

# Tackling illiteracy through literature and art

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It is said that ants, as minute as they are, eat one of the biggest animals in the wild, the elephant, bit by bit. Amazwi South African Museum of Literature, through its Education and Public Programmes (EPP), has been mobilising for the same about illiteracy.

## Reading Aloud All Subjects

It is not a secret that that illiteracy is always blamed on language teachers. Amazwi's EPP has a strong belief that every textbook has text meant to be read. Therefore, if other content subjects' teachers such as Mathematics, History, Biology, Geography and History could get on the bandwagon, illiteracy would slowly become a thing of the past. All those teachers, in every classroom at every school, need to do is to dedicate a mere 10 minutes every time by starting their lessons with a reading aloud session. That would result in every learner or student grasping the concepts while improving their reading ability. As usual, there will be those that will fumble and mumble. Should they see consistency in the process, they will start by reading at home or prior to the lesson. That would ensure that they do not get embarrassed when new words or concepts come up. After three (3) to six (6) months, the whole school would get used to the reading aloud programme. Language teachers would be relieved. Content subject teachers would no longer blame language teachers for their learners who are unable to read. Illiteracy would be a thing of the past.

## Using Performing Arts as the Learning Vehicle

The other approach that Amazwi's EPP is encouraging is for the schools, teachers, and learners to use the various forms of art to tackle some of the difficult topics, especially in content subjects or learning areas. Schools and tertiary institutions are encouraged to use storytelling, praise-singing, hip-hop, acting and other art forms to tackle theorems, essays such as the Truth and Reconciliation in History, water cycle in science, and many more. The basis would be to use what they know and like, such as their favourable songs. All that they need to do is to change the lyrics, replacing these with those of their studies. Many kids are always having earphones plugged in their ears already. They would now be listening to their own creative works. The advice is to do this privately, and not to be shared with anyone as it involves copyright and intellectual property. Once they grasp the process, they could easily venture into creating their own productions which they could share freely.

## Last Points

Teachers should not be too concerned, about not knowing, liking or understanding less of the creative arts. Learners and students are always eager when they know that the territory is not that of the teacher. Two good examples are the Amazwi's participation in the annual Scifest Africa. The museum runs the successful creative writing workshops and open mic sessions to tackle themes such as elements (periodic table).

The second example is the Amazwi's Prescribed Literature Festival. Secondary school learners are challenged to present on stage their prescribed setworks, using storytelling, poetry, drama and music.

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