



Literacy Improves Lives

*Two Latter-day Saints share
how learning to read and
write changes lives.*

Throughout the world, people improve their own lives and the lives of others by learning basic literacy skills.

A Love of Learning

Shirley Florence Sainz, who was born in Mexico, tells the story of how her mother's struggle to become literate became a blessing to others:

"When my mother, Anita Valenzuela Mendoza, was two years old, my grandfather died in a mining accident, leaving my grandmother with their eight children and little means to care for them. My grandmother could not read, write, or understand numbers.

"When my mother was six years old, she had the privilege of attending school though she did not have pencils, paper, or books. Nevertheless, she loved learning, so she embroidered napkins, swept the classroom, and brought in firewood as a way to earn paper. At home, my grandmother stitched the sheets of precious newsprint paper together into a notebook for my mother.

"The teachers appreciated my mother's eagerness. Overlooking her worn-out clothes

and unruly hair, they nourished her hunger for knowledge. At the end of her elementary school years, the family of one of her schoolteachers offered my mother an opportunity for more schooling. However, she was unable to go and her formal education ended.

"Years later, when my mother was 27, her education blossomed when she met my father and he introduced her to the gospel. She loved learning through reading the scriptures. Relief Society also provided many opportunities for her to increase her knowledge.

"My mother instilled a love for learning in me, and I have graduated from college and am an elementary schoolteacher myself. In two generations, our family has been greatly blessed because, as a young girl, my mother learned to read and write. Her literacy skills opened the door for her to understand and embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. As a result, all of my mother's posterity has been blessed."

A Gospel Literacy Class

Sister Sainz's story is not unique. When people learn to read and write, they can grow in understanding of the gospel and bless the lives of others. Learning basic literacy skills helped Paul Imietehe of Nigeria, a convert to the Church, to better understand and share the gospel. He recalls:

"I joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Warri, Nigeria. My membership in the Church made me realize the need to learn to read and write. When my priesthood leaders extended assignments to me to give talks and say prayers, I would stay away from church. It was such a source of shame for me.



My grandmother, Carmen Mendoza, could not read or write," says Shirley Sainz, who has a college degree. "In two generations, our family has been greatly blessed because, as a young girl in Mexico, my mother learned to read and write."

Above, standing: Shirley's mother, Anita; Uncle Anselmo. Seated: Shirley's grandmother, Carmen Mendoza; Anselmo's wife, Delfina, and their two children.



WE CAN HELP

"I have done a little study on literacy in the world. A billion of the [six] billion people on earth cannot read or write. . . . What a tragedy—what a stark, miserable, and dark tragedy. To not be able to read, to understand, to write—what a tragedy. We can help to lift this curse. Things can be brought to pass to change this intolerable condition."

President Gordon B. Hinckley, Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley (1997), 314.



Paul Imietehe, a Nigerian sculptor, says, "Gospel literacy has built in me a strong desire to improve my formal education. It has also helped me understand the gospel better and made me better able to serve others."

"When I moved to Abuja, I saw Church books and magazines, and I felt a strong need to know how to read and write. I desired to read these publications that other members were reading and were happy about. Most of the Church members there gladly expressed themselves, sharing their testimonies of the gospel, and I wanted to be able to express the strong feelings I have of the truthfulness of the gospel. I knew then that I had to learn to read and write.

"One Sunday I decided to attend the Sunday School gospel literacy class. On my first day in class, I saw that the other students were mainly sisters and younger boys. I was the only adult man in the class. I was tempted to leave, but my strong desire to learn kept me there. Our teacher encouraged each of us to participate in reading from the gospel literacy manual and from the scriptures.

"I put much effort into learning to read. I read the scriptures and Church magazines. My understanding improved when I was called as second counselor in the Idu Branch Sunday School presidency. Initially, I was doubtful about my abilities. But as I was set apart, the branch president pronounced a blessing that I would have the ability to magnify the calling. During the setting apart, I had a feeling of confidence.

"Two weeks later, I was given the assignment to teach adult Sunday School. Although I worried about my abilities, I prepared all week long when I returned home from work and even during my break at work. When Sunday came and it was time to teach, I said a short silent prayer and asked Heavenly Father to lead me. When I opened my mouth to speak, I was surprised that the words just flowed. I thought I would stammer but did not.

"Most of the class members are more educated than I am, but their responses and the expressions on their faces encouraged me. I felt at peace throughout the class.

"Gospel literacy has built in me a strong desire to improve my formal education. It has also helped me understand the gospel better and made me better able to serve others.

"I am a sculptor by vocation and am working with a construction company, where I use my woodworking skills. In Nigeria, we have a proverb that says, 'The axe we use in tearing wood is so important we carry it with two hands and rest it on our shoulder.' The axe is too important to set down. That's how I feel about the Church and gospel literacy. I carry them with my two hands and my shoulder and cannot put them down.

"I am thankful for my branch leaders who encouraged me to learn, especially Brother Lawrence Monyei, my gospel literacy teacher."

Brother Imietehe learned to read and write in his gospel literacy class, and as a result his confidence grew and his testimony of the gospel became stronger. He has since blessed the lives of many members of his branch.

Can You Help?

The gospel literacy student manual, *Ye Shall Have My Words* (item no. 34476), is available in English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish. Those who could benefit most from it cannot read these words. Can you help them? ■

