

Our State of Literacy

by

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Given the political and social rhetoric that has dramatically increased these past months and where more to come as the November elections in **Battle for Our Nation** heats up and draws nearer, Americans are more confused than ever.

However this should not be surprising. Recently the media announced that reading and math abilities for 4th graders dropped this past year. Like all of media there is a tendency to sensationalize things.

According to **ThinkImpact** the 2022 literacy rates for the US are:

- Nationwide, 79% of U.S. adults are literate in 2022.
- 21% of adults in the US are illiterate in 2022.
- 54% of adults have a literacy below 6th grade level.
- Low levels of literacy costs the US up to 2.2 trillion per year.
- 34% of adults who lack proficiency in literacy were born outside the US.
- The state with the lowest adult literacy rate was California.
- On average, nationwide, 66% of 4th grade children in the U.S. could not read proficiently in 2013

For decades newspaper, on average, has a reading level of 7th grade. Many articles in the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, and Washington Post are written for a 12th grade reading level.

Reading and math are the primary indicators used for determining literacy levels. While a lot of study has gone into measuring literacy levels using these indicators, they are still flawed in that they are compared to “ranking charts” developed by human biases.

The methodologies also do not take into consideration many environmental aspects, the ability to listen, reasoning skills, or comprehension levels. However this does not mean that the literacy rates are not useful. They are indicators (symptoms) of where the nation stands with regard to it's people's ability to understand the world around them.

We have become complacent in our learning and indolent in our teaching. I'm reminded of a PhD candidate who was not able to distinguish between “their” and “there,” and other homophones in his writings. What makes this incident more egregious than it was, is that the various “professors” who had this candidate as a student did not make any effort to correct the grammar.

We, ourselves, have failed in basic grammar and worse yet lack the “literacy” to understand what we read, the ability to clearly communicate via the written and spoken word, and to listen effectively to what is said. We fail to effectively filter out the world around us, and concentrate effectively on what is written or spoken.

Because we are too busy, too involved in too many things, we have adopted a lackadaisical defense to the world around us and in particular to the social and government influences that affect our daily lives.

Following is a short essay written by Melville W. Borders. Borders was a Latin and English language scholar, a graduate of Yale University, and a Chicago prosecutor during the Prohibition era of the 1920s. While his essay is on the definition of a single word, it exemplifies just how convoluted our English language has become in the past 50 years.

Definition: A Liberal

Webster: One who is liberal in thought or principles; one who favors greater freedom in political or religious matters.

New Century: A person of liberal principles or views. (Befitting a freeman, a gentleman, or a non-professional person).

Thorndike Barnhart: Person favorable to progress and reforms.

Borders:

Basis: Latin – liber-free. Greek – eleutheros-free.

Ergo, a liberal is a man FREE to choose. But he must have freedom to choose; a Communist does not; so he is not a liberal. A KKK man is similarly restricted; he is not a liberal.

In daily life any man who has presented to him dozens of choices. So long as he is FREE to exercise his own judgment, he is a liberal.

When pressures are brought to bear by family, community, union, company, associates, and particularly Government in any form, that man has lost his liberalism.