

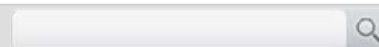


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# Ginnie Graham: Illiteracy obstructs the places you'll go

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Posted: Saturday, March 1, 2014 12:00 am | Updated: 5:00 am, Sat Mar 1, 2014.

By GINNIE GRAHAM World Staff Writer | 4 comments

One in six Americans can't read "One fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish."

It might be a recognized phrase created by famed author Dr. Seuss, but at least 32 million adults cannot read the line.

Seuss, born Theodor Geisel, is our collective touchstone for childhood literacy as his books teach generation after generation a joy for the written word.

Young minds chuckle at a cat's wayward behavior, a Grinch who grows a heart and a Lorax learning about saving the trees.

The illustrator used a poetic meter to entertain kids while they learn basic vocabulary.

He would have been 110 on Saturday, and the nation celebrates with Read Across America Day. Most schools will mark the day Monday with guest readers and dress-up events.

It shouldn't just be about kids, though. Adults need to fall in love with words, either again or for the first time.

**Illiteracy:** The U.S. illiteracy rate hasn't changed in 10 years.

It was 14 percent in 2003, when the National Center for Educational Statistics completed a state-by-state review.

That didn't change in a report released last April by the National Institute of Literacy and Department of Education. No state-level data were included.

Reasons for the stagnation could be increased literacy expectations or a rise in non-English speaking populations. It's likely a combination of both.

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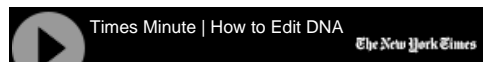
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In Oklahoma, 12 percent of the state's adults were rated as below basic reading skills, which is what most people consider illiterate. Twenty states had worse rates.

More troubling was the 31 percent at a basic literacy level, and 47 percent at the intermediate stage. Basic skills are everyday tasks like reading a television guide, and intermediate is a step up to navigating a map.

Nine percent are proficient at complex activities like comparing and contrasting editorial pieces.

**Helping hands:** The Oklahoma Department of Libraries has offered adult literacy programs since 1983 through grants and training to support local volunteer councils and other adult reading groups.

"The literacy skills required today are different than they were 10 or 20 years ago with the increase of technology," said Leslie Gelders, literacy coordinator for the state's library department.

"What is required to be functionally literate keeps going up. The jobs people are seeking today require much higher literary skills."

The volunteer programs - such as the Tulsa library's Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Services - pairs students with mentors for customized lesson plans based on their goals. Tulsa's program has 20 students on a waiting list.

"We're trying to help a person survive in the environment they live in," Gelders said. "It doesn't matter if they can spell every word correctly. Can they fill out a job application, read a medicine bottle or find a location on a map?"

Like nearly all public programs in the past decade, funding has been cut for adult literacy. Bake sales and private donations are keeping local adult reading programs alive.

"They have to hustle and be creative to find ways to provide services," Gelders said. "We don't want to charge tutors or learners, who often come from lower incomes."

Motivation: State data have not been collected in the same way since 2003. Officials use other education measures to figure out how Oklahoma adults are reading.

The 2010 Census shows that 20 percent have less than a high school education, and 9 percent didn't finish ninth grade.

Lawmakers voted to hold back all third-graders who don't pass a reading test starting this year. If only the fix to literacy were that easy.

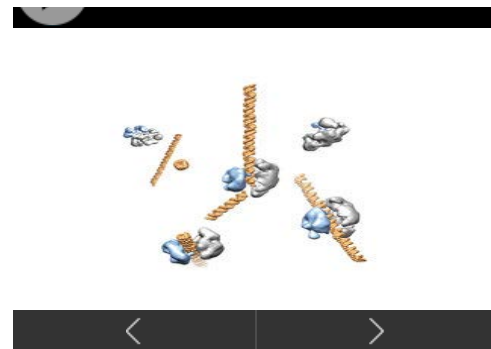
Gelders said illiteracy often exists within generational cycles, with poverty being a significant obstacle.

If a parent can't read, then there will be no books in the home and no trips to the library. Children will never see a parent with a book, magazine or newspaper or reading e-book or online materials.

"Reading is not part of their lives," Gelders said. "We are trying to get books into the hands of young children."

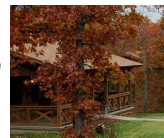
Youth also can be a motivation.

"One of the main reasons adults come forward is to read to their child or help their children in school," Gelders said. "Adults with low reading skills are often embarrassed and ashamed about it and have hidden it."



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The Dr. Seuss parties are always a treat with children and grown-ups dressed in red-and-white hats and as Things 1 and 2.

Dr. Seuss not only had catchy lines, he offered some words of wisdom.

"You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose," from "Oh, the Places You'll Go."

Adults can appreciate what these books meant to our own learning. We can also take a moment to pick up a book and be a model reader.

#### Literacy by the numbers

- 15 percent of the U.S. population has a learning disability.
- 80 percent of adults in basic education and literacy programs have a learning disability.
- 56 percent of the country's prisoners have below-average or basic literacy skills.
- 14 percent of U.S. adults cannot read well enough to understand a job application, a newspaper article or eighth-grade-level story.

Source: Oklahoma Department of Libraries

Find more information on Tulsa's Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Services at [tulsalibrary.org/blog/literacy](http://tulsalibrary.org/blog/literacy)

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Steve Meador posted at 5:52 pm on Sat, Mar 1, 2014.



Ginnie, childhood literacy did not begin with "One fish, two fish", nor did it begin with Ted Giesel, Dr. Seuss, or Dick and Jan and their dog Spot. Childhood literacy began with parents that encouraged their children to read, and then made books available to their children.

How are literacy rates staying the same when we have failing schools producing failing students? I question the accuracy of the literacy rates when the same "Officials" are telling us of the poor quality of the modern student.

Fix the Parents of failing children, then the fixing of the children will be easy.

When Parents start to once again Parent their children, perhaps then an improvement may occur. Much of the problem lies in the habits of the modern chld...they watch TV, they play video games, they watch DVD's...now of which requires reading. Shut off the Electronics, including cell phones, for one hour each night, and demand that your children read

read more (about 3 more lines)

Kitty Ang posted at 7:25 am on Sat, Mar 1, 2014.



An illustration of my point: the TW comment program changed my sentence structure to one space after each sentence.

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Kitty Ang posted at 7:23 am on Sat, Mar 1, 2014.



Posts: 510

Excellent thought-producing article, Ginnie, so I will not point out the grammar and syntax errors in the article itself. One of the main problems is that English (spoken and written) is not considered one of the most important subjects in elementary and high school. Written English was still studied in high school because syntax is what gave understanding of an author's meaning to any reader, even across generations. The publishing industry itself is partly to blame: one space after a comma, two spaces after a sentence, however, many years ago book publishers decided that took too much space - look at the article itself, the sentence spacing is not correct. How can we have true literacy if we (we are "the schools") do not demand it from our everyday reading sources? Note: Ginnie Graham is one of my favorite Tulsa World writers simply because her grammar and syntax are usually more correct than any of the others.

Churches were the original educators. I partly blame the fact the very few churches still read aloud the Bible (whichever one they use) as a group, allowing each member to read - regardless his/her reading ability. Oral

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Bernie Cremin posted at 6:55 am on Sat, Mar 1, 2014.



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Excellent article.

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