

## American Education's Beginnings

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### Abstract

Compulsory education in America arguably originated with Massachusetts's legislative acts of 1642, 1647, and 1648; the 1642 act compelled education of children. Best known is the colorfully named Old Deluder Satan Law of 1647, famously declaring towns with populations of 50 must hire a reading and writing teacher, and those holding 100 requiring a Latin Grammar School.<sup>1</sup> This law's title was derived from its purpose, as teaching youth to read allowed access to the Christian *Bible*, with their presumably subsequent faith and doctrinal adherence producing virtuous citizens confident of an eventual heavenly home rather than warmer climes. Still, these laws and many afterwards were not strictly enforced until Horace Mann advocated schooling for all, with his Common School Movement leading to free, public, and locally controlled elementary schools, beginning with Massachusetts in 1852.<sup>2</sup> Compulsory education laws were passed in 32 states by 1900 and in all by 1930.<sup>3</sup>

### Standardized Educational Materials

Although America's students increased during the nineteenth century, teaching materials did not. The *New England Primer*, introduced in 1690, was considered the first textbook and virtually the only reading text used in schools until approximately 1800, replaced by Noah Webster's *American Spelling Book*, first published in 1783.<sup>4</sup>

Regardless, educators, especially in rural areas, had few resources; textbooks were rare with instruction from those books owned by families or teachers.<sup>5</sup> Common schools, the settling of America's West, and immigrant assimilation greatly increased the number of students attending schools and thus educators' demands for standardized teaching materials.

### William Holmes McGuffey

Cincinnati, Ohio's small publishing firm Truman and Smith became interested in marketing a series of readers as the canny Winthrop B. Smith realized marketing to the growing West could incur profits as those enjoyed by established eastern firms due to those schools' burgeoning

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1 Elwood P. Cubberly, *Public Education in the United States: A Study and Interpretation of American Educational History* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1962), 18

2 Ibid, 224-225.

3 Forest W. Parkay and Beverly Hardcastle Stanford, *Becoming a Teacher* (Upper Saddle River: Merrill, 2010), 153.

4 David Miller Sadker, Myra Pollack Sadker, and Karen R. Zittleman, *Teachers, Schools, and Society* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 272.

5 Polly Welts Kaufman, *Women Teachers on the Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 188.

enrollments.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, books supplying curricula and imparting then-contemporary American beliefs and values to children in these new communities and recent immigrants were especially needed.<sup>7</sup>

William Holmes McGuffey, an Ohio professor and Presbyterian minister, had already begun work on his own readers when contracting with Truman and Smith to complete a primer, four readers, and a speller. His *Eclectic First Reader* and *Eclectic Second Reader* were published in 1836, followed by the *Third* and *Fourth* in 1837. McGuffey's brother wrote the *Fifth Reader* in 1844, a *Spelling Book* in 1846, and a *Sixth Reader* in 1857.<sup>8</sup> The term "eclectic" referred to the books' reading selections chosen from a wide variety of sources.

### ***McGuffey's Readers***

Between 1836 and 1890, *McGuffey's* sold over one hundred million copies, resulting in practically every American child who attended public schools during the second half of the nineteenth century using them.<sup>9</sup> They were serialized by grade levels, featured then uncommon illustrations, and defined vocabulary words within a piece's context. More importantly, they provided the country with a common knowledge base and worldview through their stories and exercises that illustrated the societal and moral standards expected of children at that time.<sup>10</sup>

Stories were Calvinist leaning, reflecting personal independence, character, honesty, and decency. Strong moral conclusions were presented, usually by contrasting positive and negative actions of children and resultant consequences. Biblical verses and doctrine frequently appeared separately and within selections.

Accompanying assignments and other instruction, although meager compared to contemporary texts, focused upon improving spelling and vocabulary knowledge, and creating effective public speakers through speaking. Doubtless, the era's increase of immigrants made such lessons doubly important.

