

# My Literacy Autobiography

English 101.056

Spring 2016





# My Literacy Autobiography



## **Editorial Team**

**Spring 2016**

Director - Cascidy Bandyk

Co-Director - Calvin Rosenburgh

Co-Director - Zack Chiganos

Editor - Brian Finnen

Editor - Zach Wilson

Editor - Becky Sweeney

Artist - Ian Ivkovich

Video Producer - Michael Lawrence

Instructor - Robin E. Halsey



***The acquisition of literacy is life-enhancing***

Literacy offers opportunities for personal growth, for an improved quality of life, for an enhanced self-image and the ability to function in the world. Being literate gives individuals access to knowledge and to an increasingly information-rich world, and this in turn provides choices that can lead to self-fulfillment.

(Riley & Reedy, 2000, p. xii).

Riley, Jeni, and Reedy, David. *Developing Writing for Different Purposes: Teaching about Genre in the Early Years*. London: Sage Publishing, 2000.

# Contributors

Umme Ahsan

Cascidy Bandyk

Nicole Betcher

Jordan Brown

Aaron Cable

Zack Chiganos

James Dean

Edward Ferrante

Brian Finnen

Shannon Freund

Joey Good

Ian Ivkovich

Sarah Key

Michael Lawrence

Christian Rivera

Calvin Rosenburgh

Paola Ruiz

Becky Sweeney

Bradley Taylor

Justin Taylor

Joe Tullar

Zach Wilson



## *Letter from the Editorial Team*

*Cascidy Bandyk*

*In this book we have an English 101 class explaining what “literacy” means to them and the way this word has gained meaning as they have grown older and gone through many experiences. The personal stories that are shared within these pages reflect where reading and writing started for each student and the way that their literacy journey has taken them from their childhood days in kindergarten all the way to where they are today, as college freshmen who are about to complete their second semester.*

*Each student tells their own story about literacy and gives examples about the ways they have grown as a reader and writer from when they were young. Most students give reasons about how important literacy is and the way it has impacted their life, and how much is involved with literacy. Many of us went into depth about how we had never thought about literacy in the way our teacher encouraged us to think, and the effect that this may have in our future careers.*

*Each person whose story is represented in this document has a new perspective on literacy because of the experience of writing their own literacy autobiography and reflecting on the various types of writing that they have done in the past. It is clear that each student’s ability to communicate has been enhanced through the process of writing, giving and receiving feedback, reflecting, and revising their work.*

*Our hope is that readers will find this book beneficial as a reminder of the importance of all types of literacy. Even though we are surrounded by literacy, we often do not realize the important role it plays in our lives. We hope that the stories we have shared will inspire you as you continue your literacy journey.*





## *Umme Ahsan*

As I grew older, my definition of literacy changed from the ability to read or write to something that is written to express one's feelings and opinions. Literacy has always been an important part of my life. Growing up in an Indian household, my sister and I were fully aware that we weren't raised like most children because of the different cultural values our family had. Our family had cultural literacy because we knew how to understand and function in both the American and Indian culture. Though our family was different and was able to speak in a different language, we enjoyed many pastimes a lot of our friends enjoyed. We liked to ride our bikes, play sports, write in our journals, and read occasionally.

My first exposure to writing – which I remember was in the second grade—was when I was introduced to writing journal prompts. We second graders were given journals to write in, and we were encouraged to write about anything that amused us. This was a way for us to communicate and express ourselves while improving our writing skills. The only requirement was that we attempt to write in full sentences. We also had reading workshop days when we would read books that had a number sticker. The higher the number on the sticker, the harder the book was to read. By the end of that school year, most of us were termed “great readers” by our teacher.

Every year when summer rolled around and we didn't have any vacation plans, my mom would enroll my sister and me in the Library Summer Reading Program at the Normal Public Library. The goal of the program was to get children to read in the summer. A lot of children would enroll in the program because there were prizes given after a certain amount of books were read. Through these types of positive reinforcements (by teachers and the library), the habit of reading stayed with me all throughout elementary school. I finished many series such as the *Nancy Drew* mystery books in nearly two months' time.

Although I read mostly for fun in elementary school, I read mostly for good grades in high school. Throughout high school, there were many opportunities for reading and writing. We wrote mostly essays for

speeches, narrative essays, research papers and short stories. Freshman year of high school was difficult because of the many reading assignments we had. It was already known by freshman year that understanding the reading material was essential to getting good grades.

Although I was said to be a “great reader” in second grade, it wasn’t until junior year of high school that I felt my literacy was on another level. That year I took AP Literature and was introduced to many complex books such as: *The Scarlet Letter*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Our teacher, Mrs. Thetard, emphasized the idea of reading for a purpose. The reason why we read American classics in that class was to understand and make connections using many contexts. We used those aspects to focus on the themes and main argument being made by the author of that book. The juxtapositions and connections we started to make as a class were eye-opening, and they allowed us to become critical readers and thinkers.

As a senior I joined Journalism class. At first, I found the class dull and tedious, but I started to find writing articles interesting. The class also enabled me to distinguish between material that was fact or fiction and to report accurate information. I conducted interviews, reviewed materials, and wrote primarily to gain the audience’s attention in articles that were published in the school newsletter and yearbook. Journalism class encouraged me to write what I found was a current issue and/or memorable for our senior year. This enabled me to write for a specific purpose and to learn new techniques for connecting with readers.

In college I decided to focus on science, and I am currently majoring in Biology. Many people may think that reading and writing don’t apply as much in a science- or math-related major, but they’re wrong. Writing and reading are still a major part of my life because of the research papers, assigned reading for chapters, and studying I have to do. Reading and writing are still emphasized in many other classes that are required for all of us to take because of the class discussions, debates, and projects in those classes that focus on making us more literate in each specific subject.

My definition of literacy has become more complex as I have gained more knowledge on how we should express ourselves through

writing and reading. My literacy has mostly improved because of the encouragement of my parents and the teachers that I've had in the past. My parents and teachers have helped heighten my writing and reading abilities while providing me with skills that allow me to express myself using critical reading and thinking. Though I am literate, I still have to improve in many areas of literacy and have a lot more to learn. I hope to learn from my mistakes and become more literate in the future.



## *Cascidy Bandyk*

The word “literacy” has developed as I have grown up. I used to think it just meant to learn to read and write. As I have become older I have realized literacy is necessary in order to understand language and use it in millions of different ways. There are so many ways language can be used and interpreted in everyday life, and there is so much you can do with it. My language has developed because of my parents, older siblings, and teachers. I was never very good at pronouncing words, and my mom helped me receive extra help to improve myself. I have learned that many words can have a few different meanings. My concept of literacy has definitely developed as I have become older and been exposed to more life and experiences.

I mainly learned to write from my preschool and kindergarten teachers and my mom. I was about four when I began writing, although it was not very legible or even spelled correctly. I began to have a sense of writing down ideas using words or pictures. I have a twin sister, and I always remember being in a competition to see who is smarter. We would have my mom judge contests to see who drew better shapes and could spell their name better.

When I write I want to portray myself as intelligent, filled with ideas, and caring. I take pride in my writing and want people to be able to notice that. Some challenges I have encountered when learning to write is gathering my ideas, but with the many years of writing I have learned how to do it. My victories have been mainly in high school, which is really where my writing has developed and where I learned not to hold back what I want to write. I also took time out to receive help when I needed it and was not scared to ask questions or have many people read my writings.

I have learned a lot of literacies that serve in social aspects of life. I know how to have a conversation and keep it, ask questions when I have them, listen to my friends and family, and I am able to communicate with

a wide range of people. I am not afraid to be who I am and express how I feel.

I typically use writing for school purposes, but occasionally if I am going through a hard time or need to get my feelings out I write them down. I also like writing long messages to people I care about once in a while, letting them know how I feel toward them. For school, I like to do a lot of research to have a good idea on my topic and be credible. This has impacted my literacy practice, especially in not procrastinating. I stay on top of my work and give myself enough time to gather information and to get it done ahead of time to make my work the best it can be. When you do something many times you become good at it.

Textbooks, computers, and writing assessments have definitely helped me. Textbooks have provided guidelines and instructions for writing papers. These give me an idea of how my paper should look and also give me a starting point. Computers have helped me a lot with research papers by offering a lot of resources to choose from. Lastly, writing assessments have made me a better writer by letting me know what requirements I have to meet and how to improve myself if I need to.

I have had many teachers that have assisted my writing throughout the years and have contributed to make me the writer I am today. I was never a strong writer when I was younger, but as I became older I realized I wanted to be. When I was in junior high I realized if I wanted to be a better writer then I would have to ask for help and it was not just going to randomly happen one day. I started asking for help and teachers were willing and I became better and had many people read my work and make corrections to improve it. As a student, I want to continue to improve my writing both in school and for my personal life. I will do this by continuing to write and getting it reviewed multiple times to have the best product I can. Being able to express myself by not just talking is an important quality to have. I would like to continue improving my writing for school because this is a vital time in life to start working toward careers and receiving good grades. I have certainly become better with my work, but I want to write more creative things and make them my own.

*Nicole Betcher*

Growing up in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, reading and writing were important, but now I feel that it has been taken advantage of because of technology. I grew up in a privileged school district that not only had us reading and writing on paper, but we also had technology to learn to read and write. I learned through different forms of teaching styles; for example, traditional teachers and also technology, and I believe that is why I have few troubles today with literacy.

