

It's Clee with a C

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Clee's mom had found "The Pumpkin Blanket" by Deborah Turney Zagwyn on-line. It was a rare find – a picture book about a girl with the same name as her daughter. Just like her daughter, the story character would soon be going to school for the first time, without her favourite blanket. The storybook Clee parted with her blanket, bit by bit, protecting twelve pumpkins from frost until Halloween. The book became a much-loved bedtime story, its pages smudged and dog-eared.

Clee knew the names of all the alphabet letters and could recognize a few words by sight. Clee's ability to match letters with their sounds was just beginning. "C is for Clee" her mom would say. C looks like this." Her mom would draw letter 'C' on a piece of paper or draw 'C' on Clee's back when she gave her a back scratch.

"Hey," said Clee's mom one night. "Let's see if we can find letter 'C's 'on this page of your book." Clee's mom began to read slowly, running her finger below the words. "One day, late in September, Clee, who was five, was dancing with her blanket by the garden."

"There's a C," shouted Clee pointing excitedly to the first letter of her name. "C is for Clee!" Clee ran her finger under the next few words. "I see one!" She pointed to 'C' in the middle of the word 'dancing'. "C is for Clee!" she shouted again.

Clee's mom stopped. This 'C' did not have that hard /k/ sound. 'C' could be for Clee. It could be for Celine too.

Clee's mom had just discovered the stumbling block for many children learning phonics. When children are taught that letters make certain sounds, they eventually discover exceptions to the rules. The result? The relationship between letters and sounds never make any sense.

"Hmmm," Clee's mom said. "You're right. This is the letter 'C', but this time it makes a different sound than /k/. Let's listen. Dan....c...ing." Clee's mom dragged out the pronunciation of the word so that Clee could hear /s/ in its middle. "I wonder if there are any other /s/ sounds we can find." Clee's mom read the sentence again running her finger slowly under the words. "One day, late in ssss-September...."

Clee grinned. "Ssss," Clee hissed and pointed at the word 'September'.

"Clee, you did find another /s/ sound. You know what? I think that /s/ sound can look like the letter 'C' or the letter 'S'.

As Clee grows older she will discover that /s/ can also look like 'ss' as in hiss or 'ps' as in psychology. She will learn that all kinds of sounds are matched with many different letters and letter combinations. Clee's mom helped Clee develop phonics skills immeasurably just by ensuring Clee identified the sounds first and then matched those sounds to letters.

Now Clee reads to her mom, "That Halloween, twelve lively faces lit Clee's porch. Their eyes and smiles shone far into the night."