The *Readers*, meant for students in grades one through six, varied in length difficulty, and overall theme. The *Primer* and *Pictorial Primer*<sup>11</sup> began with the alphabet and moved to simple one-syllable words, with the latter including simple three- and four-word sentences, ending with longer sentences and full paragraphs. Their contemporary audience appears closest to the first grade.

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6 Henry H. Vail, *A History of McGuffey's Readers* (Project Gutenberg, 2005), accessed April 27, 2011, 16, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15577/15577-h/15577-h.htm.pdf>

7 Henry H. Vail, *A History of McGuffey's Readers* (Project Gutenberg, 2005), accessed April 27, 2011, 16, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15577/15577-h/15577-h.htm.pdf>

8 Henry H. Vail, *A History of McGuffey's Readers*, 15-17.

9 *Ibid.*, 29.

10 Henry Steele Commager, introduction to *McGuffey's Sixth Eclectic Reader*, x-xi.

11 Henry H. Vail, *A History of McGuffey's Readers*, 15.

The *First Reader*<sup>12</sup> introduced McGuffey's moral code through stories depicting children who loved learning and God, proper and improper conduct, and respective consequences. Lessons were progressively difficult, and seem suitable for today's second grades. The *Second Reader*<sup>13</sup> featured lessons from more subjects, multi-syllabic words, and especially stressed youths' proper attitudes and duties. Today's audience approximates grades three to five.

The *Third Reader*<sup>14</sup> was more formal and difficult, largely focusing upon rules for oral reading, and fitting contemporary grades six to eight. Introducing quality or canonical literature and emphasizing thinking skills was the *Fourth Reader's*<sup>15</sup> purpose, and it contained deeper discussions of such topics as education, God, religion, and philosophy. Its difficulty level appears equivalent to modern upper level junior high or high school students.

McGuffey's younger brother added a *Rhetorical Guide*, later developed into the *Fifth* and *Sixth Readers*,<sup>16</sup> with the *Fifth* containing canonical selections and elocutionary exercises, and the *Sixth* stressing composition; all appear equivalent to contemporary high school students'. A *Progressive Speller*<sup>17</sup> was also included, which began with basic phonics and progressed to advanced vocabulary.

McGuffey's publishing contract dissolved in 1841, with his input into further editions ceasing after 1845, although his name was added to all successive versions. Subsequent editions continued their moral tone and religious doctrine while gradually softening the often frightening, harsh stories to suit societal needs over passing years. The most popular edition was published in 1879, six years after McGuffey's death and used by public schools throughout 1920,<sup>18</sup> and undoubtedly beyond in some areas.

### **Contemporary Availability of McGuffey's Readers**

Facsimiles of the 1836 versions are easily available from various bookstores and the Internet;<sup>19</sup> individual *Revised Readers* may be downloaded for a Kindle© or other like devices for a small fee.<sup>20</sup> Originals naturally vary in price and condition, but the entire revised 1879 collection may be downloaded or read free of charge from numerous online sources, including the contemporary Internet sites *Project Gutenberg*, *McGuffey's Readers World*, or *The McGuffey Readers*.

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12 Ibid., 5.

13 Ibid., 5.

14 Ibid., 5

15 Ibid, 5.

16 Ibid, 5.

17 Ibid, 5.

18 Ibid, 5.

19 Lamp Post Homeschool Store. 2011. "McGuffey's Eclectic Readers." Accessed February 9.

<http://www.lamppostpublishing.com/mcguFFEys-readers.htm>.

20 Amazon.com. 2011. "McGuffey's Eclectic Readers." Accessed February 20.

[http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb\\_sb\\_ss\\_i\\_1\\_27?url=search-alias=st](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_i_1_27?url=search-alias=st) .

