Making Your Library Dyslexic Positive: Becoming an Ally to Neurodiverse Kids Who Are Not Yet Proficient Readers

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Figure: Ceiling of the Sagrada Família by Dyslexic Architect Antonin Gaudi

Making Your Library Dyslexic Positive

Housekeeping
- Webinar will be recorded
- Microphones are muted. Please use chat for questions

Zoom Control Panel
- You can move and resize the screen views
- Camera: feel free to turn on or off
- Chat/mouth words/emoji reactions are all fine
- Use the *Leave Meeting* link if you want to exit the webinar

Figure: Bucella, Marty. (2009). My Rule for Spelling is 'My rule for spelling is, when in doubt, put the letter 'I' in front of the word.' [comic]. ID. CS320085. Licensed from CartoonStock.com.

"My rule for spelling tests is, when in doubt, put the letter 'i' in front of the word."

CartoonStock.com
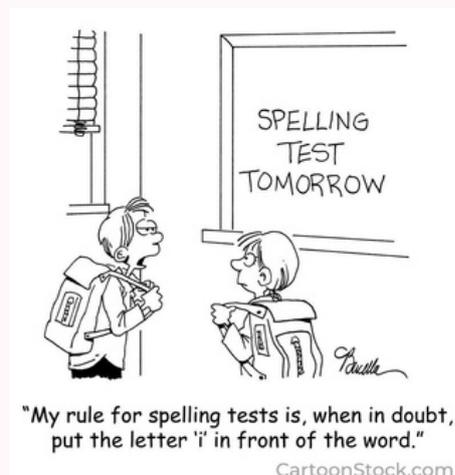
Hello everyone, I'm Emily Carley. Welcome, everyone. Thanks so much for being here with us today.

Before we get started, just a few quick housekeeping items to help things run smoothly. First, we are recording today's session. The recording and slides will be shared afterward.

We will use the chat feature for your feedback in response to an activity during our presentation, and we will use this feature to receive your questions as they come up. We'll pause for Q&A toward the end, but you're welcome to drop questions in the chat at any time for us to reference.

All forms of communication are valid. You can have your camera on or off. Feel free to move around, stretch, and stim. Thank you for being here with us.

Welcome!

Today we will:

- Experience learning to read
- Move beyond a disconnect between literacy privilege & unmet literacy needs
- Short video featuring a cat, a box, and a rescued kitten
- Cat: Adult Library Worker Ally
- The Box: The safe, effective, and empowering library space
- The Kitten: dyslexic or neurodiverse ND child
- Become equipped to support all in learning to read
- Recognize socially prioritized abilities/attributes

Figure: Dyslexic Positive Libraries Team at ALA 2025

This image shows the Dyslexic Positive Libraries team presenting at the American Library Association conference in Philadelphia earlier this year.

In the background is the ceiling of the Sagrada Família, designed by the brilliant dyslexic architect Antoni Gaudí. It's just one example of how dyslexia and neurodiversity bring beauty, innovation, and value to our world.

What was learning to read like for you?
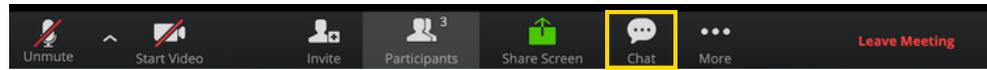
1 - Learning to read seemed effortless

2 - Learning to read was relatively easy with broad instruction, explicit instruction for spelling needed

3 - Learning to read/spell/write proficiently required code-based, systematic & explicit instruction for some of my school experience

4 - Learning to read/spell/write required code-based, systematic, explicit, intensive instruction & frequent repetition for most of my school experience.

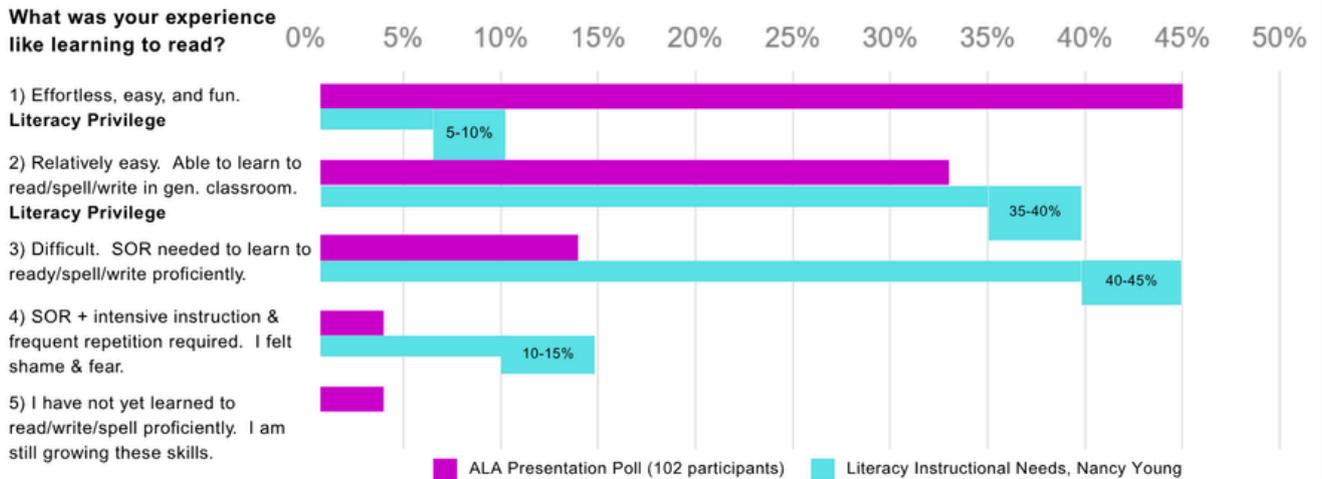**5** - I haven't yet learned to read, spell, and write. I am still growing these skills.

We were all young once. 🙂

We were excited to make new friends, follow our curiosities and use the power of play to create joy in a flow that may have been challenging for our parents and educators to interrupt.

Neurodiverse children's unmet literacy needs prevent them from accomplishing what they may perceive their peers doing so quite easily and joyfully. However, with consistent, effective evidence-based literacy instruction ALL can learn to read.

I invite you to take a moment to think about your experience learning to read. If you would like to contribute, please use the zoom chat to add a 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 to indicate your experience learning to read. This will help us all understand our lived experiences learning to read just among those in this group today.

The American Reality

What was your experience like learning to read?

	0%	5%	10%	15%	20%	25%	30%	35%	40%	45%	50%

1) Effortless, easy, and fun. **Literacy Privilege** — 5-10%

2) Relatively easy. Able to learn to read/spell/write in gen. classroom. **Literacy Privilege** — 35-40%

3) Difficult. SOR needed to learn to ready/spell/write proficiently. — 40-45%

4) SOR + intensive instruction & frequent repetition required. I felt shame & fear. — 10-15%

5) I have not yet learned to read/write/spell proficiently. I am still growing these skills.

