


AMERICAN Educator

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
WINTER 1996-1997



My name is Jose Castro-Rodriguez. I'm in the first grade, and right now we're learning about Ancient Egypt —about the sarcophagus—that's what they put the mummies in; and how they got the bodies ready to be mummies and which body parts they put into the canopic jars—they threw away the brain because they thought the heart did the thinking; and how they had to make sure no one finds out where the mummies were, because you're not supposed to mess with dead people; and how they used an ostrich feather to measure the heart, and if it was little that meant you had been good and could go on to the next life; and about the different kinds of canopic jars and about the different Egyptian gods. And we've been learning about King Tut ...

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CORE KNOWLEDGE SCHOOLS TAKE ROOT ACROSS THE COUNTRY



SURELY NOTHING is more central to what children learn than what we decide to teach them. Admittedly, middle-class children pick up a considerable amount of knowledge and skills from their "home curriculum." But for them and, of course, much more so for the millions of other children who do not come from advantaged situations, what they learn—and with it their prospects for the future—are dependent to large degree on the formal learning embedded in the school curriculum. While a good curriculum is not the only element in school success, it is a prime one.

As central and seemingly obvious as this is, the curriculum framework in most school districts—to the extent that one is able even to put one's hands on it—can only be characterized as an educational disaster. The typical district curricular "guidelines" or "scope and sequence" or whatever name they go by are vague; jargonistic; lacking in specific, concrete content; disparaging of facts and their interrelationships as the bedrock of knowledge and of knowledge as the bedrock of critical thinking; and sorely underestimating what children are capable of learning. Such a curriculum leaves teachers without guidance or structure—or the basis for professional collaboration. It leaves parents frustrated and often alienated from the public school system. And it deprives students of the opportunity for a world-class education for all.

Many districts and states have of late been working to improve their curricula. The results are uneven—some are quite good, some are quite awful—but the endeavor is a worthwhile one. Several years before these current efforts got under way, a growing network of schools under the banner of the Core Knowledge Foundation were breaking ground and moving ahead with a full-fledged, specific, sequenced, common, rigorous curriculum. There are now approximately 350 Core Knowledge schools in 40 states around the country. Inspired by the trenchant, insightful writings of E. D. Hirsch, Jr., and his unwavering and courageous determination to focus attention on the problems with the curriculum and the need—particularly as a question of basic equity—to expose all children to a common core

of rich subject matter, scores of teachers, parents, and administrators rallied to his common-sense ideas and worked to give them flesh.

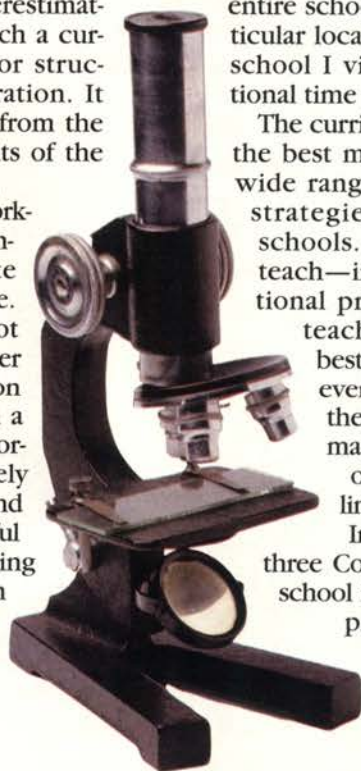
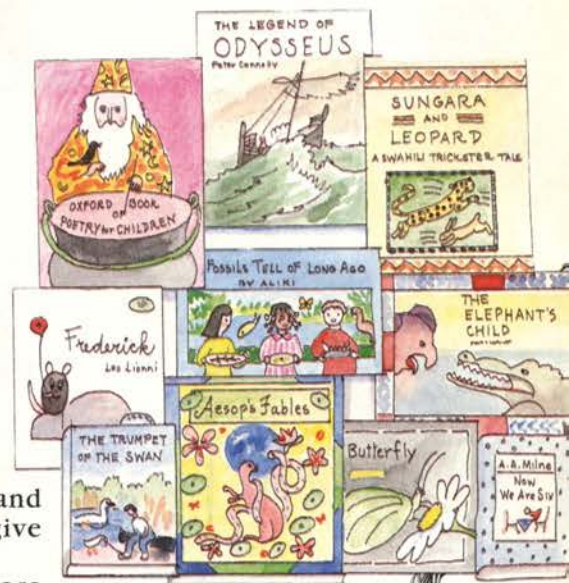
The Core Knowledge curriculum specifies what is to be taught, at each grade level, for each subject, grades kindergarten through six, with a draft under way for grades seven and eight. The curriculum includes time for the mastery of basic skills; indeed, it provides a body of interesting knowledge in which to ground skills instruction.

The curriculum is not intended to occupy the entire school day; there is time for topics of particular local and state interest. For example, the school I visited in San Antonio devotes additional time to the history of Mexico.

The curriculum set, teachers are free to choose the best method to present it, and typically, a wide range and healthy mix of instructional strategies are seen in Core Knowledge schools. Indeed, focusing on *what* they teach—instead of the latest fad in instructional process—appears to help teachers figure out *how* to best present the material. What-

ever the instructional approach, however, the challenging array of knowledge to be mastered re-establishes the primary role of the teacher as teacher, not a sidelines "coach" or "facilitator."

In the pages that follow, we report on three Core Knowledge schools: a middle-class school in Fort Collins, Colorado; an inner-city, predominantly Hispanic school in San Antonio, Texas; and a school of diverse, but mainly low-income, stu-



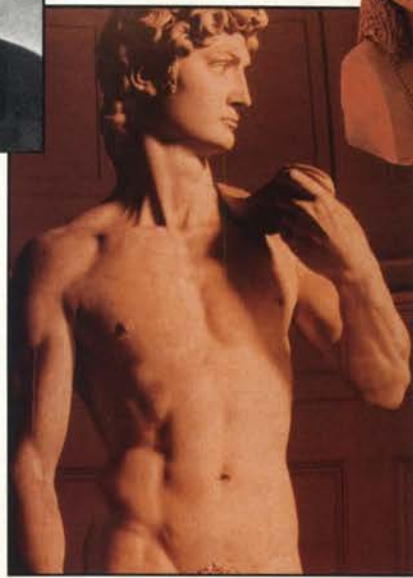
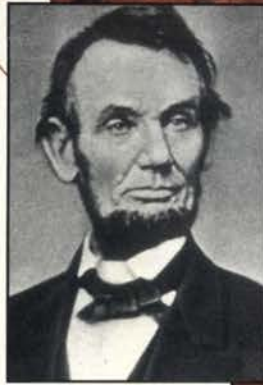


students in Baltimore, Maryland.

Before moving on to those reports, a few additional comments on the two key elements of the Core Knowledge curriculum are perhaps necessary: its specificity and its knowledge-based richness.

Specificity

As E.D. Hirsch and his associate John Holdren point out in the Introduction to the latest book in the Core Knowledge series, "Most curricula speak in general terms of vaguely defined skills, processes, and attitudes, often in an abstract, pseudotechnical jargon calling for children to 'analyze patterns and data'; or 'investigate the structure and dynamics of living systems'; or 'work cooperatively in a group.'" Teachers everywhere have similar guidelines ("students will demonstrate the ability to examine problems and proposed solutions from multiple perspectives;" "students should be able to generate original ideas") gathering dust in their cupboards, which is a good place for them since they don't tell you what you are expected to teach or your students expected to learn. Of course, such "guidelines" are not the beginning and end of the curriculum. A teacher is also likely to be handed a textbook—let's say, for fourth grade social studies. Of course, since the textbook publishers were trying to please all the various interest groups, there's much too much to be covered in one year. So, naturally, one fourth-grade teacher chooses certain topics, another chooses others. Different teachers also might add a topic they have a special interest in. Sometimes, it might happen that a third- and fourth-grade teacher have the same special interest; in science, for example, rain forests are currently a hot topic. Thus, the lack of specificity results in



myriad problems. When the three fourth-grade classrooms are

learning different things, the fifth-grade teachers who have those students the following year can't count on everyone having a common body of knowledge and skills upon which she can build. As for the students, some are left with big gaps; others are bored with repetition ("the rain forest again").

And for the millions of children in our mobile society who move to a new school, a new district, a new city, or even a new state, the results are even more disastrous. They can't pick up where they left off because the lack of specificity means there's no commonality in the curriculum. Everyone left off at a different place.