## **Homeschooling and Christian Fundamentalism**

While McGuffey's *Readers* are no longer used in public schools, fundamentalist Christians who home school their children have rediscovered them. The Cato Institute essentially defined homeschooling as educating school-aged children at home rather than at public or private schools,<sup>21</sup> and The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported approximately three-quarters of those homeschooling self-identified as conservative/fundamentalist Christians.<sup>22</sup>

Fundamentalism is based upon belief of the Christian *Bible's* inerrancy and thus its literal interpretation, the necessity of a conversion experience through faith in Jesus Christ alone, (a.k.a. being "born again"), and Christ's return to earth (a.k.a. the "second coming").<sup>23</sup> As with all religious denominations or groups, individuals' beliefs and adherence regarding doctrinal points vary. Regardless, fundamentalists' repeatedly state central reasons for homeschooling are to provide religious and moral instruction believed lacking within public schools' atmosphere and practices.<sup>24</sup>

While fundamentalism can be defined, homeschooling is less distinct. The Tenth Amendment of the United States Constitution declares that not delegated to the federal government becomes state purview; public education is thus designated to individual states' control. Although homeschooling has always occurred, fundamentalists' efforts for its legalization in all states and Washington, D.C. began during the 1960s and was achieved in 1993.<sup>25</sup> While homeschooling overall is unique to each state, all homeschooled children must demonstrate state-mandated general knowledge and achievement scores equivalent to public school students'.<sup>26</sup>

### ***McGuffey's Readers* and Fundamentalist Homeschooling**

Thousands of fundamentalist Internet sites are devoted to homeschooling; some prominent ones include Families.com, Conservative Homeschoolers, Homeschoolspot, Homeschooling Today, Homeschool.com, Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), Home Education Magazine, Homeschoolchristian.com, and ChristianHomeschoolers.com.

*McGuffey's Revised Readers* are promoted or featured on these and similar online homeschooling sites, with many, including *Eclectic Homeschool Online*, *Dollar Homeschool*,

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21 Lyman, Isabel. 1998. "Homeschooling: Back to the future?" Cato Policy Analysis No. 294. Accessed February 11. <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-294.html>.

22 Homeschooling in the United States: 2003-Executive Summary. 2006. National Center for Education Statistics. Accessed February 2. <http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/homeschool/>.

23 Wacker, Grant. 2000. "The Christian Right." National Humanities Center. Accessed February 5. [http://www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/chr\\_rght.htm](http://www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/chr_rght.htm).

24 "Homeschooling in the United States: 2003-Executive Summary."

25 Wacker, "The Christian Right."

26 "Homeschooling in the United States: 2003-Executive Summary."

and *Mott Media, LLC*, solely devoted to them. Likewise, a myriad of teaching instructions, supplemental activities, resources, teaching guides, and other accompanying materials for the *Readers* are available online, as are communication methods that allow *McGuffey* users a forum for discussions, questions, and ideas regarding application.

The *Readers* are recommended for teaching reading and the English language arts due to emphases upon traditional Christian morals, values, and beliefs, biblical use, canonical classic readings, phonics, rote memorization, and direct teaching styles.<sup>27</sup> Specifically, the texts do not contain “secular humanism,” fundamentalists’ term for any set of beliefs that promote human values without specific allusion to religious doctrine.

Secular humanism is a central but often ephemeral reason for fundamentalists’ aversion to public schools and cited as rationale for book challenges, complaints of texts, materials, and educators’ teaching, requests for overt use and display of Christian doctrine, school prayer and student prayer groups, criticism regarding Christmas, Halloween, and other holiday practices or pageants, and any other items or practices inharmonious with this groups’ beliefs.<sup>28</sup>

### **McGuffey’s Readers’ Fundamentalist and Educational Divergences**

Contemporary reviews of the *Readers* feature many aspects opposed to Christianity in general and fundamentalism specifically, as well as espousing poor teaching techniques. These detractions are glaring, consistent throughout the *Readers*, yet, aside from individuals’ comments on Internet message boards or blogs, unmentioned by fundamentalist homeschooling organizations. The most significant digressions are examined below, with all representative examples from the 1879, and most popular for fundamentalists’ homeschooling, versions.

