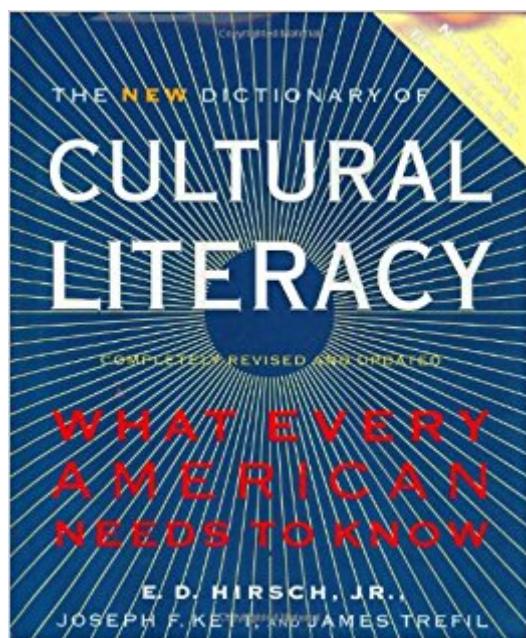


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# The New Dictionary Of Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs To Know



## Synopsis

In this fast-paced information age, how can Americans know what's really important and what's just a passing fashion? Now more than ever, we need a source that concisely sums up the knowledge that matters to Americans -- the people, places, ideas, and events that shape our cultural conversation. With more than six thousand entries, *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* is that invaluable source. Wireless technology. Gene therapy. NAFTA. In addition to the thousands of terms described in the original *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, here are more than five hundred new entries to bring Americans' bank of essential knowledge up to date. The original entries have been fully revised to reflect recent changes in world history and politics, American literature, and, especially, science and technology. Cultural icons that have stood the test of time (*Odysseus*, *Leaves of Grass*, Cleopatra, the Taj Mahal, D-Day) appear alongside entries on such varied concerns as cryptography, the digital divide, the European Union, Kwanzaa, pheromones, SPAM, Type A and Type B personalities, Web browsers, and much, much more. As our world becomes more global and interconnected, it grows smaller through the terms and touchstones that unite us. As E. D. Hirsch writes in the preface, "Community is built up of shared knowledge and values -- the same shared knowledge that is taken for granted when we read a book or newspaper, and that is also taken for granted as part of the fabric that connects us to one another." A delicious concoction of information for anyone who wants to be in the know, *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* brilliantly confirms once again that it is "an excellent piece of work . . . stimulating and enlightening" (New York Times) -- the most definitive and comprehensive family sourcebook of its kind.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This third edition of the 1988 reference, full of the same back-to-basics philosophy of the earlier volumes, promises to once again serve as a lightning rod for lively discussion. Divided into chapters such as "The Bible" (the editors point out that, regardless of one's religion, it is impossible to be culturally literate without some Biblical knowledge, just as one needs to know the Koran to be literate in Arab culture), "Technology," "Idioms," "World Geography," "Mythology and Folklore" (which includes everything from Medusa to Mickey Mouse) and "Literature in English," the book is a compendium of thumbnail definitions of the bedrock items that make up society. This latest volume includes about 500 (out of nearly 7,000) new entries, 200 of which are in the science and technology chapters. Other entries have been revised and updated. It's entertaining, snappily written, extremely handy and reasonably inclusive (although there are bound to be readers who will find issue with Hirsch's well-known conservative ideologies). Although the book will be a godsend for home schoolers and teachers looking to give students a basic reference, ultimately it may be seen as a giant list, along the same lines as the much-debated list of essential literature that Harold Bloom included in *The Western Canon*. Arguments over it will probably not center on its stylistics, but on who or what the editors consider essential e.g., Allen Ginsburg made the cut; Jack Kerouac did not. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Initially published in 1988 and revised in 1993, this book is given an exciting update whose 6900 entries include 1000 revised entries and 500 new ones, 200 of which are in science and technology alone. Given the book's aim to define "common cultural knowledge rather than to present a lexicon of words or topics," a revision was sorely needed; when the second edition appeared, almost no one knew what a web page was. The text is divided into sections by subject-e.g., fine arts, world politics, life sciences-each with a brief introduction; access is also aided by a thorough index. The entries themselves are complete, concise, and clearly written as well as extensively and effectively cross-referenced. All that need be said about this first-rate reference is that it is well written, well researched, and well worth the money. Students, general readers, trivia buffs, and those who like to have a great reference work at their fingertips will find it informative, useful, and just plain fun. Highly recommended. Manya S. Chylinski, Ernst & Young Ctr. for Business Knowledge, Boston Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I'd read about Mr. Hirsch's first book, Cultural Literacy, and was thrilled to find this one. I realized that I'd actually purchased many of his previous books when my kids were in grade and middle schools - this one just sealed the deal. This book is jam packed with every day items and things you forgot about, as well as things you were always planning on looking up. It is set up in dictionary style within the following categories: The Bible, Mythology and Folklore, Proverbs, Idioms, World Lit., Philosophy and Religion, Literature in English, Conventions of Written English, Fine Arts, World History to 1550, World History since 1550, American History to 1865, American History since 1865, World Politics, American Politics, World Geography, American Geography, Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology, Business and Economics, Physical Sciences and Mathematics, Earth Sciences, Life Sciences, Medicine and Health, and lastly, Technology. This is the 3rd edition, published in 2002. One of the nicest things I find about this book is the finite amount of information given in each paragraph - I love the internet as well as the next person, but sometimes, one can become exhausted by the amount of information that can assault you online.

