



The Phyllis Schlafly Report



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How Parents Can Evaluate Textbooks

Although schools are locally controlled, and teachers are usually your friendly neighbors, most textbooks, reading materials, and teaching guides have a national scope, and their blatant biases have caused widespread alarm. Here is a checklist of textbook biases which parents can look for in evaluating their children's textbooks.

Does the textbook help the student to develop a positive attitude, self-confidence and maturity, and a willingness to work hard to achieve success in life? Or, does it promote a negative attitude, emotional isolation, fear of the future, an obsessive preoccupation with tragedy and death, or despair in coping with life?

Does it describe America as an unjust society, unfair to economic or racial groups or to women, rather than telling the truth that America has given more freedom and opportunity to more people than any nation in the history of the world; and that is why millions of people want to immigrate here, whereas Communist countries have to build barbed-wire fences to keep people from fleeing?

Does the textbook debunk the American private enterprise system and lead the child to believe that socialism is fairer and better? Does it propagandize for leftwing domestic spending programs, while attacking defense spending and economy in government?

Does it downgrade patriotism and lead the child to believe that other nations have better systems, or that some type of world government or UN-control would be superior to ours? Does it propagandize for leftwing liberal personalities (such as Presidents Kennedy and Johnson), while belittling conservative leaders (such as President Reagan) or downgrading American heroes (such as Patrick Henry and John Paul Jones)?

Does it teach the child, directly or indirectly, that we must not be judgmental about moral questions, and that ethical questions depend on the situation? Or does it promote time-tested moral values such as the golden rule, honesty is the best policy, respect for other people and their property, and cleanliness in mind and body?

Does it attack religion and religious values, directly or indirectly, by teaching that God did *not* create the world, or that pre-marital sex is "responsible" just so long

as you don't have a baby, or that there is no eternal standard of right and wrong?

In describing the family, does it lead the child to believe that "alternative lifestyles" (immoral living arrangements) should be accepted and respected on a par with a real family? Does it tend to erase the child's sense of gender identity and propagandize for a sex-neutered society which refuses to respect the eternal difference between men and women and their different career choices?

Those who defend the right of teachers and textbooks to impose their values on the children under their care often hide behind such shibboleths as "academic freedom," "separation of church and state," or "professionalism" as opposed to parental interference. Those are just slogans to dodge the issue that many textbooks are deliberately designed to change children's values and attitudes and to indoctrinate them with political propaganda, rather than to teach knowledge or basic skills.

The values and attitudes taught in the elementary years, overtly and subliminally, clearly mold the adult. Here is how Khrushchev's autobiography, *Khrushchev Remembers*, describes how the school weaned one child away from his parents and their values, and set him on the road to become the most powerful and ruthless Communist in the world.

"My school teacher was woman named Lydia Shchegchenko. She was a revolutionary. She was also an atheist. She instilled in me my first political consciousness and began to counteract the effects of my strict religious upbringing. My mother was very religious. I remember being taught to kneel and pray. When we were taught to read, we read the scriptures. But Lydia Shchegchenko set me on a path which took me away from all that."

Parents can see before their eyes that many schools have driven a wedge between the child and his parents, and alienated him from "the faith of our fathers." Parents know that federal spending on education is not only *not* the solution; it is part of the problem. And they thank President Reagan for addressing the problem *without* calling for more taxes or federal spending.

Schools Compared With 40 Years Ago

As part of the current national debate on education, the *New York Times* presented a chart showing a comparison of "who learns what when." The chart showed at which grades American and Japanese students are usually taught particular subjects.

It is interesting to know what is happening in foreign lands, but it is not wholly comparative because of other differences between Japanese and American educational systems in orientation, methodology, and purpose. It would have been far more instructive if the *New York Times* chart had compared public schools in America today and 40 years ago.

Let's go down the list and compare what the *Times* says is the norm in today's U.S. schools with what I was taught in ordinary elementary public schools in mid-America 40 years ago. The difference is depressing.

According to the *Times*, today's American children are taught the multiplication tables (1 through 10) in the fourth grade. I was taught the multiplication tables (1 through 12) in the third grade; and the whole class knew their tables through 12×12 .

According to the *Times*, today's American children are taught to add and subtract with fractions in the fifth grade; I was taught fractions in the fourth grade. Today's children are taught to calculate percentages in the sixth or seventh grades; I was taught percentages in the fifth grade.

