

## McGuffey Rides Again

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The report made to the Kanawha County School Board by those seven members of the Textbook Review Committee who had split off from the original eighteen constitutes a good typical sample of both objections often made nationally to textbooks by conservatives and of the terms in which they cast their objections. This is especially true because, as we saw, this Textbook Review Committee consulted with the Gablers, who had also sent to the protesters the bills of particulars they had written for Texas on these same books. In some cases, as shown farther on, the committee simply repeated objections written by the Gablers. All further references to objections in this book are taken from this unpublished, unpaginated document, a copy of which was sent to me in 1974 by someone in the school district who thought I ought to know exactly what protesters were saying.<sup>1</sup>

A photocopied typescript of some 450 pages, this report is the same that Superintendent Underwood called "The Death of American Education." It states objections to one book at a time of the major programs adopted by the county, citing particular selections and page numbers and often quoting portions of the texts. It recommended removing 184 of the 254 titles reviewed. It opens with a list of the seven members who submitted it, five men and two women. None, I understand, has a college education, but though worth noting, that should not be regarded as of the greatest significance. One member, Nick Staton, was the one already mentioned who was subsequently elected to the United States House of Representatives. Another man, William Seaman, was PTA council president.

Included at the front of the report was the following "Review Procedure."

In order to insure the proper frame of reference in which to view this report, we offer the following guidelines which were used in its preparation. If an objection is listed, we have also attempted to link this objection to one of the guidelines. Please keep these in mind as you read this report.

1. Any request for information, either verbal or written, that constitutes an invasion of privacy.

2. Any statement or question that is derogatory in any manner to any ethnic, cultural or religious group.
3. A preoccupation with subject matter of a cruel, depressing, violent or amoral nature.
4. The use of profanity, either written or spoken.
5. Photographs or written material depicting disrespect of authority figures of a family, civil or religious nature.
6. Any question, comment or photograph that can be classified as a treatment of situation ethics.

Three phrases occur here that you will find repeatedly employed all over the United States as set terms in the literature of censorship — “disrespect of authority,” “invasion of privacy,” and “situation ethics.”

As preface to the report there appeared this quotation.

If you can induce a community to doubt the genuineness and authenticity of the Scriptures; to question the reality, and obligations of religion; to hesitate undeciding, whether there be any such thing as virtue or vice; whether there be an eternal state of retribution beyond the grave; or whether there exists [*sic*] any such being as God, you have broken down the barriers of moral virtue, and hoisted the flood gates of immorality and crime. I need not say, that when a people have once done this, they can no longer exist [*sic*] as a tranquil and happy people. Every bond that holds society together would be ruptured; fraud and treachery would take the place of confidence between man and man; the tribunals would be scenes of bribery and injustice; avarice, perjury, ambition, and revenge would walk through the land, and render it more like the dwelling of savage beasts, than the tranquil and happy abode of civilized and Christianized men. (*McGuffey's Reader*, 1854)

This statement, written over one hundred years ago, correctly mirrors our position concerning the dispute over the Language Arts adoption. We believe that continued exposure to the materials, to which we object, would irreparably damage the moral fiber of the students of this county.

We do not ask that you concur in our objections as we fully realize that diversity of opinion does exist. We only ask that you honor our right to hold our opinions and protect our children from that which we feel would do them harm. We ask that you reject those items of instructional material, whether they be written or spoken, to which we object. By so doing you will not be submitting to mob rule, as it has been stated; you will not be violating laws or the democratic process, as it has been stated; but, rather, you will be demonstrating that you respect that most sacred precept of all — the rights of the individual citizen.

It has been said that this adoption is relevant, timely and offers to the student a view of our nation and world “as it really is.” We would agree that this statement is partially true, however, we feel that the view that is offered is distorted and surrealistic. Even if it was totally true we ask that you consider this; do not merely show America “as it is,” but give our children hope

and promise that with God's grace and wisdom they may one day see our nation and world "as it should be."

I don't disagree with all the basic values underlying objections to follow. I too think that positive, idealistic thinking is essential. I do disagree with interpretations of the selections that falsely set the books at odds with these values. And besides the fact that many Americans are not by faith and heritage Christian (and are not all men!), the McGuffey credo fails also to do justice to this nation's pluralism in another way: even those people who can identify completely with "civilized and Christian men" can solemnly nod in assent and then promptly start fighting among themselves over how their children should be taught, because they do not understand the same thing by this phrase.

