn’t give them a list of phonic basals proven to work, as they requested,” they stated), I think the *Summary* supplies a sufficient endorsement for phonics instruction to turn the heads of the undecided looking for authoritative direction and to enable true believers to set district and state policies of phonics first. Moreover, I wonder how those administrators and teachers who begin from a different set of assumptions about language, literacy, learning, and life will withstand the pressure to fall in line with such policies when they are backed by the Center and the federal government. This second lesson should lead reading educators to the question of who really decides the curriculum for reading lessons.

So you see, it’s difficult to be objective about the politics of beginning to read. I am waiting for the federal government to pass legislation commissioning the study of the effects

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**Shannon:** I think the *Summary* supplies a sufficient endorsement for phonics instruction to turn the heads of the undecided looking for authoritative direction and to enable true believers to set district and state policies of phonics first.

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of full employment on students’ reading in the nation’s inner cities and rural areas. And I’ll volunteer to write the Summary for that report.

Brian Smitten is Consultant for the Assiniboine South School Division in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

My daughter, aged 10, found the Adams book Beginning to Read sitting on the table. She examined the title, flipped the pages, and read orally a paragraph or two. Then she wrinkled her nose and stated, “Do I understand this? No! Do I want to understand this? No!”

There was a pause of a few seconds while she considered what had just happened. She then added, “Dad, this isn’t a beginning to read book.”

I had to admit to her that I, too, thought the title to be somewhat inaccurate but, nevertheless, that many other people would think the book had a great deal to do with the subject of young children and reading. The work represents a particular perspective. Just as the perspective my daughter held influenced her interpretation, Adams’s perspective provides a powerful interpretive framework for her to discuss children and reading. I do think that this perspective is too narrow and will not, ultimately, move us along very far.

**Smitten: My major concern is that I do not think that what we teachers need at this point is a better way to teach phonics.**

This book is going to receive more than the usual amount of attention and my fear is that its influence may extend far beyond what I believe its actual value to be. The book, after all, has been supported by the Center for the Study of Reading and by the U.S. federal government and is the child of a political project that was initiated in *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. In addition, the book has a companion volume that is intended to broaden its audience. This context is powerful, and the book will not slip by unnoticed for reasons that go beyond its content.

I have not set out to refute what Adams has to say in *Beginning to Read*. In many ways it is a fascinating text and reflects much current thinking about language. The book incorporates elements that were previously unavailable or considered unimportant in language circles. A few years ago, for example, we would not have had access to a scientist’s personal observations on her own children’s reading decisions; nor would naturalistic research have found its way into such a volume and been considered seriously; nor would the conclusions contain a statement like “My objective in this book has not been to outline any particular universal, best method for teaching reading” (p. 423). These are notable inclusions and reflect a movement away from the pure “scientism” which dominated reading research.

My major concern is that I do not think that what we teachers need at this point is a better way to teach phonics. This is not to say that I discount the role or the importance of phonics. It is to say, rather, that our current theories of reading are too narrow and that we have more to gain as a profession by developing a theory of literacy instruction than we do by fine-tuning extant models of reading.

This concern stems from the argument which frames the text in *Beginning to Read*. Adams expresses the concern that current “reading” instruction is highly politicized. I would agree. I would add that it always has been and will continue to be. Adams argues, however, that this politicization is due to partisanship comprehension. She adds that by “misinterpreting each other, we prolong a fruitless debate and, worse, we do so at the cost of precious progress” (p. 26). To argue in this way is, I think, to ignore critical issues. This argument localizes the debate to a professional in-house dispute among the theorists of a “reading” model of instruction where reading is dealt with as a relatively isolated phenomenon with connections only to other language modalities (speaking, listening, and writing) and a rather passive connection to thought and action. Teachers, parents, and students are not active participants in this