

'Dick and Jane, Spot' on Way Out Of Alaska Kiddie's Schoolbooks

Dick and Jane won't be throwing the ball to Spot much longer in Alaska's rural elementary schools.

Instead, an Eskimo boy named Bill will play games with his dog after helping his parents clean fish and patch a skin boat with fresh walrus rawhide.

Traditional primary readers that have introduced millions of American school children to the world of reading and writing via Dick, Jane and Spot have always been a little out of place in Alaska's bush schools, according to Mrs. Winnifred Lande, acting director of the University of Alaska's Rural School Project.

Learning to read and write, a difficult enough task for any youngster, is complicated by traditional readers showing fire engines, circuses, elephants and cows, none of which Eskimo and Indian youngsters in Alaskan bush schools have seen.

A special series of Alaskan readers with supplementary materials, workbooks and teacher's guides will be field-tested next year in selected Interior Alaska village schools, Mrs. Lande says.

The new style Dick and Jane books are part of a three-year primary reading program being developed in the Rural School Project in association with the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory in Portland, Ore.

"Alaska native children in rural parts of the state enter school with a vocabulary, language patterns, cultural background and skills different from children in the lower forty-eight," Mrs. Lande points out.

"The school bus, zoo and city traffic are unfamiliar to these children. As typical subjects of beginning reading materials, they cause the children unnecessary difficulties in learning to read."

The new materials will emphasize children engaged in activity characteristic to rural Alaska areas. The materials then will gradually lead youngsters to an awareness of the world outside their experience.

The first new readers will be written for Indian children in villages of Interior Alaska and the upper Kuskokwim River area.

If experiments work out well, Mrs. Lande says, materials for Indian youngsters in other parts of Alaska, as well as children of Eskimo cultures, will be developed.

Bill Mudd, graduate student in education at UA and a former bush teacher, points out other complicating factors in developing special materials for rural youngsters.

"Cultural conditions vary widely among even Interior Alaska Athabascan Indian villages," he says, "not to mention the differences with Eskimo, Aleut and South-eastern Indian cultures."

"The work and expense involved in such projects can therefore triple and quadruple as special readers for each general cultural area must be developed."

Launched in 1966 with a \$579,000 Ford Foundation grant the Rural School Project is designed to train new teachers to serve in remote Alaska schools.

Each summer, selected Bureau of Indian Affairs and state of Alaska teachers

attend an eight-week session on the UA campus. Instruction is given in language training, anthropology, health and community services.

A special team involved in developing the Alaska readers and supplementary materials includes Frank Darnell, director of the Alaska Rural School Project; Mrs. Lande, Dr. William Loyens, cultural anthropologist at the UA; Dr. Charles Ray, dean of the university's College of Behavioral Sciences and Education and William Marsh, Alaska State

Department of Education.

Warren Tiffany, assistant area director for the Bureau of Indian Affairs; Mrs. Virginia Jones, State University of New York at Oswego, and eight teachers from isolated Alaska schools that enroll Indian children.

Mrs. Jones will write the experimental readers. Other team members will review them and suggest changes. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory will handle the publishing of limited editions of the readers.