If we limit our sampling of objections to *Interaction* books alone, we will miss an important distinction that became apparent in the Kanawha objections—between textbooks that are straight anthologies and textbooks in which the program authors themselves talk to the student. I have already pointed out that even anthologies may differ in how much they get into trouble according as they clump reading matter by forms or by contents. The latter, the thematic approach, lays the program creators much more open to the charge of editorializing. Some textbooks are anthologies that include all sorts of study suggestions, commentary, and questions on the text. Some other textbooks that are not anthologies treat language, grammar, communication principles, spelling, literary appreciation, and semantics by *expository* means, that is, by describing, explaining, illustrating, listing rules, prescribing, and so on. Naturally, in doing this the program creators are authoring in their own voice, except when quoting, and therefore have to take responsibility for the endless opportunities they set up, and utilize, to express their own values.

I decided early that *Interaction* books would contain no commentary, questions, or study paraphernalia. Even the teachers guides avoided directions for treating individual selections. Directions to students were placed on activity cards and concerned only repeatable activities such as writing a fable or working up an oral reading of a poem, not particular selections in the anthologies except to cite one sometimes to illustrate a form. I remember that on emerging from a publisher's lunch with me in one of those ubiquitous seafood restaurants near the Boston Common, the man then in charge of Houghton Mifflin's school department stopped on the sunny sidewalk, squinted at me in sudden puzzlement, and asked, "But how would these be *textbooks*?" He had been listening to me describe the sort of materials I would be willing to do if we signed on together, which had sounded good to him, then as he mulled this over while paying the check it hit him that such books would almost exactly

resemble "trade" books that you buy in regular bookstores. My reply was that *Interaction* books would be textbooks because he would be publishing them and he was a textbook publisher. Later, in fact, *Interaction* was sometimes billed as "the nontextbook program," because it sought to teach through realistic practice in using the language what programs usually try to teach through expository lessons embodied in series of spelling/grammar/language/composition/communication textbooks separate from the literature or reading series, itself usually heavily larded with pedagogical paraphernalia.

In my view the learner does not need information or others' prescriptions *about* language; he or she needs copious occasions to *use* that language. Under individualization, students log far more practical experience in speaking, listening, reading, and writing than by doing all those expository lessons together in lockstep fashion from the textbooks. Our approach did depend, however, on many nonbook materials such as the activity cards, recordings, and learning games that Kanawha County did not purchase or mention therefore in the book of objections (except for some recordings). Although concern for censorship did not enter into my decision to put out only anthologies as the textbooks of *Interaction*, the learning philosophy having dominated the conception, the practical upshot in Kanawha County was that the only charge we might be liable to, legitimately, was biased selection—which turned out to be severe enough!—whereas most of the other programs got heavily scored for material the creators had themselves authored. Of no small interest is the fact that Kanawha County bought the series that were heavily freighted with teaching paraphernalia as their "basic" texts and allotted *Interaction* to the "supplementary" status.

This distinction between compiling and authoring did not, in fact, hinder the single-minded thinking behind the Kanawha objections, which consistently fail to distinguish between what program creators utter and what the speakers in the selections utter. If an author treated the subject of riots, or a character referred to riots, then we compilers were thought to favor and promote riots. This confusion becomes more understandable in the case of the other programs, which continually interwove the voices of the program authors with those of authors they were quoting or of characters in the literary selections. What results, in the objections I will cite here to selections from other programs, is a mixture of fairness and unfairness in which it seems to me that a third party might indeed agree sometimes, as I do, with certain objections that these texts attempt undue direction of youngsters' minds. If *Interaction* is less vulnerable to this charge, it is, as I say, simply that we took a wholly different pedagogical approach that kept our own voices out of the texts.

For too long textbook creators have used reading selections as things

to ask questions about, either to test for reading comprehension or prompt certain thinking. I had an agreement with Houghton Mifflin that our books would contain no "questions at the end." George Hillocks, Jr., says in the article cited before that Alice Moore told him their real objection to "Jack and the Bean Stalk" was not to the content of the story itself but to the questions attached to it in one series.<sup>2</sup> These other programs did not deserve what happened to them, were done intelligently with good intentions, and certainly were not participating in some conspiracy to take over the children. But this costly lesson indicates how much we educators have traditionally overdirected students. Whether intentional or not, any program or approach that features specific directions to masses of students in a standardized format, whether it is "modern" and "open-ended" like these programs or whether it is a "no-nonsense" programming of phonics and language facts pandering to back-to-basics factions, will almost certainly be guilty in some measure of propagandizing just because it is manipulating students too much.

