



Ken Goodman 1927 - 2020

Reading researcher and founding father of Whole Language.

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Ken Goodman, Professor Emeritus at the University of Arizona, died peacefully in his sleep on March 12, 2020 at the desert oasis home that he shared with his wife Yetta Goodman. Ken was 92 years old. Ken joined in Yetta's 89th birthday celebration on March 10. His last days were full of love, laughter and the sounds of family, surrounded by daughters Debi (Cheryl), Karen, and Wendy (with the memory of Bob); grandchildren Eli (Marcy), Reuben (Retsina), Aaron (Julie), Shoshana (Justin), Josh (Kayleen), Noah, and Rachel; and fourteen great-grandchildren (Julia, Ezrial, Juliette, Madison, Levi, Arabella, Austin, Camilla, Kennedy, Isaiah, Shirley, Michaela, Guinevere, and Ava).

Ken and Yetta Goodman celebrated their 67th wedding anniversary on June 15, 2019—partners in life and partners in their world-changing research on reading. They were also co-activists, advocating for public schools, for students' rights to learn and for the professionalism of teachers. In their work and their daily lives, they opened their arms, their home, and their family to students, colleagues, visiting scholars, relatives, and friends. In return, they were loved by educators around the globe.

Ken was a nurturing person who encouraged all around him to grow and flourish, sharing widely his love of gardening and cooking (and eating). He was a gardener whose thumb remained green throughout his life. In the fall, he welcomed new U of A graduate students with olive picking parties at the 10th street house in Tucson and he cured the olives himself. He got his orchids to bloom in profusion the week before he died. He served tacos in Detroit before they became popular, reinvented crepes that the family called "Grandpa Kenny's pancakes," and explored international cooking to honor doctoral students when they finished their dissertations or for almost any occasion.

Ken's education began at age four in Chicago public schools. He moved to Detroit when he was seven, graduating from Northwestern High School at age 15. He grew up in an Eastern European Jewish family. His father, Max Goodman, immigrated at age nine searching for the American dream. His mother, Rose Berman, the oldest in a large family, left school after 8th grade





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to work in the family store in Dekalb, Illinois. She always regretted not going to high school and instilled a love of learning in her three children – all completed advanced degrees. As he grew older,

Ken's interest in his family roots deepened. The children's book he wrote, *The Smart One*, is based on Max Goodman's shtetl life in Smorgon, Lithuania (now Belarus).

Ken's world view was influenced by growing up among immigrants, by the cultural and political conversations of his older sister Shirley (Goodman) Rapoport and his brother Calvin Goodman, and by union and civil rights activism in Detroit and Ann Arbor. He picketed Briggs stadium because the Detroit Tigers were not integrated. He worked in Detroit auto plants in the summer as a union organizer. He took off a year from college to campaign for Henry Wallace.

After attending the University of Michigan, Ken moved to Los Angeles and met Yetta when they were both counselors in Jewish Center summer camps. He finished his BA in Economics at UCLA, earned a Master's degree in Education and became a junior high teacher. Ken returned to UCLA for his Doctorate of Education, working with John Goodlad.

Ken and Yetta, with their three daughters, moved to Detroit in 1962. He taught at Wayne State University, and founded the field of Miscue Analysis Research, with funded Reading Miscue Research Labs first at Wayne State and later at the University of Arizona. Ken cultivated a community of linguists, educators, teachers and researchers exploring language and thinking – or psycholinguistics. Ken Goodman and Yetta joined the Department of Language, Reading and Culture at the University of Arizona in 1975. In the relaxed Southwest, freed from business suit attire, he adopted his signature bolo ties and matching belt buckles, crafted by Native American artists.

Kenneth Goodman leaves an unparalleled legacy. His socio-psycholinguistic transactional theory of the reading process is the most widely cited in the world. Ken's research involved documenting readers in a range of communities, languages, and dialects as they read aloud and then retold whole stories. This methodology supported a growing movement for qualitative research. By looking at ordinary students' unexpected responses to print (Ken called these *miscues*), and later, their eye movements as they read, Ken's research shifted basic understandings regarding the centrality of meaning-making with its dependence on predicting, and the nature of written language.

Goodman's theory of reading is a practical theory. It informs theoretical scholarship about written language, and it deeply informs practice. It provides teachers with an accessible means of learning about their students as readers and a theoretically grounded way of influencing their own teaching. It encouraged kids to read real books and was responsible for the increasing popularity of children's literature. And it was foundational in the theory-in-practice known as Whole Language.





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Denny Taylor posted in [Garn Press](#), “By common consent, Ken Goodman was one of the greatest - *the greatest* - reading researchers of the 20th Century. He was a fearless advocate for teachers and children - an empathetic, moral force - whose reading theories based on his disciplined, systematic and utterly brilliant miscue research have been proved right over and over again. Working closely with Yetta, a giant in the reading field in her own right, Ken Goodman will continue to be a force for good in an increasingly fragile world.”

The Goodman family will be having a memorial service in the spring or summer. For those who would like to make a donation in Ken Goodman’s honor, please consider the following organizations:

[HIAS](#): Welcome the stranger. Protect the Refugee

Ken and Yetta Goodman’s families came to the US as immigrant refugees from Eastern Europe. From the website: “HIAS works around the world to protect refugees who have been forced to flee their homelands because of who they are, including ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities. For more than 130 years, HIAS has been helping refugees rebuild their lives in safety and dignity.”

[Literacies and Languages for All](#) (Formerly Whole Language Umbrella)

Ken Goodman is considered the founding father of whole language and was Honorary Past President of the first Whole Language Umbrella board. LLA is a professional conference of the National Council of Teachers of English. Donations can be designated to supporting the Literacies for All Summer Institute, or to the scholarship fund to send teachers to this summer conference.

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