■ ALA Presentation Poll (102 participants) ■ Literacy Instructional Needs, Nancy Young

32% of **12th graders** do not yet have basic reading skills (NAEP, 2024)

28% adults (58.9 million) are not yet reading fluently (PIAAC 2023, NCES). In 2017 this statistic was 19%)

We polled library workers at our ALA 2025 presentation and asked them to respond to the same question: What was your experience like learning to read?

The results of our ALA presentation for library workers are in purple.

The aqua bars represent the American reality.

Even though we had a number of dyslexic library workers self-select into our presentations, you can still is significant differences between the purple (library workers) and the aqua (the literacy needs and experiences of the people in our communities).

Categories 1 or 2, reveal literacy privilege. The US population often falls into categories 3, 4, and 5, folks who have not experienced literacy privilege and have current unmet literacy needs.

32% of U.S. 12th graders currently lack basic reading skills (Reading Results, National Assessment of Educational Progress NAEP).
28% U.S. adults (58.9 million) are not yet reading fluently, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies PIAAC 2023, NCES). In 2017 this statistic was 19%.

WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE
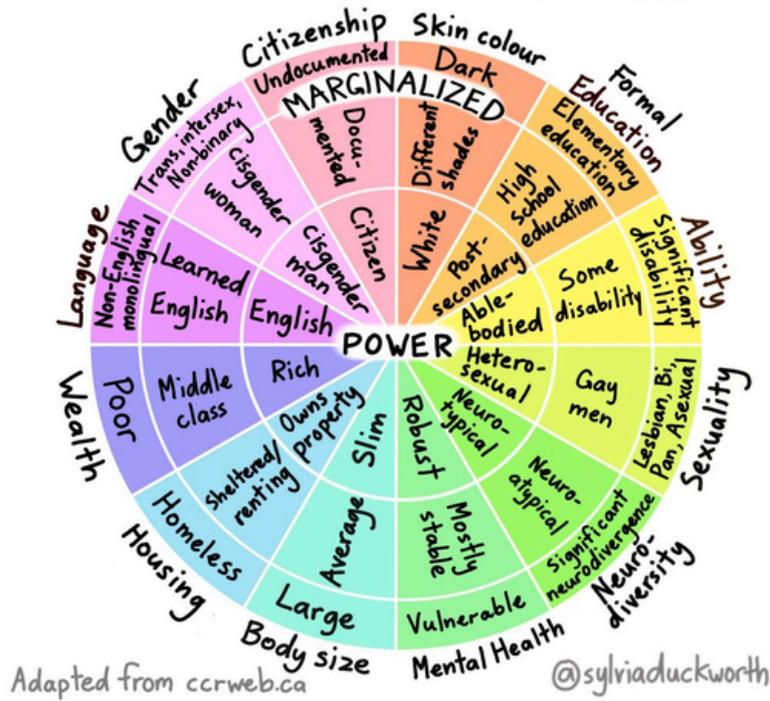
Duckworth, Sylvia. Wheel of Power/Privilege [Illustration]. Creative Commons BY 4.0

Take a moment to look at the wheel of power and privilege.
We all move in and out of privilege & power throughout our days and throughout our lives.

There is nothing wrong with any spot on the wheel; it is just a framework to help us better understand literacy and patron interactions.

There may be a disconnect between your literacy needs, experiences, and feelings about reading, and your community's literacy needs and experiences, which in turn affect their feelings about reading and their ability to access skills.

Illiteracy's Reach

US-born adults make up the largest percentage of those with low literacy skills.

Illiteracy can prevent people from:

- Filling out a job application
- Understanding medical instructions
- Safe travel & navigation of the community
- Interpreting bills and bank accounts
- Advocating for causes they believe in
- Civic participation
- Advocating for their family members
- Autonomous decision-making

Figure: News-Herald. (2018). Illiteracy Often Unseen Very Real Problem for Greater Cleveland Groups Say. Fair Use Evaluation.

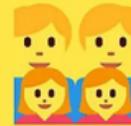## Adult Literacy Facts

36 million adults in the United States cannot read, write or do basic math above a third-grade level

Children whose parents have low literacy levels have a **72%** chance of being at the lowest reading levels themselves. These children are more likely to get poor grades, display behavioral problems, have high absentee rates, repeat school years or drop out.

$225 billion Cost each year in non-productivity in the workforce, crime and loss of tax revenue.

$232 billion a year in health care costs is linked to low adult literacy skills

43% of adults with the lowest levels of literacy live in poverty

Sources: National Bureau of Economic Research, National Center for Education Statistics, National Council for Adult Learning, American Journal of Public Health

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The challenges of illiteracy and low literacy levels have significantly negative impacts on individuals, families and whole communities.

Illiteracy prevents people from fully engaging in their lives and accessing fulfilling careers and economic possibilities. Some specific challenges include:

• Filling out a job application
• Understanding medical instructions
• Safe travel & navigation of the community
• Interpreting bills and bank accounts
• Advocating for causes they believe in
• Civic participation
• Advocating for their family members
• Autonomous decision-making

Video of a Rescued Kitten, a Box, and a Cat

QR CODE: Accessible Version
VIDEO: @Liams_Stories. 2025. Kitten Learns to Trust Again Thanks to a Loving Foster Cat Mom. Fair Use Evaluation.
MUSIC EXCERPT: Ruelle. 2016. I Get to Love You. Fair Use Evaluation.

Hello, I'm Nicole Westbom and I'm the youth library specialist with our organization and I'm going to start with a quick 1-minute video about a rescued kitten, a box, and a cat.

The Kitten: Dyslexic/ND Kid

- Who are reluctant readers
- Signs a child needs your allyship
- Strategies for effectively working with dyslexic & ND kids
- Signs you've become an ally

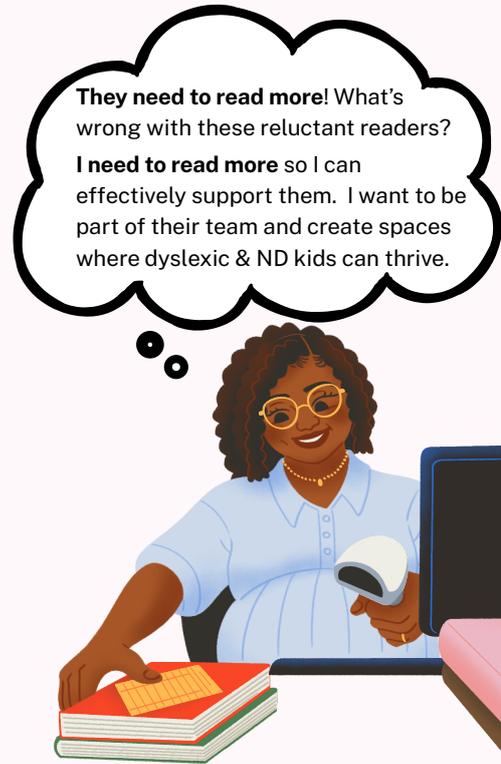We're going to use this little story as framework to talk about you, your library, and your patrons.

Let's start with talking about the Kitten. In our metaphor, the kitten is a neurodivergent young patron. They come to your library, potentially they are carrying negative experiences and emotions.