If this is true of language arts textbooks, how much more true it is for textbooks in other subjects such as history, government, and economics. Social studies, and sometimes even the sciences, are much harder to present impartially than literature, which can be about anything at all and is not meant to have the same function. Textbook creators, furthermore, do not usually write literature, whereas textbook authors in other subjects *do* write the main body of the texts themselves. They "present" much more directly out of their own minds.

It happened that English did not reflect its changes in textbooks until after the other subjects. This means that by the time the Gablers and other textbook reviewers turned their attention to language arts textbooks they were raising objections of the sort and in the way that they had learned to raise during years of screening books in social studies and the sciences. I think this affected considerably how they treated literature even though literature is a very different mode of discourse. Since their predecessors exerted powerful influence on the Textbook Review Committee, I believe that the Kanawha County objections we are about to survey contain responses more inappropriate than they might have been if the censors had not been sharpening their knives during their scrutiny of other discourse that more directly reflects and affects actuality.

Of course texts for English do include things besides literature, some of which is also factual, but language arts and English classes do not exist to get across a particular subject matter as history or biology courses do; practicing the language as speaker, reader, and writer is a more general mission, and for this purpose many kinds of content will do. The difference in the nature of literature as an art and the difference in the purpose for which even nonliterary texts are read in English courses were lost

sight of, I feel strongly, in the reviewers' application of the methods and criteria they inherited from the censorship network, which still perpetuates today inappropriate expectations about literature and a generally misguided mindset about courses of language learning as distinguished from courses developing a certain content. This is to say that whenever I read conservative criticisms that a history book ignores the spiritual setting of this nation's founding or that an economics text overemphasizes the role that the federal government should play in regulating the economy, I feel the reviewers make a much stronger case than they do in some of the following objections, which seem to me to try to treat English texts as if they were just so many more civics or physics books.

I beg the reader to keep in mind as we now survey some of these official objections that the purpose is neither to defend the books nor to pillory the objectors. You may agree with some of the objections, or you may become incensed at this sort of censoring. I merely wish to sample the objections, comment on them, and later use all this as a base for some more general observations. It is one thing to rail against some bigots who banned some books. It is quite another to hear what the objectors themselves say about particular offending selections. We have to hear their voices and follow the thought and feeling, tune to their frequencies. I have often found that in listening to their outrage I shed my own.

Kanawha's main elementary language arts adoption was D. C. Heath & Company's all-purpose series *Communicating*, which mixed literature, language, and composition.<sup>3</sup> Objections hit it harder on its directions in the teachers' guides than on its reading selection. For example, to follow up a depiction of bullying, the first-grade teachers edition gives these directions and receives this objection:<sup>4</sup>

Unit 1, page 7, column 2, paragraph 4 and 5

Use this occasion [*sic*] to discuss personal experiences that could in some way be similar to the pictured experience. Ask the pupil such questions as the following:

1. Have you ever had a bully stop you from doing something that you wanted to do?
2. How did you feel?
3. What happened?
4. Why did the bully do what he did?

Try to reserve a period for personal story telling time. Encourage the children to recall how they felt, and why they and others behave the way they do in their stories.

*Objection:* Why should six-year-olds be encouraged to talk about bullies? Surely something more constructive could be discussed. And also, we object to the child being asked, "How do you feel?". This is similar to sensitivity

training and has no place in a classroom situation. Education in the classroom should be based on facts and skills.

The response to the following directions, from the same book, typifies the resistance mounted against efforts to engage children in communicating their own experience.

Page 17, column 2, paragraph 4

Find an appropriate time to shift the discussion to personal experiences. The questions that follow will help the children recall a significant event and find something about the event that is interesting and meaningful to them. No matter what the subject is, let the children talk freely about it. As soon as the children are ready to talk, small groups may be formed so each child can have an opportunity.

1. Has anyone ever broken a toy, a chair, or some other article the first time he was visiting an unfamiliar house?
2. Has anyone ever awakened and found a stranger looking at him?
3. Has anyone ever awakened in a strange bed and been scared?
4. Has anyone ever had a dream in which he talked with some animals?
5. Has anyone ever seen a deserted house? (Did you go in?)

*Objection:* A child should not be forced to discuss his own personal feelings. This constitutes an invasion of privacy. This is also a behavioral change. Why should a six-year-old be subjected to questions that will implant fear and frustrations in his mind? Why not have questions on pleasant and wholesome attitudes?

