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Round Robin

Dorothy E. Smith

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Round Robin is a forum intended for our readers' use to express or comment on any topical subject affecting the field of reading. Send your letters or comments to Dorothy E. Smith, Round Robin Editor.



Dorothy E. Smith, Editor

Dear Mrs. Smith,

This semester I am teaching an Adult Basic Education Reading class in Three Rivers, Michigan. Governor William Milliken recently announced the elimination of State Aid Act—Reading Support Services before January of 1976, due to the insufficient economic resources of the State of Michigan. A budget cut such as this eliminates programs and personnel which serve those receiving basic reading instruction, especially in Adult Basic Education.

After I shared the details of the proposed budget cut with the students in my class, they felt we should try to change the governor's mind. Taking my suggestion, the students wrote letters to Senator Dale Kildee, a Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee. Their efforts constitute a remarkably clear demonstration of the efficiency of such programs as this in Three Rivers.

However efficacious, educationally, the Three Rivers program might be, the students' letters most clearly revealed their needs and the experiences they found in this program. Chris Shultz wrote, "... Senator, ... if you take my only chance away from me you can go jump in the Lake." Chris is 22 now and has spent a great deal of his life in trouble. He began stealing cars and going for joy rides at the age of 14. Presently, he is looking for a job and trying to complete his high school degree. It is vital for Chris to learn to read and write. In support of Chris' feelings, Alfred Palmer explains, "If Michigan takes this away I will not be able to finish to read and it is important for it can make me a better citizen and I having a Son that is a hard time (time) reading to."

David Jacobs equates his inability to read with blindness. He explains, "... sum times I feel like a blind man, but if I was, everyone would help me with out a word but this is somethin (something) you do not see." David is 43 years old and finds it extremely important to learn to read for advancement in his employment. He goes on to say, "I need this to work an to make my life a lot better my techer (teacher) is helping me write this letter because (because) I cannot spell all the words."

Among those expressing a specific reason for and desire to read is Jerry Ewell. He states his need, "To know How to read Better in my church." Mrs. Carolyn Brown also feels church is an important reason for learning to read, ". . . because when I Go to church and is ask to read I want (won't) because of fear that I Willsay something Wrong." She further declares her children to be an important reason for learning to read as does Ethel Cole, "I'd louk (like) to riad (read) to my children." Ethel goes on to explain that she dropped out of school in 1963, and she now has a chance to learn, making her point stronger by showing that this is 1975 and a lot of time has passed since then.

However faulty the spelling and grammar may be, the intensity and sincerity of their letters are unmistakable. This becomes evident in Louise R. Hard's statement, "The Reading class is necessary. In our town alone there is a lot of people including myself that has trouble reading and writing and this class has helped me a lot. There is a lot of people who didn't even know how to read until they came to the Reading class."

My students range in age from Daryl Pursel, 18 years old, to Maud Carpenter, 62 years old. Age appears to have nothing to do with their reading needs. Daryl explains without punctuation, ". . . i am 18 years old i cant do Much if you cut out the Class how is we gouing to learn . . ." Maud on the other hand labored over her 51 words, writing extremely slowly. She began her letter to Senator Kildee with, "Dear friende, I'm learning to read and write. I didn't go to school when I was small. I started to school in 1966 and couldn't write My own name. I'm 62 years old. I went through the kindergarten and just got started in the first grade so please keep this open. thankn you."

The diverse backgrounds of these students and the various reasons for attending class becomes apparent with Kim Norton and others. "I came from Korea. I hail (had) Morried (married) An American soldier. I came to Adilt (Adult) reading class to learn how to speak, read and write the American way. I need this class very Much. I learn lots in this class. To become a good American I Must learn their ways." "I don't thank (think) you should stop the reading Class for adult becouse (because) it give us the change (chance) to help our children when they ask for help.", explained Freddie Brown. Robert Martin's background is also unique and his plea is poignant in his letter. "We didn't have the chance to Go to school When We were children. We had to wark (work) in the Fields to help our parents. so please keep the reading classes open to all parents who want to learn."

These people labored diligently on these letters, as much as an hour and a half in some cases. They felt as though they were doing their bit for their fellow Michigan citizens. Max Hard makes his point to the Senator quite clear: "I don't know you, And I don't think I want to. I don't think its right to stop the Reading Class. My wife and I are in the Adult Basic Education Class. And I'm learning more in this Class than in High School. I'm 28. I quit in Feb of 1963 in the 8th grade and I was 16. And could not read to good. And don't You forget there are thousands of us of the voting age."

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I wanted to share these letters with your readers in hopes that they too will understand how important it is for adults to learn how to read.

Very truly yours,
Gail L. Landberg
Reading Specialist