

The Trap of Being Illiterate



Before you read the article, use vocabulary.com to find the definition and part of

Prodigious

Fruitful

Literacy

Proficient

Socioeconomic

Vast

Inadequate

Oppression

Repercussion

Incapable

speech for each word listed below.

Respond to the following prompts in complete sentences. Consider what you know about yourself + others as well as what you've learned in the past.

1. What is your relationship with reading? How important is the skill of reading to your own family?
2. What are the things that you do in order to help you understand while you read?

3. Have you experienced struggles with reading in your own life? Have you, or do you know someone else, who has faced issues because of a low literacy level?

4. What do you remember about learning how to read?

5. Ray Bradbury once said, ““You don’t have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them.” Explain the meaning of this quote and how it is applicable to your own life.

Reading: The Struggle is REAL

Have you ever thought about the price that you must pay if you aren’t a proficient reader? Sometimes students who claim to “hate” reading are only using the opinion as a disguise for not being able to read. Often, this even happens without the student knowing it. What makes some people “good” readers and others struggle for years?



1

What effects does reading have on your life, and more importantly, how does not reading cost you more than you think?

Over the years, research has shown that $\frac{1}{4}$ of the population over the age of 16 has not read a book in over a year. Chances are, the person sitting next to you at school, the movies, or in traffic is functionally illiterate. Also, nearly 50% of adults

2 scored in the lowest 2 levels of literacy. What does this really tell us about our society today? Even in our modern world not being able to read well affects everything from job opportunities to healthcare. Millions of people in our very own society read below the basic reading level and, in turn, these people earn less money, often report having lower self esteem, and even make up the vast majority of incarcerated inmates.

When looking at the root cause of the low literacy level in The United States, there are several interesting angles to take. Although no cause of the illiteracy issue is “one size fits all”, there are various factors that those who cannot read proficiently have in common. First, children whose parents are not exceptional readers have an almost 75% chance of being at the absolute lowest literacy level themselves. These

3 children are likely to bring home poor grades, display difficulty getting along with other students, and even repeatedly miss school days. Also, people who live in low socioeconomic areas are more likely to struggle with reading. Children who grow up in homes with parents who live in poverty are far less likely to practice reading skills which promote higher levels of literacy. Often, parents in this type of household are absent from the home whether it be because of varying, minimum-wage job schedules, behavioral issues, or problems finding proper childcare. These two factors definitely aren't the only central causes of lower reading levels, but they do makeup a large portion of those who struggle. Students may also have issues with reading because of learning disabilities, problems with focus, or other individual
1 growth areas.

Not reading at the basic level constitutes far more issues than just not being able to understand the latest New York Time's best seller to hit the shelves. Recent

4 reports show that there is a vast increase of people misusing their medication because they simply cannot read the instruction labels properly. The American Journal of Public Health reports that low literacy actually costs the government around \$230 billion dollars a year in healthcare cost because people cannot read their prescription labels or understand their medical treatments. There also appears to be serious social repercussions that stem from poor reading skills. Feelings of inadequacy combined with emotions such as shame and powerlessness often lead people to avoid situations where they will be exposed as being incapable of reading. These people can feel isolated in academic situations and, in turn, possibly act like a victim or even try to divert attention off of the real issue. A person really cannot participate in all of the many gifts and joys of society if they cannot read well.

5 Throughout history, literacy has been used as a means to control and even oppress others. Generations ago, only the privileged, upper-class white men were taught how to read. Because school wasn't free, literacy reflected and engineered a class system of the “haves” and the “have nots”. Originally, reading was truly a means to keep poor people powerless. As the years progressed, it even became illegal to teach a slave how to read. It was

quite evident that keeping people illiterate was the ultimate way to keep them under lock and key.

- 6 The cycle of low literacy levels tends to repeat itself. Clearly, the generational spiral down the rabbit hole of illiteracy is maintained through families who lack the basic skills or funding to improve their reading skills. This issue proves to be a very prodigious stumbling block in The United States. Reading is transformative not only in the way of literary analysis and finding meaning in one's own life, but also in the need for basic skills to improve jobs, eliminate poverty, and put a stop to the cycle of illiteracy.