This objection and the one before were directly taken by the Kanawha County reviewers from Mel Gabler, Bill of Particulars in the form of a letter to Dr. M. L. Brockett of the Texas Education Agency, August 3, 1974, pp. 6-7.

Here's what happened to a fifth-grade lesson aimed at dealing with color prejudice.

Level 5

Unit 11, page 194-195

Telling the fable creatively.

Question 1. Pretend that the hunter who has three eyes and no hair wants to live in the town. The people who are afraid of him want to make a law forbidding this. Other people disagree and say that the law would not be fair. Tell what might happen.

Question 2. Pretend that the people of Wardsback are all different colors: red, yellow, green, etc. When the hunter decides to stay in the town for a

while, he is told that his skin color has to be changed. He wants to know why. What will the people answer him? How will it all end?

*Objection:* Again the student is asked to make intelligent commentaries concerning the racial issue in America. Questions like this again tend to reinforce the feelings of racism and cause those students who are white to experience feelings of guilt, while those students of minority races may feel feelings of superiority or some other attendant feeling.

Of course it's probably true that such a teaching unit *does* attempt to change some children's thought and behavior away from home instruction. My own feeling is that the textbook authors are trying too hard here and the approach is too manipulative. A particular lesson on color prejudice probably doesn't dispel such prejudice and isn't necessary, anyway. A constantly expanding acquaintance with the lives and works of many different sorts of people, and continuous opportunity to think new thoughts of all sorts, will naturally free the mind from restrictive early conditioning. We shouldn't aim students' minds at particular issues we adults are hung up on.

Consider also the following direction to students. Does this effort to engage fifth-graders with ambivalence push too directly? Do you sustain the objection of the censors here? Or do you doubt the instruction for another reason?

Unit 12, page 225

Telling your own tale. Second section, question 1. Do you know a real person whom people admire even though he is bad in some way? Maybe you can tell an interesting story about this person.

*Objection:* Evil and wrong doing should not be presented in an admiring light, but rather should be presented as evil and should be punished.

Do you agree with the judgment made on the following story ideas?

Unit 16, page 294

Telling your own story. Think of an experience in which everyone believes something to be true. But it turns out not to be true. Here are some examples:

1. A big dog will attack you.
2. A woman is very mean to kids.
3. A house is haunted by evil spirits.
4. Witches come out on Halloween.

*Objections:* A continued and unrelenting focus on violence and fear. There must be more calm, peaceful and friendly ideas that the publishers or



authors of this book can put forth as opposed to having a big dog attack someone. Why don't they say "a friendly puppy followed me home"?

It seems evident that telling such stories is intended to *release* children from fears by giving them an occasion to symbolize and deal with them. But the dissenters consistently refuse to recognize the defusing of negative emotions through confronting them. They seem to feel that talking about such things makes them materialize or makes them worse. Now, I would agree that focusing the mind *gratuitously* on negative matters that are not already a problem should be challenged. I myself avoid stipulating topics for students in favor of students finding their own subject matter. In this way subjects come up if and when students need them to. But the objection here, endlessly repeated throughout the document, seems to confuse the word with the thing, as if symbolizing something conjured it. If Halloween represents violence, then every grade school teacher in the nation stands guilty in the docket.

Here are some micellaneous objections to items in the sixth-grade text of *Communicating*.

#### Chapter 1, page 22-27

Marshall McLune [*sic*] and "The Technological Embrace."

*Objection:* Marshall McLune is first of all a blue sky thinker with little to do with absolutes or reality. Secondly, this particular article is a very poor example of writing for an English textbook. It takes five pages and only uses three paragraphs.

#### Chapter 2, page 53

Poem: Emerson's "Brahama" [*sic*].

*Objection:* Object to the premise of the poem itself. That God is both the appearance of good and the appearance of evil.

#### Chapter 2, page 53

The book of Ecclesiastes.

*Objection:* This is referred to as an unorthodox book implying that it has no meaning.

#### Unit 1, page 1

"or shuffling Holy Rollers at an all night inspiration".

*Objection:* This is a derogatory term for members of the Pentacostal [*sic*] Holy Church. It should be deleted.

Unit 2, page 20-25

"The Use of Force."

*Objection:* This is a terribly sadistic story. I would hope that this is not a representative example of the medical profession. The doctor in this story would appear to be in dire need of psychiatric help. The story is classified as a realistic story, however, I cannot think of any case that it would appear real to me.

