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Basic Facts about Literacy

- Literacy is the ability to read, write, compute, and use technology at a level that enables an individual to reach his or her full potential as a parent, employee, and community member.
- There are 774 million adults around the world who are illiterate in their native languages.
- Two-thirds of the world’s illiterate adults are women.
- In the U.S., 30 million people over age 16 — 14 percent of the country’s adult population — don’t read well enough to understand a newspaper story written at the eighth grade level or fill out a job application.
- The United States ranks fifth on adult literacy skills when compared to other industrialized nations.
- Adult low literacy can be connected to almost every socio-economic issue in the United States:
  - More than 60 percent of all state and federal corrections inmates can barely read and write.
  - Low health literacy costs between $106 billion and $238 billion each year in the U.S. — 7 to 17 percent of all annual personal health care spending.
  - Low literacy’s effects cost the U.S. $225 billion or more each year in non-productivity in the workforce, crime, and loss of tax revenue due to unemployment.
- Globally, illiteracy can be linked to:
  - Gender abuse, including female infanticide and female circumcision
  - Extreme poverty (earning less than $1/day)
  - High infant mortality and the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other preventable infectious diseases