Beginning preschool at the age of three, I started to learn how to read the alphabet and small vocabulary words. I went to preschool for two years and then moved on to kindergarten where the reading, writing, and speaking gradually increased. I began going to kindergarten at age five, and going there helped expand my knowledge on how to read more than just words such as: the, an, cat, dog, etc. After increasing my ability to read I was moved up to the first grade and began to expand my knowledge on speaking and memorizing the vocabulary. In third grade I began to experience how to write in not only print but in cursive as well. My teacher, Mrs. Chingo, was a very important influence on my literacy experience. She taught me and spent hours with me, working on perfecting my cursive and regular handwriting to the point where I was ahead of my class in my writing skills. I thank her for teaching me how to physically write letters and words altogether because without learning handwriting it would be tough for not only myself to read but also my peers.

Besides writing, in elementary school I also learned how to produce words more clearly. I used to have a speech impediment, a stuttering problem, and I also could not say my “s” sounded words; however, I was put into a speech class that aided in my speaking skills that I have today. I am really grateful for attending a school that helped in my speaking flaws and worked with me to improve my oral literacy skills.

After increasing my skills, but not yet perfecting, I moved on to my junior high school days. While attending junior high I learned a lot more

about how to read, write, and speak. One very influential moment on my literacy path was during eighth grade when I had to research a topic, produce a paper, and present it in a speech. This project was one of the most important assignments because it challenged me to use what I have learned in my past about literacy and put it all into one final product. My teacher was very helpful with my topic, identity theft. I stayed after school to have my papers edited and examined by her, which I found extremely useful, and I appreciated very much. She helped expand not only my knowledge on my topic but also my knowledge on literacy as a whole.

Looking back on my past experiences with literacy, I have learned from multiple people and examples how to read, write, and speak better. Today I am very grateful that I am able to communicate with others through literacy because it truly is a key in success and networking. I have had trouble in the past with learning how to do those tasks and learning how to become literate, but with time, patience, and the right teachers to help, I have accomplished learning how to do those.



*Jordan Brown*

Growing up, literacy to me was just being able to physically read and write. I thought just because I was able to read a chapter book and write a paper about myself that I could classify myself as literate. In reality, literacy has a way deeper meaning than just being able to read and write. Literacy has a huge part to do with comprehending the words and phrases you are reading and writing. Even the words you listen to, or say yourself, are a form of literacy. From there, it's all about comprehending forms of literacy you are experiencing, and then putting those skills and practices to work. Having good literacy helps you succeed more when you start shaping the course of your college life into your professional life.

Almost every kid experiences their first run-in with literacy at a very young age. My first-ever experience with literacy was trying to read books with my Nana and sound out words as a four-year old. But even before that, I was exposed to the sounds of literacy by just being around people who would speak to me, or by watching little kid movies and TV shows. My favorite shows to watch as a toddler were *Power Rangers* and *SpongeBob*. Even though I watched them for entertainment, just by being so interested in the shows I was listening to a form of literacy before I even could understand it. My first run-in with writing and reading was probably during kindergarten. I remember my teachers giving us pieces of paper with huge dashed lines, and we had to practice writing out our letters. I remember my words and letters being so huge I could only fit like five words on each line. As I grew older though, my writing got smaller. Taking notes helped me to learn to write faster as well.

Throughout elementary school, I tested into some advanced courses, so I would say that several of my teachers had a big influence on my literacy growing up. Not only did they ultimately teach me how to read and write, but they also furthered my understanding of reading the English language. My mother had a huge influence on my schooling throughout all my years. She made sure I always did my homework and projects on time. She expected nothing less than A's throughout all of my years because she wanted me to attend a university, something she never got the chance to achieve. I thank her for the motivation to succeed in school because I never really liked reading when I was growing up. It wasn't something that I particularly struggled in, but I didn't usually enjoy it unless it was a book I was able to choose for myself. I used to

prefer sciences, writing, or even math over reading any day. As I grew older, I kind of faced the fact that if I wanted to attend college, I didn't have to like the reading, but I would have to do it. So even now, I guess it's something I just put up with and take as it comes.

During my high school years I really blossomed as a writer. I used to find it hard to express exactly what I wanted to say when I had to write three-page papers during my freshman and sophomore years. My junior year, I had an English teacher by the name of Mrs. McQueen, and she was one of the biggest influences on my literacy progression throughout the years. She taught me strategies and tips for writing a paper. The main thing she expressed was to always start by writing down ideas in an outline so you can use it to write your actual first draft, and from there you revise and edit. If not for her, I wouldn't be the writer I am today.

Literacy is a combination of reading, writing, and understanding. And I believe it is good to get kids started at a very young age because having good literacy can get you very far in this world. That is one thing my mother preached to me growing up, that it is always good to have good literacy. Being literate is how people all across the world communicate with each other. And in my case, being a young African American male, it is very easy to be categorized or stereotyped because of the color of my skin, which is another reason why my mother motivated me so much growing up to speak politely and properly.

Overall, I believe my literacy skills have come a very long way. From not being able to read a book or form a complete sentence, to being able to read long chapters almost every night and write speeches, presentations, and 10-page research papers. I owe some of the credit to myself and my own personal motivation to expand my literacy, but I couldn't have done any of it by myself, so I definitely owe credit to my family, teachers, and my peers growing up. All of them had influences on my literacy skills today, and even people I am just now meeting in college will still continue to teach me new tips and skills as I grow older. That is the good thing about literacy, you can never become too literate or have too much. You can keep learning and growing forever, which is exactly what I plan to do. The more I can better my literacy skills, the better job opportunities I will come across in the future.

*Aaron Cable*

Describing who I am is really hard to do because, to be honest, not even I know who I am. I feel like I am always changing and most of the changes are due to the way I think, speak, act, and go about my everyday life. As I grow in literacy, every single one of my characteristics that make me who I am can change. The last 19 years of my life, I have been growing and gaining more knowledge. Each and every event in my life has shaped me to be my current self. In an hour, a minute, or even a few seconds, I could possibly have a completely different idea on a topic. Mostly because my literacy is changing and it will until the day I die! I would love to share some experiences that have shaped me throughout my life from learning my alphabet, reading my first few books, and then all the way to where I am today.



From kindergarten to fourth grade, I felt like I really mastered the basics of reading, pronouncing words, and having small conversations with other peers. This was such a huge part of my life because without it there is no way I would be successful today. My elementary school teachers put a huge emphasis on learning to read and write. Reading was one of my favorite activities and, I bet, between 1st and 4th grade I am sure I read over 100 if not close to 200 books. Starting with small books like *Junie B. Jones* and *Goosebumps*, working my reading level up to the *Charlie Bone* series and also *Eragon*. Learning to read is the key to almost everything in life because it helps with learning, memorization, imagination, and so much more. It's almost impossible to describe everything that reading can benefit. And I only say “almost impossible” because nothing is impossible.

Although reading is a huge part of literacy it is definitely not the only one. I was first introduced to the German culture before I can even

remember. My grandmother and all of her family came over from Germany right after WWII. When I was born, each and every one of them was a huge part of my life. I spent two weeks every winter and summer with them and experiencing the German culture. I ate their food, learned all about German bike racing, listened to them say grace in a different language, and many more aspects of their culture. Later in life, after I joined the Air Force, I met one of my best friends, Matias. He is a Filipino who moved to California when he was nine years old. From him I learned a few words in Tagalog and how life was back in the Philippines. After joining the Air Force, I learned so many more abbreviations and slang that I would have never known if I hadn't enlisted, words like *chow hall*, *squadron*, *blue falcon*, *ABUs*, *blues*, *latrine*, *MREs*, and more. All of these moments in my life really opened my eyes and made me realize that there is not just one culture. There are many, and to be able to interact with one another you have to understand them and know where they came from!

As much as parents are worried about their children overusing their phones, computers, PlayStation and digital media, I believe that all of the devices have helped me with my personal literacy throughout my life. It has been beneficial to communicate with all of my friends whenever I want, wherever I am. It has helped build bonds that many of my ancestors never had a chance to experience. Being in constant communication with friends and family helps me to be able to learn how to converse at all times. I love texting and calling just to see how people's days are going and really staying personally connected with people. That may be weird or hard to accomplish in person. As for computers, they have allowed us to become very social. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat let me keep in touch with extended family and friends. I can learn from them and gain different aspects of literacy that I would have never even thought of. I really do believe that these platforms of social media help me build thoughts and give us different views on life. Another amazing element of the computer is I can find any book, magazine, newspaper and website that has information about any subject. Computers have unlimited information on them allowing me to learn ANYTHING.

Being able to read others' minds is a very useful type of literacy, and this is one I am always trying to get better at. Being able to look

inside of my peers and tell if they are truly all right. I would say I use it every day and always when facing unusual situations. Around a year ago, I was talking to one of my best friends. He sounded like he was happy and we were having a great conversation, but on the inside I could feel like something just was not right. I asked him what was wrong and had to pry a little, but finally I got him to explain to me what was wrong. He said he just hadn't been doing well lately and had been feeling depressed all the time. We chatted a little longer and we both decided he should go get some help. He did and now he is totally fine. This experience made me realize how important communication and literacy is for everyone. Being able to read people could change a life.

