

Information Sheet for Teachers

Light up
Literacy



Overall

With a population of over 12 million, Guatemala is the most populated country in Central America. It is also one of the poorest. Sixteen percent of the population earns less than a dollar a day and 56% live on less than \$2 a day. Over half the population is indigenous Maya. The remainder is of mixed Spanish and indigenous heritage, referred to in Guatemala as Ladino.

Literacy

Apart from Haiti, Guatemala has the lowest literacy rate in the Western Hemisphere. The literacy rate of all individuals over the age of 15 in Guatemala is 69%. In the rural indigenous communities where Reading Village works, this figure is more like 50%.

Country	Rate
Uruguay	98%
Argentina	97%
Cuba	97%
Guyana	97%
Costa Rica	96%
Chile	96%
Colombia	94%
Venezuela	93%
Panama	92%
Paraguay	92%
Ecuador	91%
Mexico	90%
Brazil	88%
Peru	88%
Bolivia	86%
Honduras	80%
El Salvador	80%
Belize	77%
Nicaragua	77%
Guatemala	69%

Social and cultural prejudices and barriers such as racism, gender discrimination and poverty, show up plainly in literacy statistics. With a literacy rate of 75% males are more likely to be able to read than females at 63%. Ladinos have a literacy rate of about 82% while Indians have a rate

of 58%. And Indians are more likely to be poor. 72% of the Indian population was classified as poor, compared with 44% of the non-Indians. So if you are an impoverished Maya woman you have only a 30% chance of being literate.

Roots of Illiteracy

Access to Books

Books are expensive and beyond the means of most Guatemalans. When Reading Village begins work in a community, the children have no books in their homes and their parents are likely illiterate, so no one reads to them. And there is no community library from which to borrow books.

The State of Pennsylvania has roughly the same population as Guatemala. Guatemala has 93 libraries. Pennsylvania has 650 – seven times as many.

The Public Education System

Because public education is not free in Guatemala, attendance figures are dismal. The outlays for enrollment fees, uniforms, transportation and school supplies can exceed a month's salary per child per year for a manual laborer. For a family with five children or more, education for all the kids is likely out of the question, and the girls often find themselves holding the short stick.

In the communities where Reading Village works, half the children fail the first grade. This is due to the fact that Maya children speak an indigenous language at home and speak very little Spanish on their first day of school, which is conducted in Spanish. Only 25% of children complete the sixth grade, and about 10% make it to high school.

Children fortunate enough to attend public school unfortunately receive a very poor education, the quality of which was deemed the worst in Latin America by the UN.

Only a high school diploma is required to teach, and the methodology used is dictation. Teachers were educated themselves without books and so primarily teach without books, giving dictation to students who copy sentence after sentence into their notebooks. When teachers do use books, the students do nothing more than copy them into their notebooks.

The Culture Does Not Value Reading

It's no wonder, then, that most Guatemalans grow up either having no relationship at all with books or associating books with drudgery and distaste. Of the literate population, only 1% actually read a book for pleasure last year. Not even teachers and librarians read for pleasure.