

Advanced 2
Unit 6 Reading
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Reading the Screen

A

The debate surrounding literacy is one of the most charged in education. On the one hand, there is an army of people convinced that traditional skills of reading and writing are declining. On the other hand, a host of progressives protest that literacy is much more complicated than a simple technical mastery of reading and writing. This second position is supported by most of the relevant academic work over the past 20 years. These studies argue that literacy can only be understood in its social and technical context. In Renaissance England, for example, many more people could read than could write, and within reading there was a distinction between those who could read print and those who could manage the more difficult task of reading manuscript. An understanding of these earlier periods helps us understand today's "crisis in literacy" debate.

B

There does seem to be evidence that there has been an overall decline in some aspects of reading and writing—you only need to compare the tabloid newspapers of today with those of 50 years ago to see a clear decrease in vocabulary and simplification of syntax. But the picture is not uniform and doesn't readily demonstrate the simple distinction between literate and illiterate which had been considered adequate since the middle of the 19th century.

C

While reading a certain amount of writing is as crucial as it has ever been in industrial societies, it is doubtful whether a fully extended grasp of either is as necessary as it was 30 or 40 years ago. While print retains much of its authority as a source of topical information, television has increasingly usurped this role. The ability to write fluent letters has been undermined by the telephone, and research suggests that for many people the only use for writing, outside formal education, is the compilation of shopping lists.

D

The decision of some car manufacturers to issue their instructions to mechanics as a video pack rather than as a handbook might be taken to spell the end of any automatic link between industrialization and literacy. On the other hand, it is also the case that ever-increasing numbers of people make their living out of writing, which is better rewarded than ever before. Schools are generally seen as institutions where the book rules—film, television, and recorded sound have almost no place; but it is not clear that this opposition is appropriate. While you may not

need to read and write to watch television, you certainly need to be able to read and write in order to make programs.

E

Those who work in the new media are anything but illiterate. The traditional oppositions between old and new media are inadequate for understanding the world which a young child now encounters. The computer has re-established a central place for the written word on the screen, which used to be entirely devoted to the image. There is even anecdotal evidence that children are mastering reading and writing in order to get on to the Internet. There is no reason why the new and old media cannot be integrated in schools to provide the skills to become economically productive and politically enfranchised.

F

Nevertheless, there is a crisis in literacy and it would be foolish to ignore it. To understand that literacy may be declining because it is less central to some aspects of everyday life is not the same as acquiescing in this state of affairs. The production of schoolwork with the new technologies could be a significant stimulus to literacy. How should these new technologies be introduced into the schools? It isn't enough to call for computers, camcorders, and edit suites in every classroom; unless they are properly integrated into the educational culture, they will stand unused. Evidence suggests that this is the fate of most information technology used in the classroom. Similarly, although media studies are now part of the national curriculum, and more and more students are now clamoring to take these courses, teachers remain uncertain about both methods and aims in this area.

G

This is not the teachers' fault. The entertainment and information industries must be drawn into a debate with the educational institutions to determine how best to blend these new technologies into the classroom.

H

Many people in our era are drawn to the pessimistic view that the new media are destroying old skills and eroding critical judgment. It may be true that past generations were more literate but—taking the pre-19th-century meaning of the term—this was true of only a small section of the population. The word literacy is a 19th-century coinage to describe the divorce of reading and writing from a full knowledge of literature. The education reforms of the 19th century produced reading and writing as skills separable from full participation in the cultural heritage.

I

The new media now point not only to a futuristic cyber-economy, but they also make our cultural past available to the whole nation. Most children's access to these treasures is initially through television. It is doubtful whether our literary heritage has ever been available to or sought out by more than about 5 percent of the population; it has certainly not been available to more than 10 percent. But the new media joined to the old, through the public service tradition of British broadcasting, now makes our literary tradition available to all.