### **Educational and Fundamentalist Discrepancies within *McGuffey’s Readers***

#### ***Morality is Materialistically and Fantastically Rewarded Non-Commensurate to the Action, with Virtue Seldom its Own Reward***

Christianity espouses goodness throughout the *Bible* without expectation of earthly reward, but the *Readers*’ proliferate with small deeds reaping huge, usually unbelievable, benefits. Examples include the *First Reader’s* “The Little Loaf,”<sup>29</sup> showing a rich baker offering poor children bread loaves. While the boys fight for the largest, a girl is content with the smallest and thanks the man. Upon slicing the bread, shiny silver coins appear, saving her family from abject poverty.

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27 Dollar Homeschool. 2011. “Eclectic Education Series: McGuffey’s Readers.” Accessed February 9. <http://www.dollarhomeschool.com/readersandgrammar/index.html>

28 Allen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth L. Donelson, *Literature for Today’s Young Adults*, (Boston: Pearson), 398

29 William Holmes McGuffey, “The Little Loaf,” in *McGuffey’s First Eclectic Reader* (Project Gutenberg, 2005), 172-174,

<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/author?name=McGuffey%2C%20William%20Holmes%2C%201800-1873>

“Respect for the Sabbath Rewarded”<sup>30</sup> finds William, a barber uncomfortable working on the Sabbath, attending church instead. This leads to his business loss and utter ruin, until a stranger appears and William uses his last candle to provide a shave. The stranger was seeking William, soon to become heir to an immense fortune.

**Impact:** Repeated subjection to extraordinary rewards doubtless causes children’s eventual expectations of them, creating environments of greed and materialism. Students quickly want rewards for completing various assignments, projects, and other tasks; grades themselves are unsatisfactory. Society is full of such examples, including fundamentalist and secular financial scandals, with America’s present economy a telling illustration.

Moreover, the redundancy of this plot throughout all *Readers* quickly causes uninterest, unimaginativeness, and ineffectiveness among students and instructors; worse, unvarying stories frequently results in like teaching, with ultimate development of critical thinking skills stalled.

***An Immediate Punishment System is Demonstrated; Negative Behaviors are Punished Harshly, with Single Experiences Transformative***

Unlike real life, where individuals’ negative behaviors may be undetected or ignored, in *McGuffey’s* actions are immediately judged. “Harry and Annie”<sup>31</sup> were forbidden to cross a frozen pond while walking to school; disobeying, they fell in the freezing water. Both were rescued, but lesson learned.

Likewise, “The Truant”<sup>32</sup> has James skipping school and lying to his parents upon returning home. Skipping again, he hired a boat and a great storm suddenly appeared, throwing him into the churning water. Saved just before drowning, James became a model student.

**Impact:** Children learn to listen only to others, not themselves, as their choices are inherently bad or wrong and bring disastrous results. Condemnation, not compassion, results from wrongdoing, ultimately developing simplistic worldviews. Long-standing behaviors changed after a single incident, even a harrowing one, is unlikely, perhaps more so today, and idealized.

Real children continually make mistakes, often the same repeatedly; continual instruction and assistance from caring adults’ shapes behavior over time rather than single incidents. While *McGuffey’s* characters’ poor behaviors are immediately punished, unmentioned are children who continually misbehave, or those profiting from their actions.

By depicting right and wrong via absolutes rather than providing questioning or gray

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30 William Holmes McGuffey, “Respect for the Sabbath Rewarded,” in *McGuffey’s Fifth Eclectic Reader* (Project Gutenberg, 2005), 69-71, 671 <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/author?name=McGuffey%2C%20William%20Holmes%2C%201800-1873>.

31 William Holmes McGuffey, “Harry and Annie,” in *McGuffey’s Third Eclectic Reader* (Project Gutenberg, 2005), 46-48, <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/author?name=McGuffey%2C%20William%20Holmes%2C%201800-1873>.

32 *Ibid.*, 27-29.

areas in between, students' critical thinking skills regarding their own selves remain undeveloped, meaning individuals will likely believe and follow others, especially authority figures, regardless of appropriateness. This produces sycophantic followers, and repressed individuals, not societal leaders.

