

**DOCUMENTARY: THE TYPEWRITER AND ITS EFFECTS ON  
LITERACY**

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## **Introduction**

The documentary includes a combination of actors and animated characters. The two little boys discuss the typewriter as the older brother tries to teach the younger brother what he knows about typewriters and their impact on women's literacy. The actors give the documentary a connection to the present and a meaningful yet simple reflection on the impact of the typewriter on literacy from the perspective of today's child. The animated characters provide a more analytical approach with less emotion and more facts about the typewriter and its implications for literacy. Characters often refer to other sources, which are listed in the references section of the accompanying document. The video alternates between the two scenes to keep the viewer engaged and reflective about the typewriter, its impact on literacy and finally its effect on other modern day inventions and how it continues to impact literacy today.

## Script

*(In a living room. Valentino brings a keyboard to his brother)*

**Valentino: Look Rasdre!**

**Rasdre: It's kind of like a typewriter!**

**The most important thing that a typewriter did was help women find jobs in offices. Are you listening Valentino? You have to listen. This is very-very serious.**

*(Near a blue background)*

**Female Animated Character 1:**

In eighteen sixty-eight, Christopher Latham Sholes made a writing machine in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He presented the machine to Remington and Sons in 1873 and released it in 1874.

*(In the Living Room)*

**Valentino: What's that?**

**Rasdre:** That's the shift key. It's used to make capital letters. A long time ago typewriters did not have a shift key.

*(In the Office)*

**Male Animated Character 1:**

Nowadays, it's easy to switch from Capitals to small letters. But typewriters did not always have the SHIFT key.

**Female Animated Character 1:**

The first typewriter with a Shift Key was Remington number 2.

**Rasdre:** In 1878, Remington number 2 was the first keyboard with a shift key and it was very successful.

**Female Animated Character 1:**

Here's what Remington number 2 looked like.

**Male Animated Character 2:**

Underwood looked like this! Followed by the IBM Selectric, in 1960, which used a single-element mechanism and was very successful. It looked like this!

*Question on the screen. "Do you know Mark Twain?"*

*(In the Living Room)*

**Rasandre:**

Mark Twain? Of Course! He was the first to buy a typing machine and the first to submit a typed novel to his publisher. Are you listening Valentino? The first novel he sent was "Life on the Mississippi".

**Female Animated Character 2:**

By 1930 over 95 percent of typists were women while they only made up 6 percent of bookkeepers, cashiers and accountants.

*(In the Living Room)*

**Rasandre:**

Valentino. Did you know that 95 % of typists were women? Are you listening Valentino? Other jobs like book-keepers and cashiers only had 6 % women.

*(In the Office)*

**Female Animated Character 2:**

Although women were dominating the typing industry rapidly, female employment was increasing quickly in all clerical occupations and its existence didn't create the opportunity. Instead, typewriters facilitated female entrance into the work force.

*(Female Animated Character 3 enters)*

**Female Animated Character 3:**

I once read a book called Evolution of the typewriter. It argues that the typewriter enabled freedom and speed of expression without the need to sacrifice clarity and exactness.

**Female Animated Character 2:**

This also bridges the gap between oral and literate culture described by Ong (1982) because what is written can now be recorded or pronounced at almost the same speed as it could be said.

**Female Animated Character 3:**

Literacy may still structure the way that we speak, but it no longer slows down the process of communicating ideas as a result of the typewriter.

**Female Animated Character 2:**

Consequently the typewriter increased the demand for literacy and the will to become literate.

**Female Animated Character 3:**

The book "Gramophone, Film, Typewriter", makes a reference to an interesting remark regarding female typewriters by Elizabeth Forster of the University of Zurich.

**Female Animated Character 2:**

You sure read a lot of books, Jenny. Since I have a friend like you, I don't even need to go to the library! What does Mrs. Forster say?

**Female Animated Character 3:**

She claims that “men very much appreciated having emancipated women of the time at universities and libraries as secretaries and assistants.” (Kitler, 1999)

*(In the Living Room)*

**Rasandre:**

First of all, they though that men were better than women. But that’s not true! They thought that girls should not be working or get a lot of money because they would soon leave their job after they have babies.

