

A problem of illiteracy in modern world

[Education](#), [Learning](#)



In today's fast paced, technologically advanced society it sometimes slips the mind that over 32 million adults in the United States can't read. That's over 14% of the population! After seeing these numbers my shock was quickly replaced with curiosity. I looked up the word Illiteracy and wasn't surprised when I saw the definition. Illiteracy: the state of not knowing how to read. After some research I began to realize that being illiterate in today's world means a lot more than simply not being able to read. In this essays I will look at what life is like for people suffering from illiteracy. This will allow for better understanding and compassion. To close up I will ask the question, who is to blame and who can fix it? What is reality like for those millions of Americans who can't read? Let's find out.

With the upcoming Presidential Elections right around the corner I see it important to address an issue that the author Jonathan Kozol, brought up in his book *The Human Cost of an Illiterate Society*. He states, " The number of illiterate adults exceeds by 16 million the entire vote cast for the winner in the 1980 presidential contest. If even one third of all illiterates could vote, and read enough and do sufficient math to vote in their self-interest, Ronald Reagan would not likely have been chosen president." (Kozol 255) This really opened my eyes to the fact there are huge portions of the population being disenfranchised. Yet not being able to vote seems like a minor problem when stacked against all of the struggles that come with illiteracy. I Imagine that a person who cannot read becomes very dependent on symbols and pictures to figure things out, this begs the question, if a person is willing to sit and decipher a picture, and make decisions based on that picture. What is stopping that person from doing the same thing with words? I can only

assume that embarrassment plays a huge factor in keeping someone from learning how to read. And it's my guess that people who can't read would choose the company of other illiterates rather than deal with awkward situations. I make this guess because I can't quite wrap my head around how someone could go through life and not feel it necessary to learn to read.

As much as I feel for anyone going through a struggle, I must make it clear that the responsibility to learn (After your 18) falls on the individual. And it's a personal decision. Malcolm X is a great example of this, He once said " Every book I picked up had few sentences which didn't contain anywhere from one to nearly all of the words that might have been in Chinese." He then got a dictionary and began to learn the words he didn't know. And he did all of this while with being in prison. So who is to blame for this appalling situation we find ourselves in as a country? Blame is not the word for this situation. We must get to and educate Illiterate mothers and fathers on the importance of teaching their children to read. In a document published by the Departments of Education of Colorado, Iowa, Nebraska, and others, Judith Schickendanz explains that " Children learn about written language in a ... socially mediated way.... Children also learn about the functions of written language as they observe and help parents make lists, write letter to family members or friends, or read menus in a restaurant" (1999). Part of being a human is learning when to break cycles that are negatively affecting you or those around you. Again I get back to the point of it being a personal decision on how you want to live your life. I can only wish people were more aware that their lives affected more people than just themselves. Also it seems to me the issue of illiteracy in the country should be among the top

concerns for our leaders in government. But when looked at with an understanding of the situation I have come to the conclusion that our government prefers us in a medicated and uneducated state of being.

In conclusion, a person only has to stop for a moment and think to understand how serious of an issue illiteracy is. With illiteracy rates climbing and 14% of our country already living that reality. I believe this issue to be one of the most significant things will face as a country in modern times. Either things will get a lot worse. Or we can tackle this issue head on and ensure a future where kids and parents have the ability to read. It angers me that I feel helpless in this battle. In this fast moving, always updating world that we live in today, illiteracy is something that needs to be addressed with unique and innovative solutions that match with the times. The worst thing we can do is do nothing at all. I leave you with a quote from James Madison, " A people who mean to be their own governors, must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives..." (Madison Ch. 18)