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Course: ACR 150 Literacy in American Society

Professor: Ewa Barnes

Date: November 11, 2022

Assignment: Research essay

Option 5

For this research essay assignment, I chose **Option 5: Analyses of Literacy Tests**

Instructions :

With or without a partner, distribute a historic literacy test to at least five adults. Post-Civil War, many states required adults to pass a literacy test to be eligible to vote (with the explicit purpose of limiting voting access of African American voters). Ask these individuals to take the literacy test. After the participants finish the test, ask participants to discuss their reactions to/experiences with taking the literacy test (e.g., did they feel there was cultural bias in the way the literacy test was structured). Individually, write a reflection outlining what you learned through the activity while using data from participants to inform your reflection.

My Research Essay (Transcript)

This project is an analysis of Historical literacy tests. I am finding out why historical literacy tests were used to determine if an individual was eligible to vote. I downloaded samples of historical literacy tests and distributed them to four adults. A series of questions were asked, and answers were provided.

My primary information sources are three adult participants and 3 samples from

Participant 1

Question 1: What were your experiences taking this test?

Answer: This was not a good experience.

Question 2: Do you think this test could have been structured better?

Answer: Yes, there were no instructions for the questions. It was very confusing.

Question 3: Do you believe that there was cultural bias in the structure of the test?

Answer: Yes, based on the year this test was distributed African Americans had no access to literature.

Question 4: Do you think you were given enough time to complete this test?

Answer: Ten minutes was never enough to complete this test. I think it is completely unfair to have such unclear questions.

Image of completed essay sample from participant 1

Participant 1

The State of Louisiana Literacy Test

(This test is to be given to anyone who cannot prove a fifth grade education.)

Do what you are told to do in each statement, nothing more, nothing less. Be careful as one wrong answer denotes failure of the test. You have 10 minutes to complete the test.

1. Draw a line around the number or letter of this sentence.
2. Draw a line under the last word in this line.
3. Cross out the ~~longest~~ word in this line.
4. Draw a line around the shortest word in this line.
5. Circle the first, first letter of the alphabet in this line.
6. In the space below, draw three circles, one inside (engulfed by) the other.



7. Above the letter X make a small cross.
8. Draw a line through the letter below that comes earliest in the alphabet.

Z V S ~~B~~ D M K I T P H C

9. Draw a line through the two letters below that come last in the alphabet.

~~Z~~ V B D M K ~~T~~ P H S Y C

10. In the first circle below write the last letter of the first word beginning with "L."



11. Cross out the number necessary, when making the number below one million.

1000000~~0000~~

12. Draw a line from circle 2 to circle 5 that will pass below circle 2 and above circle 4.



13. In the line below cross out each number that is more than 20 but less than 30.

31 16 48 ~~29~~ 53 47 ~~22~~ 37 98 ~~26~~ 20 ~~25~~

14. Draw a line under the first letter after "h" and draw a line through the second letter after "j."

a b c d e f g h i ~~j~~ k l m n o p q

15. In the space below, write the word "noise" backwards and place a dot over what would be its second letter should it have been written forward.

esion

16. Draw a triangle with a blackened circle that overlaps only its left corner.



17. Look at the line of numbers below, and place on the blank, the number that should come next.

2 4 8 16 32

18. Look at the line of numbers below, and place on the blank, the number that should come next.

3 6 9 12 15

19. Draw in the space below, a square with a triangle in it, and within that same triangle draw a circle with a black dot in it.



20. Spell backwards, forwards.

Sdrawkcab or forwards

21. Print the word vote upside down, but in the correct order.

22. Place a cross over the tenth letter in this line, a line under the first space in the sentence, and a circle around the last the in the second line of this sentence.

23. Draw a figure that is square in shape. Divide it in half by drawing a straight line from its northeast corner to its southwest corner, and then divide it once more by drawing a broken line from the middle of its western side to the middle of its eastern side.

Participant 2

Question 1: What were your experiences taking this test?

This was confusing. The questions appear easy however the wording was not clear. I was struggling to understand some of the questions.

Question 2: Do you think this test could have been structured better?

Yes, my brain was trying to process each question it was unclear, the instructions were backward.

Question 3: Do you believe that there was cultural bias in the structure of the test?

