



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on November 27, 2012

How to Eradicate Illiteracy in America

Although the National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2003 that 43 percent of American adults are virtually illiterate, nobody seems to have noticed. I retrieved this information from the NCES's website, not from the media, which ignores this problem. Otherwise I wouldn't have known exactly how serious our illiteracy problem still is.



Indeed, I had been studying the problem since 1973 when I wrote [The New Illiterates](#). But in the interim 39 years, the continued growth of American illiteracy has become a "factoid" that has no resonance anywhere, not among the cognitive elite (liberal or conservative), not among the political parties, not among the legislators who vote to spend billions more on education, and not among parents who send their children to schools that turn them into illiterates.

Back in the 1980s, when a group of American university students were invited to lecture in Moscow, a Russian student in the audience asked: "According to the *U.S. News* magazine, one-third of Americans are illiterate. How can this be in a nation as advanced as the United States?" The American students were nonplussed. They had no answer. It was an embarrassing moment. But their ignorance was a reflection of the ignorance of the American public in general.

In 1988, Arthur Sulzberger, publisher of the *New York Times*, told his fellow newspaper publishers that 60 million Americans, a third of the adult population, couldn't read. This must have shocked them, but what did they do about it? They created the National Assessment of Adult Illiteracy, which keeps track of the problem but doesn't solve it.

The latest statistics report that 14 percent (32 million) of U.S. adults can't read. Twenty-one percent (48 million) read below a 5th grade level. Sixty-three percent of prison inmates can't read. And with compulsory schooling in America, all of these illiterates and semi-illiterates spent years in American schools learning to read. So obviously, something is wrong with the way reading is taught in American schools.

How is it that America was once the most literate nation on Earth? The answer is simple: The method used in teaching reading was the phonics method. It was Noah Webster's "blue-backed speller," based on the phonetic method that made Americans the most literate people on Earth. Early Americans were determined to make sure that every child could read the Bible, and that is why children had to be taught.

Today many children not only can't read the Bible, they can't read a newspaper. They can't read, period. How did this situation come about? It all started in 1898 when socialist John Dewey proclaimed



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that the traditional primary school subjects that emphasized literacy, spelling, and arithmetic for the development of independent thinking, must be replaced by a new curriculum that emphasized socialization and group think. He wrote:

It is one of the great mistakes of education to make reading and writing constitute the bulk of the school work the first two years. The true way is to teach them incidentally as the outgrowth of the social activities at this time. Thus language is not primarily the expression of thought, but the means of social communication.... If language is abstracted from social activity and made an end in itself, it will not give its whole value as a means of development.... It is not claimed that by the method suggested, the child will learn to read as much, nor perhaps as readily in a given period by the usual method. That he will make more rapid progress later when the true language interest develops ... can be claimed with confidence.

This sales pitch also turned out to be baloney. The illiterate student doesn't make rapid progress later. He becomes stuck in his illiteracy. Dewey also said that this transformation of the primary school must be done over a long period of time, lest there be a backlash by parents. He wrote, in *The Primary School Fetich*:

Change must come gradually. To force it unduly would compromise its final success by favoring a violent reaction.

It took about 30 years before they could begin putting the new curriculum in the public schools. But the negative effects of the new curriculum became apparent pretty soon. The educators blamed the increase in reading failure on the children, not the teaching method. In 1944, *Life* magazine could publish an article on dyslexia which, when read today, indicates the incredible lengths to which the educators had gone to find fault with the children who could not learn to read by the look-say method. The article states:

Millions of children in the U.S. suffer from dyslexia which is the medical term for reading difficulties. It is responsible for about 70% of the school failures in 6- to 12-year-age group, and handicaps about 15% of all grade-school children. Dyslexia may stem from a variety of physical ailments or combination of them — glandular imbalance, heart disease, eye or ear trouble — or from a deep-seated psychological disturbance that “blocks” a child's ability to learn.

But it took Dr. Rudolf Flesch in his sensational book [Why Johnny Can't Read](#) to finally explain to parents why their children were having such a hard time learning to read. He wrote:

The teaching of reading — all over the United States, in all the schools, and in all the textbooks — is totally wrong and flies in the face of all logic and common sense.

And then he explained how the alphabetic phonics method — the proper way to teach children to read — had been replaced by a look-say, whole-word method that was causing untold harm to the children. What was the reaction of the professors of education? They circled the wagons and created the International Reading Association which became the citadel of the whole-word method.

Today, the situation is far worse than it was in 1955. The socialist curriculum is so deeply entrenched in the education system, that there is no possibility that the illiteracy-producing machine can be stopped. Such reform efforts as Jeb Bush's Foundation for Excellence in Education can't even begin to address the issue of illiteracy. They espouse the thinking of all previous establishment reformers: set standards and spend more money.



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The only way to eradicate illiteracy is to go directly to the people affected by the programs that create illiteracy. This means creating a massive campaign for universal literacy that can only be successfully undertaken by conservative leaders who sincerely believe in the cause. They must want to help those who have been academically damaged and handicapped by the schools. And they must embark on a program to teach these people to read.

This can be done. If Noah Webster could teach a whole nation to read with one little book — he was also helped by opportunist imitators — so today one little book can do the same thing: *Alpha-Phonics*, created by this author. Of course, there are other good phonics programs on the market. But none are as simple and easy to use. *Alpha-Phonics* can be used by any parent by simply following the easy-to-understand instructions. Thousands of homeschoolers have already used the program quite successfully. In other words, you don't need a fancy degree in literary arts to become an expert teacher of reading.

In other words, we can eradicate illiteracy provided the will to do so is there among conservative volunteers who see this program as a means of saving lives.

You can imagine the kind of conflict that would erupt between Democrats and conservatives should the latter decide to embark on this campaign for universal literacy. Who can be against literacy? If Republican conservatives get behind this effort, they will be creating a new image for their party. The Republican Party abolished slavery. The Southern Democrats built their Jim Crow system to prevent African-Americans from advancing socially and economically. And today's Democrats are behind a school curriculum that dumbs-down African-Americans as well as all other children. The Democrats have created the black underclass for their own political benefit.

The Republican Party, which freed the slaves, should begin to free the black underclass from its debilitating illiteracy. It can be done, and it should be done.



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