They are reluctant.

Reluctant Readers

- language learning differences, such as dyslexia, dysgraphia with concurrent processing challenges
- a cycle of under education & socio-economic suppression
- neurodiverse working memory and processing speeds
- neurodiverse ways of thinking and socializing
- anxiety, social / emotional trauma
- ADHD, ADD or AuDHD
- a disconnect with materials and experiences and their lived experience & cultural backgrounds

Approximately 17.4 % of kids are on the dyslexic spectrum

They need to read more! What's wrong with these reluctant readers?
I need to read more so I can effectively support them. I want to be part of their team and create spaces where dyslexic & ND kids can thrive.

I'm sure you've all heard the term Reluctant Readers. But who are they?

They are curious, creative and smart folks who may not be your library's patrons, yet. I think on some level we are all aware of achievement gaps and how they snowball as a child grows (see The Matthew Effect in Reading: Consequence of Individual Differences in Acquisition of Literacy).

Some of the factors that contribute to this:
• A cycle of under education & socio-economic suppression
• Neurodiverse ways of thinking and socializing
• Learning differences, such as dyslexia, dysgraphia with concurrent processing challenges
• Anxiety, social / emotional trauma
• ADHD and ADD or AuDHD
• A disconnect with materials and experiences and their lived experience & cultural backgrounds.

We want to take some time to talk about what makes a person hesitant to "buy-in" to reading and library offerings.

Signs a Child Needs Your Allyship

- Playing games on the library computers; avoiding books (unmet literacy needs, humans avoid painful/difficult experiences)
- "Interrupting" during storytime
- Boasting and exaggerating about reading. A "perfect child" checking out a 4" decoy book
- Naysaying about the library/reading (negativity is the opposite of indifference)
- Running around, zipping in & out of the library, not engaging
- My Library doesn't represent my identity and my culture

In a public library setting, we are seeing a different slice of each young person's life. Teachers often have some background knowledge or expectation, but we are almost always going in with no information and with no set routine for developing a relationship.

Here are some examples of ways a child might be telling you they need a library ally. You may recognize some of these scenarios.

These first three examples are descriptions of the way a child who has unmet needs might interact with books. They might avoid reading books altogether, but they also might brag about already having read everything in the library. They might talk about how all the books in your library are for babies or that there aren't any cool books.

A child who needs your allyship may run around, be a bit of an agent of chaos, try to get other kids to not engage in the library.

They may not be seeing themselves as a library user, which is not a reflection on your services, just a feeling of insecurity that can come from a variety of different sources. Or they may hold the library at "arms length," you may see them look at a book they see on a table, but pretend to not be interested in it or stand just off to the side to watch you as you present a program.

Finally, a child who has unmet needs may mask this with "perfect" behavior. They might check out something that is meant to impress others (and you).

Strategies

- Library ownership and volunteering
- Using a questionnaire to learn about interests and communication styles
- Connecting through specific questions and direct interest
- Special topics
- Consistent routines
- Emotions behind words
- Being direct, explicit and transparent

Figure: Morgan, Ron. (2015). "I don't know. Have you thought of asking your librarian?" [cartoon]. ID CS111092. Licensed from CartoonStock.com.

"I don't know. Have you thought of asking your librarian?"

CartoonStock.com

• Reconfigure "ownership" of the library to be a shared format through volunteerism and care for the space.
•Use a neuroinclusive questionnaire paired with a conversation guide to learn your patrons interests and ways to meet their literacy, environmental and social needs.
• Find ways to connect 1:1 eg.
Include specialized topics in library programming eg. Fabulous Fungus festival; An Egg Drop Contraption Challenge, Dungeons and Dragons

• Establish consistent routines and expectations for typical procedures, communication

• Consistent routines and a flexible mindset about outcomes for every program

• Understand the emotion behind the words, keeping an empathetic presence to the patron's lived experience

• Be direct, explicit and transparent and always be kind when setting expectations, supporting boundaries.

Signs You've Become a Successful Ally

Children

- Open, relaxed, engaged behavior
- Honestly sharing struggles
- Shame-free mistake making, example late or damaged books
- Casual book handling (freely browsing, piling, and misshelving
- RRs engaged in "book talk excitement."
- They know their librarian by name and ask to help with tasks

Teens & Adults

- Socializing in your library
- A reluctant reader comes in from summer landscaping job to use library
- Typos in casual correspondence
- First gen users getting library cards
- The library is a resource to access information, complete homework

So the other side of the allyship coin is how to know you've become an ally
You will see them become more relaxed. How do you get them to this point?

• One way is by being ready for whatever way they want to engage with you, no matter how silly or trivial it may seem. They made a cootie catcher and want to tell your fortune? Let them tell you! They just spent the whole weekend working on a Halloween costume? Ask about that process. The things that we might find to be "small talk" are big to them.

• A huge sign of a well-developed allyship is the sharing of struggles. This is one that can take some time to get to, but the sharing of little struggles is the first step.
-Damaged and late books are a part of life. It's important to not dwell on these things with kids. Can it be repaired for continued use? Is it the end of the world that something was late? In the grand scheme of things, it is more important that we value the relationship than get wrapped up in our procedures.

I know, I know, kids love to shove books back on shelves with no regard to where anything goes and this can make it challenging to keep things the way they SHOULD be. But fret not, this is a good sign. A sign that your space is one of comfort and safety. When you think about it this way it, it makes all of the extra work truly worth it.

Another sign that you've become an ally is when a striving reader finds a book they are ready to rave about. This is a big darn deal. Give them your full attention. Be ready to talk about what's next. If they try something new and they don't like it, be ready to talk about that, too. Sometimes it

can be a real fun time to talk about a character you hate or a plot point that didn't make sense.

Ownership of the library space is one of the most valuable forms of connection that I can talk about. If you have simple jobs that a young person can help you do and you express how much you value that work, you've really won the allyship battle. Some examples: Cutting out stickers for the sticker bin, returning in-house circs to library staff to be prepared for reshelving, picking books out for a display, delivering things from one part of the library to another (one staff member to another), and most importantly making recommendations. A recommendation from a striving reader who is just starting to see themself as a "library kid" is the most valuable recommendation of all for both the child making the recommendation and the one who receives it.

The Box: Library Space

- Downloadable signs & infographics for your library
- Collection development & shelf organization
- Automating the kindness with OPAC message
- BARD: Braille & Audiobook App
- Building a Library Literach Hub to Meet Literacy Needs
- Aligning Programing with the Stages of Reading Development
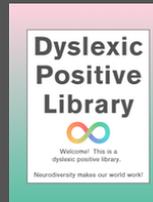
Hi, I am Susan Whitehead, academic librarian and a person who brings lived experience to this discussion as a dyslexic and neurodiverse librarian.

Let's talk about The Box, our library space.

We are going to cover downloadable signs & infographics available in the DPLI toolkit. We understand that library workers need practical, free, ready-to-go resources, and we have great stuff for you!

We are also going to briefly touch upon collection development and strategies for serving kids who are at different stages along their reading journeys.