Summary:

The text discusses the evolving debate around literacy, highlighting the decline in traditional reading and writing skills and the growing complexity of literacy, which now includes new media and technology. It compares historical and modern literacy, noting that while reading and writing remain important, their roles have changed with the rise of television and digital media. The text points out that while there is a perceived crisis in literacy, new technologies can be integrated into education to enhance literacy. It emphasizes the need for collaboration between educational institutions and the entertainment and information industries to effectively incorporate new media in schools. The text concludes that new media can democratize access to cultural heritage and literacy, blending traditional and modern skills for a comprehensive understanding of literacy in the digital age.

Vocabulary

A

- **debate** – discussion with different opinions.
- **charged** – intense, full of strong emotions.
- **army of people** – a large number of people.
- **convinced** – certain, strongly believing something.
- **progressives** – people who support modern, forward-thinking ideas.
- **protest** – object, argue against.
- **technical mastery** – complete skill or control in a technical area.
- **context** – the situation, background, or environment.
- **Renaissance** – period in European history (14th–17th century) known for art and learning.
- **distinction** – clear difference.
- **manuscript** – handwritten text (not printed).
- **crisis** – serious problem or emergency.

B

- **evidence** – proof, facts showing something is true.
- **overall decline** – general decrease.
- **tabloid newspapers** – popular newspapers with simple language and sensational stories.
- **decrease in vocabulary** – using fewer words.
- **simplification of syntax** – making sentence structure simpler.
- **uniform** – the same everywhere, consistent.
- **readily** – easily.
- **literate** – able to read and write.
- **illiterate** – unable to read and write.
- **adequate** – good enough, sufficient.

C

- **crucial** – extremely important.
- **industrial societies** – societies based on manufacturing and technology.
- **doubtful** – uncertain, not sure.
- **extended grasp** – deeper understanding or ability.
- **authority** – recognized power or influence.
- **topical information** – information about current events.
- **usurped** – taken over, replaced.
- **undermined** – weakened.
- **compilation** – collection or putting together.

D

- **issue (instructions)** – provide, distribute.
- **video pack** – set of video materials.
- **handbook** – instruction book.
- **spell the end of** – indicate the end of something.
- **automatic link** – natural or guaranteed connection.
- **institutions** – established organizations (like schools).

- **appropriate** – suitable, correct.
- **fluent** – smooth and confident.

E

- **illiterate** – unable to read and write.
- **oppositions** – contrasts, differences.
- **inadequate** – not enough, insufficient.
- **encounters** – meets, comes across.
- **central place** – important role.
- **anecdotal evidence** – informal, personal stories rather than scientific proof.
- **economically productive** – able to work and create value in the economy.
- **politically enfranchised** – having political rights, especially the right to vote.

F

- **nevertheless** – however, in spite of that.
- **acquiescing** – accepting something without protest.
- **state of affairs** – situation, condition.
- **stimulus** – encouragement, motivation.
- **camcorders** – video cameras.
- **edit suites** – professional video-editing equipment.
- **integrated** – combined into a whole.
- **fate** – destiny, what happens.
- **national curriculum** – official program of study in schools.
- **clamoring** – demanding loudly.
- **uncertain** – not sure, doubtful.
- **aims** – goals, purposes.

G

- **industries** – large businesses.
- **drawn into a debate** – made to take part in a discussion.

- **blend** – mix, combine smoothly.

H

- **pessimistic** – negative, expecting bad outcomes.
- **eroding** – slowly destroying, wearing away.
- **critical judgment** – ability to evaluate and think clearly.
- **coinage** – the act of inventing a new word or expression.
- **divorce (figurative)** – separation.
- **cultural heritage** – traditions, art, history of a society.
- **separable** – able to be divided or split.
- **participation** – being involved in something.

I

- **futuristic** – related to the future, advanced.
- **cyber-economy** – economy based on computers and the Internet.
- **treasures (figurative)** – valuable things (here: culture, literature).
- **heritage** – traditions, history passed from earlier generations.
- **public service tradition** – principle of serving the whole society (e.g., public broadcasting).
- **available to all** – accessible for everyone.