



## Deciphering the Indecipherable

CATHY DRENNAN wasn't like other kids when she was young. At dinner parties and family gatherings, Drennan would, as you'd expect, be seated at the "kids table." But she didn't want to be at the kids table. She wanted to sit with the adults, where the conversation interested her. Drennan - a self-described "INTELLECTUAL, geeky kid" - had a bright future ahead of her, until she started FIRST GRADE and quickly realized she wasn't like other kids.

Who wasn't like other kids? (Cathy Drennan)

Drennan described herself as a geeky and \_\_\_\_ kid. (Intellectual)

When did Drennan realize she wasn't like other kids? (First grade)

At first, Drennan was placed in the HIGHEST reading group, but she had trouble learning to read. So, the teachers bumped her down a level. She continued to struggle and was bumped down again...and again...and again...and again until she was at the bottom. This didn't add up, so Drennan's mother did some research. She found a SPECIALIST (authority, professional, consultant) who gave them the answer they were looking for. Cathy Drennan had SEVERE DYSLEXIA.



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Drennan was placed in the \_\_\_ reading group when she started school. (Highest)

Her mother found a \_\_\_ who gave the diagnosis. (Specialist)

What was the diagnosis? (Severe Dyslexia)

What is another word for “specialist?” (Authority, Professional, Consultant)

Dr. SALLY SHAYWITZ of Yale University and her husband, Dr. BENNETT Shaywitz, began tracking the reading capability of more than 400 random KINDERGARTNERS in 1983. They’re still tracking them today. When they first started, they expected about 20 would have dyslexia. Their findings yielded a much higher number. 30? No. 40? Try 80. One in five. But their most important finding showed that there is no link between dyslexia and intelligence.

What person was mentioned at the very beginning of this paragraph? (Dr. Sally Shaywitz)

What is the name of Dr. Shaywitz’s husband? (Bennett)

At what grade level did they start tracking? (Kindergartners)

They said there is no link between two things. Name one. (Dyslexia, Intelligence)

How long ago did they begin their study? (\_\_\_\_ - 1983 = \_\_\_\_ years)

The Shaywitz findings show how far we have come in diagnosing dyslexia. In the 19th century, doctors called dyslexia “WORD BLINDNESS.” They blamed the condition on poor eyesight. While those doctors got part of the equation (problem, issue) right, they were missing a few components. For typical readers, the left side of the brain is activated whenever words are read. For dyslexic readers, there is an INEFFICIENT functioning that hinders this process. In severe cases, like Cathy Drennan, a page full of words turns into a blotch of INDECIPHERABLE shapes.

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"I have dyslexia" was extremely hard for me to say to anyone. It was like saying "I am stupid." I didn't believe that I am stupid. I didn't know if the person I was telling understood what it means to have dyslexia. I once told a close friend and her response was "I didn't know you weren't normal."

What did doctors use to call dyslexia? (Word blindness)

For dyslexic readers, there is an \_\_\_ functioning in their brain. (Inefficient)

In severe cases, words turn into a blotch of \_\_\_ shapes. (Indecipherable)

What is another word for "equation?" (Problem, Issue)

What side of the brain is responsible for creativity? (Right)

Dr. LAURA CASSIDY has done extensive (broad, comprehensive, lengthy) research regarding dyslexia, partly because her daughter, Kate, failed reading as a first grader. She couldn't write it, say it, or read it. Dr. Cassidy, a retired SURGEON, would not allow her daughter to continue to struggle and hired a private TUTOR. Today, Kate is doing much better, but is still working through the obstacles of the condition.

Who has done extensive research into dyslexia? (Dr. Laura Cassidy)

Dr. Cassidy is a retired \_\_\_\_\_. (Surgeon)

She hired a private \_\_\_ to help her daughter. (Tutor)

What is another word for "extensive?" (Broad, Comprehensive, Lengthy)

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As she watched her daughter struggle, Dr. Cassidy knew she had to use her resources and knowledge to help others. In 2013, she opened the LOUISIANA Key Academy, a public charter school in BATON ROUGE for dyslexic students. EMMY YOUNGS, a student at the Academy, said reading was her “worst nightmare.” MACKENZYE JUPITER, described her experiences at her previous school: “It made me feel, like a little bit dumb and stupid that I couldn’t do [as] much things as all the other kids could do.” When asked if she knew she wasn’t dumb and stupid, Jupiter replied, “Maybe.”