Finally, we are going to talk about creating a high-quality, science of reading-aligned literacy hub in your library to support pre-readers, emerging readers, and struggling readers.

The Box: Kind, Safe, & Inclusive Library Spaces

Celebrate Dyslexia Display with DPLI Printables
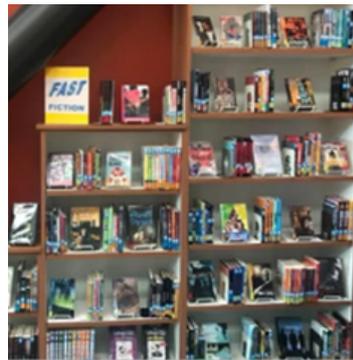
Fast Fiction Shelves. Hi-lo books mixed with popular series. Book shame & segregation avoided.

Hi Patty Patron,

Thank you for using the Springfield Library.

It's time to return or renew your library materials. Please let us know if you need help with this. [instructions]

Thank you again for using the library and being part of our the Springfield Library community.

See you at your next visit to the library!

Automate the kindness with OPACs. Template from ALL Brains Belong VT

The DPLI toolkit contains signs, bookmarks, and infographics you can download, print, and displa y.
These materials act as safe-space cues for dyslexic and neurodivergent patrons and gentle reminders for all of us that we want to keep the library a welcoming space.

We also have ever-growing GoodReads book lists that are carefully curated to be representative and discrimination-free. Nicole has told me of the many times someone has come up to her while she worked the children's circulation desk- excited to see themself or their child reflected positively in a library display.

In the center are the Fast Fiction Bookshelves created by middle school librarian Carolyn MarRo. She mixed Hi-Lo books with several of her most popular series, making this a popular space for all kids. Through mindful library work, book shame & segregation has been avoided.

Those little comic book and card game icons are a visual prompt to remind me to mention the benefit of having games with low entry, high replay value, including Exploding Kittens,Taco Cat Goat Cheese Pizza, and Apples to Apples. Also graphic novels and a well-curated collection of Text for ALL readers can help support our kittens. I'm not going to spend much time here, because frankly, you all are already doing a fantastic job here.

Finally, I think it would be great if our OPACs could do some of the kindness work for us–so let's automate the kindness with OPAC notifications. This is an overdue notice that doesn't use the word "overdue." This template is modeled after the All Brains Belong Vermont Neuroinclusive

Healthcare & Community messages, and is used with permission.

BARD Braille & Audiobooks App

The BARD Braille and Audiobook App from the Library of Congress allows you to expand your audio and braille collections--at no budgetary cost.

Librarians are certifying authorities and it's an easy application process, so please sign your patrons up for the BARD app.

We include a printable sign that you can use to advertise this service.

Meet Literacy Needs with a Literacy Hub!

- Story time with explicit literacy skills (DPLI Toolkit)
- Build a decodable book collection and decodable storywalk (Teach My Kid To Read website)
- Science of Reading handbooks
- Teach My Kid To Read's literacy@mylibrary online community (30-day free trial for library workers).
- Connect with local literacy specialists

Let's talk about literacy.

The DPLI offers an
ever-growing collection of science of reading-aligned literacy resources.

There is a story time guide amped up with fun ways to include the 5 pillars of literacy: oral language, phonological awareness, vocabulary, print concepts, and letter knowledge.
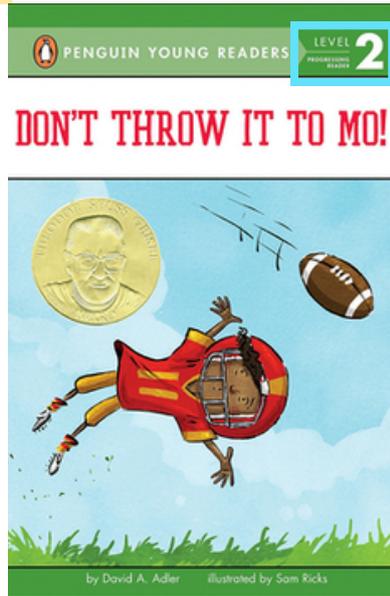
One of our partners, Teach My Kid to Read is currently offering librarians a 30-day free trial to their literacy@my library online community. It includes guides to decodable book collections, decodable book labels, shelf labels, a downloadable storywalk, and more.

Another great asset is the local literacy specialists in your community.

Repurpose or Weed Literacy Misinformation

Repurpose a Book

1) Cover the "Level 2 Progressing Reader" and other discredited literacy information (back cover, frontmatter, etc.)

2) Repurpose as a sports book; not a literacy learning tool.

3) Now you have a lovely children's book.

PENGUIN YOUNG READERS — LEVEL 2 PROGRESSING READER

DON'T THROW IT TO MO!

by David A. Adler   illustrated by Sam Ricks

Discredited Text Written for Teaching Children to Read

- Ready Readers
- Leveled Readers
- Guided Readers
- System 44 published by Scholastic
- Predictable Text
- Meli Series

Discredited Literacy Theory & Literacy Instructional Programs

- Whole Language
- Balanced Literacy
- High Frequency / Sight Word Memorization
- Reading Recovery
- Waldorf Pedagogy
- Units of Study
- Units of Study curriculum
- Teachers College of Reading and Writing Project, TCRWP, or "The Project"
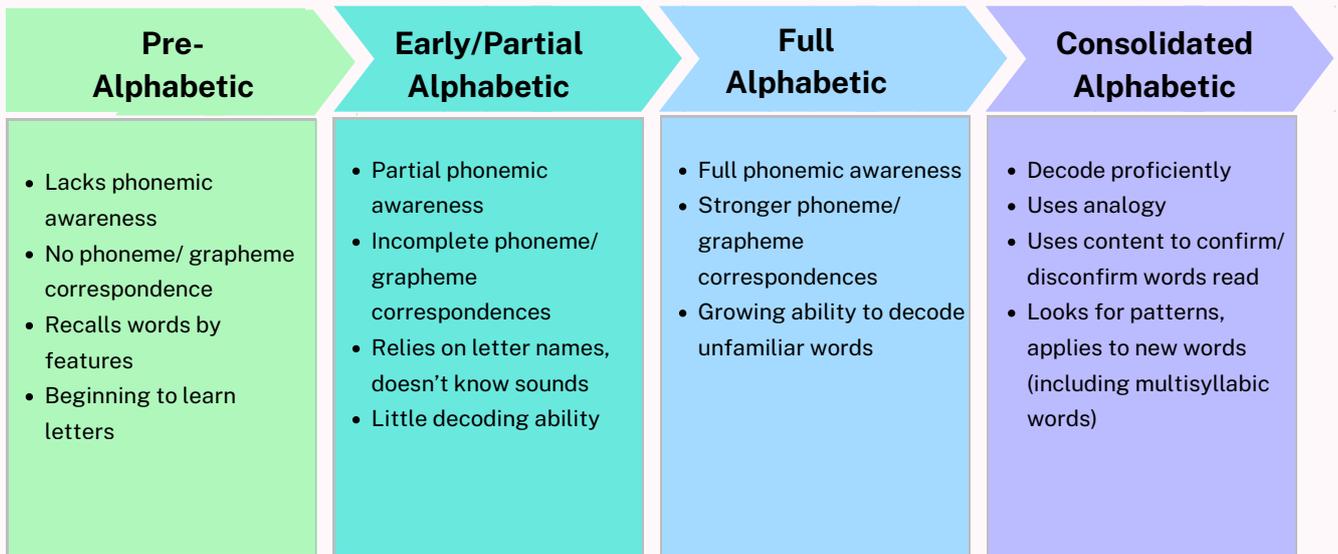- Classroom Library Series published by Heinemann

