

Test How 'Culturally Literate' You Are

E.D. Hirsch, professor emeritus of education and humanities at the University of Virginia, has become famous for his advocacy of ["cultural literacy."](#)

According to Hirsch, "To be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world." He emphasized that a "shared, canonical knowledge is inherently necessary to a literate democracy," and that, problematically, many Americans did not fully possess this knowledge. (In one experiment he conducted, his 17 and 18-year-old subjects didn't know who Grant and Lee were—and those subjects went to school in Richmond, Virginia!)

At the back of his 1987 book entitled *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, Hirsch provided a large list of the terms, references, and ideas that every educated American should be able to recognize and understand. Below, I have provided 50 items from this list. If pressed, how many could you define or briefly explain?

1. acrophobia

2. ad hoc

3. Baconian method

4. Battle of Stalingrad

5. College of Cardinals

6. comme il faut

7. De Gaulle, Charles

8. Doctor Livingstone, I presume?

9. ecumenism

10. Elysian Fields

11. fermentation

12. fringe benefit

13. Ganges River

14. Goebbels, Joseph

15. hedonism

16. Holy Roman Empire

17. in loco parentis

18. I came, I saw, I conquered.

19. Jacob and Esau

20. justification by faith

21. Khomeini, Ayatollah

22. Kitty Hawk

23. Lee, Robert E.

24. Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address

25. Madrid

26. montage

27. NAACP

28. nebula

29. Occam's razor

30. OPEC

31. parabola

32. Pope, Alexander

33. realpolitik

34. Remember the Alamo!

35. Sacco-Vanzetti case

36. Stradivarius

37. Taj Mahal (image)

38. tilt at windmills

39. understatement

40. utilitarianism

41. Valley Forge

42. V-J Day

43. War of the Roses

44. Whitney, Eli

45. xenophobia

46. xylem

47. Yorktown, Battle of

48. You can't have your cake and eat it too.

49. Zeitgeist

50. Zion, Mount