



LITERACY MATTERS

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Literacy Matters is a recurring publication of Literacy Nassau, Inc.

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INTERVIEW WITH IRWIN SCHARF: ALL ABOUT CITIZENSHIP PREPARATION

(submitted by Kelly Siry)

Irwin Scharf has been volunteering as a teacher for citizenship preparation classes for the past two years. He has recently taken his dedication to our organization to the next level by joining our Board of Directors. His fresh ideas and passion for helping the immigrant community has brought a new perspective to the Board.

The process of applying for and preparing to become a United States citizen is complex and can often be overwhelming. The clients who we serve through application assistance and preparation classes are truly grateful to have us as their guide. I wanted to write an article as a window into the steps to becoming a citizen. I decided to interview Irwin since knows every aspect of the process and is there for his students every step of the way.

Q: What inspired you to teach a citizenship preparation class?

Irwin minored in government and history in college so he felt like his expertise could be valuable to the students applying for citizenship. Once he started teaching the class he felt how grateful the students were for his help and what a difference he was making in their lives.

Q: Describe briefly the process of becoming a United States citizen.

1. Fill out citizenship application. This takes roughly 2 hours and involves gathering many official documents to show proof of permanent residence in the United States for the past 5 years.

2. Go in to an assigned USCIS office for finger printing.

3. Six to nine months of study and preparation. The applicants should be well versed in the 100 questions about American history and civics. They should also study questions about geography. Study materials are available on USCIS.gov

4. Five part interview by US Citizenship and Immigration Services.

- English conversation (questions about family, personal life etc.)
- Verify answers given on application (Irwin goes over these questions and answers with his students so they truly understand why they are being asked.)
- Reading section (The applicants are given sentences to read aloud that contain specific US history and civics vocabulary.)
- Writing section with specific content and vocabulary (Must be phonetically correct which can be challenging when English is not their native language.)
- Generally the interviewer asks 6-10 questions to assess the applicant's knowledge of American History and Civics.

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THOUGHTS FROM THE CORNER OFFICE

Hi Everyone,

Well, I am back from my travels to Arizona and I must say, I now have a bit of spring fever. It was colder there than normal but still balmy compared to NY winter weather. We spent every day outdoors watching baseball, hiking, walking and exploring. I came home feeling invigorated, ready to take on new challenges, and more than anything, eager to get moving!

Many of you, like me, are winter hibernators. I hate being cold, and love nothing more than to curl up with a good book. I don't go out of my way to exercise. I prefer to be as comfortable as possible. But once spring hits, I wake up from the winter slumber and want to get busy! In fact, the first thing I did when my plane landed was to book a Zumba class.

My time outdoors did wonders to refresh my soul by reminding me that working out can be fun if you choose activities you enjoy! I recommend this strategy for use with your students. Learning English doesn't have to be boring or draining; with a little bit of creativity, it can be a blast!

Karen 😊



Arizona was great! It was so nice to have a change of scenery and spend some time in the fresh air!



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Q: What advice or tips would you give to someone preparing for citizenship?

Before you consider applying for citizenship make sure your knowledge of English is proficient. By attending a citizenship preparation class you get a clearer picture of where the questions originated. This allows for a better understanding of why these specific questions are being asked. Merely memorizing the answers is not enough. You should know why you want to be a United States citizen. Strategies for how to handle the interview properly are helpful, including learning ways to properly ask the interviewer for further information or to repeat a question if it is unclear.

Q: What is the most gratifying thing about helping people become United States citizens?

There are very few things in life that you can do to change someone's life. Being a part of helping them achieve something that has been a life-long ambition is truly wonderful. It is something that money can't buy, and it gives a lasting benefit that they will have for the rest of their lives.

Thanks to Irwin, over a dozen of his students have become citizens and he has been to all of their swearing in ceremonies!

Would you pass the civics portion of this exam? Test your knowledge on these questions! Be the first person to email: KSIRY@LITERACYNASSAU.ORG with the correct answers and win a \$75 gift card Il Luogo Ristorante in Lynbrook!

1. How many amendments does the Constitution have?
2. What are the two parts of the U.S. Congress?
3. How many justices are on the Supreme Court?
4. When was the Constitution written?
5. What territory did the United States buy from France in 1803?
6. Before he was President, Eisenhower was a general. What war was he in?



Irwin Scharf with a new citizen!