Discredited Literacy Theorists & Instructional Program Developers

Fountas and Pinnell, Kenneth Goodman, Frank Smith, Yetta Goodman, Regie Routman, Irene C. Fountas, Marie Clay, Gay Sue Pinnell, Lucy Calkins, Rudolf Steiner, Dorothy Watson, Carolyn Burke, and Jerome Harste

It's also important to weed or repurpose discredited literacy methods, including ready readers, leveled readers, guided readers, sight words, the five-finger rule, Fountas and Pinnell, Whole Language, Balanced Literacy, and Reading Recovery.

It is a deeply painful truth that we have been using discredited literacy methods in our libraries, our schools, and our homes. But we can face painful truths, and we can do hard things, as long as we doing so with loving compassion for ourselves and others. Knowing that we were doing the very best we could with the knowledge that we had at that time. In the wise words of Maya Angelou, "do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

Recognizing the Stages of Learning to Read

Pre-Alphabetic	Early/Partial Alphabetic	Full Alphabetic	Consolidated Alphabetic
• Lacks phonemic awareness • No phoneme/ grapheme correspondence • Recalls words by features • Beginning to learn letters	• Partial phonemic awareness • Incomplete phoneme/ grapheme correspondences • Relies on letter names, doesn't know sounds • Little decoding ability	• Full phonemic awareness • Stronger phoneme/ grapheme correspondences • Growing ability to decode unfamiliar words	• Decode proficiently • Uses analogy • Uses content to confirm/ disconfirm words read • Looks for patterns, applies to new words (including multisyllabic words)

Lane, Holly B. 2022. How Children Learn to Read Words: Ehri's Phases. UFLI University of Florida Literacy Institute.

Thank you, Susan. This is Emily again.

The Science of Reading is a compendium of more than 30 years of research on how our brain learns to read, which is neither a natural or simple process.

The implication of this research, which advanced significantly with the development of the FMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) in 1991, has resulted in a systematic approach to learning to read and spell in the English Language, evidence-based instructional practices and books aligned with the sequence of how we learn to read.

Dr. Ehri's 5 stages of learning to read words show us how we acquire language skills for proficient text reading.

Every stage is important. beginning with spoken language, moving into reading symbols and making associations, then reading letters whose sounds when made together make meaning, such as d-o-g is dog and the child has a dog themselves. These are exciting discoveries! Every stage of development requires learning the sound-to-symbol association in our system of language incrementally, building from simple to complex with lots of practice. Spelling is equally important as learning to read, it's our language in print!

Let's highlight key features of each stage of learning to read.

PRE-ALPHABETIC PHASE

The first of Ehri's phases is the pre-alphabetic phase. A
child in this phase has little or no alphabetic knowledge
and, instead, uses other cues to figure out words. Most
often, the cues are visual cues, such as a picture on the
page. A visual cue could also be the shape of a word or an
accompanying logo. When a young child sees a familiar logo and says the name of the
brand or product, his parents may think that he can read, but what he's really doing is
recognizing a logo and attaching it to a word he
knows. He would not recognize the word without the logo.

Children in this phase recognize some words as pictures and read words as
wholes. They use context clues, pictures, and guessing strategies to identify words. They
also match voice to print in memorized texts. Children in the pre-alphabetic phase notice
semantic rather than phonological relationships and they make arbitrary rather than
systematic connections.

The pre-alphabetic phase is a perfectly normal part of reading development, but
by sometime early in kindergarten, once phonics instruction has begun, typically
developing readers have moved through this phase and into the next. Instruction for
children in this phase should focus on phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and
grapheme-phoneme correspo ndences.

PARTIAL ALPHABETIC PHASE
Children in the partial alphabetic phase demonstrate emerging use of grapheme-
phoneme, or letter-sound connections. This is known as phonetic cue reading, but usually,
the connections are incomplete or unreliable. Children in this phase often use the first
letter sound, along with the context, to guess unfamiliar words.
For example, because in one instance they encountered the word "puppy," which
begins with the letter P, they may guess that each subsequent word that begins
with P is "puppy." They may also occasionally use the last letter sound or other letters to
figure out a word. The partial alphabetic phase is more reliable than visual cue reading,
but it provides no way to read novel words in print. Instruction in this phase
should reinforce letter-sound knowledge and phonemic awareness, with an emphasis on
using all of the letters in each word.
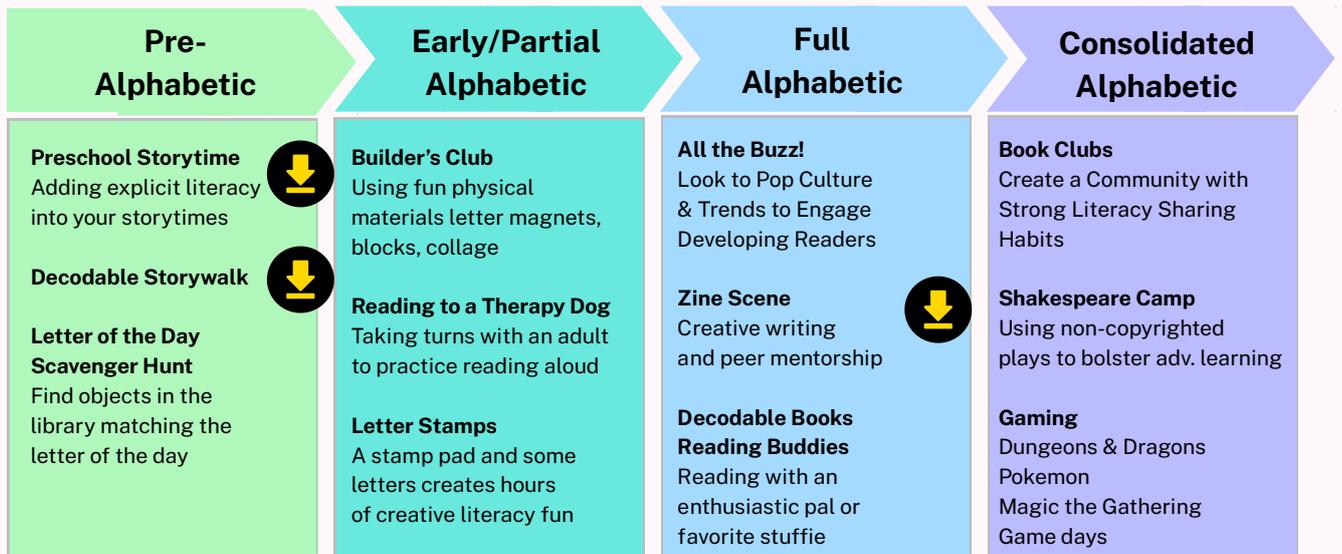
FULL ALPHABETIC PHASE
In the full alphabetic phase, the reader attends to every letter in every word. Words are
accessed through phonological recoding, or converting graphemes into phonological
representations, or put more simply, converting letters into sounds and words. This phase
is dramatically more reliable than phonetic cue reading. A child in this phase has a
working knowledge of most letter-sound correspondences, has phonemic awareness,
decodes sequentially and often slowly, and uses

decoding skills to read unfamiliar words.