This is a great reference book; I've read it three times, once for each edition. Having said that, I must point out its one huge flaw: its treatment of pop culture. This is briefly referenced in the Introduction to the First Edition: "Our collective memory of people and events in the fields of sports and entertainment is too ephemeral to take a permanent place in our cultural heritage. There are outstanding exceptions, however, and these are included in the dictionary." And in the previous paragraph: "If a person or event has been widely recognized for more than fifteen years or seems likely to be recognized by a majority of people fifteen years from now, that person or event deserved consideration in this dictionary." With those criteria in mind, here is a very partial list of the entries one will NOT find in "The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy": Lucille Ball, Johnny Carson, "Saturday Night Live," The Simpsons," Oprah Winfrey; Federico Fellini, James Cameron, Clint Eastwood, Howard Hughes, Stanley Kubrick; James Brown, Miles Davis, Michael Jackson, The Rolling Stones, Andrew Lloyd Webber, John Williams." Each of those people or things has been a cultural icon for 25-50 years, and will likely continue to be so for many years to come. And my favorite example of a pop-culture exclusion: James Bond. Seriously? Did the editors do any pop-culture research AT ALL? I estimate that I've heard references made to James Bond approximately a million times. (Compared to zero references to Burkina Faso, which DID make the cut.) Try doing a Google search on James Bond and see what comes up. All one needs to do is check out the Wikipedia article to discover the MASSIVE cultural impact of the James Bond franchise. But I suppose the editors of "The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy," if they thought about it all, decided it was

"ephemeral." I want to repeat, the editors did a great job on the traditional, high culture content of the book, which is about 95% of it. But in the very few pop culture entries they DID include, and in the many, many more they DIDN'T include but should have, they seem almost completely ignorant. They even made some obvious factual errors; for example, they listed one of the members as Monty Python as "Graham Chapin." His last name is CHAPMAN! It would have been incredibly easy to check that, but it seems that the editors just didn't care.

Heard Dr Hirsch being interviewed by Milt Rosenberg. Intrigued by Hirsch's "Core Knowledge" idea with respect to literacy. Have always been a fan of the "Harvard Classics" and the "Great Books". While surfing around, looking at the body of Dr Hirsch's work, found this dictionary and bought a used but almost new copy. No regrets. Although it literally is a dictionary; I am reading through it a few pages at a time. Learned a few things I didn't know before; however, I am pleasantly not surprised that I appear to be literate (at least through the two chapters completed thus far: The Bible and Mythology & Folklore). Important Note: This really is a dictionary. Not a book to literally read cover to cover in a few days, rather read a few pages every day.

Obviously this isn't a book for everyone but if you're a knowledge buff, or a buff about anything you'll love it. It's a great book if you want to be literate on any topic that might come up in conversation. Modern society is becoming increasingly complex, but this book has the core things that you should know. If you want to never find yourself in a position of ignorance, this is the place to start. Or if you're just a nerd and want to know everything, this book is for you. I like to play this game where one person reads the definition and your friends guess the word, it's really fun and you learn a lot about all sorts of things. It always feels awesome when you're right too.

We were suggested to buy this dictionary because my daughter is now on the Scholar Bowl Team for her school and the teacher said this is the best recourse we could get. I think that this dictionary should be in every home. It has just enough information about every single subject in it that it is to darn neat not to own. I am going to get a copy for my step kids eventually but I do not want their mother to think poorly of me, it is just a awesome book.

Great !

A great reference book. As a teacher, I use it weekly to explain idioms, art, or other information from

Western culture in a straight forward way. Purchase it as a student along with a dictionary of mythology.

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