The price of not reading proficiently comes



- 7 hard and fast and will often leave those who struggle with a payment too heavy to ever pay back. Utilizing reading programs found within schools, practicing reading as often as possible, and taking advantage of any extra community help programs can ultimately be the difference between a life of poverty, crime, and hopelessness or a fulfilling journey into a fruitful existence.

2

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. What is the effect of the allusion in paragraph 6?
 - A. To emphasize the chaotic struggles one will face if they cannot read proficiently.
 - B. It encourages the reader to see the underlying sarcasm the speaker is using.
 - C. It creates a tone of whimsy, intrigue, and curiosity.
 - D. To draw a comparison between non-readers and animals.
2. Which group of words *from the passage* conveys the author's attitude about her subject?
 - A. Lock and key, incarcerated, isolated
 - B. Proficient, practice, divert
 - C. Issue, serious, interesting
 - D. Absent, oppress, eliminate

3. Which of the following is an objective summary of the text?
 - A. Proficient readers can be produced if only lazy parents would take the time to work with their children on their reading skills.
 - B. Not being able to read well is a growing problem and can have academic and social consequences.
 - C. People who cannot read well are victims of a terrible education system.
 - D. People who cannot read well will not be successful in life because they lack the basic academic skills to make it in a university setting.
4. How does the author connect ideas in the selection?
 - A. By highlighting the relationship between illiteracy and struggle
 - B. By utilizing academic language throughout the selections
 - C. By incorporating personal anecdotes about how literacy has influenced the speaker's life
 - D. By placing emphasis on similes and metaphors that advance her point of view
5. What does the author mean when she says, "The price of not reading proficiently comes hard and fast and will often leave those who struggle with a payment too heavy to ever pay back."
? A. She doesn't know what it's like to be illiterate.
 - B. Being illiterate has consequences sometimes too great to fix.
 - C. Reading is not a necessary skill to be successful in life.
 - D. Learning to read in later years can often prove to be expensive.
6. What is the author's primary tone in this selection?
 - A. Carefree
 - B. Optimistic
 - C. Concerned
 - D. Indifferent
7. What is the author's purpose in writing this selection?
 - A. To encourage people to see the importance of being literate
 - B. To promote a rebellious attitude toward organized education and the limits placed on lower socioeconomic classes
 - C. To discourage others from feeling "less than" just because they cannot read as well as their peers
 - D. To refine the notion that academic skills do not always lead to success in life after high school
8. Which line from the passage *best* supports the central idea?
 - A. "The *American Journal of Public Health* reports that low literacy actually costs the government around \$230 billion dollars a year in healthcare cost because people cannot read their prescription labels or understand their medical treatments."
 - B. "Over the years, research has shown that $\frac{1}{4}$ of the population over the age of 16 have not read a book in over a year."
 - C. "These two factors definitely aren't the only central causes of lower reading levels, but they do makeup a large portion of those who struggle."
 - D. "The price of not reading proficiently comes hard and fast and will often leave those who struggle with a payment too heavy to ever pay back."

9. Read the following quote from the text: This issue proves to be a very prodigious stumbling block in The United States. Which word could replace *prodigious* in the sentence and mean nearly the same thing?
- A. Puny
 - B. Great
 - C. Unimportant
 - D. Decisive
10. What is the effect of the phrase from paragraph 4 on the overall selection: “These people can feel isolated in academic situations and, in turn, possibly act like a victim or even try to divert attention off of the real issue.”
- A. It demonstrates the effects of illiteracy in a non-academic setting.
 - B. It emphasizes the notion that academic situations make non-readers feel like targets rather than victims.
 - C. It shows the reader that those who cannot read are merely victims of a careless society.
 - D. It punctuates the idea that people who cannot read are embarrassed and try to disguise the weakness.

Constructed Response:

Why did the author choose to utilize rhetorical questions within the text? Use at least 2 examples from the selection to justify your answer