



## Literacy Narrative

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I started off my experience with literacy by learning in a bit of a different way. I was deaf for the first 4 years of my life and no one knew about it, so learning words was a different experience. I learned how to communicate on my own by reading lips. I had my own language in a way since I had to find a way to understand people and respond. I was privileged enough to start in speech therapy when my own form of communication was not working as well as it needed to in order to participate in the world around me. Without that opportunity, I would have probably had a lot more trouble in the future.

A specific and tame example of error with this different form of communicating was when I was learning the simple concept of numbers. My sister taught me the word “three” and she was not enunciating a lot, so I thought it was “tree”.” I got in an argument with my friend over it because I was just confused and frustrated that I wasn’t communicating with people in a way that was consistent enough.

I also had experience with frustration around reading once I got to elementary school and got my hearing. Hearing was no longer a problem and other than the things I needed to catch up with, I remember doing reading level tests in elementary school. These were such stressful tests since they seemed to determine how good you were and who you should be spending time with. It seems like a problematic way to measure reading. I would pretend to read faster than I could just because I wanted to be considered smarter and I wanted to be put in the “better” groups. This did not work so consistently because I wouldn’t actually be able to answer any questions about the readings they made me do. My comprehension clearly was not at the level that I wanted it to be. Sometimes I would make up responses just to give them something to believe that I could read a higher level book. I would compare myself to my friends and my

sister and teachers would put us with people who were reading on a similar level. I don't remember much of this, but I do remember the anxiety around it.

When I could get them to think I was a higher reading level than I was, I would end up being put in situations where I felt lost and couldn't understand things. This was not helpful in learning or developing my reading because I was just stuck. I would tell people in my family that I was at a different reading level and then I was fortunate enough that they got me books, but they were books that I couldn't read. They would sit on my shelf and I would pick them up once in a while and not be able to get through them. It was a waste of good books and could have been books that I worked up to if I were honest. I had the resources to get books for my reading level but I held myself back from that and missed out.

These tests would get people put in groups and either they would become motivated to move up or become discouraged and stay stuck in the level they were at. This was hurtful for some kids and I'm sure carried over to when they grew up and impacted their whole experience with education. There were different social circles and it wasn't necessarily based on the reading groups, but it definitely played a role in socializing in school. I also believe that it shamed people and impacted self esteem. This can easily end up impacting future goals and eventually careers.

Now I have a negative association with reading since it has always been a source of shame and stress for me. I avoid reading unless I have to for school, which I struggle with but have gotten a little better with figuring out some specific skills that work for me just to get work done.

I have experienced more joy and confidence through developing my musical literacy, but I have still had similar issues. There is such a competition to any kind of literacy because people are typically trying to build a life where they have the best jobs they can get and still be able to have other things. Music can be more collaborative and creative, but understanding the theory

is a lot of being musically literate. It also takes building skill. I think this is an example of having different strengths within the concept of literacy.

It is also a way to start over in a way. I have had privilege in other ways, but with this I am starting from scratch. Other people have had different amounts of musical education which makes it so that we are all on different levels. It is a little more comforting in that way because literacy in childhood generally assumes that people are on similar levels, but in college, that shifts to understanding that not everyone has the same history if the school and professors are good.