Yes, because I believe that there were many poor people who probably couldn't read and write.

Question 4: Do you think you were given enough time to complete this test?

No, five minutes wasn't enough because each question took a long time to answer.

Image of completed essay sample from participant 2

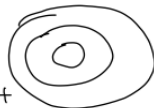
Participant 2

The State of Louisiana Literacy Test

(This test is to be given to anyone who cannot prove a fifth grade education.)

Do what you are told to do in each statement, nothing more, nothing less. Be careful as one wrong answer denotes failure of the test. You have 10 minutes to complete the test.

- ① Draw a line around the number or letter of this sentence.
2. Draw a line under the last word in this line.
3. Cross out the ~~longest~~ word in this line.
4. Draw a line around the shortest word in this line.
5. Circle the first, first letter of the (a)lphabet in this line.
6. In the space below, draw three circles, one inside (engulfed by) the other.



7. Above the letter X make a small cross.
8. Draw a line through the letter below that comes earliest in the alphabet.

Z V S ~~B~~ D M K I T P H C

9. Draw a line through the two letters below that come last in the alphabet.

~~Z~~ V B D M K T P H S ~~Y~~ C

10. In the first circle below write the last letter of the first word beginning with "L."



11. Cross out the number necessary, when making the number below one million.

1000000~~0000~~

12. Draw a line from circle 2 to circle 5 that will pass below circle 2 and above circle 4.



13. In the line below cross out each number that is more than 20 but less than 30.

31 16 48 ~~29~~ 53 47 ~~22~~ 37 98 ~~26~~ 20 ~~25~~

14. Draw a line under the first letter after “h” and draw a line through the second letter after “j.”

a b c d e f g h i ~~j~~ k l m n o p q

15. In the space below, write the word “noise” backwards and place a dot over what would be its second letter should it have been written forward.

esion

16. Draw a triangle with a blackened circle that overlaps only its left corner.



17. Look at the line of numbers below, and place on the blank, the number that should come next.

2 4 8 16 22

18. Look at the line of numbers below, and place on the blank, the number that should come next.

3 6 9 11 15

19. Draw in the space below, a square with a triangle in it, and within that same triangle draw a circle with a black dot in it.



20. Spell backwards, forwards.

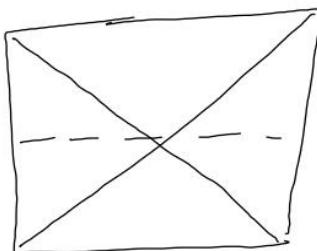
sdrawrof

21. Print the word vote upside down, but in the correct order.

evot

22. Place a cross over the tenth letter in this line, a line under the first space in the sentence, and a circle around the last the in the second line of this sentence.

23. Draw a figure that is square in shape. Divide it in half by drawing a straight line from its northeast corner to its southwest corner, and then divide it once more by drawing a broken line from the middle of its western side to the middle of its eastern side.



Participant 3

Question 1: What were your experiences taking this test?

The questions were a bit confusing.

Question 2: Do you think this test could have been structured better?

Yes, the wording for each question is off. I wasn't sure how to answer each question.

Question 3: Do you believe that there was cultural bias in the structure of the test?

During the 1960s not many individuals had access to education. Some African Americans could not read or write. I do believe that there was some cultural bias when it came to the literacy tests.

Question 4: Do you think you were given enough time to complete this test?

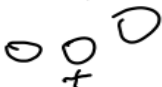
No, I don't think I was given enough time to answer each question. Each participant should have been given at least half an hour in order to properly answer each question.

Image of completed essay sample from participant 3

Participant 3

The State of Louisiana Literacy Test(This test is to be given to anyone who cannot prove a fifth grade education.)Do what you are told to do in each statement, nothing more, nothing less. Be careful as one wrong answer denotes failure of the test. You have 10 minutes to complete the test.

1. Draw a line around the number or letter of this sentence.
2. Draw a line under the last word in this line.
3. Cross out the ~~longest~~ word in this line.
4. Draw a line around the shortest word in this line.
5. Circle the first, first letter of the Alphabet in this line.
6. In the space below, draw three circles, one inside (engulfed by) the other.