Typically developing readers begin the full alphabetic phase by late kindergarten or early first grade, as their phonics instruction progresses and as their phonemic awareness develops. Instruction in this phase should focus on segmenting and blending phonemes and on getting children to attend to every grapheme individually. Repeated exposures to words with taught grapheme-phoneme correspondences is necessary for growth through this phase. This exp osure

promotes orthographic mapping, or the strengthening of associations between graphemes and phonemes "to bond the spellings, pronunciations, and meanings of specific words in memory"

The description of Ehri's Consolidated Alphabetic and Automatic Phases continues on this document ufli.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/EhriPhases.pdf

Programming for Learning to Read

Pre-Alphabetic	Early/Partial Alphabetic	Full Alphabetic	Consolidated Alphabetic
Preschool Storytime Adding explicit literacy into your storytimes	**Builder's Club** Using fun physical materials letter magnets, blocks, collage	**All the Buzz!** Look to Pop Culture & Trends to Engage Developing Readers	**Book Clubs** Create a Community with Strong Literacy Sharing Habits
Decodable Storywalk	**Reading to a Therapy Dog** Taking turns with an adult to practice reading aloud	**Zine Scene** Creative writing and peer mentorship	**Shakespeare Camp** Using non-copyrighted plays to bolster adv. learning
Letter of the Day Scavenger Hunt Find objects in the library matching the letter of the day	**Letter Stamps** A stamp pad and some letters creates hours of creative literacy fun	**Decodable Books Reading Buddies** Reading with an enthusiastic pal or favorite stuffie	**Gaming** Dungeons & Dragons Pokemon Magic the Gathering Game days

Lane, Holly B. 2022. How Children Learn to Read Words: Ehri's Phases. UFLI University of Florida Literacy Institute.

Thank you Emily. This is Nicole again.

I'm going to take some time to present some examples of programs that integrate scaffolding for the skills at each stage in the process of learning. I'm not going to talk in detail about each of these, but I want to highlight a few of them.

At the Pre-alphabetic level, we encourage and have made available some storytime resources for building these skills into your programs for your youngest patrons. Teach My Kid To Read also has decodable StoryWalks which are such a great way to combine these skills with movement and getting out in nature.

At Early-partial alphabetic level, reading with a therapy dog has so many benefits, especially when taking turns reading with a trusted adult

At the full alphabetic level, we encourage reading buddies, but also are developing resources about tapping into popular interests to connect with the enthusiasm that kids have for their own personal interests. For example, embracing enthusiasm for Taylor Swift and the layers of literary references that she writes into her work.

At the Consolidated alphabetic level, gaming is a highly successful way to get non-users engaged and keep them coming. From hosting programs about trading card games, such as Pokemon (which has high buy in and great opportunities to build content confirmation skills) to Dungeons and Dragons, which delves deeply into writing and responding to texts, these high buy in,

peer-approved activities are surefire ways to combine literacy with fun.
We are also working on resources to share a program that I have run for 10 years,
Shakespeare camp, where kids see how lively it can be to explore the classics.

The Cat: The Adult Ally

- Patient, reliable presence
- Responding with welcome, adaptability, and regulation skills
- Well informed and build your expertise
- You are not alone--people and resources are available to support you

Thank you Nicole. I'm Susan again, and I'd like to talk about the Cat with you. The Cat is the Adult Ally in our libraries for our neurodiverse children and young adults.

We have the ability to learn how to be a patient, reliable presence. How to respond with welcome, adaptability, and co-regulation skills.

To do this begins with being well informed and accessing the right resources to build your expertise.

You are not alone. People and resources are available to support you.

The Cat: The Adult Ally

You are a vital part of every library experience

Your role as "the cat" is to be understanding. Continuing to build your knowledge and expertise so you feel confident, prepared and able to work as a reliable presence.

That cat was amazing! It showed so much vulnerability, staying low, slow blinking, demonstrating a safe space and returning again, and again for connection.

We, the human cats, are similarly amazing, well-meaning and adaptable to our environment and others in need.

Supporting kids and young adults is hard work.

Supporting dyslexic, neurodiverse, and struggling kids is even harder because we are helping them navigate a world that is not designed for them.

Recognizing that each individual is going to have their own needs and responses to the library space and your interactions is a key part of building connections.

Some people will immediately open up and recognize you are a person they can be themselves ar ound.

For others, you may not know for months or even years that they feel safe with you. You may never know.

And even still, there are people (children, youth and adults) where you may feel that you've connected one week and the next week they seem more distant.

This is challenging work. It can mean remaining unresponsive to the immediate negativity/words/actions of a child–not taking anything personally–while at the same time keeping an open heart, seeking connection, and remaining responsive the underlying emotions driving the behavior: unmet needs, feelings of exclusion, rejection sensitivity, trauma, and leveling behaviors.

Your role as "the cat" is to be understanding. Continuing to build your expertise so you feel more confident & prepared for whatever the kittens throw at you next.

Remember people and resources are available to you. There are so many amazing books, videos, and guides available. You don't have to have all of the answers. Reach out to the DPLI, The Literacy Spark, Teach My Kid To Read, your local literacy specialists, and others.

YOU don't need to be perfect! Being present is enough.

Punctuality

Please use the zoom chat to brainstorm words associated with people who are on time.
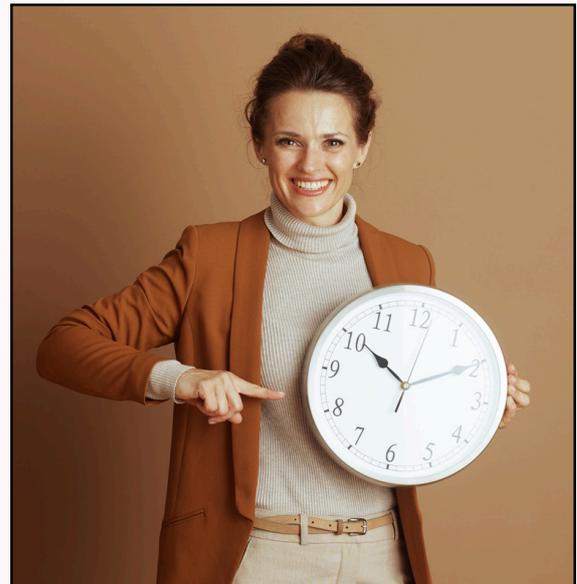
We want to talk about a few socially prioritized ways of being, and challenge our thinking about these attributes as the norm.

