

# Nonreading Adults: Who They Are, How We Can Help

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ing adults must and do participate in a wide range of literacy practices on their jobs, in their homes and in their communities. They understand the ways that language is used to convey meaning and to manipulate the system. Their broader knowledge of oral cultural patterns, their life experience and their personal goals provide a rich resource for literacy education and, indeed, for our entire society.

Rather than trying to figure out how to speak for adults with low print literacy skills, we must begin to listen to their voices. There is an exciting new literature emerging in which new writers talk about their lives, their dreams, their learning, their pain and their achievements.

Although developed to provide an outlet for new writers and relevant material for new readers, these publications also provide access for the larger literate public concerned about getting to know these adults whose voices have been silenced for so many years.

New readers and new writers also are making presentations at local and national conferences, forming support groups and participating in training for new literacy tutors and teachers. In many ways, literacy students and program staff are beginning to work together to create more effective and more relevant programs.

Unfortunately, such programs remain in the minority.

## What Needs To Be Done?

You may ask, "What needs to be done?"

Adults with low literacy skill levels have told us that they are interested in literacy education because they want to use literacy skills in new ways at work, with their children, in their communities and in their civic and religious organizations.

For example, they want to be able to pay their bills with checks, to make sure that they are receiving benefits at work, to talk knowledgeably with their children's teachers, to accept promotions at work or appointments to offices at church, to read novels and to write letters to their friends.

In addition, new readers have told us that all of their relationships shift as they begin attending literacy classes and learning new skills.

Their friends and family members had been helping them with literacy tasks; now those relationships begin to change as learners become able to do things for themselves.

In addition, some of the time that used to be spent helping out or hanging out has to be committed to attending classes and practicing skills; sometimes friends and family become alienated and angry in response. New readers want help understanding and dealing with these changes, and they want programs to be responsive and realistic in relation to their lives.

But literacy curriculum often continues to consist of workbooks that do not reflect the tasks adults need to learn, and do not respect the experiences that could provide a rich foundation for learning. Students are often told that first they must learn to read and then they can learn how to do the tasks they care about.

However, we know that good literacy programs can integrate content with skills, helping adults learn both the tasks and skills at the same time. In other words, students can learn reading and writing skills by using job applications, writing letters or reading the brochure from work about their health insurance.

We must involve students as partners in the development of instructional programs, and we must develop programs that help people learn the things they want and need to learn.

Those of us who can read well and those who cannot read share concerns about our families, our homes, our health, our communities and about our ability to be productive—to live with a sense of purpose, of contribution. When we ask, "Who are illiterate adults?" and "What can I do?" we must start from this sense of shared humanity.

**Editor's Note:** Hanna Arlene Fingeret, Ph.D., is executive director of Literacy South in Durham. Parts of this article were originally published as "Who are illiterate adults?" in *Adult Learning*, Feb. 1990, p. 27. This is the second in a series of essays on literacy provided courtesy of the North Carolina Press Association in cooperation with the North Carolina Literacy Association. The NCLA's local affiliate is the Brunswick County Literacy Council, 754-7323.



SEA OATS against a blue sky can be an inspiration from the sea for many of us. PHOTO BY BILL FAVER

## Inspiration From The Sea

It is sometimes surprising to discover how many writers seem to get their inspiration from the sea. A quick look at any book of poetry or literature will reveal it. Even the biblical writers were often influenced by the sea. So much of our life history is tied up with adventures of the sea and the seashore that it is not really so much a surprise to find that our poets and authors found inspiration from the sea.

Think about some of the lines you know. Very probably they have to do with the sea, the water, the skies, rain, sunrises and sunsets, and the mysteries of the deep. Some no doubt are about the birds and fish and crabs and other seashore creatures. Or about love at the seashore, or sadness of shipwreck and tragedy.

One of my favorite poets is the late Archibald Rutledge, who lived on the Santee River near McClellanville, S. C. His life-long experiences with birds and animals and wildflowers and the trees around him kept him close to the natural world and an awareness of his environment. He spent many hours along the seashore and you can see it in his poems. He knew the marshes and the river and the flowers and wrote about many of them.