What is the name of Dr. Cassidy’s school? (Louisiana Key Academy)

Where is this school located? (Baton Rouge)

The school opened in what year? (2013)

Name one of the two young girls we talked about. (Emmy Youngs, Mackenzie Jupiter)

What are your thoughts on Mackenzie Jupiter’s comments?

The effects of dyslexia reach far beyond the classrooms. Dr. Cassidy said that there is a “[diminished] high school graduation, diminished entry into college as well as college graduation” among dyslexic students. A sobering byproduct of this condition is that a good amount of those diagnosed end up in prison. More than **50** percent of inmates in ELAYN Hunt Correctional Center are dyslexic. Those numbers are similar to an earlier prison study conducted in TEXAS.

What correctional center underwent a study about its inmates? (Elayn Hunt)

What percentage of its inmate population were dyslexic? (50 percent)

A similar study took place in what state? (Texas)

Tell me one of the effects of dyslexia beyond the classroom. (Diminished high school graduation, Diminished entry into college, Diminished college graduation)

What do you think the connection is between inmates and dyslexia?

Dr. Cassidy said, “If your SELF-ESTEEM is battered (beaten, bruised, crushed) and you're not really learning, and you have an option to go on the streets, you go to the streets.” Inmate JONATHAN WILSON - who never finished high school - is one of those who never

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got the help he needed. Wilson, who wasn't diagnosed with dyslexia until he was INCARCERATED, said it was hard for him to understand the words in school.

Dr. Cassidy said that if your \_\_\_ is battered, you'll look for other options. (Self-esteem)  
What inmate did we talk about? (Jonathan Wilson)  
Wilson wasn't diagnosed until he was \_\_\_\_\_. (Incarcerated)  
What is another word for "battered?" (Beaten, Bruised, Crushed)

And to anyone who questions why society should care about dyslexia in prisons, Dr. Cassidy cites the bigger PICTURE. "It's a life. Why wouldn't you want to help the life?" She asserts that if these inmates are given the tools they need, RECIDIVISM - the tendency of a convicted criminal to reoffend - will decrease.

Dr. Cassidy implores people to look at the bigger \_\_\_\_\_. (Picture)  
What is "the tendency of a convicted criminal to reoffend?" (Recidivism)  
OR  
What is recidivism? (The tendency of a convicted criminal to reoffend)  
Giving inmates the tools, they need will help \_\_\_ recidivism. (Decrease)  
What else do you think could help people struggling with dyslexia?

In DECEMBER 2018, a first step was taken to help these inmates when the FIRST STEP Act was signed into law; much in part of Dr. Cassidy's husband, BILL CASSIDY, a U.S. Senator. Among other items, the law calls for dyslexia screenings in prisons. Wilson, who is in the midst of a sentence, said he'd like to design things once he gets out.

What act was signed into law? (First Step Act)  
When was the First Step Act signed? (December 2018)  
Who is Dr. Cassidy's husband? (Bill Cassidy)  
What does the law call for? (Dyslexia screenings in prison)  
What does Wilson want to do when he completes his sentence?

And as for Cathy Drennan, she eventually taught herself how to read in the SIXTH grade. She memorized the shape of words and when she sees that shape, she knows what it sounds like. Drennan credits her dyslexia for making her a better SCIENTIST. She said, "The way that I learned to view the world from learning to read, memorizing these shapes, and thinking... 'What is this code?' definitely [helped]." And for those who may be skeptical...they can visit her in CAMBRIDGE, Massachusetts where she is a tenured professor of chemistry and biology at MIT.

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When did Drennan teach herself how to read? (Sixth grade)  
Drennan said her dyslexia has made her a better \_\_\_\_\_. (Scientist)  
Drennan teaches in what city? (Cambridge)  
Name one of the subjects she teaches. (Chemistry, Biology)

### Creative Writing:

Write from the perspective of the dyslexic brain. What do you want to say to someone who doesn't understand your experience?

Drennan used her "disadvantage" to her advantage. Tell me about something else that could be seen in the same light.



By: Tom Foti, S2C Practitioner, Inside Voice, Philadelphia PA

### Source:

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cracking-the-code-of-dyslexia/>

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