The lack of specificity—and the resulting lack of commonality—in the curriculum also have a serious, but less obvious, impact on teacher interaction and teaching quality. When everyone is teaching about specified aspects of Ancient Egypt in first grade, or the families of instruments that make up an orchestra in third grade, or electricity in fourth grade, teachers begin to collaborate more, to share ideas, materials, tips and techniques, what works and what doesn't. Closets that were once teachers' private enclaves start opening up. At first, the sheer magnitude and newness of the topics means that everyone needs each other to help gather materials and plan units. But soon the effort takes on a life of its own, changing teaching from an isolated to a collaborative profession.

The other tremendous advantage of a specific cur-

riculum—specific goals that must be mastered at each grade level—is that it's much easier to monitor, intervene, and help students when they need it. The more vague the goals, the easier it is for students to fall through the cracks.

Knowledge-based Richness and Rigor

There are two interrelated issues that need to be addressed here. First is the question of what young children should be learning, what they are capable of learning, what they are interested in learning. The second question has to do with attitudes toward factual knowledge. The Core Knowledge curriculum exposes children, early on, to interesting and demanding subject matter, and then builds on that, year by year, in a carefully developed sequence that reflects the basic cognitive principle that knowledge builds upon knowledge. When asked to give a flavor of the Core Knowledge curriculum, Hirsch once replied: "topics like: Ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome; the Industrial Revolution; limericks, haiku, and poetry; Rembrandt, Monet, and Michelangelo; Beethoven and Mozart; the Underground Railroad; the Trail of Tears; *Brown vs. Board of Education*; the Mexican Revolution; photosynthesis; medieval African empires; the Bill of Rights; ecosystems; women's suffrage; the Harlem Renaissance."

This is an ambitious curriculum, rich in the important people, places, events, ideas and concepts, and artistic productions that have shaped our world. I would like to be able to explain why anyone would be against such a curriculum—or why, upon seeing it, wouldn't immediately embrace it—but I honestly don't fully understand why. Certainly one only has to visit a Core Knowledge school to see how excited the children are to explain to you what they are learning about. (Jose, the San Antonio first-grader pictured on the cover, was especially delighted to demonstrate to me how, in Ancient Egypt, which he was studying about the day I visited, certain inside parts were removed from the dead bodies before they were mummified; the brain, he showed me in some detail, was removed via the nostrils. All of these interesting parts were placed in a canopic jar, a word that *he* knew but *I* had to look up.)

Make no mistake about it, though, what Core Knowledge students are learning is not the standard fare in American schools. For anyone who doubts that, please examine pages 22-23. We compare some randomly selected pages from the new 1997 Houghton Mifflin second-grade social studies textbook, *Work Together*, with a list of topics from the *Core Knowledge Sequence* for second-grade social studies. To give you a flavor, in a typical two-page spread from the Houghton Mifflin textbook, printed on over-sized pages and using large type and lavish illustrations, the entire passage reads as follows:

"Our Needs and Wants"

Needs are things people must have to live. We all need food to eat. We need clothes to wear. We need shelter, or cover, for protection. We also need love and friendship. Needs are the same for everyone all over the world.

Wants are important too. Wants are things we would like to have. Different people have different wants. What do you want?

Is there anyone who thinks children find this interesting? Or informative? Or useful? Vacuous, boring, and self-absorbed are the words that most immediately come to mind.

Is there anyone—adult or child—who wouldn't prefer to be engaged in the study of the following (and very partial) list of topics from the Core Knowledge second grade social studies sequence: "China: Huang He ['Yellow'] and Yangtze Rivers; Confucius; ancestor worship; Qin Dynasty; Great Wall of China; importance of silk; inventions, such as paper, seismograph; Chinese New Year."

The choice seems so obvious, and yet the textbooks like the one quoted above continue to be produced, bought, and used in large number. Why?

Perhaps part of the answer is a certain lack of excitement about, a kind of loss of faith in the value of knowledge.

In its place is, on the one hand, an emphasis on feelings, self-expression and immediate relevance; and, on the other hand, a disparagement of anything that smacks of "mere facts." An article last year in *Forbes* magazine described a high school literature class:

"The students pick a short story that relates to their ethnic backgrounds. A girl of Indian descent picks 'The Grass-Eaters,' a short story from the sub-continent, but she doesn't analyze the story. Instead she talks about her feelings, about how the story reminds her of a visit to her family's native village. Quite interesting and gossipy, but the proceedings do nothing to advance the children's ability to read or write English."

Or, as one veteran British educator described the situation in her country, "English at school now is less concerned with understanding and communicating the thought of the great masters than with the personal response of readers."

Perhaps the saddest moment recalled in his new book, *The Schools We Need*, took place when Hirsch was addressing a group of principals and administrators from around the country.

"In my first small-group session, an educator asked me what sorts of things I thought first graders should know. I mentioned, as they occurred to me, several examples of what first graders were learning in Core Knowledge schools: some fables of Aesop; some facts about Egypt, including mummies and the Nile; some elements of geography, like being able to find north, south, east, and west both out of doors and on globes and maps, as well as being able to identify the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and the seven continents. Immediately, one of the participants asked me if I really thought it was of any use whatever to a first grader to learn the seven continents? No one at the meeting was willing to defend the idea of teaching such facts to young children. Even if some might have privately favored doing so, no one dared to speak out. If dissenters were present, they were being powerfully inhibited by social constraints.

"An hour or so later, in a plenary meeting, I was asked by a curious teacher, intrigued by the idea of teaching solid substance in early grades (for some did seem interested in the general idea), whether I had enjoyed editing resource books for the early grades. I said, yes indeed, that I had learned a great deal. Next question: What had I learned that was most interesting? I pondered. Well, perhaps, the most exciting thing for me was at last to understand the relations between the earth and the sun during a year's orbit, and why, at the equator, spring and fall are the hottest seasons. Then, from another quarter, a dash of cold water was thrown on this momentary enthusiasm when an educator asked me if I thought that tidbit of information had made me a better person. Again, no one spoke up to defend teaching factual knowledge."

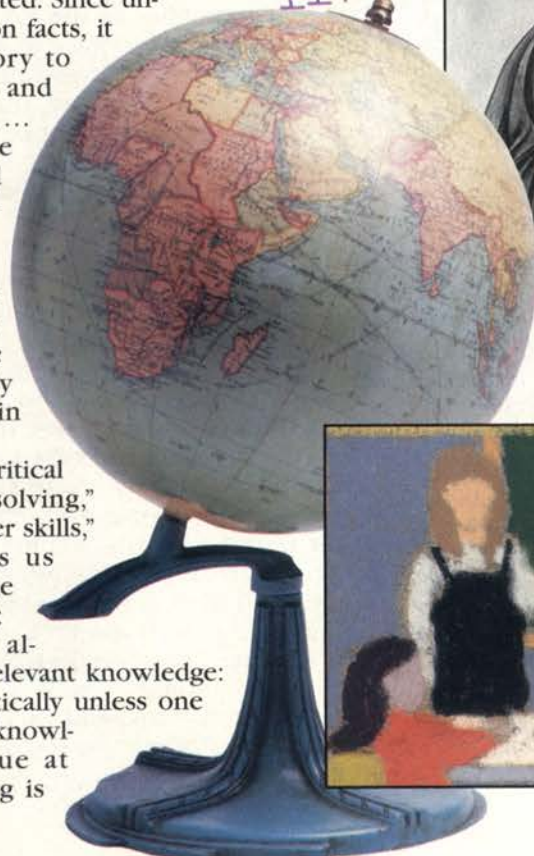
Much of the lack of enthusiasm for "factual knowledge" seems to come from the "factual" part of the phrase. Facts, it seems, are out of fashion. But as Hirsch, in full command of the relevant cognitive research, points out, "It is true that facts in isolation are less valuable than facts whose interrelations have been understood. But those interrelations are also facts (if they happen to be true), and their existence also depends entirely upon a knowledge of the subordinate facts that are being interrelated. Since understanding depends on facts, it is simply contradictory to praise understanding and to disparage facts.... Whether [facts] are dead and fragmented depends upon teachers and students, not upon the facts themselves, which are not only required for understanding but are sometimes immensely vital and interesting in their own right."

As for the famed "critical thinking," "problem solving," and other "higher-order skills," Hirsch again brings us back to the central role of factual knowledge: "Critical thinking is always predicated on relevant knowledge: One cannot think critically unless one has a lot of relevant knowledge about the issue at hand. Critical thinking is



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not merely giving one's opinion. To counterpose 'critical thinking' and 'mere facts' is a profound empirical mistake. Common sense and cognitive psychology alike support the Jeffersonian view that critical thinking always depends upon factual knowledge." In other words, it's hard to think critically about something you don't know much about.

Nor, Hirsch points out, has the advent of the computer reduced "the need for students to have in their minds well-practiced habits and readily available knowledge. Quite the contrary," he writes, "the more one looks things up via computer, the more often one needs to understand what one is looking up. There is no evidence that a well-stocked and well-equipped mind can be displaced by 'accessing skills.'"