In high school, I went beyond just reading books, watching movies, and listening to music. I would begin to analyze the true meaning behind them and the lessons that can be learned from them. One of my favorite movies, "Alice in Wonderland," has a bunch of hidden messages that each person can interpret differently. I love deciphering and coming up with what I believe they mean. Same with music, every song has a message that they are telling.

My literacy journey has been very long and rewarding. I have learned so much over my nineteen years, but it hasn't been easy. It has taken a lot of time and effort. All of the reading, writing, homework, and other forms of literacy that I have had to learn have taken a lot of time, but they have helped to form the person I am today. I am grateful for every experience I have had, and I plan on learning a lot more in the future!



*Zachary Chiganos*

Literacy has different meanings for me due to the fact that I am trilingual. I am 100% Greek so with that I know how to fluently speak it, read it, and write it. I also am able to speak and read Spanish; I used to be able to write Spanish also, but not so much anymore. Lastly, I am obviously able to read, write, and speak English fluently. My concept of literacy has changed with my development of all three languages over the years and has led me to a better understanding and use of the word.

From the day I was born my parents and family would only speak Greek to me, which eventually had me speaking only Greek until I was four years old. I furthered my knowledge by attending and graduating from Greek school, which strengthened my speaking, reading, and writing. When I was in the sixth grade, I competed in an essay competition that was to be written in Greek only, with no help from anyone else. I competed against other sixth graders all around the Chicagoland area, and I won the competition! I was very proud of myself, my heritage, and my versatility in literature. In my mind, I looked at the Greek language as more of an advantage to people around me rather than a barrier because of my success. I realized how amazing it is to know not one but three languages, and to actually speak, read, and write in them is even more incredible.

After I graduated from Greek school, I began to try and keep up with the language by conversing with my family, especially with my grandparents. Recently I traveled to Greece for six weeks, which forced me to use the language a lot more because the majority of the people there spoke only Greek. Over time I have kept up with the language and brushed up on it if I felt that I was getting rusty, but those are some of the ways I developed and maintained literacy in Greek.

Spanish was a tough language for me to grasp because of Greek being so prevalent in my life. I would often try to think of the word in Spanish and I would confuse it with the Greek version of the word. I began taking Spanish in high school, and I pursued it for four years.

Keeping up with it was difficult because of the fact that I didn't exactly have a chance to use it in conversation unless I was in the classroom. The usual reading and writing for homework kept me going in learning the language.

English was my second language, but I attended a Greek preschool so the blend helped me ease into it better than going straight to an American school. I picked English up fast because that was literally the only way I could converse with others around me. I used different methods with my family to help strengthen my use of the language, whether it was by using flashcards, playing different children games, watching TV shows, or simply by writing and sounding it out.

When I was younger, I always tried to converse in Greek with people who couldn't speak the language. I remember one time when I was in a store and I asked an employee a question about a certain product I had in my hand. The employee, who obviously did not understand Greek, looked at me in total confusion with an expression on his face as if to say, "I cannot help you with that." This was a barrier for me to get past because I felt like I was mentally stuck; I couldn't get through to the people around me unless they were my own family.

This is how I developed literacy in multiple languages so that today I can use any of them at any time.



*James Dean*

For as long as I can remember my parents wanted the best out of me. They got me into school as early as possible. I don't necessarily remember learning the alphabet, but I do remember some of the little things I would have to do. I'd do things such as trace the upper and lower case of a letter, or look at a picture and tell my mom what it was. I lived in Chicago until I was four, and we all know the public schooling system is not the best; therefore, most of my memories of learning anything was in the apartment I lived in.

I moved to Plainfield in 2002. I believe I went to school right away because my first memory there was me walking into my kindergarten class. I really do not remember much from my early elementary other than that I kept learning how to do basic reading and writing. I really enjoyed picture books at the time because I only knew a handful of words. In mid-elementary I started reading chapter books; however, they were not the big books, just the short chapter books with the occasional picture. I remember loving fiction books because I loved the idea that what I was reading was in a world of its own. Instead of just reading the words, I had to use my imagination to make a visualization on what was happening. I remember there was this book fair in my school every year and I loved going to it. It was not lame to read books at that age. Everyone I knew went. A lot of my friends would get the same books and then we would talk about them. I really enjoyed literature as a young child. I hated writing though. Every time I had to pick up a writing utensil I would get angry and I think that had to do with the fact that my 3rd grade teacher made us write a paragraph a day. It may not seem like much now, but it was something I did not look forward to every day. Also, in 4th grade we were required to learn cursive. I really struggled at cursive writing. I struggled to the point that I would break down because I wanted to give up. I hated writing so much when I was young.

Middle school really made my enjoyment for reading hit a decline, and my enjoyment for writing hit an incline. It wasn't just reading anymore, it was analyzing the reading which I hated doing. I just wanted to read without worrying about a test about what I read. It pressured me to

look at every fine detail, and any hidden meanings the author might've had. I thought it was a waste of time because I thought the story was just a story with no hidden meaning. Writing on the other hand became more enjoyable. In middle school we were given a lot more freedom on how to write things. Personally, I loved incorporating humor into what I was writing. I enjoyed seeing people smile, and if I could get my work done and create smiles, it was a win-win. It wasn't until the last book of 8th grade where I started to appreciate reading more. It was a common book called *The Outsiders*. The mature sequences made me enjoy the book. All throughout middle school, it was all books with no mature scenes, and it was boring. Middle school made me appreciate literacy more overall.

High school was another giant step for me because my literacy skills improved dramatically. I came into high school thinking I knew everything there is to know about literature; but of course I was wrong. All of my English classes were fairly similar in high school. We'd have a few books to read and a few papers to write. Reading books such as *Animal Farm*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Huckleberry Finn* really helped me appreciate reading more. From freshman to senior year, I learned how to read books with ease, and catch hidden meanings and metaphors with ease. The graphic scenes and mature content in these books made it all more enjoyable. I actually looked at some of my mom's old books and read a couple works from Stephen King. Writing was even more enjoyable in high school. There was more freedom to incorporate any style of writing I enjoyed. I was introduced to persuasive writing, and to this day it is still my favorite. I just enjoy blasting people with facts to the point where they have no choice but to agree with me. I came into high school thinking I knew everything there was to know about literature; after leaving though, I knew there was so much to learn. Too much actually; too much to the point where even a lifetime isn't enough time.

My short time in college has been very beneficial. I have not done any reading yet, but I have done a lot of writing. The big difference is that my writing ends up being spoken words. My first semester of college I took a communications class, which was extremely beneficial. I wrote narrative and persuasive papers about things I enjoy. I learned how to take context from the papers I wrote and turn it into a speech. It was very

beneficial because I am in a business major, and talking to people is one of the main things I need to do.

Overall, I enjoy reading and writing. I'm not one to spend money on books, but when I need to read one it is not a big deal. Writing is decent, as long as I enjoy and support what I need to write. In my lifetime my viewpoints of literature have changed, and I'd be wrong if I said they weren't going to change in the future. I have come to learn that literacy isn't just for school, it is something that everyone needs in their lives to make them better people overall.



*Edward D. Ferrante*

Being born in the year 1996 is pretty interesting. I was born too late to experience a completely "technology-free" upbringing. However, my parents did a good job integrating technology into my life in an effective and non-overwhelming manner. When I was about six, my mother would read me nursery rhymes and stories out of an old hardcover book. I actually got so involved in these stories that eventually I was able to pick up the book, go to the page of a certain story/rhyme, and recite the story/rhyme completely by memory, without really knowing how to read words! That is my earliest memory of literacy in my life.

Growing up, I wrote books for my elementary school. These books were quite fun. I always remember enjoying these assignments because I could really let my mind free and just write whatever I wanted (within appropriate school boundaries). I continued writing these books every year until I was in the 7th grade, when the school stopped assigning us to write them. This brings me to the next stage of my literacy autobiography, technological literacy in my life.

By the time I was in the 7th grade, I was no stranger to technology. I had played video games, used the internet, and had a cell phone, though not like the one I have today. But this was the year everything changed for me, I got a new cell phone that allowed me to send/receive text messages and pictures. As most would assume, I was completely stoked, and I felt very empowered to be able to share my thoughts with others by simply pushing buttons. I was constantly reading texts from my peers, and going on social media and reading posts. My technology literacy went up exponentially.

Throughout middle school, I was writing various papers and stories for assignments. However, none of these assignments really seemed to challenge me. I have narrowed this down to two potential reasons as to why the assignments felt easy: 1) They were legitimately easy assignments that didn't take much thought process whatsoever; or 2) I was simply too focused on other things in middle school to put much thought or effort into the assignments. If I remember correctly, I would put more effort into my texts to girls than into my writing assignments. That all

changed in high school, as I found myself putting more and more effort into my increasingly difficult writing assignments.

My freshman year of high school, I took Spanish 1 and did awful. I would later take French 1 and 2 during my junior and senior year. I always thought French was easier to read and understand than Spanish, which is why I decided to take it those last two years of high school. I did decent in French class, but I found myself struggling with some of the verbal pronunciations. I have been able to work through some of the kinks that come with learning French, but my French is far from perfect.

