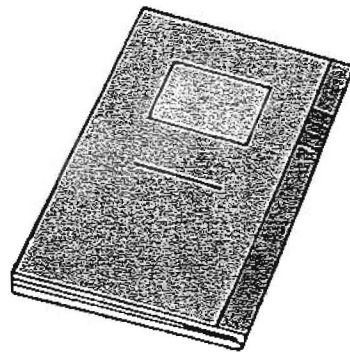


# *Life with an Illiterate*

## Sample Lesson



- \*Writing Task & Rubric (Grades 7 & 10)
- \*Anticipation Guides (2)
  - \*Article
  - \*Cornell Notes
  - \*Quotes Practice
  - \*Model Essay
- \*Vocabulary Word Map

## *Life With an Illiterate*

### Writing Task

In this article, the author describes her experiences living with an illiterate parent.

Write an essay in which you describe the complications that arise from being illiterate. Use specific examples and details from the article to support your ideas.

### Grade 7 Rubric

#### 4: The writing

- clearly addresses all parts of the writing task
- demonstrates a clear understanding of purpose and audience
- maintains a consistent point of view, focus, and organizational structure
- includes a clearly presented central idea with relevant facts, details, explanations
- includes a variety of sentence types
- contains few, if any errors in the conventions of the English language (grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling)

#### *Response to Literature*

- \*develops interpretations that demonstrate a thoughtful, comprehensive grasp of the text
- \*organizes accurate and coherent interpretations around clear ideas, premises or images from the literary work
- \*provides specific textual examples and details to support the interpretations

## Anticipation Guide

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Per: \_\_\_\_\_

Please read each statement and mark if you agree or disagree in the left column.

Before you read

After you read

Agree / Disagree

Agree / Disagree

- |       |  |       |
|-------|--|-------|
| _____ | 1. People need to be able to read.   | _____ |
| _____ | 2. The ability to read helps people live better lives.                           | _____ |
| _____ | 3. It is hard to live a normal life when you can't read.                         | _____ |
| _____ | 4. If a person can't read, it's his/her own fault.                               | _____ |
| _____ | 5. Everyone learns to read in elementary school.                                 | _____ |
| _____ | 6. Immigrants should know how to read before entering the United States.         | _____ |
| _____ | 7. People should be obligated to help others in their community learn to read.   | _____ |
| _____ | 8. It's stupid for an adult to not know how to read.                             | _____ |
| _____ | 9. An adult who can't read is probably retarded.                                 | _____ |
| _____ | 10. It's easy for nonreaders to function in society by pretending they can read. | _____ |

## Anticipation Guide

Directions: In the column labeled *Me*, place a check mark next to any statement with which you tend to agree. Be prepared to defend and support your opinions with specific information and experiences. After reading the article, compare your opinions on those statements with those of the author, Jean Leung. At that time, check those statements with which the author would agree. Identify the paragraph within the article that includes specific information that led you to this conclusion. Copy a quotation from this paragraph that helped you to identify Leung's perspective.

Me	Author	
_____	_____	1. Illiterate adults are greatly affected by changes in their daily routines. Paragraph # _____ Quotation:
_____	_____	2. Illiterates have a difficult time trying to access news and information. Paragraph# _____ Quotation:
_____	_____	3. Illiterates are victims of negative stereotypes. Paragraph # _____ Quotation:
_____	_____	4. Illiterate parents are not interested in their children's education. Paragraph #: _____ Quotation:
_____	_____	5. Illiterate adults can participate fully in a democratic society. Paragraph #: _____ Quotation

Life With an Illiterate  
Jean Leung  
Editorial staff, *The Wall Street Journal*

(The Wall Street Journal, May 1989)

Notes

Whenever I read or hear about illiteracy, I think about my mother. I wonder whether middle-class Americans realize the consequences of illiteracy both for the individual involved and society in general. Illiteracy is not just a handicap in this high-speed, high-tech world - it is a prison. I know this because my mother is illiterate. Totally illiterate, not just functionally illiterate. She cannot read or write in any language.

When was the last time you wrote out a list of things to do or jotted down a reminder note? Now try to imagine being unable to use a written record to cue yourself. In the grocery store, my mother does not zero in on certain items: Instead, she wanders through the aisles, relying on the displays to prompt her into remembering what she needs to buy.

Picture organizing your life strictly on memory. My mother has had to break her life into routines. Sunrises are not just beautiful sights to my mother; they are her measurements of time. Every seventh sunrise means her granddaughter will be at church. The next brings another cycle. Since so much of an illiterate's memory is used up by daily living, very little of it is free for conceptual thinking. Creativity becomes impaired. Every change in life takes up more of the precious memory. Illiterates are conservative, wary of any change that will have to be remembered. Moving the bus stop two blocks away may make it accessible to more people, but it is an irritant to my mother. The same with stores opening or closing.



Because ours is a highly literate society, illiterates are dependent upon others for translation. This is a tricky business- translation often becomes interpretation. Is the glass half full or half empty? The illiterate is very vulnerable to the views of the translator. My mother's neighbors believe that the local government is worthless. My mother believes that the local government is worthless. What other evidence does she have? The literate person can broaden his views through varied reading. The illiterate is not likely to find new translators.