OUR CHILDREN are hungry for knowledge—important, grown-up knowledge. E. D. Hirsch's great insight was to understand both the importance and attraction of factual knowledge and the necessity for a common curriculum and to translate these ideas into a specific, carefully sequenced, rigorous curriculum that could become the common ground upon which we continue this great experiment in democracy, a common ground upon which our students meet and grow and connect with the larger literate society they are preparing themselves to become part of. We may never completely level the playing field

made uneven by differences in family wealth, education, and stability, but we can give all kids a fighting chance at a full life by making sure that, *at school*, they are all exposed to a rich, common curriculum.

P.S. And if you're ever in San Antonio, stop by the Hawthorne school and have Jose—or any of the first graders—give you a lesson on Ancient Egypt. Unless you know more about canopic jars and sarcophagus coffins than I do, be prepared to learn something. □

—EDITOR

Fort Collins, Colorado WASHINGTON CORE KNOWLEDGE SCHOOL

Some parents are trying to sign up their unborn children.

BY DAVID RUENZEL

WHEN YOU talk with parents at the Washington Core Knowledge School in Fort Collins, Colo., about the typical public school curriculum, the discussion is often filled with images of erosion. Many describe how the curriculum they knew as children, the one rooted in the granite truths of Western civilization, has disappeared from most schools, or as they like to put it, "washed away."

Listening to them, it's as if whole strata of history, science, and literature have been eroded into a pile of unidentifiable fragments by a series of destructive shifts in the educational climate. Once students as young as twelve could intelligently discuss the causes of the Civil War; now some aren't sure which century it was in. Once students mused over the meanings of Aesop's fables and Greek myths; now there is a heap of basals and pop-culture novels. Once students understood how time formed rivers and mountains; now there are peppy speeches about saving the rain forests.

That is why, in the spring of 1992, a group of these Fort Collins parents decided to petition the local school district for a different kind of public elementary school. The school they envisioned would emphasize character education and parental involvement. But most of all, it would emphasize a content-rich curriculum that would leave nothing to chance. The curriculum would be teacher-directed from beginning to end. Students would acquire specific knowledge and skill at specific times in their schooling, the idea being that they would build on this knowledge and skill from one year to the next in an orderly and productive fashion. There would be, as the parents like to say, "no gaps" in

David Ruenzel is senior writer for Teacher Magazine and contributing editor for Education Week. This article is reprinted with permission from Teacher Magazine (August 1996), where it appeared under the title "By the Book."

their children's education.

When the Washington Core Knowledge School finally opened in the fall of 1993 after sometimes tense but ultimately successful negotiations with the local school board, it was with an all-encompassing curriculum developed and published by the Core Knowledge Foundation of Charlottesville, Va. The school is one of approximately 350 in forty states now using the curriculum, formally known as the Core Knowledge Sequence.

Like the college town from which it draws its students, Washington is predominantly white and middle-class. But a number of the Core Knowledge schools are succeeding with a much more diverse student population in tough urban settings like the Bronx and inner-city Baltimore. In fact, the foundation, which is headed by scholar and author E.D. Hirsch, has long claimed that the sequence is most valuable for poor and minority children—those with the widest gaps in their knowledge base.

THE SEQUENCE has its roots in Hirsch's now famous (and to some, infamous) 1987 best seller, *Cultural Literacy*. It features a bedazzling list of items children are expected to learn. The language arts segment of the first grade curriculum alone contains some forty five poems and stories, from Langston Hughes' "Hope" and Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Swing" to Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit* and A.A. Milne's *The House at Pooh Corner*. And this is just the beginning. Other people, words, events, and terms the first graders learn about include Tutankhamen, Maya, mosque and Mecca, minutemen and redcoats, Monet and Mona Lisa, Bach and Prokofiev, the Yucatán Peninsula, and the Louisiana Purchase. The sciences are thoroughly studied as well, starting with the food chain, constellations, and rocks and minerals in the first grade and advancing to natural selection, double

(Continued on page 24)

San Antonio, Texas NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

An inner-city school is transformed.

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE Elementary School is an inner-city, predominantly Hispanic school in San Antonio, Texas. Ninety-six percent of Hawthorne's approximately five hundred students receive free or reduced-price lunches; 28 percent are considered limited-English proficient (LEP). Before its transformation to a Core Knowledge school, which began with the 1992-93 school year, Hawthorne bore the typical scars of many inner-city schools. As described in a recent article by two Hawthorne teachers: "Hawthorne had battled all the problems common to inner-city schools, including low student achievement, inconsistent attendance, and a transient student population... (s)tudents entered and exited its doors below grade level. Student behaviors ranged from apathetic to disruptive."

Open house and PTA meetings were attended by a handful of families."¹

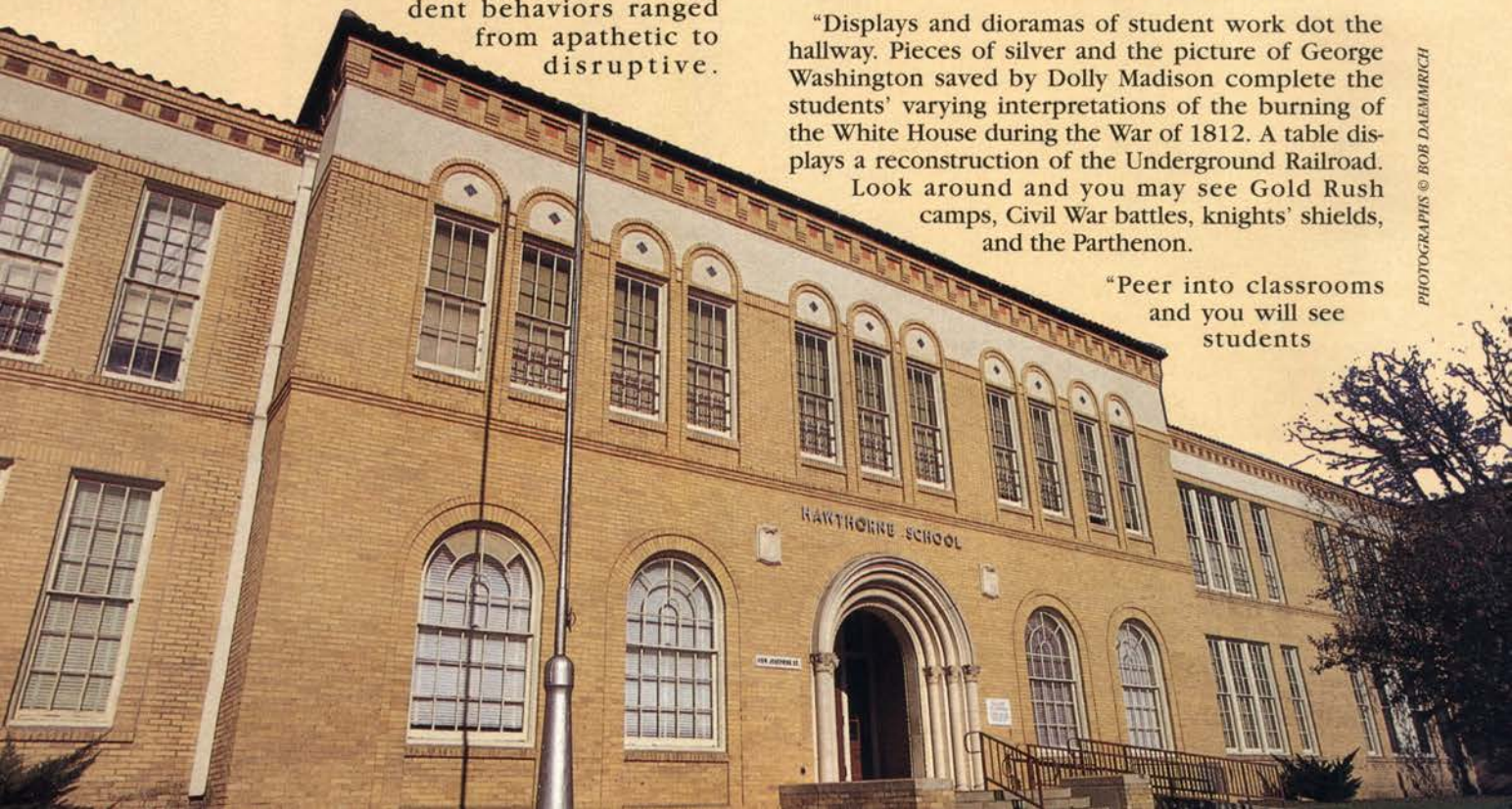
Fewer than four years after the Core Curriculum was introduced, these same teachers would describe a very different scene:

"Enter the main door of the school and you are welcomed by a collection of African masks. A bulletin board on which students have drawn a map of their neighborhood and identified examples of Greek architecture grabs your attention as you stroll down the hallway. Another map shows places where the Vikings traveled and traded around the world. Still another bulletin board displays the similarities and differences between Mayan and Egyptian pyramids.