Senior year of high school, I was decently studious. I wrote a few scientific theories for fun that I showed to my biology teacher who enjoyed them. I also wrote a few "reviews" on cars that I fancy. However, the effort I put into all of my reviews and theories combined would not amount to the effort I put into my admission letter I wrote to get into Illinois State University. The letter took me approximately a week to complete, with help from my aunt in California, who had her colleague help me edit the letter. I put more effort into writing that admissions letter than I have put into any writing assignment that I have ever done. The effort paid off because I eventually got accepted!

Here at ISU, I took a communications course last semester. During the course, I had to make numerous speech outlines. All in all, it was a fun course and I thoroughly enjoyed giving my speeches. Though writing is not my most favorite thing in the entire world to do, I understand that it is necessary to achieve certain forms of success in today's day and age. Hopefully, with hard work and dedication, my writings about math, science, and cars, or possibly all three will be published in a highly-regarded magazine, newspaper, online article, or even become a published book of my own.

*Brian Finnen*

Over this past summer, my family took a vacation to Las Vegas, Nevada. Before we got to the airport, we paid a visit to my 95-year-old grandmother who was staying in the hospital. Little did we know, that would be the last time we would see her. She unfortunately passed away while we were on the plane coming home a few days later. That night, my family met with my aunts and uncles and discussed what was going to happen next regarding when the wake/funeral was going to take place, where all of my relative were going to stay, etc. Days before the funeral, my father asked me if I would be a pall bearer, and I generously said yes. Moments before the church service was about to begin, my father pulled me aside and told me that I needed to say a Bible passage during the service because one of my relatives who was going to recite the verse was not able to make it at the last minute.

This was the first time in my life that I was terrified of what was about to happen. I was going to have to walk up to the podium and say this Bible verse that I did not know in front of all of the members of my family. I successfully recited the Bible verse on the spot. That is my proudest moment in terms of public speaking.

Growing up with a sister who is only 14 months older than me, it was easy for my parents to take care of us. Almost every night, my mom would tuck us into bed and read us a story of our choosing after a long day as an elementary school teacher.

Things changed when I started going to school, however. During elementary school, I never really appreciated writing or speaking with people. My teachers constantly had meetings with my parents about how concerned they were about me. It wasn't until about 5<sup>th</sup> grade when I finally came out of my shell. I remember before Thanksgiving break we had a writing assignment where we had to talk about what we were thankful for. I wrote about all of the things in life that make me happy, like my family, friends, hockey, etc. I got an A+ on it, and at that point I

knew that writing was something that I was going to love and appreciate forever.

When I eventually got to middle school, it was very hard for me. I was in a new school with almost three times as many kids as were in my elementary school. I also was so scared the first few days about changing classes, working a combination locker, meeting new people, etc. On the first day of sixth grade, I was very overwhelmed. First period I had Language Arts and second period I had Literature with the same teacher, Mr. Munao. He was, without a doubt, my favorite teacher throughout all of middle school, and he made me enjoy writing and communicating even more than I had in elementary school. He really helped me at the beginning of the year because he knew that I was struggling, and at the end of the year, I was an A student in both of his classes.

High school was even tougher than middle school. I was surrounded by more people I didn't know. My first year was horrible because I was playing hockey and I didn't keep my grades up. I was constantly in trouble with my parents at home because of this. It was a very hard time in my life. Over the summer, I told myself that I needed to buckle down and get good grades because school is very important. Sophomore year of high school, we read the novel *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck for my English class, and we had to write a huge research paper on it. This was the first time in my life that I had to write something so lengthy, and I was very overwhelmed. I really liked my teacher and she knew that I was a good student, so it was important to me that I get a good grade. I probably wrote about 10 different drafts over those couple of months, and I was so proud of myself that I had gotten an A on it.

My junior year of high school was both the best and the worst year of English class I've ever had. It was the worst because it was junior year and it was hard enough to try to juggle school, work, and playing hockey. My English and history class were combined into one, called HAMSTUDS (honors American studies). My teacher for English was probably the best English teacher I have ever had while being in school because she really knew how to teach the material. It was hard at times



though because she was very sarcastic. During the middle of the year, we started our junior research paper and I chose to read the short story “A Mystery of Heroism,” by Stephen Crane. The short story was very interesting, and it’s one of my favorite short stories I’ve read over the years. I worked for approximately two and a half months to produce a research paper for both my English class and my history class. I was so relieved to hear that all of my hard work paid off when I received an A on my English paper and a B on my history paper.

These papers I have written and the classes that I have taken over the years have shaped me to be the writer that I am today. I’ve set many goals this semester, one of which includes achieving an A in this course. I hope that this chapter in my life called college helps me throughout the rest of my life.



*Shannon Freund*

Growing up as a kid I didn't spend much time inside. I was always playing outside with my neighbors and my sisters, or playing sports. I was never the type of kid to sit inside and read or write all day, not even in a secret diary. I barely even colored as a kid; I would rather be with my friends running around. The only books I have ever read for my own enjoyment were the *Harry Potter* series. My grandma had convinced me to read them. I was so hooked that for the final book I made my mother take me to Barnes and Noble at midnight to get it. Other than that, the only traditional reading and writing I ever did was for classes.

In elementary school, I first learned how to read and write. My neighbor also helped me learn how to read when they would babysit me after school. We would always practice reading and writing after school, and if I did well then I could have play time. In third grade when I finally learned to read and write, our school taught how to write in cursive. My teachers swore that I would always use cursive for the rest of my life, but that wasn't true. Throughout elementary school we did many different activities to help us improve our literacy. We would have "reading buddies" once a week, which were 5<sup>th</sup> grade students that would come down as a class to help us improve our reading skills. It helped a lot and made reading more fun.

In junior high and high school I cared about my grades and worked hard on everything I did. I still work hard, but I've always been more of a math person instead of an English person. I just don't enjoy reading and writing papers, and it tends to be very difficult for me. Whenever I have a paper for school to write, I usually put it off until last minute because I dread it. I already know ahead of time that I will sit at my computer for a solid hour with no idea what to write or how to write it. Especially in high school, we had a lot of "freedom" on what to write, which would be the hardest part for me. I would rather have a strict rubric telling me everything I needed to have and exactly how to write it; otherwise it is very difficult for me.

In high school we were assigned to read a lot of books for our classes. I would read all the books, like *One Who Flew Over the Cuckoo's*

*Nest* and *How to Kill A Mocking Bird*. Once I started getting into the books I realized they weren't that bad and I wouldn't mind reading them. But there are so many other things that I would rather be doing than sitting in my room reading. My friends tried to recommend good books to read, such as *Gone Girl* and *Sharp Object*, because I always wanted to try to get into reading, but I just couldn't. No matter how good the books were I would always get bored.

The worst part for me now, in college, is that there are so many pages and articles for me to read for all my classes. In the past the books we had to read were at least interesting and I could read them without a problem because it was homework and I never had to read textbooks, but now almost every class of mine requires reading. It is so hard for me to force myself to read because books aren't interesting in the slightest bit.

Obviously there are many different types of literacy than just the traditional reading and writing, but I wrote about them because I feel they have been the most understood pieces of literacy throughout my life. Now that I know that there are other types of literacy, such as digital literacy, I know that literacy is more prominent in my life, especially with social media being so popular lately. I check my social media so many times throughout the day, without even realizing that it is literacy. So it is very largely used in life, but the more traditional types of literacy have never been that big in my life. In the future, I feel there will be so many new types of literacy as technology and the world around us keep improving.

## *Joey Good*

I have always enjoyed reading, and I probably get that from my mom. She is always reading in her free time. I don't, however, share that much love for the hobby. I do enjoy reading though. It is interesting to see what kind of world the author creates, and what the story is that they are telling. This got me interested in writing stories of my own.

My parents always made sure that I tried my hardest during school. I never really had trouble with any subject in school. English has always been my best subject in school. I think it's one of the easiest subjects since we are using English in our everyday lives. While I was in elementary school and junior high, I always liked the assignments where we had to write short stories. I can't think of any particular assignment that stands out, but I did enjoy doing it.

During high school, I took six English classes. You only needed four to graduate. Two of the classes I took were Journalism 1 and 2. I was a writer for our school newspaper and really enjoyed doing it. Over the two years of writing for the newspaper I developed my own style of writing. Journalism was a very different writing style than I was used to, because you don't follow all of the same rules as a regular English paper.

I took German for the first two years of high school to fill my language requirement. I had already taken Spanish during elementary and junior high, and I wanted to try something new. German and English do share similarities, which made it easier to learn. We learned how to read and somewhat write in German, and by now I have pretty much forgotten a lot of it. This is because I haven't really kept up with studying the language. However, I probably remember more than I think about the language.

My literacy has changed drastically over the course of my life. For now, I can write essays and large papers with ease. My style as a writer is largely thanks to all of the English classes that I took in high school. With my writing style changing, my literacy will change with it. I feel as though someone's literacy never stops changing. There is always more to learn in this world.