***Stories Frequently Show Children Haunted by Negative Actions, Often Single Ones, for Entire Lives Without Forgiveness***

"The Insolent Boy"<sup>33</sup> shows a boy who is physically cruel, brutally attacking a shabby man he encounters. Upon returning home, he discovers the man is his rich uncle, bearing a gold watch for him. The boy's remorse cures his cruelty, but remains unbearable throughout his life. Similarly, "My Mother's Grave"<sup>34</sup> features a girl recalcitrant regarding bringing water to her ill mother, finally doing so grudgingly. Upon discovering her mother died during the night, she changed her behavior, but forever mourned that her mother's last memory was of her uncaring.

**Impact:**Children are not allowed to act as children; perfection is expected with minor faults overly magnified, causing exaggerated regrets, pain, and remaining perhaps forever. Because only perfection is demonstrated, children cannot so emulate and may cease improving behavior completely, failing to learn coping and social skills for ordinary issues or problems. Those without such skills do not meld well into society's many structured situations, with personal pain causing depression and other like debilitating illnesses.

***Many Stories Make No Age Concessions, and Show Little Effort to be Entertaining; the Message, not Presentation, is Key. Messages Regarding Conduct are Provided Through Fear***

"The Noblest Revenge"<sup>35</sup> follows a boy pulling off a bee's wings for fun, being stung, striking the hive in anger, and then stung by the hive until near death, after which he repents and ceases all negative acts. "The Venomous Worm"<sup>36</sup> describes a reptilian worm:

The symptoms of its bite are terrible. The eyes of the patient become red and fiery, his tongue swells to an immoderate size, and obstructs his utterance; and delirium of the most horrid character quickly follows. Sometimes, in his madness, he attempts the destruction of his nearest friends.<sup>37</sup>

However, the so-called worm is a description of one who drinks alcohol.

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33 Ibid., 158-162.

34 William Holmes McGuffey, "My Mother's Grave," in *McGuffey's Fourth Eclectic Reader* (Project Gutenberg, 2005), 253-255, <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/author?name=McGuffey%2C%20William%20Holmes%2C%201800-1873>

35 Ibid., 94-97.

36 William Holmes McGuffey, "The Venomous Worm," in *McGuffey's Fifth Eclectic Reader*, 77-78.

37 Ibid., 77.

**Impact:** Teaching through fear may overly frighten some children to the point of nightmares or worse, such as panicking upon being alone, extreme shyness, or introversion. Fear may cease the young's negative behaviors, but becomes ineffective when children are no longer frightened; a venomous worm is scary for youngsters, not necessarily older children. Moreover, fear garners resentment rather than respect; once youth overcome initial fears, they lose trust and respect for personal authority figures.

Aside from squandering productive teaching opportunities and perhaps causing personal illnesses as above, such harshness may also lead those being taught to rebel or renounce family beliefs and views.

***Ominous Messages Allude to Children Always Being Watched and Thoughts Known, with Implications of Imperfections Removing Love***

One chilling warning is a *First Reader* statement, “If you are good, and if you try to learn, your teacher will love you, and you will please your parents,”<sup>38</sup> and a reminder from *The Third Reader* is “...Remember, if no one else sees you, God does, from whom you can not hide even your most secret thought.”<sup>39</sup>

**Impact:** Absolute perfection is impossible, and children's mistakes will make them doubly frightened, believing removal of parental or other love, along with God's—who might send them to hell, an especially frightening prospect for the more devout original readers and contemporary fundamentalists'. Fear often results in poor self-confidence, and children may focus on and produce extremely small products and ideas, remaining only with that which they know to be safe in order not to make mistakes. Fear of imperfection will never allow children to take the risks that produce growth and greatness in life.

***There is Forgiveness for Some, but Not All***

Naturally, those engaged in negative actions are necessary antagonists, but they are not given the same opportunity as protagonists' to change behaviors in stories. “Charlie and Rob”<sup>40</sup> details a discussion between a lazy boy and a hard worker; the ending shows the worker as rich and the other a tramp before age 30.

“A Walk in the Garden”<sup>41</sup> describes Frank and his mother invited to walk in a lovely garden, and asked to take care with its greenery. Another boy asks to enter the garden's gates, but is refused because he previously meddled with the plants. Upon leaving, Frank is rewarded with lovely flowers.