Let's highlight punctuality.
Please use the zoom chat box to brainstorm words associated with people who are on time.

Thanks everyone. We came up with a really comprehensive list.
Some of the other words I thought of include: considerate, responsible, thoughtful, respectful, mature, punctual, reliable, good person, good employee, successful, organized, competent, morally right, dependable, and trustworthy.

"Why doesn't that person just
leave 15 minutes earlier?"

When we see someone looking harried and running late, the natural question many people think is "why doesn't that person just leave 15 minutes earlier?" They would be less stressed and everything would go more smoothly.

Well, I wanted to give you a behind the scenes tour of what is often happening.

Tools/Strategies I Use to be 5 Minutes Early

- Visible color timer
- Kitchen timers
- Phone alarms
- Light alarms
- Pomodoro method
- Synced online schedules
- Scouting locations/events
- Eisenhower Matrix
- Goblin tools AI
- Pill bottle timer caps
- Opting out of time-sensitive volunteering & events
- Meditation
- White boards (offloading cognitive tasks)
- "Eat the frog"
- External rewards

- Time management classes
- Time management books
- Time blocking
- Body doubling
- Interval/hourly chimes
- Visual schedules
- Wristwatch synced to calendar
- Outlook work shared calendar
- Work trades with colleagues
- Booking software for patron appointments
- Annual calendars, 3-month calendars, monthly calendars, and weekly calendars
- Dry & wet erase boards
- Hour glasses

This is a list of the many tools and strategies that I use to be 5 minutes early to everything. You don't need to read the lists, they're all common "time management" strategies.

I just wanted you to have a sense of the burden, the weight, that people like me–those without a socially prioritized attribute or ability–have to carry, everyday, all day long.

It's exhausting, and I feel like I am carrying around an unpinned grenade. I don't know how or when the grenade will explode and all my systems will fail, I know it will happen, and I fear it.

Time awareness is a lot like literacy. A complex, unnatural, and recent evolution for the human brain.

It's not bad to experience frustration with someone who is late, that's a natural human reaction. We can feel our emotions fully, and then let them go.

Socially prioritized attributes and abilities–like punctuality, beauty, youth, athleticism, health, wealth, intelligence, and so many others–will likely remain highly prioritized.

However, when we align our values this way, we often categorizing ourselves and others as being of lesser value.

I wonder if we might try prioritizing other attributes: grace, loving kindness, deep listening, and equity. I think this would help us create a world where all of us could better thrive.

Neurotypical Communication

Characteristics
- Eye contact
- Open, mirroring body language
- Smiling
- Oral and Written Communication

Socially Prioritized Attributes
- Articulate
- Friendly
- Extrovert
- Honest & Trustworthy
- Listens, cares about me
- Good employee, person
- Welcoming

Thank you Susan. Socially prioritized communication characteristics are those we've learned to expect, and understand as an acceptable unspoken social language.

These characteristics include:
- Eye contact
- Open, mirroring body language
- Smiling
- Nuanced oral language and academic-style written communication

Often socially prioritized communication is demonstrated through:
- Articulate spoken language
- Friendly gestures
- Extrovert engagement styles

When we experience these qualities in a person we often believe they are:
- Honest & Trustworthy
- They are truly listening, and they cares about me
- They are a good employee, a kind person
- Welcoming and they want to connect.

Open Hearted Inquiry
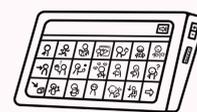
Valuing all forms of communication and explicitly making space for people who communicate and speak differently.

Neurodivergent communication is not a problem to be solved; it is a diverse and valuable part of our human experience. To bridge the communication gap between neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals, shifting perspective and approach to celebrate the diversity of human communication styles can work to understand and accommodate everyone's needs.

- What do I know about my patron(s) — how they communicate and how they learn? Is that enough?

- Am I using positive, affirming, and explicit language in my greeting, transitions, and programming closure?

- Do my words and does my body language support brain–body connections that promote comfort, safety, and learning?

- Am I intentionally eliciting patron communication about comfort, safety and learning?

Do I recognize communication as an expression of need and objective feedback, even when it is not my preference, possibly dis-engaged, nonverbal or indirect?

Valuing all forms of communication and explicitly making space for people who communicate and speak differently is important.

When developing budgets, designing library spaces and planning programming, we can ask ourselves key questions to ensure inclusive practices are at play, and we are bridging communication gaps with patrons.

What do I know about my patron(s)--how they communicate and how they learn? Is that enough?

Am I using positive, affirming, and explicit language in my greeting, transitions, and programming closure?

Do my words and does my language support brain–body connections that promote comfort, safety, and learning?

Am I intentionally eliciting patron communication about comfort, safety and learning?

Overall, when we recognize communication as an expression of need and offer objective feedback we are able to be present and seek to understand.

Celebrate Dyslexia at Your Library

Go to: Teach My Kid to Read website > Libraries tab > download our free stuff
Exciting things coming soon: Neurodiverse Communication, Literacy Guide, and Shakespeare Camp

You can download all our materials by going to the Teach my Kid to Read website.

Look under the libraries tab.
We have several exciting new resources that will be coming soon: literacy, neurodiverse communication, and Shakespeare Camp. They will be posted here.

Finally, we are continually analyzing our library programming and would welcome your feedback, ideas, and requests about what you would like.

Thank You

Dyslexic Positive Libraries Initiative teachmykidtoread.org/dyslexic-positive-libraries-initiative/
Emily Carley, M.Ed., Literacy Specialist, emily@theliteracyspark.org, www.theliteracyspark.org/
Nicole Westbom, Youth Librarian Specialist, nicwestbom@gmail.com
Susan Whitehead, Academic Librarian, susanwhiteheadvt@gmail.com

Library and literacy work is hard, emotionally demanding work.

The DPLI team leaned into laughter, friendship, loving-kindness, grace, and self-care throughout our journey.

As a small gesture of appreciation, we're raffling off and mailing a self-care gift to someone here today as well as our new DPLI logo.

We know it's a small thing in light of all that you do--but we wanted to do something to tell you that we see you.
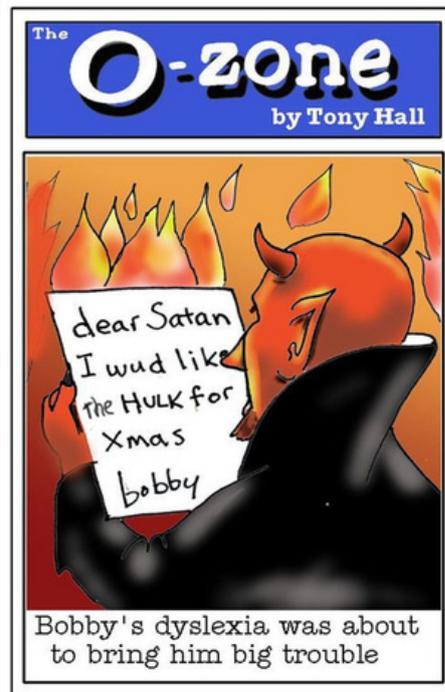We honor your work.
And we thank you.