In a society where primary education is free and widely available, illiteracy takes on a stigma. The illiterate is viewed as someone who is retarded (and therefore can't learn). But many U.S. illiterates are immigrants from cultures where education wasn't available (primarily due to poverty) or was denied (as it was for so many women). So it was for my mother, coming from China. The move to America doesn't necessarily create literacy opportunities. Many illiterates are caught up in the daily grind of survival, lacking either the money or time to learn how to read. It is enough of a challenge to learn to speak a new language.

Like most immigrants, however, illiterates make sure that their children avail themselves of the opportunities America offers, especially schooling. Knowing their own imprisonment, they are the strongest advocates of education as a tool for improvement. Of my mother's four children, three are college graduates.

What effect has my mother's illiteracy had on me? Every night before I go to sleep I read. Newspapers, magazines, books, pamphlets - you name it. I bless the fact that my ability to read has brought so many new

worlds to me - worlds that I won't reach in person - and opened my mind.

Encouraged by my parents, I picked up my older brother's books and began reading before I entered kindergarten. In the third grade, a teacher took me aside and told me that I had the highest reading score of anybody in the whole elementary school. In honor of my mother, I have tutored immigrant children in New York's Chinatown, hoping to ease the transition into the English language for them.

Is illiteracy a problem? Yes, and it will be as long as we are a nation of immigrants. Do we deal with it only through prevention and ignore adult illiterates? No.

We should remove the stigma of illiteracy. Publicizing the problem in an understanding way through the media with a follow-up in the schools and community organizations would encourage people to step forward. The problem should not be overstated or understated.

Perhaps it should be mandatory for high school or college students to participate in community self-help projects as part of their learning process. Literacy tutoring could be one of these projects. Libraries could encourage home study with borrowed book/audio tapes combinations. Perhaps an adult version of "Sesame Street" could be created. Responses to illiteracy need not require massive amounts of government aid or intervention. The private sector, particularly the publishing industry, would benefit tremendously from a more literate public.

Freedom of speech has an ironic meaning to people who have a hard enough time gathering, composing,

organizing and communicating their thoughts. And  
freedom of the press has no meaning to illiterates.  
Can we depend on people to whom such freedoms have  
little or no meaning to defend them?



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Reading \_\_\_\_\_

Main Idea	Evidence/Detail/Quote

## The Prison of Illiteracy

Have you ever walked down a city street or through an airport, bus or train station? Have you searched in a mall for a certain store or item? Of course you have, because these are ordinary things that people do in the world. But for the illiterate individual, ordinary things are sometimes impossible to manage. In the article, "Life with an Illiterate" from the Wall Street Journal in May of 1989, author Jean Leung discusses the challenges that her mother faced as she tried to manipulate the world as a functionally illiterate woman. She emphasizes her mother's struggles with everyday living and how just trying to do basic life activities took extreme discipline, routine and structure to sustain. It is obvious that one's ability to read and write has a profound effect on his/her freedoms, world views and participation in society.

Being able to easily read the world is a skill that enables people to live freely and have many choices. If you can read, you can travel to new places and find any point of interest. You can decide at any moment which way to turn or what you would like to do next. The illiterate individual cannot do this. Traveling to a new place would be terrifying, confusing and frustrating. Jean Leung, in the article from *The Wall Street Journal* asserts, "Illiteracy is not just a handicap... it is a prison" (p.10). The world, for an illiterate, shrinks down to a small well-known area. There can be no travel or even wandering out of one's own neighborhood when reading the street signs is impossible.

Literacy skills give people a larger world view. Illiterates must rely on information that is given verbally, and this can be easily misinterpreted or even forgotten. Literate people can read books and magazines and surf the internet for ideas and information in multiple perspectives. As Leung states, "My mother's neighbors believe that the local government is worthless. My mother believes that the local government is worthless. What other evidence does she have? The literate person can broaden his views through varied reading. The illiterate is not likely to find new translators" (p.2). The illiterate's world is both literally and figuratively small. They are confined to not only the area they know, but also the sources they trust.

Finally, illiterate individuals cannot fully participate in society. They cannot vote or run for public office. They are unable to access or affect the legal rights that are provided by the constitution. As Leung points out, "Freedom of speech has an ironic meaning to people who have a hard enough time gathering, composing, organizing and communicating their thoughts. And freedom of the press has no meaning to illiterates " (p.4). Illiterates are so caught up in daily survival that there is no room for anything else. Participating in our very technical society is a luxury that demands more than what the illiterate individual can handle.

It is clear that literacy has a huge impact on peoples' lives. Not being able to read dramatically affects one's freedoms, world views and ability to participate in society. Can you imagine not being able to easily "read the world"? Life would be so frustrating and difficult! It is a situation that no one would deliberately choose.

illiterate  
(adjective)

"I know this because my mother is illiterate. Totally illiterate, not just functionally illiterate. She cannot read or write in any language."

il =  
not

liter =  
a letter

ate =  
state of

illiterate(adj): unable to read or write

Sentence

One of the reasons the man was homeless was because he was illiterate and couldn't fill out a job application.

Word family

literate (adj.): able to read and write

literacy (n.): the ability to read and write

literary (adj.): of or dealing with literature

literature (n.): all writings in prose or verse of an imaginative character

Illustration