**Impact:** Aside from Christianity's doctrine of forgiveness, seeing some children not afforded absolution is doubtless frightening and confusing. If children cannot be forgiven or

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38 William Holmes McGuffey, “Lesson LXIII” in *McGuffey's First Eclectic Reader* (Project Gutenberg, 2005), 94.

39 William Holmes McGuffey, “Things to Remember” in *McGuffey's Third Eclectic Reader*, 66.

40 Ibid., 104-107.

41 Ibid., 39-41.



given second chances, their fears over any transgression must be horrific. Such children may feel frightened, hopeless, engage in new, or continue, negative behaviors, and begin self-fulfilling prophecies that will undoubtedly become true, needlessly.

As above, subservience from fear stunts intellectual growth and curiosity; children will do only what is assigned, never more lest possible incorrectness would lead to censure or worse. As above, those unwilling to progress past certain points will never excel, lessening success in all areas of life.

***The Readers' Contain Numerous Death-Themed Stories, Requiring Children to Baldly Contemplate Death***

“A Home Scene”<sup>42</sup> describes a small boy in his comfortable home—with every stanza emphasizing his unawareness of death until the final two, when he suddenly matures by realizing death comes to all. An especially morbid story, “We are Seven,”<sup>43</sup> features a girl who eerily refuses to refer to her two dead siblings as such, continuing to spend nearly as much time at their graves as if they were alive and conversing with them.

Likewise, the classical selections in the *Fifth* and *Sixth Readers* by renowned authors overwhelmingly feature grim, death-related stories rather than choices from their many other lighter, and presumably as or more meaningful, works. Notable examples from the *Fifth Reader* include Longfellow’s “The Reaper and the Flowers,”<sup>44</sup> Bryant’s like-themed “The Death of the Flowers,”<sup>45</sup> and Thomas Hood’s “Faithless Nelly Gray.”<sup>46</sup>

Some entries from the *Sixth Reader* include Dickens’s “Death of Little Nell,”<sup>47</sup> Gray’s “Elegy in a Country Churchyard,”<sup>48</sup> and Irving’s “Sorrow for the Dead.”<sup>49</sup>

**Impact:** Children and youth repeatedly reading stories about death would doubtless feel fearful or morbid, finding it difficult to enjoy the present, and when a death does occur, become challenged to move forward and continue living productive, enjoyable lives. Children of contemporary society, with its emphases upon Goth culture, suicides, school shootings, darker media and video, video games, etc., are perhaps more at risk than yesterday’s, with their instant access and knowledge of these items and events.

Moreover, some can become increasingly fearful and didactic, expressing inappropriate warnings and concerns to others or enacting such behaviors, thus halting or limiting activities and challenges regarding their education and later life. As with the above reward stories, topic redundancy causes uninterestedness, ineffectiveness, unimaginativeness, and the stalling of

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42 William Holmes McGuffey, “A Home Scene” in *McGuffey’s Fifth Eclectic Reader*, 292-294

43 William Holmes McGuffey, “We are Seven” in *McGuffey’s Third Eclectic Reader*, 163-166.

44 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Reaper and the Flowers” in *McGuffey’s Fifth Eclectic Reader*, 113-114.

45 William Cullen Bryant, “The Death of the Flowers” in *McGuffey’s Fifth Eclectic Reader*, 129-131.

46 Thomas Hood, “Faithless Nelly Gray” in *McGuffey’s Fifth Eclectic Reader*, 155-157.

47 Charles Dickens, “Death of Little Nell” in *McGuffey’s Sixth Eclectic Reader*, 112-116.

48 Thomas Gray, “Elegy in a Country Churchyard.” in *McGuffey’s Sixth Eclectic Reader*, 124-131.

49 Washington Irving, “Sorrow for the Dead.” in *McGuffey’s Sixth Eclectic Reader*, 271-273.

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### ***Anthropomorphization in Stories***