According to the *Times*, U.S. children are taught to write paragraphs in the second grade; I was taught this in the first grade.

According to the *Times*, U.S. children are taught to write creative essays in the ninth grade. I was taught this in the fourth grade in what is now an inner city ghetto public school. My most vivid memory of the fourth grade is being required to write a short creative essay *daily*.

Writing is the finest learning experience because it forces a pupil to organize his thoughts and put them on paper in a form that is intelligible to others. An important fringe benefit of early training in creative writing is the development of perfection in grammar and spelling.

It is curious that the *Times* chart did not include the most fundamental of all the basic skills taught in elementary schools, namely, reading. I was taught to read anything and everything well (including the newspaper and encyclopedia) in the first grade, and never needed to study "reading" again.

Today's American children, however, hobble along trying to learn to read a few hundred new words per year in the first through fourth grades. After that, some children must take a course practically unheard of 40 years ago called "remedial reading." The decline in the quality of American schools has nothing to do with funding or public support or teacher-student ratio. Several years of the excellent public school education I received was in classrooms where one teacher taught two full grades in the same room.

The deterioration of education is the most shocking of all the changes that have taken place in the United States over the last few decades. The American people have uncomplainingly paid billions of dollars a year in taxes to build and staff supposedly better schools to educate their children.

Yet they've been cheated by a massive rip-off that

makes any sale of shoddy or defective merchandise by corporations insignificant by comparison. No corporation could get by with consistently reducing the value of its product while regularly raising its price every year.

American inventive genius has had to develop memory typewriters for secretaries who must retype pages again and again until they clean up all their mistakes; word processor programs to locate misspelled words (for secretaries who not only cannot spell but can't even spell well enough to find the words in the dictionary); and cash registers that automatically calculate the change due a customer's payment.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education concluded that a "rising tide of mediocrity" threatens our very future as a nation and as a people. That's putting it too casually; functional illiteracy threatens millions of Americans today in their ability to get and hold a job here and now.

Everybody's been cheated by the deterioration in the quality of education in America. And the ones cheated most of all are those who have a high school diploma but have not been taught what Americans up to a generation ago had learned by the sixth grade.

Forcing Students To Write "Journals"

Assigning pupils the task of writing in a daily journal, or diary, has become quite fashionable in schools which emphasize fads and trends instead of the pursuit of learning. Forcing the students to write a journal is a major technique used in *all* the classroom courses in nuclear war, where it is obvious that it is a major device in the process of changing children's attitudes about the Bomb (rather than educating them with facts about weapons and war).

Since the mere assignment of writing a journal may sound harmless or even educational, it is very revealing to examine a "Student Guide to Writing a Journal." Fortunately, one parent sent me a copy of the twelve-page instructional guide which was given to her eighth grade child.

Of course, writing is one of the most important skills that any school can teach a child. Elementary education should include teaching the child how to write his thoughts clearly and logically, and to handle the English language in written form.

It is clear from this "Student Guide" that "writing a journal" has nothing whatsoever to do with training in writing skills. The instructions state explicitly, "Don't worry too much about style or correctness." The student is encouraged to ignore "regular sentence structure, punctuation, logical sequences and so forth." The student is promised that the teacher who reads the journal will not "criticize or even evaluate your writing."

If a child is writing a journal without regard to style or correctness (of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, logical sequence, facts, etc.), then student journals must have a purpose that has nothing to do with writing skills. It is clear from the 12 pages of instruction that the purpose is to get the child to record on paper — in a very confidential and uninhibited way — how he *feels* about other people and events. The word "feel" appears repeatedly in the instructions.

The clear message of the instructions is, "The journal is not so much a point-by-point description of

your daily activities as how you think and feel about them." Don't just record facts and events; tell how you *feel* about them.

The instructions give several handwritten samples to show the child what sorts of things he is expected to write in his journal. All the samples relate depressing events and the child's unhappy reactions. For example, "I just got mad. I was still steaming at the end of the day." "What a bad day yesterday turned out to be. Going home was a monster." "I really felt like turning the hose on him. Sometimes he really makes me mad." "I felt hurt and angry with her."

Writing this kind of journal induces the child to remember, re-create in his mind and re-live his own unpleasant experiences so they will remain vivid in his memory and can be re-lived again and again. The journal does not allow the child to forget his gloomy moments so that happier and more constructive memories will take their place.