Okay, we are going to take a few minutes to answer questions and raffle off the prizes and swag.

Acknowledgements

A debt of gratitude is owed to the following people and organizations for their support, permissions, and expertise.

The O-zone by Tony Hall

dear Satan I wud like the HULK for Xmas bobby

Bobby's dyslexia was about to bring him big trouble

CartoonStock.com

References

The dyslexic positive libraries initiative uses an accessible, simplified citation style. The citations include the information necessary to 1) credit the author/creator, 2) locate the source, and 3) evaluate source quality. Additional citation information is excluded, including: page numbers, volume, number, issue, month, day, database, DOI, URL, accession date, and publisher location. That information is readily available online and library workers are happy to provide. Footnotes and parenthetical citations are options for in-text citations. The Simplified Citation Style (SCS) emphasizes the qualities of simplicity, consistency, clarity, adaptability, brevity, and accessibility. It is suitable for all academic disciplines.

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Image Description: Wheel of Power/ Privilege

The Wheel of Power/Privilege. The wheel is divided into 12 "pie" sections: Language, Gender, Citizenship, Skin Colour, Formal Education, Ability, Sexuality, Neurodiversity, Mental Health, Body Size, Housing, and Wealth. Sections are further divided into three parts.

- Language section: Non-English, Learned English, English
- Gender section: Trans, intersex, non-binary, cisgender woman, cisgender man
- Citizenship section: undocumented, documents, citizen
- Skin colour section: dark, different shades, white
- Formal education section: elementary education, high school education, post-secondary
- Ability section: significant disability, some disability, able-bodied
- Sexuality: lesbian, bi, pan, asexual, gay men, heterosexual
- Neurodiversity section: significant neurodivergence, neuro-atypical, neurotypical
- Mental Health section: vulnerable, mostly stable, robust
- Body size section: large, average, slim
- Housing section: homeless, sheltered/renting, owns property
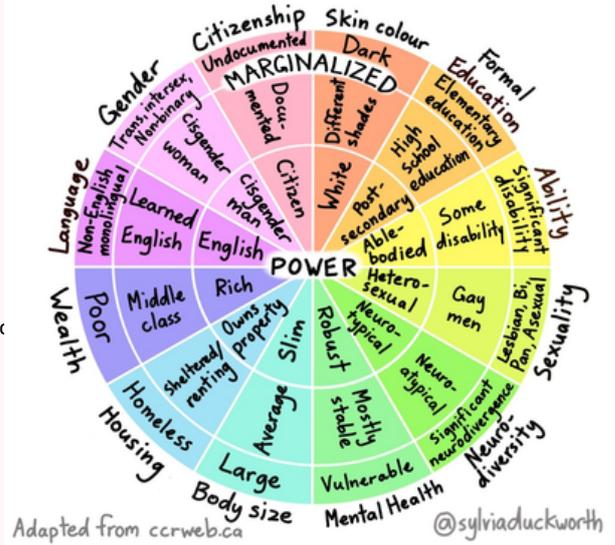- Wealth: poor, middle class, rich

Image Description: Adult Literacy Facts

36 million adults in the United States cannot read, write above third-grade level

Children whose parents have low literacy levels have a 72% chance of being at hte lowest reading levels themselves. These children are more likely to get poor grades, display behavioral problems, have high absentee rades, repeat school years or drop out

$225 billion is the cost each year in non-productivity in the workforce, crime, and loss of tax revenue

$232 billion a year in health care costs is linked to low adult literacy skills

43% of adults with the lowest levels of literacy live in poverty.

Sources: National Bureau of Economic Research, National Center for Education Statistics, National Council for Adult Learning, American Journal of Public Health

Adult Literacy Facts

36 million adults in the United States cannot read, write or do basic math above a third-grade level

Children whose parents have low literacy levels have a **72%** chance of being at the lowest reading levels themselves. These children are more likely to get poor grades, display behavioral problems, have high absentee rates, repeat school years or drop out.

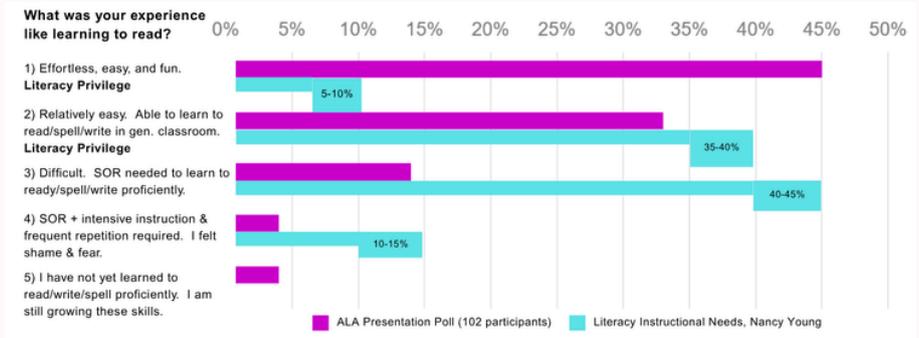**$225 billion** Cost each year in non-productivity in the workforce, crime and loss of tax revenue.

$232 billion a year in health care costs is linked to low adult literacy skills

43% of adults with the lowest levels of literacy live in poverty

Sources: National Bureau of Economic Research, National Center for Education Statistics, National Council for Adult Learning, American Journal of Public Health

Image Description for the American Reality Chart

What was your experience like learning to read?

1) Effortless, easy, and fun. **Literacy Privilege** — 5-10%
2) Relatively easy. Able to learn to read/spell/write in gen. classroom. **Literacy Privilege** — 35-40%
3) Difficult. SOR needed to learn to ready/spell/write proficiently. — 40-45%
4) SOR + intensive instruction & frequent repetition required. I felt shame & fear. — 10-15%
5) I have not yet learned to read/write/spell proficiently. I am still growing these skills.

Legend: ALA Presentation Poll (102 participants) | Literacy Instructional Needs, Nancy Young

What was your experience like learning to read?

Results from the DPLI ALA 2025 Presentation poll of 102 library workers compared to the literacy instructional needs of the US population from Nancy Young.

1. Effortless, easy, fun (literacy privilege).   Library workers: 45%, U.S. population 5-10%
2. Relatively easy. Able to learn to ready/spell/write in general classroom (literacy privilege). Library workers: 35%, U.S. population 35-40%
3. Difficult. SOR needed to learn to read/spell/write proficiently. Library workers 12%, US population 45-45%
4. SOR + intensive instruction & frequent repetition required. I felt shame & fear. Library workers: 3%, US population 10-15%
5. I have not learned to read/write/spell proficiently. I am still growing these skills. Library workers: 3%

32% of US 12th graders do not yet have basic reading skills (NAEP, 2024)

28% of US adults (58.9 million) are not yet reading fluently (PIAAC 2023, NCES). In 2017 this statistic was 19%