*Ian Ivkovich*

I was so young I couldn't even grip a pencil the right way. I told my Dad I wanted to write a song. My Dad loves music, so he happily got a vibrant green marker and a white piece of computer paper. He wrote down the words as I told him the lyrics. It was the earliest I could recall of myself wanting to put thoughts down on paper. I went through kindergarten learning colors and shapes. I started learning to read when my mom ordered those books from the "Hooked on Phonics" commercials. Honestly, I resented studying the words "cat, hat, bat," etc. The mechanical voice was the problem; it was so cookie cutter. I went through all of those books, steaming from my ear tips each time my mom pulled them out. It kind of makes me laugh at how naive a child can be. Looking back, it was a good thing, because I was a better reader than my peers.

I was never good at speed reading and understanding at the same time, though. I was actually put into classrooms that provided extra help for speed reading. They had me reading quickly, just trying to pick out key words. I like to saturate the words in my brain so it can digest the information slowly. I got an 18 on the reading portion of the ACT, which I have nothing good to say about. I can admit I was upset at the score I received. I felt like I deserved more recognition for the hard work I had done the past 11 years.

Growing up, I only read few books because it was hard for me to find literature to connect with. I would pick up books and start to read and find myself bored or uninterested. The books I did read I could not put down. The *Percy Jackson* series was a particular favorite of mine. I also read the book *Cracker*. It was about a man and a dog's relationship as they trained for deployment in Vietnam. This book was like a dream; I felt like I was side by side the protagonist the whole time. I wish I enjoyed reading for pleasure. I have yet to find that one thing that keeps people reading. I mostly read for knowledge. I read a lot of what is assigned to me. Not until I got to college did I realized that it's not only about the points. Some readings actually have great concepts that I have used outside of school.

I took Spanish classes from seventh grade to sophomore year. I'm not the best, but if you and I were lost somehow in Tijuana, I could get us help. I've kept a couple of journals and I'll sporadically jot down dreams; they are fun to go back to. I am a huge rap fan, and I write down my own lyrics. I actually love to write and I found this out through writing assignments in school. It was so calming for me to express my ideas and read them back to myself and others. I received good grades on every writing assignment. It was easier for me to write a paper about a concept to prove my understanding than to be tested on it.

In high school I took a creative writing class that I enjoyed. I created several pieces that expanded my knowledge of writing. I participated in Writers Week at my high school, sharing a piece on how the high school experience impacted me. I painted and have drawn pictures with messages behind them; it feels good to send a message. I think one has to be literate enough to create a strong enough message to move others; interpreting art requires high amounts of literacy. I love art and I feel like without all the other artists that do everything from cartoons, dance moves, performing lyrics, poetry, traditional art, and computer-generated media, I would not be the artist I am today. I would say literacy to me means that you have enough knowledge about specific things to where you can use them to your advantage. An example would be the movie "There Will be Blood." In the movie the protagonist knows a lot about drilling oil and a lot about business. He uses his mastery in the fields to make a fortune off of the ignorant people in town. You could argue his ethics in the movie, but that's beside the point. Being at the top of multiple fields gives you the ability to connect them and use them to your advantage.

In the future I plan to write a lot more when I learn a lot more about life. I want to write a book about my perspective of spirituality. I am excited to learn how to code computers and to network them together. I will continue to create art in different ways. I want to keep my voice out there and hopefully one day it can be heard by thousands. I promise to read more. It's something I want for myself.



*Sarah Key*

I became literate when I was in kindergarten. We learned the alphabet, and I began to read books on my own. But when I was in kindergarten, I didn't know what the term literacy meant, and I never really thought about the meaning of the word until I was assigned this paper. Literacy is the ability to read and write. Something so basic to me, but without it where would I be today?

When I was little, reading and writing was just something that everyone else was doing. It wasn't something that everyone learned to be more educated or get a good job, we learned because that is what we were taught in school. However, being the youngest child in my family, I was the last to read and write. Being the youngest motivated me to learn quickly, so that I could be just like my older siblings. It was also kind of a competition. Not only did I want to be like my sister and brother, but I also wanted to be one of the first few kids in my class to be able to spell my name and get my reading rocket to the moon. That is why most kids in my class learned to read and write.

As we got older, we were graded and tested on how well we wrote and how fast we could read. They made it a competition or a test. Every teacher had different standards, and every year you had to adapt to how each teacher wanted you to write, and how much they expected you to read for their class. It was difficult because one year you would get a difficult teacher who expected perfection from your writing and made you read two chapters every night; then the next year you would get a teacher who never made you write and gave you time to read in class. Then when you went back to having a difficult teacher, you lost writing skills from not using them, or learning how to fix them. Even though no one likes to have the difficult teacher that gives you too much homework and takes points off for every minor mistake, it is better than having a teacher who does not make you apply yourself and learn new skills. It was the difficult teachers that helped to educate us, make us better writers, and prepared us for our future so we do not look stupid by spelling something wrong in an email, or using improper grammar.

It was my teachers that taught me literacy, but with the help of my parents and by communicating with others I applied the skills that I was learning. At home, my parents would help me with my homework, where I would have to apply the skills I learned in school. At night, my parents would take turns reading books with me before I went to bed. In class, my friends and I would write letters to each other and then exchange them at recess and after school and read the letter that was written for us. Those little things outside of school, where I would apply the things that I learned in school, is how I think people become literate. Going to school educates you, but applying what you learn in school to what you do outside of school is how you really learn.

Ever since I was a kid, I have loved to read. I love stories, but I am not good at making them. In elementary school we were supposed to write a Young Authors book. We would get a little white book with blank pages. Sometimes the teacher would give guidelines as to what they wanted you to write about, and you were expected to make a book. My sister Amanda was a really good story teller; her Young Author books were always great. Mine, however, were terrible. To this day, I am still a horrible writer. It takes me a really long time to write a paper, and after I write it, I have to print it out and edit it with a pen. It is a long process for me that I do not enjoy, and in the end, I still never feel that my paper is as good as it could be. However, I love to read. I prefer novels, but I will read anything over having to write, although I think that loving to read and reading often have helped make my writing skills better. Literacy is the ability to read and write, which are very similar concepts. If you can do one, then you can learn to do the other. And by perfecting one, you can help to perfect, or at least improve, your skills with the other.

I cannot remember a time in my life when I could not read or write. Literacy is all around us, and it is a part of everything that we do. Reading and writing are such important skills to learn because literacy is how people all around the world communicate with others and express what they feel or think. That is why we learn reading and writing skills when we are little, and why we spend the rest of our lives improving them.

*Michael Lawrence*

As a child, my parents knew I had an ability to write. It started when I picked up my first reading book. It was called Leap Frog, and it had a stylus pen that allowed me to push the buttons to hear the correct pronunciation of words while also following along and comprehending the story. Because of the hands-on experience I got as a child, I became an advanced reader, which helped me to continue to enhance my literacy while also focusing on becoming a skilled writer.

My experience with literacy at such a young age has given me the opportunity to express myself through reading and writing. I have written material in a variety of formats, including screenplays, research papers, essays, outlines, and extended responses.

During elementary school, I wrote a biography report on Steven Spielberg, a very well-known movie producer. My elementary school teacher was so impressed with the outcome of the report as well as the quality and presentation, that he asked to keep my project in his classroom to show his students for the many more years that he would be teaching. My parents were just as thrilled as I was. I couldn't believe that a form of my work, especially work that I did during elementary school, would receive that kind of attention from a teacher. It was an honor, and it motivated me to continue going above and beyond with the composition work arriving in middle school.

Middle school was a time where students started to become more competitive, to get the best GPA and the best grades. While most teachers complimented my skill as a writer, it didn't seem to be impressive enough to receive any sort of recognition. I wrote many essays and letters to major corporations, attempting to persuade them to change some of their business practices, and I even wrote a research paper about Walter Cronkite. Even though I didn't get any recognition, I wasn't about to give up. I used this experience as a way to motivate myself to go even higher in my academic performance and to set higher standards for myself as I was getting ready to enter high school.

As I progressed toward high school, this is where things had completely changed, but they had changed for the better. Many teachers were so impressed with my writing that they wanted to keep using my work as an example for the students taking the courses the following year (and beyond that). Also during high school, I participated extensively with my high school television network. Throughout that time, I wrote many scripts for news packages, for the announcement production episodes, and also for some of the non-broadcast productions that I had worked on (which were documentaries and informative videos to help promote the school district). I was also involved in directing many of these visual products to build on my leadership skills that I knew would help me to pursue my Communications degree in college.

For my work with my high school television network station, I received an award for Best News Story for my television production class, and during my senior year, I produced a documentary for my sister for the American Heart Association, which was presented to a mass audience of 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders attending our district. From research papers, to screenplays, to narrative essays, I received more compliments from teachers in my high school than from all the teachers who had complimented my work in grade school. One of my research papers received an A+ for outstanding efforts and achievement for the focus on my thesis concerning school violence. Because of the recognition of my outstanding work in high school, many of my teachers told me that I would have no problem with college-level writing.

Having graduated from high school recently and starting my freshman year of college, I am excited to see what lies ahead with my academic career. So far, I have presented speeches in COM 110 and completed outlines about the importance of bulimia nervosa (for my informative speech) and a persuasive speech on improving Illinois State's dining center for those with dietary needs. I am proud of the many accomplishments that I have completed from the time I was born, and I will continue to enhance that performance in the future when going into the real world and representing myself in the business of a Fortune 500 company.