Fundamentalists fight virulent censorship battles to ban those books in which animals or other non-humans speak or otherwise exhibit human characteristics, e.g. “anthropomorphization.”<sup>50</sup> Still, the *Readers* are full of such stories, as the “The Wind and the Sun,”<sup>51</sup> showing the two debating which is stronger, or a story from the *First Reader* showing a hen taking her chickens to a small brook for fresh air and sunshine.<sup>52</sup>

**Impact:** If fundamentalists’ find anthropomorphization unacceptable in trade literature,<sup>53</sup> it seems hypocritical to accept it in *McGuffey’s*. However, if so, adults should re-evaluate their views against this universal technique that is especially enjoyable to children, allows imagination, further identification and understanding of emotions and actions, and assists in development of critical thinking skills.

Imagination is especially crucial to education and lifetime skills; as with those stories containing fearful aspects, a steady diet could produce those unable, or unwilling, to contribute or create new ideas and items. As above, this group, if unable to reach their potential or greatness, will doubtless be passed over for those who can.

### ***Although the Readers Were Compiled During America’s Period of Great Reform, They Reflect No New Inventions, Question Existing Ideas or Institutions, or Consider Concepts of Social or Political Responsibility***

**Impact:** Opposite from contemporary politicians courting fundamentalists’ to change societal views and laws—abortion, homosexual marriage, school prayer, sex education, etc.—the *Readers* contain neither discussion of then-current events nor comparative models for effective, respectful change.

Fundamentalists as a whole are associated with intolerance and hatred, especially by the public presence and voice concerning above topics by some, flamed by imposition of views and demands without using skills to listen and negotiate. Students must learn of current world events, discuss, compare and contrast them, becoming knowledgeable of their various facts and fictions.

Those fed a diet of partial, prescribed, or sanitized facts may never be able to process complete information regarding certain items. Those unable or unwilling to accept all topic facets will have little to contribute among those with differing beliefs; such stoics either face a lifetime with only those sharing identical views or combative, uncomfortable relationships’ with others, hardly desirable societal characteristics. Moreover, those with such limited views are likely to face frequent opposition, making many more unlikely to consider other views or practice positive aspects of effecting societal or other change, again limiting growth.

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50 Alleen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth L. Donelson, *Literature for Today’s Young Adults*, 407.

51 William Holmes McGuffey, “The Wind and the Sun” in *McGuffey’s Third Eclectic Reader*, 59-60.

52 William Holmes McGuffey, “Lesson LXI” in *McGuffey’s First Eclectic Reader* (Project Gutenberg, 2005), 88-92.

53 Alleen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth L. Donelson, *Literature for Today’s Young Adults*, 401.

***While Read by American children, Readers Omit Many Important American People and Events of the Era***

**Impact:** Fundamentalists’ promote *McGuffey’s* due to their distinctly “American” values, views, and beliefs. However, aside from later canonical works, the stories have no particular sense of place or people. For example, the Civil War is barely mentioned, as are Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, or Mark Twain. The California Gold Rush and Oregon Trail, which helped create the need for these readers, are also unmentioned.<sup>54</sup>

Those intending to use the *Readers* to promote American patriotism, a strong fundamentalist value, will require supplementation, lest producing adults ignorant of basic American history, or holding biases.

***Many of the Readers’ Works are from or About Non-American Authors and Countries. However, Few Significant Cultural Comparisons are Made***

**Impact:** As with anthropomorphization, fundamentalists have and continue to be highly critical of multiculturalism/diversity, challenging books containing non-American information and like writers.<sup>55</sup> Many canonical authors and stories are included in the *Readers* that would doubtless be challenged in public school anthologies. Aside from being hypocritical, students are not given a view of the world that allows understanding, sympathy, or empathy toward others’, hardly beneficial to later success or personal happiness in any venue.

***McGuffey’s Reflects No Conscious Concession of Children’s Learning Needs, Assuming Understanding of Material***

**Impact:** Because contemporary estimations place the *Readers* at higher-grade levels than originally intended, today’s students will be using texts meant for younger students, possibly lessening interest, story identification, and motivation. Written during a past era, the series obviously does not contain modern helps (graphics, glossary, words defined in the margins, etc.) found in contemporary texts.