OG STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: HUNTER LUFT

(submitted by Kate Quijano)

Hunter is a 4th grade student in our OG tutoring program. He comes to our tutoring center three times a week after school to practice his reading and spelling skills. I am impressed by his commitment to attend every week and by all the progress he has made. When we started working together, Hunter was reading one syllable words with only short vowel sounds. After about 50 hours of instruction, he is now familiar with long and short vowels, r-controlled vowels, multisyllabic words, suffixes, and several spelling rules. He has also learned every letter (uppercase and lowercase) in cursive and is now working on practicing cursive to become more comfortable using it regularly. I have also seen his fluency and his confidence improve. His hard work here has paid off for him in school as well! His family has reported that he increased his reading level based on assessments completed in his school.

Hunter is very friendly and loves to play games. He has taught the game "snatch" to several of our other student/tutor pairs. In "snatch," you take turns pulling a card and reading a word, if you pull a "snatch" card, you get to take all your opponent's cards from them. The person with the most cards at the end of the game wins. It was great to see him share this game with his peers. We also began playing chess together as a bit of an icebreaker. Hunter loves playing chess at Literacy Nassau so much that he recently joined the chess club at his school.

Hunter also attended Literacy Nassau's Dyslexia Dash with his family and friends. We love to see so much support from a student's family and friends and are so glad that they continue to support our programs and to refer other children and teachers to us.

I interviewed Hunter to get to know him better and to gain his insight into our pilot OG program:

Q: How long have you been coming to Literacy Nassau and how did you find out about it?

A: Since September and my Mom told me about it.

Q: What kind of activities do you do at Literacy Nassau?

A: We play chess and games, learn sounds, syllable types, and new words.

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Kate with her OG student Hunter Luft

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Q: What do you like most about reading?

A: Nothing; I think it's hard.

Q: Has it gotten better since you started coming here?

A: Yes, my reading comprehension is better and I moved up a level in school.

Q: What advice would you give to new students coming to Literacy Nassau?

A: Always play chess while learning- it helps you learn to be a great thinker and your mind gets stronger.

Q: What advice do you have for new teachers at Literacy Nassau?

A: Play games with your students; they'll really enjoy it.

Q: What are some things you like to do?

A: Chess, math, sticker books; I'm good at sit ups and writing.

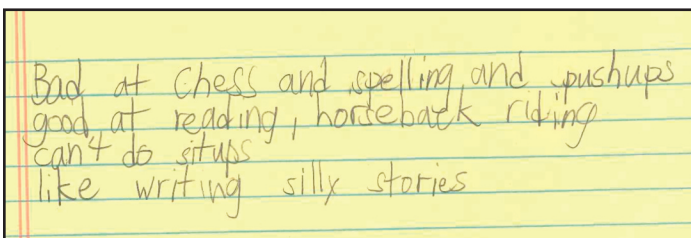
Q: What was the hardest thing you've learned here?

A: Suffixes and spelling rules.

Q: How is what you do at Literacy Nassau different from school?

A: In school, we only have 35 minutes for reading, here I have 60 minutes which is very important. And I don't get to play chess in school either!

Hunter was so interested in the interview process that he asked if he could interview me as well. He asked me questions about what I like to do and what strengths and weaknesses I have. He took notes as he interviewed me. He wrote independently and applied skills we learned about adding suffixes, doubling the final consonant in the base word, and dropping the silent e in the base word when needed. I thought it was a great example of how much progress he has made.



Above are Kate's interview responses handwritten by Hunter.



Frank Annese - Alissa Belize - Marilyn Benson - Joan Borruso - Kristen Brennan - Arianna Caradonna - Harvey Caust - Claire Deroche - Linda Diamond - Nancy Doyle - Eleanor Feingold - Alan Freeman - Mary Greenfield - Linda Hanson - Carol Horvat - Margaret Kemp - Robert Lanzisera - MaryLou Laurie - Maureen Lonergan - Mindy Mangot - Harri Meyers - Joyce Mongitore - Deborah Monteko - Carol Morris - Ronnie Packer - Aruna Paingankar - Ammu Paulose - Louis Pulido - Lauren Quinn - Janice Raven - Jennifer Reedy - Charlene Serenita - Sophia Shapiro - Mary Smith - Vickie V.Y. Stanco - Gladys Stuart - Peter Walsh - Christina Wrigley - Carolyn Zaremba

Cursive is Better

(submitted by Kim Nau)

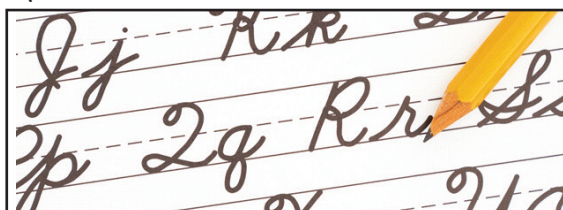
For students with dyslexia, cursive handwriting is an essential component in their educational success. According to the Orton Gillingham approach, handwriting should be taught as a multi-sensory process where students use their hand (tactile) to form the letters and students say the name of the letter as they write (auditory and visual).

