

# Illiteracy causes more problems than first thought

Imagine if you needed to read a sign, yet couldn't. For 7 million Americans, this is life.

The life of illiteracy is to see, yet remain blind. Illiterate Americans live a cursed half-life, endowed with the virtues of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, yet somehow barricaded because of an intangible stigma.

Whether stepping outside of the house or enclosing themselves in the confines of hermitage, the need to read is just as immediate as a label, sign or letter away. While America is a vanguard as an affluent and technologically advanced nation, providing free primary education, there are shockingly disproportionate numbers for reading competency.

Even functional illiterates, those able to comprehend basic vocabulary yet are still despairingly short of true mastery, number 27 million, according to an ABC news report. Their difficulties lie in the knowledge of the existence of the golden apple, yet they lack the means to complete that job application, help with their children's homework or synthesize written instruction to reach it.

The American Medical Association conducted a study in 2008 on patients who could not read, and cited cases of patients taking medication improperly and even signing on for misunderstood medical procedures. One woman underwent a hysterectomy, only to realize it hours after the surgery during the post examination.

The testimonial conducted detailed investigations of these men and women, and cited the underlying factor as the shame and fear of reprisal for not understanding. Yet the AMA Association dually noted the cost of illiteracy on health care, which is estimated to be between \$50 billion and \$73 billion per year. While education is expensive, so too is ignorance.

Limited literacy also leads to lackluster health. Illiterates tend to "have poorer health status than the rest of the population due to the aforementioned deficits in health knowledge, as well as medication errors, poor understanding of medical instructions, and lack of self-empowerment," according to the AMA Association's Second Manual for Clinicians.

Reading truly is the gateway for every path in life. It is the common written language that bridges the gaps in society. How can we, as a society, leave our fellow Americans stranded on their islands of isolation?

It is costlier for our economy and our conscience to leave some in the dark as we foray into the future. Promoting a literate America should not be an epilogue but a preface to the next series in American history.

No person should have to live in the shadows with shame. Were not we all there at one point struggling to master the written the word, to decode its unfathomable potential, and wrest its valiant prowess into a meek and supplicating tool in our hands?

It is time for America to turn a new page and confront the giant of illiteracy with patience and understanding. Humiliation is not an explanation, just an inhibition.

Fomenting a reading revolution starts now. By ensuring that every child is proficient in reading and comprehension, the monster of illiteracy will slowly be tamed. Illiteracy will be flushed out with the joint efforts of education and technology. Literacy in society is an undeniable truth that cannot be slowed for any man, woman, or child.

Yet the more we read, the more we know. The more we know, the more we'll grow as a people and a nation.

Illiteracy may not be a disease, but it is an epidemic. Imagine if you needed to read a sign, but you already can.