Writing the journal induces the child to nurture and build his own feelings of anger, fear, hate, guilt, revenge, and frustration. Writing a journal encourages the child to share his innermost thoughts and feelings with some adult in the school administration (identified in the instructions as a "correspondent") rather than with his parents.

This kind of journal writing is a grievous invasion of the child's privacy. It encourages the child to report events and attitudes within the home that are clearly none of the school's business, and even to discuss the child's personal reaction "to a recent rap session you've had with your parents."

Scaring Children About the Bomb

Parents are getting a new answer to the age-old question they ask their children, "What did you learn in school today?" Children in public and private elementary and secondary schools are answering, "Oh, we're learning about the Bomb."

The current mushrooming in the schools of scary courses, lectures, assigned reading, and games about nuclear war is a cruel psychological trick being played on children. The promoters of these nuclear war courses pretend that they are simply responding to children's fears about war. On the contrary, the children only started worrying about nuclear war *after* adults told them to be afraid.

The curricula on nuclear war now being forced down the throats of unsuspecting children in many schools this fall were recently evaluated by one of the country's foremost psychiatrists. He is Dr. Harold M. Voth, chief of staff at the Veterans Medical Center in Topeka, Kansas, a clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of Kansas, and a faculty member of the Menninger School of Psychiatry in Topeka.

It is human nature to try to arrive at solutions when presented with problems. But, Dr. Voth says, "the end point of all these exercises is a blind alley, for there are no solutions for the young to find. The sense of frustration can only be great for those who take these curricula seriously."

"When there are no solutions to life's problems," he continues, "despair eventually follows, and then comes a sense of defeat and depression. I can see no other end point for those youngsters who are exposed to this

material."

The lessons and exercises in the curricula are often extremely complex, and they imply that the bomb will eventually go off. Dr. Voth warns that "children should not be subjected to such nonsense. Such exercises will seriously aggravate the sense of despair many young people already feel about life."

Dr. Voth concludes: "Bluntly put, these programs can only scare the wits out of young people, challenge them with unsolvable problems, and ultimately lead to a sense of hopelessness about the future."

Of course, Dr. Voth doesn't deny the nuclear threat to mankind. But, he says, "to expose millions of children to the horrors of a nuclear war, thereby promoting a massive response of resignation, defeatism, and reaction formation, can only substantially add to the devitalization of our nation."

Often the simplest truths are the most obvious. "If the world's greatest statesmen are having difficulty solving international relations and removing the threat of nuclear destruction," Dr. Voth says, "how in the world can people in their right minds expect children to make constructive contributions to these grave issues, especially when such a high percentage of those children are already troubled within themselves and do not live within a solid, secure home?"

He points out that even "the most psychologically secure child, from the most stable and secure family, is no match for the overwhelming issues being presented to them. Even the healthiest children are also very likely to react with despair."

Based on his 30 professional years in psychiatry, Dr. Voth states unequivocally that "personality factors have a powerful impact on career choices. A special kind of personality is required to be able to stand firm during tough negotiating processes."

The nuclear war courses tell the children in a hundred overt and subliminal ways that military people are bad, that the Pentagon is occupied by greedy, power-hungry monsters, and that these elements should be removed from our society. The children are led to believe that, "if we will lay down our arms, the world will be a safe place in which to live and prosper." Dr. Voth reminds us that "perhaps the world will some day be such a place, but it is not such a place now."

Dr. Voth believes that our nuclear dilemma will eventually be solved. He does not think we will blow each other up. But, he says, "one thing I know for certain is that the negotiations which will eventually lead to this happy day will never succeed if we populate our nation with devitalized people and fill them with despair about the future during their developmental years."

Dr. Voth urges that children "learn the basics first and then the more difficult fields later, after having achieved the maturity to comprehend them. Then, as adults, they will possess sufficient courage and knowledge of the human condition to enter into negotiations with other nations — not from a position of passivity, despair, fear and trembling, but from a position of courage, reason, strength, competence, and hope for the future."

Eye-Witness Report From the Classroom

As a result of our original exposé of the nuclear war classroom courses in the August 1983 *Phyllis Schlafly*

Report, we received some very interesting mail. One correspondent wrote:

"In one of your recent reports, you addressed the defeatist mentality inculcated in our children concerning nuclear war. At that time, I thought you were being alarmist and overstating your point. My thinking has radically changed!"

