

1-1-1970

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Recommended Citation

Carter, H. L. (1970). Can Reading Failures Be Eliminated By 1980?. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 10 (2). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol10/iss2/1

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Editorial Comment

CAN READING FAILURES BE ELIMINATED BY 1980?

Studies indicate that there are three million illiterates in our adult population. Approximately one half of the students in some school systems read below grade level. Nearly one half of unemployed youth are, for all practical purposes, illiterate. Over thirty percent of the students in some universities say that they do not read well enough to do satisfactory academic work. In New York City it is reported that three quarters of the juvenile offenders are reading two or more years below their expected level. Surely, the U.S. Office of Education which plans to remedy this situation by 1980 has undertaken a Herculean task.

This goal will be far more difficult to attain than a landing on the moon or a victory over poverty for the causes are fostered by a permissive society and lie deep within the individual. It is difficult indeed to change the nature of man and the society which nurtures him. He who learns to read should hunger for books and thirst for their understanding, help, and charm. He must put forth and sustain effort for no teacher can aid the individual without his persistent desire to learn.

There will always be poverty and disabled readers. Our schools can, however, focus more attention upon learning to read and less upon subjects of minor importance. The meaning-decoding quagmire can be avoided and more effort directed to the child, his interests, and his instructional needs. Teachers can, if they will, *stimulate*, *inform*, and *guide* the child as he pursues his objectives and has an opportunity to experience for himself the values of effective reading. Seminars for parents can be instigated so that fathers and mothers can understand the place of the home in developing an interest and readiness for reading. The challenge is worthwhile.

Homer L. J. Carter
Editor