**Female Animated Character 2:**

Even though men viewed typewriters and female literacy as a “help” to them, I wonder if such a movement also had an impact for women wishing to go beyond this role...

**Female Animated Character 3:**

Perhaps. Kitler even goes so far as to say that women working as typewriters often suffered break up in their personal relationships or divorce. Such personal misfortune often resulted in successful careers as female authors and therefore a contribution to female literacy through positive role-models.

*(Inside an Office with many people)*

**Female Animated Character 4:**

The typewriter was used at Ohio State University Right to Read for an adult reading lesson.

**Male Animated Character 2:**

It helped the students that were reading too fast to slow down and study each word closely.

**Female Animated Character 5:**

Oh yeah! I'm reading it here on page 585 on JSTOR.ORG.

“The eye/hand motor coordination needed to locate the correct letter on the keyboard, the sensory involvement of touching and pushing that key, and the satisfying “thwack” heard when the key strikes the paper all help to reinforce neurologically the basic tasks beginning readers must learn.” (Crowley and Tresner, 1980, p. 585)

**Male Animated Character 3:**

Some of the skills that the typewriter helps improve are discriminating between capital and small letters, spacing between and within words, improvement in both spelling and form.

**Female Animated Character 5:**

Crowley and Tresner (1980) explain that the novelty of the typewriter motivated students. In other words, students wanted to learn with the typewriter because it was new!

*(In the Living Room)*

**Rasandre:**

Oh! It's kind of like the iPad! Right Valentino?

**Valentino:**

Yes!

*(In the Office)*

**Male Animated Character 1:**

I found a book titled "Women's place is at the typewriter" online. Allow me to read an interesting excerpt from this book. "

First of all, there was the widespread belief that women were simply, and by the very nature of things, inferior to men. In addition, women were often thought to be working for "pin money" with which to make frivolous purchases. "Since they were not thought to be supporting themselves or their families, there was nothing the matter with paying them low wages. Then there was the argument that women were not serious members of the labor force: they would be returning to an exclusively domestic life either as soon as they married or, at the latest, as soon as they bore children. Such transient workers did not deserve higher wage with which an employer might try to attract and keep a more steadfast male worker. Finally, women's depressed wages did drive them back into the home, where they again became available to fill a subordinate position within the domestic division of labor. Whether or not this worked to the ultimate benefit of men, it certainly provided them with short-term benefits.'" (Margery, 2010, p.56)

**Female Animated Character 3:**

That is an interesting perspective indeed. It seems that the invention of the typewriter both liberated and further limited women.

**Female Animated Character 3:**

In any case the typewriter had an impact on literacy even if it was accompanied with some setbacks or cultural tensions as it became integrated in society's existing preconception.

**Male Animated Character 1:**

Looking over the impact of the typewriter on literacy in North America, it is interesting to note that although the typewriter existed in Asia and many forms and versions of its creation existed prior to Remington number 2, it had the most noticeable impact on the development of female literacy in North America.

**Female Animated Character 5:**

Why is that?

**Male Animated Character 1:**

Looking over the impact of the typewriter on literacy in North America, it is interesting to note that although the typewriter existed in Asia and many forms and versions of its creation existed prior to Remington number 2, it had the most noticeable impact on the development of female literacy in North America. Aside from the invention, the time and tendency in society or cultural movement is crucial for the manifestation of a change, which is never entirely enabled but often facilitated by a particular invention. In this case, the typewriter did not directly improve literacy or even create jobs for women.

**Female Animated Character 5:**

But I thought that you said it did?

**Male Animated Character 1:**

I mean that the cultural development and movement was moving in this direction with or without the typewriter. The typewriter's contribution was the acceleration or facilitation of the movement towards literacy.

*(In the Living Room)*

**Rasandre:**

When I grow up, I am going to make an invention that helps people even more than the typewriter.

I want to make something that helps people even more than a typewriter.

**Female Animated Character 5:**

The typewriter continues to impact literacy today for one could argue that it also gave birth to the modern day keyboard that we continue to use on laptops and desktops as well as the modified version of a touchscreen keyboard that we find on tablets and phones. Further studies in autocorrect and word prediction in touchscreen keyboards as a continuation of the invention of the typewriter and its effects on literacy may be interesting to future educators and students.

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