personal story

In my life, literacy has had a great impact. Being Hispanic and bilingual, I had to learn to read and write in two languages. One was my connection to my family and the other my connection to school. In fact, learning to read, even more so than writing, has been my best defense in school; I’ve been able to get through because I can read and do my assignments. But it was a struggle early on. Similarly, David Raymond, Malcolm X, and Richard Rodriguez struggled with literacy and all had common experiences.

background

Today in the US, one third of the population can't read or write. According to John Towler, a researcher in education, twenty-five million American adults can't read the newspaper, a letter from their children's school, even the poison label on a can of bug spray. Thirty-five million are "functionally illiterate," meaning they can read just enough to get by. 15% of high school graduates read at lower than sixth grade level. These facts show how hard it is to become literate. Malcolm X, Mike Rose, and Richard Rodriguez describe the same problems in a much more personal way. Their stories have common messages about literacy.

turn-around

It's easy to read and write! At least that's what most people believe. Anyone can do it, even little children. But that's not the case for everyone. Many people, even famous ones, have had struggles with literacy. David Raymond, Lucille Elmore, and Mike Rose all dealt with similar experiences related to reading and writing.

You might think reading and writing aren't relevant anymore. Who needs these skills today? You can get information needed from other people and writing has shrunk down to abbreviated emails, in which no one cares if there are misspellings or fragments. But I disagree and so do many others. It's not just reading and writing the words that is important. It's what literacy can do for a person, how it can affect a life. Malcolm X, Thomas Cottle, and Emily Dickinson have common messages about literacy, and one is it opens doors for people.

attention-getter (quotes from famous people)

Victor Hugo, a famous author and philosopher, once said, "To read is to light a fire; every syllable pronounced is a spark." Learning to read can change a person's life, light the way towards a better future. Malcolm X, Mike Rose, and Richard Rodriguez would all agree with Hugo because the common experiences in their stories of how they became literate include a such a spark.

Malcolm X was once asked, “what's your alma mater?” “Books,” he replied. Malcolm X taught himself to read and write so well many think he had college degrees, instead of completing just the eighth grade. Like overcoming any obstacle, he believed becoming literate depended on motivation and especially taking action. Others agree. Mike Rose, Richard Rodriguez, and Emily Dickenson wrote about their own similar experiences with literacy.