"Displays and dioramas of student work dot the hallway. Pieces of silver and the picture of George Washington saved by Dolly Madison complete the students' varying interpretations of the burning of the White House during the War of 1812. A table displays a reconstruction of the Underground Railroad.

Look around and you may see Gold Rush camps, Civil War battles, knights' shields, and the Parthenon.

"Peer into classrooms and you will see students



involved in exciting interdisciplinary projects. While one class investigates the interactions of Newton's Laws on the exciting world of amusement park rides, another class analyzes the chain of events in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Yet another class is identifying the influence and impact of the Magna Carta.

"On a typical day, students are moving about the school. Some are scurrying to share their latest stories. Others are searching for evidence of heat exchange throughout the school. Still more are conducting interviews, asking students and staff who their heroes are and why. A group of students has just returned from the physics department at Trinity University. Students are proudly placing "Peaceable Kingdom" outside their room, a delightful mixed media artwork that was created by classes that visited the art museum.

"Ten-year-olds and eleven-year-olds debate whether *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, or *Macbeth* is the best Shakespeare play. Their arguments are knowledgeable and confident. While waiting in the lunch line, third-graders can be heard debating interpretations of the Viking's actions of pillage, plunder, and barter. Students with learning disabilities compare the traditions of Roman feasts with their local Fiesta celebrations. Another student shares her opinion that both Michelangelo and da Vinci could be claimed to be the best Renaissance artists because, in her words, 'they both touched the world and our hearts with their beauty.'

"The common language of Core Knowledge spreads beyond the school and out to our families and community. Siblings talk about what they are learning. One boy said, 'My little sister was learning about the Maya. I knew a lot from what we studied so I helped her and now she is the smartest in the class!'

"Parents have noticed and have taken an interest. Our dine-a-versities, which are held in the evenings and include a meal, are attended by hundreds. Parents, grandparents, and other family members come to learn about and to share what the children are learning."²

Test score results bear witness to the teachers' observations. Children enter the school below grade level—often at the 20th and 30th percentiles—on nationally normed tests—but by the time they finish fifth grade, they've caught up; they're at grade level or above.

Writing in a new journal that emanates from Johns Hopkins University, a San Antonio school district evaluator recently reported that "...the results from the Hawthorne students in grades three through five in writing, reading, and mathematics are very encouraging. Although Hawthorne students tend to be more at risk of failing academically than are students in the district as a whole, because of the larger percentage of economically disadvantaged and LEP students, snapshots indicate that the school has succeeded in raising

achievement levels beyond the aggregate performance of all other elementary schools in the district.... The data appears to indicate that, despite the early deprivation that makes itself apparent to the teachers of children who enter school far below the academic standing of their more advantaged peers, potential failure to thrive over time can be ameliorated for children of teachers committed to the principle put simply by [E.D.] Hirsch that knowledge does, in fact, build on knowledge in rather dramatic ways."³

In the pages that follow, we present an interview with Maria Espinoza, a first-grade teacher at Hawthorne, and a display of photos showing what life and work look like at this extraordinary school.

—EDITOR

1. "Hawthorne Elementary School: The Teachers' Perspective," by Debra Mentzer and Tricia Shaughnessy. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1996. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Mahwah, NJ.
2. Ibid.
3. "Hawthorne Elementary School: The Evaluator's Perspective," by Gail Owen Schubnell. Ibid. p. 39.



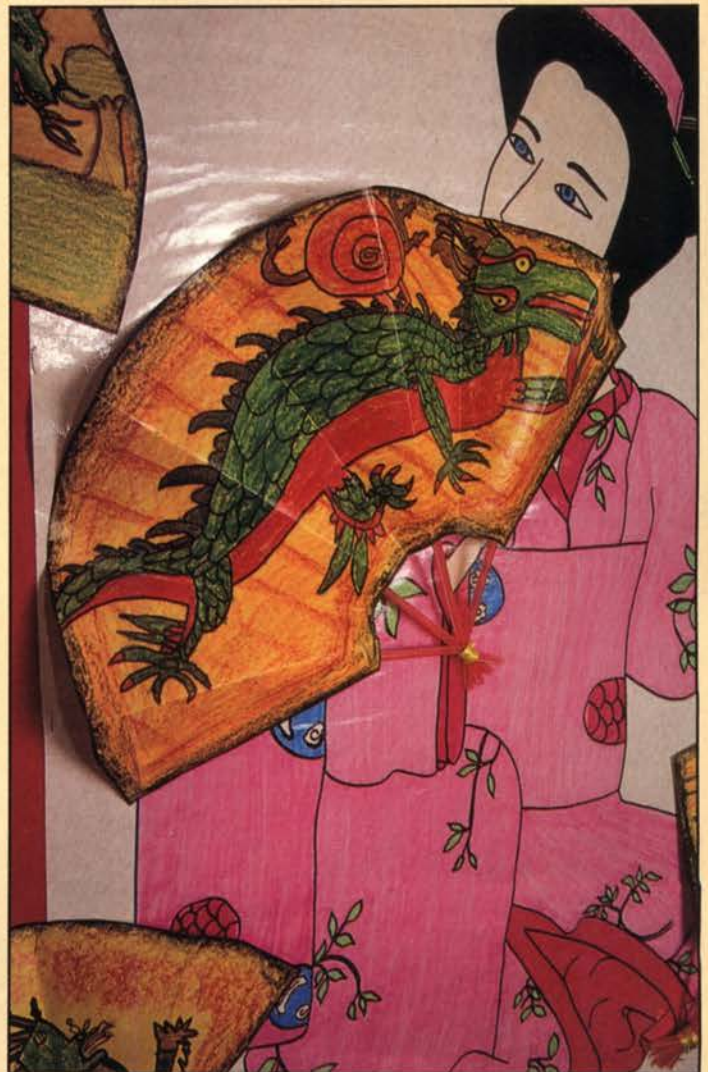
PHOTO: TOMMY HULTGREN/BOB DAEMERICH

First-graders construct their own canopic jars, as part of their study of Ancient Egypt.



Above: Fifth-graders prepare for a performance of Macbeth. Left: Teachers meet regularly by grade level to share materials and ideas. Common grade-level planning time is a key ingredient in the successful implementation of the Core Knowledge curriculum.












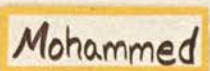
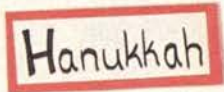

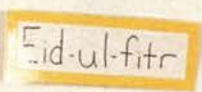







The visual arts command an important place in the Core Knowledge curriculum. While much of the work in art in the early grades is in the form of creative doing—drawing, painting, working with clay—children are also taught how to see art in an informed and active manner. Students at all grade levels consider the technical concepts and terms associated with the generally recognized elements of art—color, line, shape, light, texture, and space—and study specific works of art as illustrations of the concepts and terms introduced at each grade level.

The art curriculum is usually integrated with the students' other subject matter. Above are first-graders' cave drawings, part of their study of ancient civilizations. To the right are Chinese fans made by second-graders to complement their study of the culture of China.

Judaism Christianity Islam

	Judaism	Christianity	Islam
Symbols	Star of David 	 Cross	 rescnet
Books	 Torah	 Bible	 Koran
Places of Worship	 Synagogue	 Church	 Mosque
Important People	 Abraham Moses	 Jesus	 Mohammed
Celebration we Studied	 Hanukkah	 Christmas	 Eid-ul-fitr
Important Places	 Jerusalem	 Bethlehem	 Mecca

"Since religion is a shaping force in the story of civilization," explains the Core Knowledge Sequence, "[the curriculum] introduces children in the early grades to major world religions.... The goal is to familiarize, not proselytize; to be descriptive, not prescriptive. The tone should be one of respect and balance. No religion should be disparaged by implying that it is a thing of the past. Any one of the religions studied may be important in the life of a student."

The above display comes from Sandra Zapata's first-grade class.

TEACHER WELCOMES DEFINED, RICH CURRICULUM

MARIA ESPINOZA has been a teacher for twenty-three years. She taught fifth-grade, then first, then fifth again, and now is back with first. This is her sixth year at Hawthorne Elementary School. She also serves as the building representative at her school for the San Antonio Federation of Teachers.

This interview was conducted by Liz McPike, editor of the *American Educator* magazine.