When the hand is involved, there is a stronger association for learning and memory. This process can actually help to retrain, or rewire, the brain. When people write things, they remember them longer. Individuals with dyslexia struggle when learning to read because they are unable to connect sound and letter combinations. Cursive helps them overcome this difficulty by combining hand-eye coordination, fine motor skills, and memory and activates other brain functions.

The continuous flow of cursive improves writing speed, spelling, and common letter reversals. Cursive helps with easily confused letters such as, "b", "d", "p", and "q". In cursive, the letters are more distinctive than when they are written in manuscript form. It also enables students to distinguish between uppercase and lowercase letters better. The writing hand develops a physical memory of the letters and this can be demonstrated when we ask students practice writing a letter with their eyes closed. They almost always reproduce the letter correctly because they are relying solely on muscle memory.

A creative way to make handwriting more fun and multi-sensory is to use different foods to write on. For example, give a student a wooden skewer and have him/her practice writing a cursive letter in a tub of Cool Whip. Another suggestion is to give a child a plate of ketchup and have the student use a crispy French fry to write a cursive letter on the plate.

Often times in school, children are required to type their notes. Research has shown that those who type their notes tend to only process the content on a shallow level. Students who take notes by hand often digest the information better and use more critical thinking skills. I hope this article gives you the incentive to practice your own cursive handwriting a little more too!





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RESOURCE CORNER: DUOLINGO

(submitted by Cindy Cabrera)

Duolingo is a popular language-learning platform. Duolingo's mission is to make education free, fun, and accessible to all. You can use Duolingo on your computer or download the App on your phone or tablet.

This app is a great supplemental activity for students who are meeting with our tutors. With over 80 languages, students can utilize their first language to learn English. Students can learn new vocabulary words, grammar, and practice their speaking and listening skills. As the student progresses in the program, Duolingo provides immediate feedback on their performance. They provide high interest content such as games to motivate students. It's a personalized tutor on the go.

I highly recommend this program for your students as it offers continuity during breaks between tutoring sessions. Duolingo repeats information that students may have found difficult. It also offers progress monitoring for you, the tutor. This program is very helpful for our beginner learners, and you can learn any language (not just English!). I challenge you to use this app for yourself. Put yourself in your student's shoes. Happy learning!

A VERY SPECIAL THANK YOU!

(submitted by Karen Micciche)

One of the first lessons I ever learned about fund raising was that you never know who is in the room, so it's always important to convey your message with passion. Recently, my friend Olga Scileppi (who has been a part of Literacy Nassau for 10+ years) told me about her work with the Kiwanis Club. Kiwanis Clubs are known for their service to the community, and since Olga is an active member of her chapter, she invited me to come speak about Literacy Nassau. This sparked a "Kiwanis tour" for me, as I ended up going to not one, but 3 different clubs, and most recently, I was invited to speak at the Oceanside Kiwanettes meeting.

Similar to the Kiwanis Clubs, the Kiwanettes are a female-only group that provide service to the community. I was invited to speak about Literacy Nassau on a cold, January night at a restaurant in Rockville Centre. We discussed the importance of literacy and the role that the Oceanside Library plays in their community. When the presentation was over, I brought several bags of donated books to my car along with a small monetary donation from the Club.

The following week, I got a follow-up email from a woman who had been in the room the prior week named Pat Roth. In addition to being active with the Oceanside Kiwanettes, she is also a trustee for the Frances and Gertrude Levett Foundation, a family foundation with a passion for supporting charities that align with their funding priorities. She was intrigued with our work with learning disabled children and wanted to learn more, so I invited her to come to our facility for a visit. After touring the building and learning about our OG program, she invited me to apply for a grant. I am so pleased to report that we received \$49,850 from the foundation, which will enable us to train 9 new Orton Gillingham tutors. We will also use these funds to build a wheelchair-accessible ramp at our front entrance. We are so grateful to Pat Roth and the Frances and Gertrude Levett Family Foundation for this extremely generous gift!