

## **Caution: Textbooks Are Hazardous to Your Child's Mind**

*By: Gary Hull*

### **In Math, History and Literature, Today's Textbooks Actively Undermine a Child's Capacity to Think**

Society's greatest concern, claim the so-called humanitarians, is our children--who are suffering from inadequate nutrition, shelter and health care. Yet these same "humanitarians" are silent about the scourge destroying a child's mind--his textbooks.

Consider math textbooks, which should train students to think logically. Instead, using texts such as Addison-Wesley's Secondary Math: An Integrated Approach, they are bamboozled with "team math"--which encourages each student to shut down his mind and to defer passively to the group as it guesses at solutions to math questions.

These textbooks reject the notion of objectively correct answers arrived at through individual problem-solving. Consider this standard problem: Two trains start out simultaneously, 100 miles apart. One approaches from the east at 50 miles per hour, the other from the west at 25. How long will it take them to meet?

The "team-math" approach employs a technique called "jigsawing"--whereby Susie, Johnny and Sally are each given one part of the problem to work on. Then the group agrees, by arbitrary consensus, on an overall solution.

This kind of "math" destroys a student's independent, cognitive development. The result is that your child will not know how to build a bridge or calculate the tip on a restaurant bill--but he will forever be obedient to the demands of any assertive clique.

The same anti-intellectual attitude permeates your child's history textbooks. Such books should be filled with narrative explaining the important events of the past, including the ideas that caused them. But the new history texts, says the director of the American Textbook Council, have "lost a lot of literary quality as we've replaced the core text with pictures, white space and all sorts of glossy graphics." These textbooks are gutted of any substantive presentation of history as a sequence of causally interrelated events. Pages are now filled with colorful visuals--not to support the narrative, but to replace it. The student is supposed to learn by pictures, not by words. This method of teaching makes the development of a child's conceptual faculty impossible.

His ability to think stunted, a child is now vulnerable to the history text's next cognitive assault: "pressure-group history."

Just as the premise that there is no objectively correct answer animates math by consensus, so it drives history by group agreement. If there are no objectively true ideas in history that a child must learn, then his textbooks become, not a source of knowledge about the world, but a chronicle of pressure-group whims. As the president of Harcourt Brace admitted: "Social studies is ripe for pressure from a

multitude of special-interest groups. It's the most difficult area to publish in, no question about it." Thus we have a vast assortment of groups demanding that the accounts of important events be altered so that various "sensibilities"--of women, of blacks, of homosexuals, of religionists--can be accommodated.

And publishers give in to these demands. Their "modernized" texts now give your child a double dose of irrationality. First, by bombarding him with pictures rather than ideas, they help render his mind impotent; then, by literally rewriting history, they convey the lesson that the group's wishes are omnipotent.

Perhaps your child can be mentally stimulated by reading some thought-provoking literature? In the past, when grade-schoolers read Sophocles, Shakespeare and Hugo, they were challenged by abstract ideas. Students were exposed to difficult themes that expanded their knowledge and stretched their capacity to think--themes such as the nature of man, the meaning of virtue, the proper relationship between the individual and society.

But today's literature texts have been "dumbed down." Now students read idiot-level drivel, such as this passage from an 8th-grade reader titled Hilda: The Hen Who Wouldn't Give Up: "Hilda was very excited. Her aunt had just hatched five baby chicks. Hilda couldn't wait to see them, but her aunt lived five miles away. How was Hilda going to get there? It was much too far away." This--for 13-year-olds! If the student's mind has not already been corrupted by math and history, it will surely atrophy after enough English classes.

Modern textbooks are one more symptom of our culture's growing rejection of the central role of reason in human life. Unless we start to grasp the urgent need to develop the individual child's conceptual ability, our schools will be turning out an ever-increasing number of students who simply do not know how to think.