Likewise, corresponding assignments are sparse, difficult, essentially identical throughout the readers, and rely upon rote memorization or questions asking for information contained in the story; student creativity or development of questioning and thinking skills are not developed through such activities.

Supplemental materials for comprehension assistance and enticing yet productive activities, projects, quizzes, tests are necessary or helpful for any text, but especially for these Victorian *Readers*. It is assumed contemporary students can learn from them, but using as teaching tools may require far more time and effort than first supposed, with the creation of

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54 Henry Steele Commager, introduction to *McGuffey’s Sixth Eclectic Reader*, xi.

55 Alleen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth L. Donelson, *Literature for Today’s Young Adults*, 401.

supplemental helps more extensive, for some. Depending upon those taught, educators might find themselves rewriting or otherwise revising large sections for understanding, thus undermining the use and effectiveness of the original texts.

### ***McGuffey's Readers as Contemporary Teaching Tools***

Students are asked to learn using texts *from* the past, not *about* the past; *McGuffey's* were intended for children of a bygone era. Today's students hardly live in the *Readers'* Victoria, and as their lives and situations are not mirrored in their entries, productive learning appears dubious.

The *Readers* look and sound essentially the same throughout, with their main difference larger fonts and illustrations for youngest readers. While one volume is interesting for its quaint pictures, stories, and historical value, how long the basically identical content of the entire series' and their activities will engage curious, modern students is questionable. It is also assumed that students' will enjoy and want to learn from these readers, doubtless false for some.

Fear of change seems the central rationale for fundamentalists' using *McGuffey's Readers* for homeschooling. Most people presumably dislike society's disturbing or unsettling elements, but society as a whole cannot necessarily be changed. Television, the Internet, movies, music, video games, teen pregnancies, school shootings, the economy—such items are encountered by all, especially children, and fears of this long list vary by individual.

Because one cannot change society, one seeks what *can* be changed—that section of society immediately concerning individuals and their families. As schools teach students each day, they naturally become a focus for those with minority views. Fundamentalists and others fight for various changes within schools, but schools cannot personalize teaching to fit the needs and desires of every family, regardless of alterations made.

Those homeschooling undoubtedly feel their children will be irrevocably changed for the worse by public schools' curricula, methodologies, and population that differ from family beliefs and behaviors. Homeschooling is a reaction to that fear, presumably a way of keeping children safe from schools', which mirror society, negative influences.

Fundamentalist *McGuffey's* users doubtless believe the series' morals, biblical use and doctrine, paternalistic families, separate gender roles, powerful illustrations regarding children's proper behavior, stories absent of contemporary situations considered offensive, and language free of profanity or otherwise troubling terminology, is a way of reclaiming their way of life. It is also a return to the past, when things were deemed "simpler," "safer," or "easier," and "old-fashioned values" were upheld, unlike today.

This is not strictly true, of course, but the past is always viewed nostalgically, through rose-colored glasses, and *McGuffey's* provides such imagined safeness and ease without either contemporary society's problems or Victorian brutal realities. Still, there is a difference between *education*, i.e., teaching children to think, question, and reflect about ideas, actions, and consequences, and *indoctrination*, i.e., teaching children selectively, omitting controversial

material, and discouraging questioning of items considered inappropriate by adults. Every child should be taught to be culturally literate, compassionate, sympathetic, empathetic, and socially aware.

All children deserve to be educated, but fundamentalists' using *McGuffey's Readers* to home school contemporary youth seem to be making an age-old mistake: looking *behind* for teaching resources that will erase the intimidating transformations of the present and future while still providing students with modern, challenging curricula.

While *McGuffey's Readers* accomplished much in the past, there they should remain; education must prepare students, regardless of belief, for the future in which all will be living. The *Series*' deserves to be celebrated rather than used as teaching tools, as their current educational and personal benefits appear more detrimental than effective regarding contemporary students'

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