American Educator (AE): Before your school adopted the Core Knowledge curriculum, to what extent was it true that one fifth-grade teacher might be teaching one topic and another fifth-grade teacher might not cover that topic? How much variation was there among the classes?

Maria Espinoza (M.E.): We all had the same textbooks, but if you want to stay a week with Native Americans, do that. If you want to spend six weeks with Native Americans—that's all right, too. It was at the teacher's discretion. Would anybody know? Would it make any difference? The teachers the following year, they were going to do their own units, they were going to take up their own topics.

For example, when I taught fifth-grade, there were three fifth-grade classes. I didn't know what the teacher down the hall was doing. She had her agenda and I had mine. I liked American history—both the early period and the Civil War period, so my students were receiving that information.

AE: But one teacher might decide that she is more interested in science and she might spend, say, a lot of time having students study the rain forest.

M.E.: That's right. That's how it worked. One class of students might know all about rain forests, but not much about Benjamin Franklin.

AE: What were the implications of all of this?

M.E.: Well, as a student travels through the grade levels, what if the next grade teacher wants to do rain forests again? Because that's what she likes to do. Then the student gets it twice. There was a lot of repetition, and there were a lot of holes.

I remember being at my other school and when the students came in at the start of the year, it was almost like starting from the beginning. We had no way of knowing where they had been or where they are. The advice we all went by was to assume nothing. We couldn't be sure what they knew. "Assume that they know nothing"—that doesn't sound good at all anymore, now that I look back at it. Now, with our Core Knowledge curriculum, when students come to me or when I send them on to the next grade, we can count

on all of them knowing certain things. And then we can build on that, in a carefully sequenced progression of knowledge.

AE: What will your students know when they leave first grade? Just off the top of your head, give us a flavor. What can the second-grade teachers count on?

M.E.: Oh my, let's see. They will know about the cave-dwellers, the Mayans. They will know about Egypt, the pyramids, King Tut, the Boston Tea Party, Benjamin Franklin and Paul Revere's ride. They will know about the ancient Aztecs; they will know they were a civilization with cities and government and science and trade. In science, they will know about land formations, animal habitats, the parts of the earth—the core, the mantle, the crust. They will know about volcanoes and molecules. They will know their seven continents, they will know the habitats of major animal groups on different continents. They will have put together a world atlas. They will know how to take a non-fiction book and use the index and table of contents of that book. That's just a very partial list; they will know a lot.

AE: And at the same time, they're learning to read and write and add and subtract and all the basic skills that go with first grade.

M.E.: Absolutely! Never drop that. What's different, though, is that, in their reading, for example, we talk about core information. We made a basal reading book based on the people and culture of Mesopotamia: "They learned to judge from their friend King Hammarabi. They learned to paint from their friends the berries." Wherever we can, we tie their reading to interesting information, as well as to good literature.

AE: I'd like you to take a look at this document, "The Essential Elements for Elementary School: Prekindergarten-5th Grade, San Antonio Independent School District." It's like a "scope and sequence," organized by grade level. Read me one of the items from the first grade list and tell me what kind of direction it might give a teacher.

M.E. Well, here's geography. It says, "Knows basic geography skills concerning direction and location." (Laughing) I don't know. You would probably turn to a textbook and talk about your school—where it is, the streets, your own home, places you go to in the community, that kind of stuff. And under history, it says "learns concepts of time." That's the only item listed. What do you do now? "Concepts of time." Like, how far back? Yesterday? Weeks? In fact, I know what they're getting at here. Concepts of time have to do

with the days of the week, the seasons, how many weeks in a year. That's what it is. That's time. (Reading from the document) "Political science: learns pledge of allegiance and the National Anthem." This is it. You see, with the Core curriculum, we discuss the concept of civilization, what makes something a civilization, the six signs—government, trade, cities, etc.

And look at this: Under social studies skills, the only item is "Recognizes cause and effect relationships." I'm trying to think, before "Core," what I would do with that. I guess I would look for something in reading, some kind of workbook skill on cause and effect and try to tie it in. "This happened because..."

AE: Sounds pretty empty compared to what you teach now.

M.E.: It's just so limited, when we know that six-year-olds can do so much more.

AE: I suppose some teachers would say that a specific, defined curriculum is confining. What's your feeling about that?

M.E.: First of all, in my opinion, to be given a two hundred to three hundred-page textbook and let loose to more or less do your own thing is really a lot more difficult than being given a very specific body of knowledge and skills that you are expected to teach and the children are expected to learn. And I think a lot of teachers want this kind of stability, this structure. This is the amount you cover, this is what you cover. And after that, we move on, go on to the next unit. I think teachers want flexibility in the way we present the material—and that should always be—no one is tied to any single way of presenting their material. But we are talking content.

For example, take the curriculum I'm responsible for this year, the first-grade curriculum. I've got a nine-week period, a time frame, and I know what I'm supposed to do in that time frame, and I feel secure that I've set aside this many days for this topic, this will take a week, this will take two weeks, we'll do this at the end of this grading period and then work to get that done. Whereas, I think before, it was, "Well, I've got a whole year and I've got this textbook and wherever I want to go." That was a lot harder. Now, with the curriculum set, my energy is free to concentrate on the best way to help the children master the material.

AE: What impact has this specific, common curriculum had on the way teachers relate to each other?

M.E.: Well, going back to your question of do we find it confining: If anything, it has brought us out of our confinement. Before, weren't we just an island in our classroom, so far off from everyone else, so far away? With Core Knowledge, we have to come together: "What did you find on Egypt? Well, this is what I found.... What did you find on the Aztecs? This is what I have.... Do you want to use it?" I think we all just like getting together and sharing this information.

First-grade teacher Maria Espinoza is surrounded by her students, some of whom are costumed for a presentation to parents and other visitors.

WINTER 1996-1997



This idea of sharing the Core Knowledge has become kind of a motto. It just comes, it's a natural kind of thing. "What do you all have...let me see what you have, let me show you what I've found." We work together. There is a lot more collaboration.

AE: This curriculum you're teaching is so much richer than the standard first-grade fare in most school districts. How do the children respond?

M.E.: Well, you can see how excited my first graders are about Ancient Egypt and how the pyramids were built and how the mummies were prepared. They love the big words and the feeling of grown-up knowledge. And it's just all very interesting—interesting to learn, interesting to teach.

I do want to mention one aspect that was very apparent in my fifth-grade class. The Core Knowledge curriculum had a big impact both on their writing and on their reading habits.

Before Core, they would typically have a writing assignment from the language book. "This is what you write about," and that didn't excite them. It was like pulling teeth. Or it was something from their personal experience: "What I Did on My Summer Vacation," or what did you do when you went roller skating, or here is a picture, tell me something about that picture. So we said, let's take the core information and plug it into persuasive writing, into narrative writing. Now they could actually write about something we had talked about or studied. Shakespeare: They went back in time and took a Shakespeare story—for example, *Romeo*

and *Juliet*—how would it have been different if there hadn't been a Juliet? Or I might tell them, "You are Don Quixote, go on a second quest." Or, "You are an ancient Mayan ball player, or a Mayan princess: tell us about that."

As for their reading habits, there has been a tremendous change. Before the Core curriculum, the class would go to the library and they would come back with, say, books on how to draw cartoons. Or sports—that was the boys' favorite; that and the drawing of airplanes. But since we started using the Core, we have done a study—our librarian has done a printout for us—that shows that the students are picking out library books that pertain to the information they are learning in the classroom. "Do you have a book on Egypt?" We don't tell them what to get, it's their library time, take the pass. And they come back with books on atoms, the molecular structure, Michelangelo, the Renaissance times. They're putting together those kinds of things on their own. They would go down and get that book and bring it up and they were so proud—"Look at this, look at what I got." That excitement about picking out a library book: We hadn't seen that before. Our librarian was amazed: "Look at what they're checking out now."

AE: The teachers meet by grade level on a regular basis, don't you?

M.E.: Yes, we do. We've been able to arrange the schedule so that we can meet together every other week for a class period. A lot of times, we look at the curriculum...where we are, what we need to cover. We look at the state requirements...for example our TASS (our state skills test)—what do we need to do in that, how do we tie our basic reading program in with the Core?

The meetings give us a set time to come together—what do we have, where are we going with this, are we on schedule, what else do we need to cover, are we going to make it? It's like a working document—these units that we have. Maybe this didn't work, let's try something else. The opportunity to talk about what we do in our class with someone that we work with is a great advantage.

AE: And you can only do that because you are working on the same topics. When you were working on different topics, there wasn't much in common?

M.E.: That's right, there was no common ground and there was a feeling of isolation. I really think that's what it was. Unless you had a principal come in and say, "You must do this" ... but they don't do that. They keep it open, to be flexible. But there are some things we shouldn't be flexible with, and that's content. Because if we are, the children lose out. The flexibility is not worth the price that we pay.