*Christian Rivera*

My understanding and mentality about literacy changed throughout the course of my life. I once believed that reading wasn't for me. Then, at the start of fifth grade, my teacher assigned me a book that I would eventually come to love. It was called *Percy Jackson, The Lightning Thief*, by Rick Riordan. This book is a Greek mythological fantasy about a boy with ADHD who learns that he is half human and half descendant of Poseidon. Percy and his friends must try to defeat Kronos before he lets his army take over Olympus and the world.

This book made me realize that there is a world that consists of more than just watching television, a world that uses literacy to not only undergo an adventure through a book, but also to communicate in various ways using numerous languages, technical skills, and a vocabulary that can be used in a powerful way. These types of literacy served as a way I can express myself and interact with others. Through writing I was able to inform, persuade, and write stories just like the one that influenced me to read a long time ago.

My first lesson growing up was something as simple as learning the alphabet. Something that seemed impossible at the time paved a long road to writing in my future. When I begin to write I portray myself as the speaker. Through my words I can use a page full of words to motivate and influence others. Challenges that I needed to overcome with my writing would definitely be my grammar. I could continue to write word after word, but periods and commas would be the death of me. Nevertheless, after reviewing the essentials for a complete sentence or the use of the comma I was able to achieve a level of literacy with my writing, thereby coming one step closer to making my imagined self as a speaker a reality.

As time passed, the English language with its forms of literacy wasn't the only language I worked on. Coming from a Hispanic heritage, I had to practice my Spanish. But more importantly, I needed to always remember where my family came from. Hearing stories of how my parents struggled in their life coming from Mexico to the United States

inspired me to be grateful for what my parents had endured to give me and my siblings a better life. I was also inspired to accomplish what they always wanted for us, which is to be able to live better lives due to being successful. My parents had to work hard in order to achieve the title of American citizen. Moreover, they now understand the advantages of being born a citizen, such as: being eligible to run for president, the ability to enroll in a university to earn a degree, and to be able to participate in a vote that will determine our leader for the next four years. The possibilities that natural citizens are born with are limitless.

Having the ability to speak both English and Spanish has opened doors for me that others wouldn't normally have. Being bilingual widens my understanding of different cultures and their type of literacy. I understand now that literacy isn't something you can learn after graduating high school or even after earning a master's degree in college. Literacy is a skill that we must practice throughout our lives in order to achieve something that only professors dream of, which is to have mastered literacy skills to the point that no matter what our goals are we can use our literacy to intrigue the world and help it in some way.

*Calvin Rosenburgh*

Before this class I never really understood the real definition of literacy, yet I have been using it almost my entire life in various forms. I grew up thinking literacy was only the ability to read, speak, or understand literature. Yet now I realize that literacy is our ability to use reading, writing, technology, and speaking to solve problems as we progress through life. Even though I graduated high school and am in college right now, I know I'm still not even close to my full potential when it comes to literacy. Through this autobiography I will explain how literacy, in many different forms, has helped me to grow into the person I am today.

Every great thing has to start somewhere. I remember when I first experienced literacy. Every night my mom would come into my room and read me *Dr. Seuss* books. At this age I didn't understand the rhymes or what they meant, but I loved the sound of them. I also remember a little while after that my mom bought me my first piggy bank. She wanted me to write my last name on it but I had no clue how to do it, so she helped me and made me practice on a piece of paper. After hours I finally got it, and I was really proud. Thinking back, this was the first time I created literacy, even something as small as a last name. As time progressed so did my ability to write and read. Taking a lot of classes in middle school and high school taught me a lot of basics I needed to know about writing, such as many types of figurative language.

Now that I think of it, elementary school was the golden age of literacy for me. Everything we did had literacy written all over it. You go to school and whether it was from learning your ABC's to your 123's, literacy was everywhere. Even when you thought you could go home and have a break from it all, digital literacy was all over the computer and television. I dreaded going home and doing homework assigned by my teachers. I thought they were giving it to me just to waste my time. Little did I know they were doing me a huge favor in regards to expanding my literacy. With my parents' helping me with homework, I became a really good reader and writer. My mother also taught me how to truly enjoy reading to the point where I couldn't wait to get home to read the book I

just got from the library. My early understanding of literacy helped me grow to the person I am today. Reading and writing in college is infinitely useful in the fact that every class has a need for it. Also, in my free time, I spend my time on various different types of literacy such as books, television, computer, or even hanging out with my friends.

Another big subclass of literacy that has been a huge part of my life is music. Through my life music has helped me get through a lot of rough times; whether it is from a breakup, or even de-stressing me during a homework assignment, music is always there for me. What I love about it is there is an endless amount of different types of music out there. Music was also really big for me in middle school because I was a part of the band. Back then I played the French horn, and it was really enjoyable because of the number of my friends that were in that class.

Literacy has been behind every corner of my life and has helped me in many ways. Every year I learn more and more about it and understand more deeply what it is and how to effectively use it in everyday life.



*Paola Ruiz*

All throughout my life there have been many factors and events that have contributed to my development as both a reader and a writer. Personally, I feel like we all begin to use literacy the day we say our first words. I say this because using language and communicating with others is a form of literacy. My skills developed as I grew older and I started attending school. I also built my proficiency in literacy in the English language because Spanish had been my main language for the first 5 years of my life.

Going into kindergarten with Spanish being my first language held me back from being as social as I would've liked. I was put into a classroom with only Spanish-speaking students forcing us to learn certain forms of literature in Spanish before English. For example, I learned to read the alphabet and a couple of words in Spanish. Soon after, my family and I moved to a different neighborhood, which meant I was going to have to attend a different school that didn't have any Spanish-speaking classrooms like the ones I was used to. In first grade I finally started learning English at my new school. This was the period in my life where my language and literacy skills really started to grow because I was learning to read and write two languages at the same time.

In the first couple of years in elementary school I did not do much writing other than short journal entries and paragraphs in my English classes. It wasn't until third or fourth grade when I started writing essays. I don't remember the first essay I wrote, but I remember we would always have to write out an outline, produce a rough draft, have it revised by the teacher as well as peers, edit it, and then write our final draft to turn in. This process was something that we were taught to follow in order to get full points. This helped me in a way to go over my essays and try to make them the best they could be.

In middle school my English teachers still stressed that following specific steps would help us write out the perfect essay. The teachers were a lot stricter about using a wider range of vocabulary words to enhance our essays. I remember that we would get assigned into reading classes according to our reading level and ability. We would be assigned a certain

number of chapters that needed to be read by the end of the week, and then we would get with our groups to discuss the chapters and questions that went along with our assigned reading. The questions helped us as readers to think critically about what we were reading.

My high school years were the years when I got a lot of help and encouragement from my teachers to become the best writer, reader, and speaker possible. I also took a speech class that helped me step out of my comfort zone and to improve my public speaking skills. This was the time that really helped shape me into the writer I am today. Even though I did not enjoy every essay I had to write, I felt like it was challenging, yet useful. I was able to bring those skills to ISU, and maybe I will be able to improve on them. I have already taken the Communications class, where we developed and delivered our own speeches to the class. The different types of essays, readings, and projects I was exposed to throughout my school years have helped me become the writer that I am today.

*Becky Sweeney*

Growing up as a kid, I did everything that my sister did. Not because I wanted to, but because it was expected from us because we are twins. When my mom chose how we dressed, she would dress us exactly alike and she put us in the same classes, clubs, and extracurricular activities. We were pretty much the same person. Because of this, I felt like we had to have all the same likes and dislikes. When my sister was good at something, I felt pressure to be just as good. This wasn't always the case though.

My sister loved to read, and she was extremely fast at it for her age. She was reading more difficult books than most of the kids in our age group, but I could barely read the standard books that were expected from us. It was very frustrating because everyone, even our teachers, assumed that we were basically the same person and could do the same things. Reading just didn't interest me. I wasn't picking up on it fast, which frustrated me and made me want to give up. I was more frustrated at the fact that I was always getting compared to my sister, and I wanted to prove to people that we are two separate people. I am better than her at some things, just like she is better than me at certain things. It's not such a hard concept to grasp, but it took awhile for my family and friends to realize that.

During my free time at home, I loved to draw pictures. I also loved to practice my writing, so I began to write short little paragraphs that probably made no sense at all to go along with my pictures. I didn't care though, because they were only for myself. Most of my drawings and stories involved my family and close friends as well as my dog. In school, we were practicing cursive writing, so I started writing my little stories in cursive and hanging them on the fridge. Everyone who walked into the kitchen praised them even though I knew that my cursive was horrible and not one person could actually read my handwriting.

Throughout elementary school, I wrote many papers, but there was one very important one from the fourth grade that I can remember vividly to this day. This paper was for social studies, which was my favorite subject at the time. We had to write a paper in the form of a letter, as if we

were one of the colonists planning the Boston tea party. This assignment was fun for me because it allowed us to use our creativity and basically do anything that we wanted. I spent a lot of time on this and I even burned the edges and stained the paper with tea bags to make it look old and worn out. I was extremely proud of my work and how much time I put into it, until I got it back a week later. My teacher gave me a D on the project. I was devastated, especially because there weren't really any rules for the assignment, so I wasn't sure what I did wrong. This definitely lowered my confidence about my writing because I was so proud about something that turned out to be worth only a D grade.