Continuing, my correspondent wrote: "In my eleventh grade Sunday school class, the students were giving me almost verbatim the same defeatist propaganda you wrote about. They evinced fear that they had no future, that bringing children into the world to suffer nuclear devastation was cruel, and that any plans or dreams they had for their lives were futile."

My correspondent put his finger on the problem: "Somebody has done a criminal thing to these kids, undermining their sense of worth and their ambitions while trying to indoctrinate them in anti-family, anti-procreative, and anti-American propaganda. These are good kids, and the more I heard, the more upset and angry I became. This whole scheme has been hatched in the public schools funded by our tax dollars, yet how many parents know about it?"

This parent-teacher concluded, "Please continue your fight on this issue. You must continue to work to stop the sense of hopelessness with which liberal educators persecute our children. No wonder so many commit suicide!"

Why Teachers Can't Teach

This Report has repeatedly complained that today's children can't read, write, spell, add, subtract, and do other elementary basic skills as well as children of a generation ago. We've discussed the inadequacies of the schools and the textbooks. This has inspired a letter from one of our readers who approaches the subject from the point of view of the teacher, and she makes some valid points in defense of the teacher.

"Did it ever occur to anyone why teachers can't teach?" she asks. "Let me inform you. Let's begin first with the child and his/her needs." For starters, she gives six principles.

"(1) There should never be over 20 children in a first grade classroom where we are laying the foundation and children need lots of individual help. (2) Their day should begin around 8 o'clock when they are alert — not when the bus schedule says 8:45. (3) They should have had a decent breakfast.

"(4) They should not be up half the night watching HBO, CINEMAX, Showtime, etc. (I can't compete with sex and violence.) (5) They should not have to be moved into their fourth first grade in one year. (6) Parents should back teachers in their efforts for discipline."

"Another reason teachers can't teach," according to my correspondent, "is the frustration. I, for example, went to school and was trained to teach, not to be a glorified babysitter. Many parents want their children sent on to first grade against the recommendation of the kindergarten teacher because (are you ready?) mother works and they need a full day babysitter."

And that's not all, according to this teacher sounding off. "I am also frustrated by the fact that I am expected to be secretary, nurse, psychologist, and most importantly, policeman. Had I chosen one or all of these fields of endeavor, I would have no complaints. How-

ever, I chose to teach and must work teaching in among these other more pressing duties."

My correspondent cites "money" as another reason why teachers can't teach. "The school boards only have so much money and it must be divided among busing, maintenance, books, lights, heat, etc. Something must be eliminated due to lack of funds. So what happens? In order to keep schools open, teachers are reduced in numbers and class sizes are increased."

This frustrated teacher cites a couple of reasons "why teachers are leaving education and going into business. One, of course, is salary. The other, and most important, is that they are not allowed to do the job they chose to do. If business or industry will offer me a job to do what I do best, teach reading, I'm theirs."

This teacher says she is proud of the reputation she has for teaching first-graders to read. She adds, "My classroom is open to any and all visitors at any hour of the school day, and you will see phonics being taught." Of course, if she uses the phonics method, it's no wonder she is successful in teaching first-graders to read, and is happy to show off their skills.

This teacher says that her students are able to read when the first grade year ends, "or they do not receive passing grades from me. However, this does not mean they will not enter second grade in the fall."

How can this be? She asks and answers her own question. When she fails a child, "the parents go over my head and the child is passed. This happens quite often, believe me. When such a child graduates and cannot read, I do not intend to be held accountable."

Teachers have been caught in the middle between undisciplined pupils, parents who are either angry at what their children are not learning or have abdicated their own role in education and supervision, and textbooks which are designed to change attitudes rather than cultivate basic skills. Most teachers want desperately to do a good job, and many have an uncommon dedication to their profession.

In Indianapolis in 1983, President Reagan told an educational conference that our nation's schools need "good old-fashioned discipline" rather than an increase in the \$230 billion we spent on schools last year. Teachers who really want to teach, and who have their hearts in the task, should be given the proper support by parents, school administrators, and textbooks.

Phyllis Schlafly has her B.A. from Washington University, her M.A. from Harvard University, her J.D. from Washington University Law School, and an honorary L.L.D. from Niagara University. She is the author of nine books and over 1,000 network television and radio commentaries. Before her marriage, she was a librarian. She taught all her six children to read before they entered school. Two are lawyers, one is an orthopedic surgeon, one has his Ph.D. in mathematics and is the author of a book on Rubik's Cube, one is an electrical engineer, and the youngest is in college.

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