

Sophie, Climbing the Stairs

One / O-N-E

Stair / S-T-A-I-R

Two / T-W-O

Stairs / S-T-A-I-R-S

(gotta remember the S, mo' than one!)

This learnin' to count and spell at the same time
be a nuisance, but I've gotta do it. Only way

to learn somethin' in this world. Thank the lawd for
Uncle James. He knows how to read and write and count!

Massa's got nothin' on him!

Five / F-I-V-E

Stairs / S-T-A-I-R-S

Run outta stairs soon, then where will you be, Sophie?
Run outta breath, too, then what use are you, Sophie?

But these stairs be of no use, no use at all, unless
they hep Sophie walk her way up to readin' and writin'.

Uncles James' idea. Good one, too.

Eight / E-I-G-H-T

Strange sound; *eight* with an *E*. Why don't they spell *ate*
with an *E*, too, sound the same, don't make sense. Should
be
an *A*, but no I heard Massa spell somethin' out to Missus

the other day ('cause he didn't want me to know what he
was sayin')
and he mentioned *eight* and spelled it with an *E*. I
remembered
the letters and told Uncle James and he told me *eight*, come
to

think of it, I remembered all the letters Massa spelled out
and Uncle James told me everything he said. Poor Ole
Massa
had lost eight dollars that day gamblin' on a dog fight.

He needed to borrow ten more dollars from Missus to pay
his debts
around the town. Well, he got me free, almost, paid about
twelve
hundred dollars for me, but I worked that off long ago.

Right now, I'm profit.

Twelve / T-W-E-L-V-E

Finished. At the top. Days gettin' longer and my breath
gettin' shorter, but my memory be still young and askin'.
There be the period and the commas, the stops and the
shorts,

And the periods put an end to everything and don't let
you go
no further, don't play 'round with periods, Uncle James
says,
they the be-all and end-all, don't believe in takin' long
walks

in the fields when you're tired, don't believe in too much
moanin'
and misery, just bring things into focus when you least
'spect
and bring the Lawd's truth up to your doorsill, if you can.

No, don't fool 'round with them periods. Got lots of them
in my
pocket. Savin' them for my children when they ole' enough
to spend them.

But the comma, gotta learn that better. Say my prayers
with a period.
Listen to Missus with a comma.

Twelve tribes of Israel
sittin' in a tree,

Daniel in the Lion's mouth,
Lawd, deliver me!

Take this hot milk to Missus' room and see if the two of
them
start spelling' things out again that they don't want me to
know.

Wants to know the baptism of words.