

Hotdogs and Hamburgers: Unlocking Life's Potential by Inspiring Literacy at Any Age,
by Rob Shindler

Review for MFC Book Club written by Kimberly Mach

Literacy.

The ability to read and write.

Education

Advancement

Equality

all tied together.

The latest read for the MFC Book Club was *Hotdogs and Hamburgers: Unlocking Life's Potential by Inspiring Literacy at Any Age*, by Rob Shindler. The book takes a close look at the issue of adult illiteracy in our nation. A successful lawyer, Rob found his way to Literacy Chicago seeking answers to his own questions about literacy. Rob's twelve-year-old son has a learning disability that impacts his reading. He could memorize the early reader words, could sound out some basic words, but could not pull the words together in sentences. He could not unlock the meaning of printed text. By the age of twelve, Rob's son had yet to read his first book. Feeling his son was facing a lifetime of illiteracy, Rob volunteered at Literacy Chicago hoping that by teaching adults to read he would be able to help his son. What he discovered was the connection between literacy, advancement and equality, and an entire group of people hidden in our nation.

Fourteen percent of the adult population in the United States cannot read. Twenty-one percent of the adult population in the United States reads below a fifth grade level. (National Institute of Literacy) These adults are native English speakers who have had access to the free public school system in our country.

The adult learners featured in the book do not place blame. Each of their stories shows a combination of factors that led them to become illiterate adults. Learning disabilities, poverty, desire, frustration, time, work responsibilities – all these things together can lead to illiteracy.

So why is literacy important now for adults? Why does it unlock life's potential?

Because literacy, the ability to read and write, allows us to access information.

Because accessing knowledge gives us independence.

Independence to read a bus schedule.

Independence to read an article on politics.

Independence to read instructions on a bottle of medicine.

Independence to complete and file tax returns.

Independence to fill out a lease or loan agreement.

Independence to complete a job application.

Literacy gives people choices in life where before none existed. It is the cornerstone of equality.

The power of this book is the personal stories presented as the reader gets to know each of Rob's students. They are memorable, real people who struggle and succeed, one step at a time. Their desire to learn and overcome barriers is infectious. As Rob describes in the book, "Someone who wouldn't walk a block to school years ago now takes two trains and a bus to get there."

For members of the MFC Book Club, these stories were the ones that touched us. It caused us to think about and reconsider our own lives and experiences. The personal stories and later successes of the adult students were a reminder of the power of literacy, which is the goal of this book.

The book is an advocate for adult literacy programs. These programs rely on volunteers like Rob Shindler to teach or tutor adults. The class sizes are usually small, with a maximum of eight students, and the position comes with ample training. Adult literacy programs across the state of Connecticut are looking for volunteers to tutor students. You do not need to hold a teaching degree or have experience teaching. The centers will provide you with training. It is a commitment, and one not to take lightly, but the rewards come back ten-fold.

If you are interested in reading *Hotdogs and Hamburgers: Unlocking Life's Potential by Inspiring Literacy at Any Age* there are copies available at Middlefield Federated Church.

The next book for the MFC Book Club is *The Death of Bees*, by Lisa O'Donnell. In this story two young girls make a most unusual choice when faced with the death of their parents. Please join us on June 8, at 7pm and see what all the talk is about.

-The MFC Book Club

guaranteed discussion to make you think