7. Above the letter X make a small cross.
8. Draw a line through the letter below that comes earliest in the alphabet.

Z V S ~~B~~ D M K I T P H C

9. Draw a line through the two letters below that come last in the alphabet.

~~Z~~ V B D M K T P H S Y C

10. In the first circle below write the last letter of the first word beginning with "L."



11. Cross out the number necessary, when making the number below one million.

1~~000000~~0000

12. Draw a line from circle 2 to circle 5 that will pass below circle 2 and above circle 4.



13. In the line below cross out each number that is more than 20 but less than 30.

31 16 48 ~~29~~ 53 47 22 37 98 ~~26~~ 20 25

14. Draw a line under the first letter after “h” and draw a line through the second letter after “j.”

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q

15. In the space below, write the word “noise” backwards and place a dot over what would be its second letter should it have been written forward.

esino

16. Draw a triangle with a blackened circle that overlaps only its left corner.

17. Look at the line of numbers below, and place on the blank, the number that should come next.

2 4 8 16 6

18. Look at the line of numbers below, and place on the blank, the number that should come next.

3 6 9 12 15

19. Draw in the space below, a square with a triangle in it, and within that same triangle draw a circle with a black dot in it.



20. Spell backwards, forwards.

21. Print the word vote upside down, but in the correct order.

+

22. Place a cross over the tenth letter in this line, a line under the first space in the sentence, and a circle around the last the in the second line of this sentence.

23. Draw a figure that is square in shape. Divide it in half by drawing a straight line from its northeast corner to its southwest corner, and then divide it once more by drawing a broken line from the middle of its western side to the middle of its eastern side.

My Reflection

When I think about the past especially when it comes to African Americans and the discrimination, they face it's very unfortunate. One such example is the historic literacy test. This test was used to determine the eligibility of voters in the southern part of the United States during the 19th century. It was also used to disenfranchise African Americans from voting. They used literacy as a weapon to deny African Americans to deny their rights. African Americans have a long history of literacy. Only a few African Americans had access to education. In the 1900's only a small number of enslaved African Americans who were considered well-situated house slaves had access to books or opportunities to be educated. They were also denied human rights time after time. Being able to read was considered a privilege because not everyone had access to it.

The literacy test was used to determine who could vote or not. It was used as power to determine the rights of African Americans. This is because Literacy has always been used as a tool of power. Especially when it comes to minorities. Back then, most African Americans were allowed to go to school. The lack of education caused low literacy rates and many individuals were swindled out of their properties and several personal belongings. Over the years they exploited the lack of education and took away people's rights.

Each participant found question 22 states Place a cross over the tenth letter in this line, a line under the first space in the sentence, and a circle around the last the in the second line of this sentence. This question was not structured properly. I had a hard time completing this question in the time given. I wasn't the only individual who found it confusing. The other participants were just as confused as I was trying to take the test.

According to <https://americanhistory.si.edu> In the south, historical literacy tests were used to prevent African Americans from voting. Each Applicant was asked to interpret a section of the state constitution and then write an essay on the responsibilities of citizenship. Or in this case a series of different questions. Then the registration officials would select the questions and interpret the answers, then they would decide which applicants to pass and which to fail. After purposely failing many African American applicants. They justified their actions by claiming that it proves the applicant's ability to read and understand English. They also claimed that the exams ensured an educated and informed electorate. This was purposely used to disqualify immigrants, poor and uneducated people. They knew that many African Americans did not have access to resources that they could use to educate themselves. All this happened until there was a voting rights act in 1965.

In my opinion, African Americans have never been truly afforded equal access to literacy in America. Today we see the struggles African Americans face when it comes to literacy. Even with access to resources some schools still lack the necessary resources needed to facilitate better learning environments for students. Even at home students still lack resources. During the pandemic, several students never had access to technology to complete their schoolwork. Many students fell behind academically. Many African American students are reading below the proficiency level. Many students either repeat classes or end up dropping out of high school. Some ended up going back to school while others fall into the school-to-prison pipeline and end up going to jail.

In conclusion, this historical literacy test proved how society as a whole view literacy access to education. It has been proven very beneficial. It was seen as a privilege to read and write. The school's curriculum has changed a lot with more subjects added. Even students who

aren't from financially stable backgrounds have a better chance of improving their education than generations before.