With the Core curriculum, the other teachers are counting on me and I'm counting on them to each do our part of the spiral, to keep it going so that, when our students leave this school they will be an all-round kind of kid and they can go anywhere they want to—that's the whole point. You can travel and go anywhere you want to and you're going to know something. □

How to get started, where to get help

EVERYONE ACKNOWLEDGES that the first year or two of implementing the Core Knowledge curriculum takes a lot of hard work. But thanks to the people at the Core Knowledge Foundation and to the teachers and schools who pioneered the curriculum, help is at hand. Approximately fifty percent of the topics in the Core Knowledge Sequence now have written lesson plans to accompany them. These are available for the cost of printing and shipping, as is a booklet that gives ideas for getting started, "A School's Guide to Core Knowledge." In addition, E.D. Hirsch, Jr. and John Holdren have just edited a jam-packed, 350-page resource guide, *Books To Build On*, which is an annotated guide—organized by grade and by subject—to a wealth of children's books that can be used with the Core Knowledge curriculum. Finally, training for teachers is also available. To find out more about any or all of these resources, write or call the non-profit Core Knowledge Foundation (2012-B Morton Drive, Charlottesville, VA 22903; 804/977-7550). Also, you can get access to more lessons and ideas through the Core Knowledge Home Page on the Internet (sponsored by Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas) at the following address:
<http://www.trinity.edu/departments/education/core/core.html>

Baltimore, Maryland

CURTIS BAY

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

'This curriculum unites the family.'

FROM THE outside, Curtis Bay Elementary School in the city of Baltimore has a somewhat bleak look to it—no fancy playground or well-tended soccer fields like one finds in the suburbs. The student population is diverse, but primarily white and primarily low income; 70 percent receive free or reduced-price lunch.

But walk inside Curtis Bay and the bleakness is re-



placed by the bustle of activity and enthusiasm and by beautiful displays of student work. The school introduced the Core Knowledge curriculum only a little more than a year ago, but already the change is palpable. In the pages

that follow, we hear from some of the voices at Curtis Bay.

*Inspired by a Core Knowledge conference, fifth-grade teacher **Paula Myers** introduced the idea of the Core Curriculum to Curtis Bay Elementary. Here she leads her class in a discussion of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*.*

"I think that for a long time we've played down to children, we haven't given them rich materials to work with. In literature this year we did Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, and at first when I looked through the book, I thought, 'Oh Dear.' It's a romantic comedy where you have couples falling in love with each other because of the magic potion that this one fellow puts in their eyes. And there are so many characters in it, I thought, 'Oh gee, I don't know if fifth grade is going to be able to handle this.' Well, they loved it. They loved it. They got a kick out of it and they understood it and, of course, we acted out part of it in a play, and then I got the children's classic version on video, which enhances it for them. We had already done background work on Shakespeare, the Elizabethan era, and English life during the Golden Age. The students had built cottages and castles and theaters. I overheard them

speaking in Shakespearean language: 'Doth thou want to go to lunch with me?'

"We're just now starting to get to the point in education where we should be, in terms of content, process, and dimensions of learning. I think this should have been done twenty years ago so that by now it would be refined. It seems that we are still having these discussions about what should be taught in each grade level and how we should do it. We need a national curriculum—they know the ways to teach reading, writing—it's like, 'Polish it up and get it done.'"



PHOTOGRAPHS © MICHAEL C. CAMPBELL

"We have this little conversation about what I did at school, and it seems like I just go on and on and on, because we did so much stuff."

Editor: "I know you use a lot of other materials, too, but as a basic outline of what you're learning this year, you're using the book, *What Your 5th Grader Needs To Know*." I understand you took the book home and showed it to your parents? What did they think of it?"

Shannon: "They thought it was really good for 5th graders. My mom gave my teacher, Ms. Myers, a note asking how to buy one of these for herself, because my mom wants me to grow up and be rich and smart. And my dad said he'd like to have one of these books, too, because sometimes when he has troubles with my brother with his homework or something, he can help him. They want their own copy so they can read it and practice it over with us."

Editor: "And how about your parents, Kristina?"

Kristina: "My mom was really excited about that book, and she wanted to get a 6th-grade one for me to practice over the summer to get ready for 6th grade next year, and she wanted one for my brother, too—he's seven. She's really excited and she wanted me to learn more and work with the book a lot and she's really happy. She looked at it and she read some stuff and she was really into it, because it has so much information in it."

Shannon: "It's a little complicated but once you get used to it, it's not so hard. And it's very interesting."

Editor: "Does learning interesting stuff make you more excited about coming to school?"

Kristina & Shannon: "Yes!"

Kristina Baker
5th Grade

Shannon Frock
5th Grade

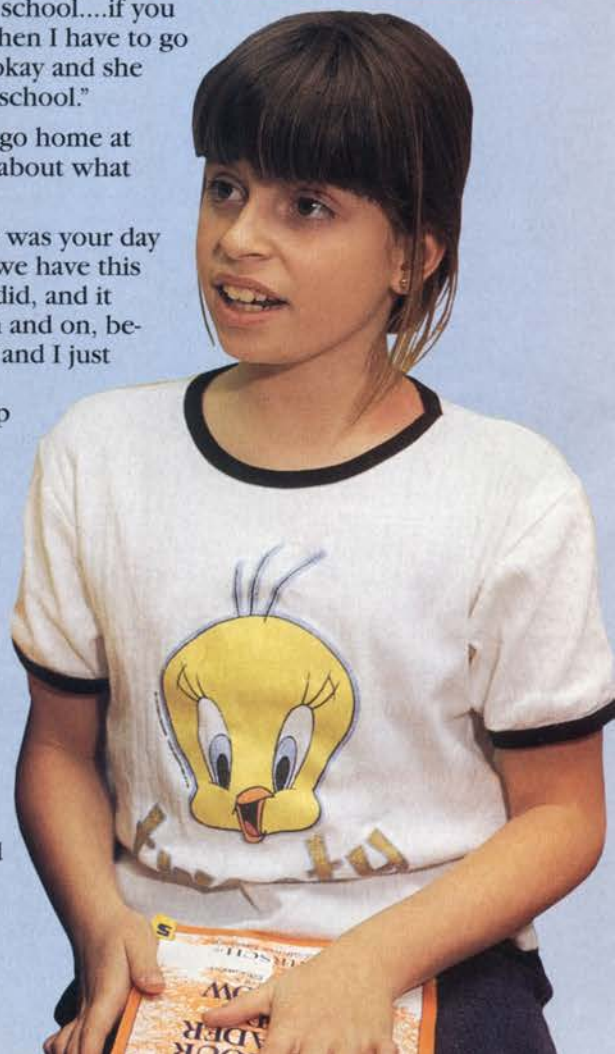
Shannon: "Even when I'm really really sick, I tell my mom I'm not staying home, I have to come to school. I want to learn. Last year I was really sick near Christmas time—it was almost time for Christmas break—remember, Krissy? And my mom said I was staying home. I said 'Mom I have to go to school...if you want me to grow up and be smart then I have to go to school and learn.' And she said okay and she called my grandma to drive me to school."

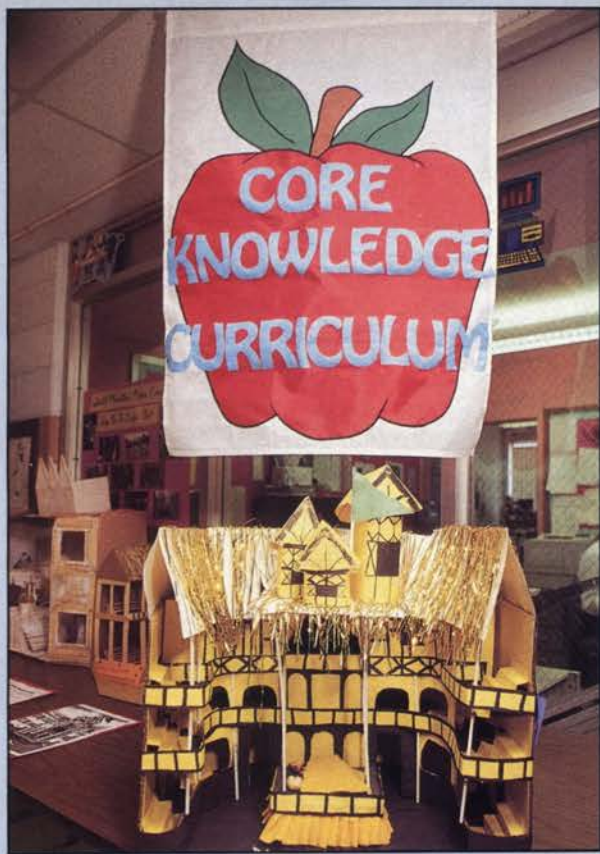
Editor: "Sometimes when you go home at night, do you talk to your parents about what you've learned that day?"