The next year, in fifth grade, was where I gained my love for writing back from my teacher. My fifth grade teacher was my favorite teacher that I have ever had. She is the reason that I am studying to become a teacher. She taught me so many things that I will take with me for the rest of my life. Every day we had time set aside in class for us to journal about whatever we wanted. Each day, my teacher would read our journals and she would reply to each and every one of us. I was obsessed with my teacher, so I looked forward to journal time each day because I was excited to see what my teacher wrote to me and what I was going to write back to her. I think that this activity is what helped me to develop my writing skills because I practiced them every day and this helped me to love writing again.

In junior high school, I took English every year, and we wrote the standard persuasive, narrative, and research papers. These are the types of papers that I don't really enjoy because they just seem boring for me to write. Also, I found myself writing about the same things every year, so it was getting old pretty fast. Throughout all of junior high I was on the volleyball team. My coach was my English teacher at the time and she was in charge of the school announcements each morning. Because she thought that I was one of the best writers on the team, she put me in charge of writing the highlights from our games each day, and these were getting read each morning during the school announcements. The fact that something I wrote, even though it was nothing big or that important, was getting read to the entire school each day was exciting for me. This was a fun little extra-curricular activity for me to do each day that helped me to

practice my writing and it also led me to enjoy writing more and more. It was something other than the traditional narrative or persuasive paper that I was used to doing all the time.

In high school I took four years of Spanish, and although I did not enjoy it, I definitely learned a lot from it. Writing in a different language allowed me to compare the English language to Spanish and notice all of the differences in the rules and ways of writing. It also allows you to go back to the basic sentence structures because your vocabulary is not that big when you are just beginning to learn a new language. This is something that I was not very good at, so it was a challenging class for me to take, and I had to work extra hard to get a good grade—harder than I normally would in any other class.

One of my favorite classes that I took in high school was called creative writing. I took this class senior year, and I loved it. At the beginning of the semester, we got a list of assignments that we had to complete by the end of the semester, and each day in class we had all period just to work. We could work on whatever assignment we wanted, and we had the freedom to write about whatever we wanted. Some of the assignments included a movie script, a fiction short story, several poems, non-fiction stories, and several book reports. My teacher warned us that we would have to turn in all of the assignments for completion grade at the end of the semester, but he was only going to grade the one that we were the most proud of. His reasoning behind this was that he didn't want us to stress out about this too much. He said that this class was mostly for ourselves to improve as writers and to not have to worry about what others would think about our writing. It was to learn to love writing and being creative without having to be worried what grade our pieces would get because that's all we ever worry about. This class was a lot of fun for me because it taught me to be myself in my writing and not stress so much about what my teacher or my peers would think about it.

I went through many different emotions in my senior year of high school. It was my last year in high school and I wanted to enjoy it as much as I could, but at the same time, it was very stressful. The reason for that? College applications. Any possible free time that I had at home outside of my homework and sports was dedicated to working on essays

for college applications and scholarships. These essays essentially would affect the rest of my life which was no pressure at all.

It wasn't until after I received a huge scholarship that I realized how important writing is. When I was in elementary school learning the basic principles of reading and writing, I had no idea that these skills would get me such an important scholarship and get me into college. Now, I am a freshman at Illinois State University pursuing my dream to become a teacher. I know that although I have been through a lot in my life already, this is still only the beginning and there's so much more to come.

*Brad Taylor*

When I sit down to write a paper, I always want to come across as a very proficient and confident writer, but I often find myself staring at a blank white screen. I have a concept that seems so easy to write about in my head until I'm asked to elaborate on it and put it into paragraphs in the form of an essay. Writer's block doesn't begin to explain what hits me as I sit down and try to put my thoughts into some legible form. So I sit here on my laptop and tab out of Microsoft Word every five minutes so I can reorganize my thoughts and begin to write again. But if you haven't figured writer's block out yet, in simple terms it is the inability to formulate cohesive thoughts to write a paper. Most of my friends would probably describe me as ridiculously extroverted and overconfident in basically all of my endeavors. I talk loudly, and I do brash things. I was my high school's mascot at soccer games, so I was asked to yell and make a fool of myself on a weekly basis. That last sentence might not have the closest tie to literacy per se, but I like to think I am confident in almost all ways except for writing. I have always struggled to write at the level I want to be at. But I still like to think that I come across as a well-spoken and very literate person.

Now on a public speaking standpoint, I have no problem getting in front of hundreds of fans and going absolutely buck wild, but I can't help but feel a twinge of apprehension and anxiety every time I get in front of a computer to write a paper. Anxiety is coursing through my bloodstream like Lewis Hamilton at the Italian Grand Prix. For me, papers have always been about just filling the required length. I always find myself struggling to elaborate on topics unless I am given a research paper, where I just recant all of the things I needed to study. All of those once very confident extroverted traits become quite recessive as soon as I open Microsoft Word. I have taken a writing class, actually quite a few, albeit it was required to graduate from my high school, and I do feel that I write pretty decent papers. I still feel though that if I can improve my confidence in

my writing just a little more, then I will definitely be able to captivate my reader more while they read the piece I have composed.

I have always thought the most important goal when writing a paper is to interest the person reading the paper. It is so easy to just tune out as soon as you begin to read a paper on a topic that you have the most miniscule amount of interest in. I try to write papers that are relevant to the audience that will be reading it. Nobody wants to read a paper on the rise of staplers in rural Alaska: it is important to understand who your audience is.

Our world revolves around literacy. Just being literate allows you to constantly upgrade your learning skills. Literacy allows you to stay informed about things happening around the world through different mediums and channels of communication. Knowing current news about what is happening is how you stay ahead in the world. We are being bombarded with information, news, and communication. Without sufficient communication skills, how could we take in any of this information? Without sufficient literacy skills, you would have an extremely difficult time functioning in our world. Think about your average day and how many times you use your literacy skills to help you. Could you function without those skills? I think we both know the answer to that question.



---

## **What Literacy means to me**

My literacy journey all started when I was in the first grade and we were given journals to fill by the end of the



school year. The objective of that assignment was to write about our everyday lives, like things we do outside of school and things we do at home, on the weekends, holidays, etc. To me, this was a gift. I enjoyed writing about the fun things I did, and I even talked about personal things like writing about things that upset me and how I wish things were, etc. This journal assignment started most of my literacy interest. I like sharing some of the things in my life and writing about them. I understand that I may have exaggerated some of the things I have written but that was the beauty of literacy to me. You can read and write things and be as creative as you would like. I made many friends while sharing some of my literacy creations.

We've been assigned to create our own books and stories in quite a few classes and most of the books I created, people actually liked them and thought they were interesting. I felt great as a writer. At one point in time, I wanted to write books for a living and become a great author. But that dream didn't last long.

As you may know, as I progressed and went on to higher grade levels, literacy became more difficult and less interesting. I began to struggle with many types of writing, like persuasive writing and narrative writing. It all became a pretty hard task to complete and I just really was not interested in it. In high school, I struggled to complete most reading and writing tests, and ever since I just haven't been interested in literacy

like I used to be. I can really only freewrite now. That's the only type of writing I like doing: freewriting, theme, and poetry.

I have used literacy and I still do use literacy in my everyday life. I've read newspapers/articles to learn about what goes on each day and to know how the weather may be. Literacy represents the various types of knowledge we need to make it far in life. Without literacy, I wouldn't have known that my politics class was cancelled yesterday and I would've wasted my time and energy going all the way to the hall I take that class in. Literacy means a lot to me and I think it should to you!

In the future, I plan to be an architect, and I know that I will need a great source of knowledge and literacy skills to get there.

*Joe Tullar*

I was never much of a writer, and you'd be lucky to catch me reading a book. Going through elementary school I found silent reading times and writing assignments to be an absolute bore. Not to mention my penmanship was barely legible. Similar to a scribbly font you'd find. I had an awful procrastination issue with any writing and crammed last minute with online summaries for books that had quizzes.

The earliest and only time I can remember writing I enjoyed in grade school was with a short story in first grade. It was the middle of October at Edgebrook Elementary. I was in Mrs. Karp's class. She was a long time teacher at the school and one of my favorites. We were to come up with a creature or monster. Once you had one thought up, you'd draw it and create a background story for it. I took much more than the recommended time. I spent hours each day writing a little bit. By late October, I had written out a long descriptive tale of my monster. He was orange, sphere-shaped, and hairy. My class turned in our drawings and stories on Halloween and the teacher anonymously shared them out loud. I listened as we were read a multitude of stories regarding monsters. After we went through all of the presentations of the creatures, we voted on the best ones. To my disbelief, I ended up getting the most popular story. I was so proud of myself and my family was as well when I came home to tell them. We placed the stapled story and drawing into a storage box in my attic where it still remains to this day.

As I proceeded into my next few grade levels, I was bombarded with reading assignments, research papers, narratives, persuasive papers, etc. This created a bad rap for English in my point of view from then on. I really disliked the repetitive nature of each grade. The writing was the worst bit, but I found myself tolerating the reading by discovering a genre I was extremely fond of. Historical war fiction was the only thing that kept me afloat for most of the years. Just about all of my book-related summaries and papers from third grade until the middle of high school were on books in this genre. A few of my favorites that I read were *The*

*Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien and William Warten's *Shrapnel: A Memoir*, both of which were extremely interesting accounts of war through unique aspects.