"The Use of Force" recounts how a doctor has to force open a young girl's mouth, with the help of her parents, to discover if she has a seriously infected throat, which indeed she has—in the days before sulfa drugs were available. She fights bitterly, but the job has to be done, because she can die if not treated. The author is poet William Carlos Williams, himself a doctor.

A lesson that tried to get children to think about war by means of discussing a myth provoked this reaction.

Unit 8, page 149

Discussing the myth. The actions.

Question 2. When does trouble first come into the world?

Question 3. The soldiers fight a war to bring love into the world. Why does Kintu oppose this war? Do you agree with Kintu or the soldiers? Why?

Question 5. Would Kintu's law of love solve the problems in today's world? Are there some things worth fighting wars for? Or could you always apply Kintu's law of love?

*Objection:* Questions 2, 3, and 5 are far beyond the scope of a normal sixth grade student. Questions like this, while certainly thought provoking, could only tend to cause confusion and doubt, and thereby destroying [*sic*] the faith in government leaders. The recent issue over the Vietnamese War is still fresh in the student's mind and questions concerning war and love, and etc. could only further the doubt that already exists. While there are a few people who actively support fighting and warfare, there are times when warfare is justified, and the student should be made aware of that.

Now comes a summary of the whole Heath series, grades 1-12.

These series of books are undoubtedly professionally prepared and scholarly works. Their objective is clearly defined and relentlessly pursued. It is this objective to which we take great exception. The Heath English program, grades 1-12 is a systematic attempt to change the thinking, perceptions and behavior of the American school student. It is increasingly subtle and crafty. It is therefore, a danger in the worst form.

In the guise of English, new linguistics, oral communication and relevancy for the student, it seeks to seduce the child and change his thinking and behavior patterns already established or it establishes and indoctrinates its own philosophy.

Specifically, basic grammar or how English works is avoided and replaced by linguistics [*sic*] even the new grammar is secondary to literature in the Heath program. Heath is literature that indoctrinates in the guise of grammar. The Heath philosophy through continued editorializing by the authors in a subtle choice of examples for the student replaces grammar with literature in books 1–12 and why? Of course, it is to indoctrinate. The philosophy includes a study of folk tales, myths, legends, realistic stories and new grammar. . . .

Through examples, and editorializing again myths are linked to reality until the student is unable to determine which is which. The myths in books 2–6 set the stage for the undermining of absolutes and for the undermining of organized religion. The building blocks are carried into grades 7–12 for the purpose of rejecting the biblical accounts, the origins of language, the biblical accounts of moral absolutes.

Throughout the entire Heath series, there is systematic development of a subtle rejection of democracy and of the American free enterprise system. This is handled under the guise of rhetoric.

Although it is clear enough that the objectors want to fill the curriculum with rules for correct grammar—the new, descriptive grammar not being as good as the old, prescriptive and proscriptive grammar—this summary only implies about literature what specific objections elsewhere make explicit, that the inclusion of literature into a series they felt should comprise only language facts provided unwelcome opportunities for crosscultural comparison as, for example, with creation myths, folk literature especially being multiethnic and international. When a whole book was devoted to language information, however, like McDougal, Littell's *Dialects and Levels of Language* in its *Language of Man* series,<sup>5</sup> it received this condemnation.

Although this book is not objectionable from a moral standpoint, it is a finished product in itself. It has no real value in an English course of study. There is very little value studying dialects which change from time to time. Neither is there value in studying specialized professional dialects for these have value only to those involved in that profession.

Similarly, the *Interaction* booklets *Codes, Maps, Charts and Graphs*, and *Tongue Twisters* were judged unfit for English classrooms despite their illumination of language or their practical utility.

Of course, the overt objection to the study of dialects is relativity. The dissenters wanted all language study to drill on correctness and to pre-

tend that English has an absolute form. The fear arises over and over again in various ways: if youngsters know of alternatives, standards will crumble, whether in morals or language. And dialectical variation goes with variation in people and their ethnic groups or milieus. Dialect is always a hot issue because individuals can be identified as members of acceptable or unacceptable social groups by how they talk. Fear of slipping into "bad grammar" correlates directly with one's social insecurity or with one's past struggle to overcome a social stigma. Professional grammarians and language specialists know that facts about language go vastly far beyond mere knowledge of what conforms to the majority or "standard" dialect, but censors, typically, are not interested in any other information about language than that regarding status or identity.