Shannon: "Yes. They say, 'How was your day at school?' and I say, 'Just fine!' and we have this little conversation about what I did, and it seems like I just go on and on and on, because we did so much stuff and I just have to tell everything."

"When I get up, I get up at 5:30 in the morning and get ready. We have to get up at 5:30 because we have to get to our grandma's around 6:30 because my mom has to work. I leave for school 15 minutes early—I start walking—and nobody has to call me and tell me it's time."

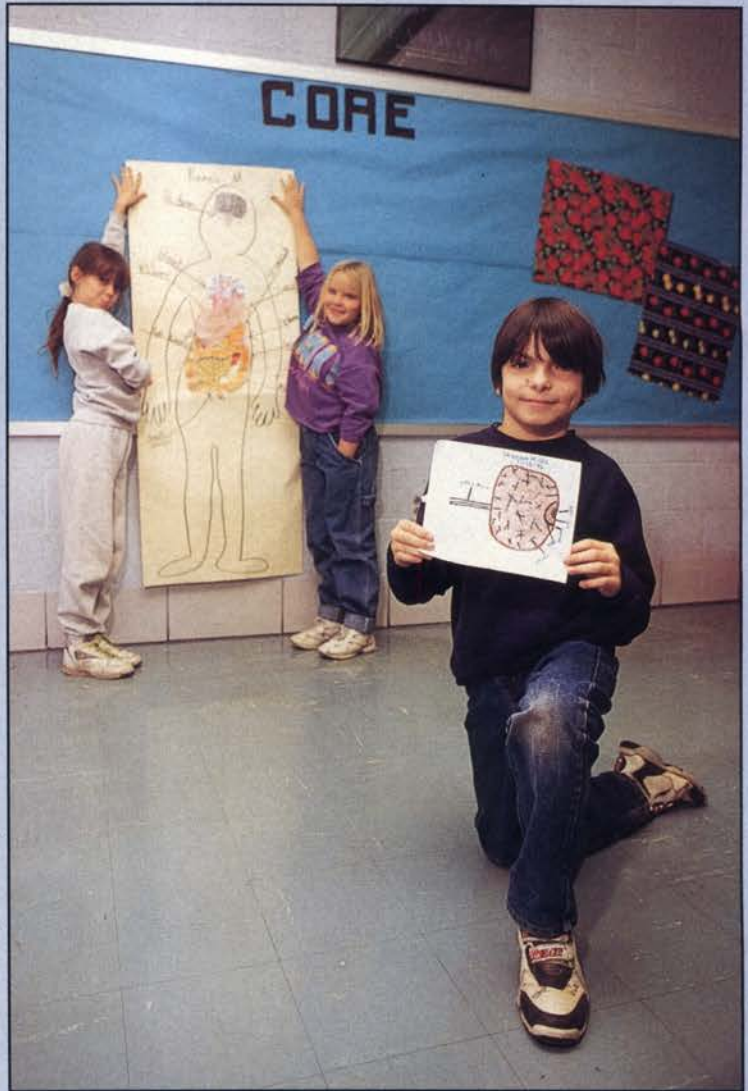
I'm already out the door and ready to roll."





This Globe Theater was made by Dana Coker, Grade 5.

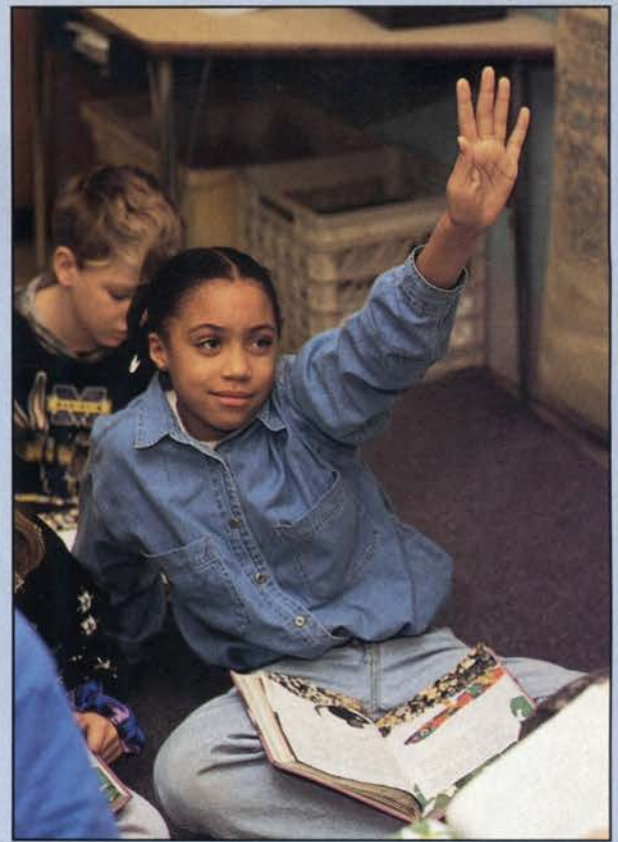
Knowledge builds upon knowledge: In second grade, students receive an overview of the major parts and functions of the human body. Building on this in the third grade, they delve more deeply into the nervous system and how the human eyes and ears work. In the foreground, a third-grader displays a drawing of the parts of the eye.



Ruth James, the librarian—who also manages the Core Knowledge Resource Room, teaches second graders about the Kwanzaa celebration.

"I love the Core Curriculum because it allows the teacher to be very creative. It allows the teacher to explore and share a wealth of information. And the content is fabulous! I can take these second graders and I can work with them on a level that may be what 4th and 5th graders would get if it were just a regular curriculum."





A third-grader is anxious to add her voice.

Mary Minter, the principal



“The parents are very excited and much more involved in their children’s education than they used to be. I recall one parent telling me that they were playing ‘Jeopardy’ and there was a question about the Great Lakes and her son, a kindergarten student, answered the question. I don’t know if they asked what is the biggest lake or what, but he was able to yell out the answer. ‘Now I know that has to be wrong, he doesn’t know that,’ she

thought to herself, and it turned out she was shocked that that child knew that answer and she had not a clue of what was the biggest lake. That type of thing, coming from a kindergarten student, really excites parents. And, as another example, the children are able to talk about the voyages that Columbus made. Before, they knew about Columbus, but they could not tell you the voyages he took, how he got where he was going, what route, what direction, what continent—that kind of detail. They know about the states, not just that this is Maryland or this is a particular state, but what’s important in that particular state—what are the attributes. They can really get detailed about what is going on — not just a state on the map anymore.

“The children’s attendance has also improved; they *want* to be here.

“Through our newsletter, we inform parents all the time of what we are doing and what the class is doing so they are kept abreast of what’s going on. Also, the teacher sends home on a monthly basis a project that the child will be working on and gives parents ideas of things they can do to help the child get a stronger knowledge of what they’re studying in that particular subject area.

“The students have more to say to their parents now about what they learned at school. They talk around the dinner table now. Usually you ask the child, ‘How was school?’ ‘Fine.’ That’s it. There is usually no conversation. Now the children go home and really talk about all this because this is really interesting. Yes, it unites the family. If nothing else, this curriculum unites the family.” □

Test Scores Rise, Enthusiasm Abounds

RESEARCHERS FROM Johns Hopkins University and the University of Memphis are conducting a multi-year study of a number of Core Knowledge schools. That study has not been completed, and the quantitative test score results are not yet available. However, a first-year "qualitative report" is in circulation; it is based on school and classroom observations, focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires.

Regarding the benefits of the Core Knowledge program, this qualitative report is decidedly positive. The common curriculum is working as it should: "Core Knowledge appears to lessen the need for reteaching concepts at the beginning of the school year." Teachers report that students are more interested in learning: "Over and over again, educators told us that their students are much more excited about learning since they began teaching Core Knowledge." In addition, the report concludes, the children are also reading more, especially non-fiction.

Core Knowledge also seems to invigorate teachers. The Hopkins study found a significant increase in teacher interaction: "We probably have at least one formal meeting a week, and maybe five or six other informal meetings in the hallways, talking about where we are.... We share our resources, and we share ideas." Teachers also reported that Core Knowledge made their own work lives "more interesting and exciting;" and rather than waning—as often happens with new programs—this enthusiasm "increases over time as

teachers attain mastery of the curriculum."