I headed into high school and began taking more complex classes. We began reading famous works of literature and writing heavily critiqued essays. One of my favorite projects to work on was our book fair. We were to read a book of our choice and create a poster board along with detailed persuasive arguments on why someone should read the book. We had just finished learning about WW2 in history so I decided to head to the library and find a good historical fiction. None of the fictional books appealed to me so my librarian suggested looking into historical nonfiction. I found many encyclopedia-style diaries regarding events. One book with a detailed cover caught my eye. I settled with a book called *Auschwitz*. I figured that would be a good change of pace from the same warfront style I had read for the last few years. The book ended up being one of my absolute favorites. The perspective of the author and his description of the events he went through really made the book hard to put down. At the book fair it's safe to say if you see someone with a poster with a Nazi sign on it, they will get a bit of questioning for such an "off" topic sort of subject. But the attention paid off since I got plenty of people persuaded to read my book, and I got a fairly good grade.

During high school I didn't only go after expanding my English, I also learned German. I took on the language due to my older sister having great things to say about it and having some family history tied in with it. Learning a new language really made me think about how vast and expansive my vocabulary was compared to when I was little. When learning a language you almost get put back into grade school by having to tackle the basics of grammar, reading, writing, and speaking. The whole way sentences form was a bit backwards when using past tense. Not only that, but there were now word genders that would change the way you say/spell the word "the". After two years I stopped taking German as I had completed my international language requirements to graduate. I replaced my German classes with extra science classes to prepare for college.

Along with the science classes, I took one of the hardest classes I had ever taken. Through school I saw my English grade go from A, to B, and then by my last year I was averaging a C in most English classes. My writing seemed to be the culprit of it all. My papers would either be turned in late or rushed with little effort. Creative writing was a tough and extremely enjoyable class. I originally took the class because it seemed like a clear fit for what I wanted to improve on. I can easily say that this class broke me of my procrastination problem quickly since we had new papers due every few days. In creative writing we brainstormed for a majority of the class. Every day we would come in, sit down, and just write as much as we could about the topic written on the board. If we liked our topic, we could roll with it and begin turning it into a draft for our weekly short stories. Each story had a main criteria such as imagery, character detail, theme, or stream of consciousness. While this class didn't necessarily turn my now C average in English into an A, the constant writing easily helped me become better at organizing thought and preparation. By the end of the semester I wrote just about every idea I had in my head, from my own historical fiction to futuristic mystery stories. This class taught me more about writing than all of my previous English writing had.

I had improved my English, but I could not say the same for my foreign language. When I quit learning German, I didn't give up on learning languages. I attempted learning Japanese and Chinese at home, but I never had enough time to do so with work and school being my main focus. I've always loved the traditional formal style that eastern Asia had created from its ancient roots. When applying for schools I knew I wanted to minor and study abroad to East Asia, and this was one of the bigger deciding factors for picking ISU. I've now been learning Japanese in school for six months, and I can tell you it is more unlike German or English than it is similar. Three writing systems, multiple formalities for grammar, and flow of sentences that can leave you mispronouncing words left and right. When I studied at home, it was the reading of the different writing systems known as "kana" that stumped me the most. Luckily, the teaching methods here in college made them quick to learn by using

symbolism and relating them to things I already knew. I however really like the formal and informal nature of the language. You can get the exact same message across using extremely different sounds and words. It makes giving respect to an elder, instructor, or boss much more meaningful.

By going through the tasks of learning new languages, extensive reading, and writing till my hand felt numb, I was able to figure out that writing and reading take much more than basics. You can be literate in different senses. Visual, Media, Digital, and Political are just a few of the types. Even the most basic works done way back in grade school can have a major impact on your writing and reading today. I have gone through a lot so far in my education and I still have a lot more to go. I hope to further expand my knowledge on literacy as I complete my minor in Japanese. Perhaps I will even continue learning German as well. No matter what is to come in the future, I have learned so far that the things you read, write, and say will carry with you and build you into the person you are and will be.

*Zach Wilson*

Being literate is often misunderstood as simply the fact that someone can read. Until my high school years, I genuinely thought this to be true. The thing is, there is a lot more to it than that. It's perhaps even more important that literate people are able to actually *comprehend* the information through the words they are reading. The question is not whether or not you can read the words, but rather whether or not you can decipher them for their true meaning. To write a biography on your own literacy is a tall task, because literacy is so important and essential to our everyday lives. It affects us in more ways than most people realize. This is why it is so important to look back on it and discuss it for what it really is.

To start in the beginning, like just about everyone else, I read children's books. The simpler, the better. Tales like *Goodnight Moon*, as well as the stories from the *Berenstain Bears* or even the poems of Shell Silverstein, were a nightly occurrence in the Wilson household. But the one that captured me the most at a very young age was *The Kissing Hand*. Its story made me feel safe and loved. At age three (or any age for that matter), it's important to feel this way. This might have been why I was so drawn to it. Obviously, *The Kissing Hand* is not by any means what one would call a "novel" (you can read the story in a mere three minutes), so naturally as I grew older, so did the level of difficulty and length of my reading adventures both in and out of school.

The first book I have any recollection of reading in school was *BFG* in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. I thought it was a wonderful story, and it led me to delve deep into the works of Roald Dahl. I am not one who often reads for pleasure, but this was the first time I got so invested in a series of novels (I can count on one hand the amount of times that that has happened to me). The reason that I love his work is because while his stories are clearly meant for children, the reading levels were a little bit more difficult than the other things I had been reading, so it challenged me at the time. The story was good enough for me to be able to push through as a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader. Something has always held true to me in my experience as a reader: if I'm going to actually commit to reading something that takes a

chunk of time to complete, I'm not going to half-ass it. I've always tried to challenge myself, and the next year I really did that in a big way.

In 4<sup>th</sup> grade, for a book report, I read *The Hobbit*. My teacher told me that *The Hobbit* was the hardest book anyone in my grade read for their book report all year (based off of lexile range). I was quite proud of that. Did it require a lot more work than I would have liked to have done? Yes. Was it difficult to comprehend things? Yes. But I would then just go back and try my best to learn new things and look things up when I didn't understand them. I made sure I understood that book. During the following year or so, I would read four of the *Harry Potter* novels, three *Pendragon* novels, the first *Lord of the Rings* novel, *Marley & Me*, and countless other titles. But then, I went on a hiatus from reading for the most part. As far as I was concerned I had better things to do. I still generally feel that way. But at least for a little while, a book changed my mind about that, and in a quick manner.

*The Hunger Games* will always be a contender for the greatest book I have ever read. Not only was it the first book that I read from cover to cover in one sitting, but I went on to read the book two more times after that. I read its sequel, *Catching Fire*, and the sequel to that, *Mockingjay*, once each. This is truly a masterpiece of a series. This book does something to the way your brain works as you're reading it. The TV show *Breaking Bad* is a good example of this, so I'll compare the two. In *Breaking Bad*, the lead character, Walter White, goes from being a normal chemistry teacher to a murderous monster of a meth dealer all within five seasons. As you are watching it, things become more and more acceptable in the show because you, as the viewer, are progressing along with it. People can find themselves rooting for this maniac even despite all the things he is doing. *The Hunger Games* is similar in that even though the concept is absolutely barbaric, it just ends up drawing you in that much more. I love that in literature and in film. These types of storylines can make you think in ways that you would otherwise never think, all for the sake of entertainment.



The last book that I fell in love with was the second and final (so far) book that I have read more than once. *Tuesdays with Morrie*, by Mitch Albom, one of my summer reading books from high school, was stellar in just about every way imaginable. Books like *The Hunger Games* were interesting for their action and insanity, and *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* and even *Pendragon* for their mythical nature. But *Tuesdays with Morrie* wasn't like those. This was the first book I had ever read that struck a chord with me emotionally to the point that it did. It follows a man with ALS and the discussions that Mitch had with him. The fact that it's a true story definitely helped its case as far as how I reacted emotionally, though.

Through all of these readings I noticed that it usually did not matter if what I was reading was for school or not. Of course, there have been a lot of things I have read for school that I simply could not stomach, but out of my favorite books (for the most part, all the ones I mentioned in this paper) it's about 50/50 as to whether it was related to school or not. I found this to be interesting looking back, because I had always had this attitude towards school that made me feel like I would not like what I was reading before I even opened to the first page of the story. A lot of it would have to do with whether or not I liked the teacher and whether or not I thought they were good at their job. In retrospect, if I had spent more time and effort trying to truly comprehend and study its content, as I did thoroughly with *The Hobbit* as well as *The Hunger Games*, than I did assuming I was going to despise whatever my teacher gave me, maybe I would have more books to share about in this paper.

I would only get what the author (and my teacher) wanted out of me if I truly decided to be committed to it, and when I did, I usually had a blast. Since reading *Tuesdays with Morrie*, I have been deeply invested in TV series like the aforementioned *Breaking Bad*, as well as the *Star Wars* saga and everything that has to do with it, but never a book. I would like to figure out why. My passion and drive is really the only thing that gets me into what I'm reading, and I think I need to channel that more throughout my time in college when reading not only the literature that I am assigned, but also things that I truly desire to read on my own.