One of his poems is called *The Source of Song*:

A little child who runs along the shore,  
Coming upon an opalescent shell,  
Cries, "See what I have found! A mermaid wore  
This for a brooch!" And who could better tell  
That poetry is? Come from mysterious depths,  
Seraphic wonder from the gross concealed,  
Where life's wild wave upon love's sea-strand weeps,  
To the naive heart divinely is revealed.

Forever to the soul its voice is singing  
Like sea-wind or a song of long ago;  
Always to us in beauty it is bringing  
The magic that we always yearn to know.  
It is a miracle by the spirit made,  
A glimmering wildflower that shall never fade.

Those of us who live near the sea can appreciate the feelings and inspiration the sea gives us. Perhaps more of us should try to express our inspiration in words and art and song. It is one of the free benefits we have in the special place where land and sea and sky come together.

## AT BRUNSWICK COMMUNITY COLLEGE

# ABE, GED Classes Reopening

Brunswick Community College is reopening a number of adult literacy classes it had to close last spring.

Ten Adult Basic Education (ABE) and GED (General Educational Development) classes are beginning this week at various locations across the county that will help adults learn basic skills or earn the equivalent of a high school diploma, said Anita White, who is helping coordinate literacy programs at BCC.

"I know we have a lot of people in Brunswick County who need their high school education," she said. "It's free and available."

However, the classes will not be allowed to continue if sufficient students do not register.

New classes are slated as follows:

GED: Big Macedonia Church, Supply, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6 p.m.-8 p.m.; BCC Southport Campus, Southport, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9 a.m.-12 noon;

BCC Industrial Education Center, Leland, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9 a.m.-12 noon; Little Prong Baptist Church, Ash, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m.; Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Longwood, Mondays and Wednesdays, 6 p.m.-8 p.m.; Shallotte Presbyterian Church, Shallotte, Mondays and Wednesdays, 1 p.m.-3 p.m.; Waccamaw Community Center, Ash, Mondays and Tuesdays, 6:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m.; and West Brunswick High School, Shallotte, Mondays and Wednesdays, 6 p.m.-9 p.m.

BCC also offers other ABE, GED and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. There is no charge to attend any of the classes.

Interested students may come to the class of their choice at the time given or contact the college for more information at 754-6900, 457-6329 or 343-0203, Ext. 397.

## L. Bookworm

New Store Hours: Sunday thru Thursday 10 a.m.-6 p.m.  
Friday & Saturday 10 a.m.-10 p.m.  
at the bridge to Holden Beach  
842-7380

New additions to the Paperback Bestsellers:

TIME BOMB

By Jonathan Kellerman

FOUR PAST MIDNIGHT

By Stephen King

THE WOMEN IN HIS LIFE

By Barbara Taylor Bradford

UNDER SIEGE

By Stephen Coonts

One of each should get you through the month!



## Foundation Plans Recognitions

Faculty, staff, students and supporters of the college will be honored at the Brunswick Community College Foundation's annual recognition dinner Thursday, Sept. 19, at 7 p.m. at the Jones-Byrd Clubhouse, Sea Trail Plantation.

Vicki Spencer, executive director, said the foundation will present distinguished service awards for BCC employee of the year, outstanding support staff member, leadership, and teacher of the year. Also, an outstanding part-time general education instructor will be honored.

Also slated for recognition are those who have endowed scholarships through the foundation during the past year, as well as some scholarship recipients.

A new endowment will be announced at the dinner, said Ms. Spencer.

A highlight of the program will be brief testimonials from faculty and staff members on how the foundation has helped them. Last year, students described ways the foundation supported them during the year.

New officers to be installed are Al Laughinghouse, president; Joe Stanley, vice president; Lee Langston, secretary; and Bill Rabon, treasurer.

Outgoing board members Paul Dennis, Bruce Caldwell and John Marshall will be recognized as well as incoming board members Napoleon Barefoot, Marshall Woodard, and Dean Walters.

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