

BOOKS

The U.S. Illiteracy Rate Hasn't Changed In 10 Years

09/06/2013 04:27 pm ET | Updated Dec 12, 2014



GETTY



Sunday is International Literacy Day! We recommend taking the opportunity to curl up with with a warm cup of coffee, a comfy chair, and a favorite classic. Of course, this holiday is bittersweet - We know *we'll* be celebrating accordingly, but many Americans won't be able to do so.

[According to a study conducted in late April by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Institute of Literacy](#), 32 million adults in the U.S. can't read. That's 14 percent of the population. 21 percent of adults in the U.S. read below a 5th grade level, and 19 percent of high school graduates can't read.

[The current literacy rate isn't any better than it was 10 years ago](#). According to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (completed most recently in 2003, and before that, in 1992), 14 percent of adult Americans demonstrated a "below basic" literacy level in 2003, and 29 percent exhibited a "basic" reading level.

We probably don't need to spell out the benefits of reading and writing for you.

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Economic security, access to health care, and the ability to actively participate in civic life all depend on an individual's ability to read.

According to the Department of Justice, "The link between academic failure and delinquency, violence, and crime is welded to reading failure." The stats back up this claim: 85 percent of all juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate, and over 70 percent of inmates in America's prisons cannot read above a fourth grade level, [according to BeginToRead.com](#).

[Visit the American Library Association](#) to learn more about what libraries are doing - and what you can do - to promote literacy. Your contribution can be as simple as reading stories to young relatives, volunteering to read at your local school or [donating your unwanted books to libraries and organizations such as Housing Works](#).

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