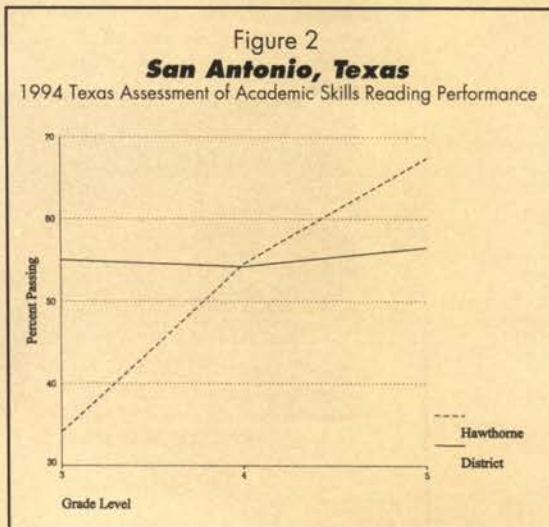
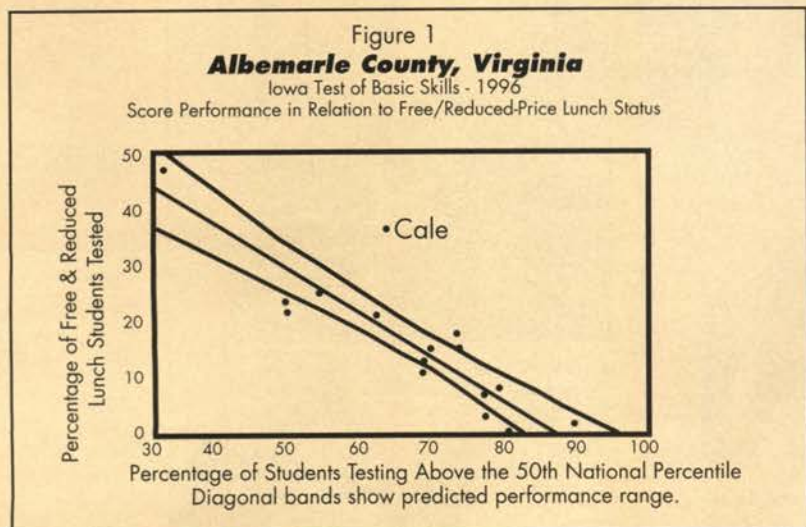
Although no large-scale quantitative results are yet available, studies have been conducted of achievement outcomes, as measured by standardized test scores, at individual Core Knowledge schools. One of the most interesting studies centers on the Paul H. Cale Elementary School in Albemarle County, Virginia. Bearing out E.D. Hirsch's prediction that a common, rigorous curriculum would be especially beneficial for disadvantaged students, a statistical analysis shows that the gap between students of low socio-economic status and others is narrowing. Approximately forty percent of Cale's students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. The diagonal lines in Figure 1 represent the best prediction of the percentage of low-income students who would score above the 50th national percentile on standardized tests (in this case, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills).¹ As the dots on the graph indicate, most of the district's elementary schools performed within their predicted range. Only one school—Cale—stood out dramatically from the rest, far above what would be predicted by the socioeconomic composition of its students. "We can show that over the last four years, which happens to be when we implemented Core Knowledge," says Cale principal Gerald L. Terrell, "our scores for all students have consistently gone up, especially in social studies, science, and math.... We are scoring well above the national norms in social studies, above the

75th percentile.... Our scores defy what you might expect."

Figure 2 shows how students at Hawthorne Elementary School in San Antonio, Texas compare to students in the other 65 elementary schools in the San Antonio district on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills Reading Performance (TASS).² [For a broader discussion of the Core Knowledge program at Hawthorne, see pages 9-16.] As the author of the Hawthorne study commented, "[The graph] illustrates that although district reading performance is generally consistent across grade levels with a student pass rate of about 55%, Hawthorne's results show a steep increase in the reading pass rate at consecutive grade levels. At Grade 3, Hawthorne's pass rate of 34% is well below that of the district. By Grade 5, however, Hawthorne's 67% pass rate far exceeds the district's 56% pass rate.... Although Hawthorne students tend to be more at risk of failing academically than are students in the district as a whole, because of the larger percentages of economically disadvantaged and LEP students, snapshots indicate that the school has succeeded in raising achievement levels beyond the aggregate performance of all other elementary schools in the district." —EDITOR

¹ "Core Knowledge Sequence Credited in Test Score Boosts," by Michael Marshall. *Common Knowledge* (Fall 1996). The Core Knowledge Foundation: Charlottesville, VA.

² "Hawthorne Elementary School: The Evaluator's Perspective," by Gail Owen Schubnell. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* (JESPAR), Vol. 1, No. 1, 1996. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Mahwah, NJ.



STANDARD CURRICULUM

The pages shown here are typical of the social studies curriculum for most second graders in the country. These excerpts happen to be from the new 1997 Houghton Mifflin second-grade social studies textbook, *Work Together*. We don't mean to pick on Houghton Mifflin; other textbooks are similar. Thousands and thousands of teachers are given books like these and told to teach from them.



Not only are the contents vacuous and boring—is there any child who finds this interesting? informative? useful?—but they jump from one topic to another in a

scattered, disjointed fashion that makes it difficult for even an adult to find the thread.

Some very rudimentary map skills are introduced, along with a basic introduction to the dictionary and how a library is organized, and there is a strangely unconnected smattering of history scattered throughout the book—something on the founding of Pittsburgh, a few pages on the Pilgrims, a history of “Earth Day,” two pages on Canada and two on Mexico (approximately fifty words each). But the overwhelming impression one is left with is that this curriculum

Our Needs and Wants

Needs are things people must have to live. We all need **food** to eat. We need **clothes** to wear. We need **shelter**, or cover, for protection. We also need **love** and friendship. Needs are the same for everyone all over the world.

Needs... Wants

Wants are important too. Wants are things we would like to have. Different people have different wants. What do you want?

51

Pilgrims Plantation

Then & Now
History

People do not always have everything they need or want. Throughout time, people have had to use things that were easy to get. People must also choose what they can afford.






In 1627, Plymouth Plantation was a village in Massachusetts where families worked hard to get what they needed. Pilgrims grew their own vegetables, milked their goats, and hunted for meat and fish.

In Plymouth today, people have an easier time finding food, clothing, and shelter. People still grow vegetables. They can also buy food in supermarkets or go to a restaurant.

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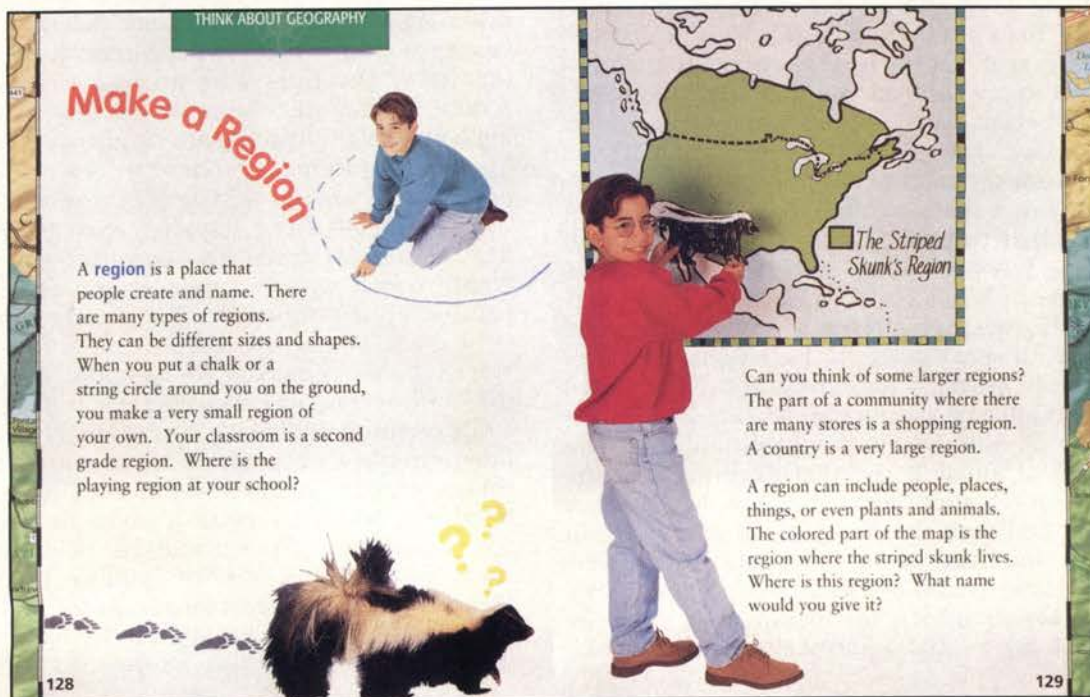
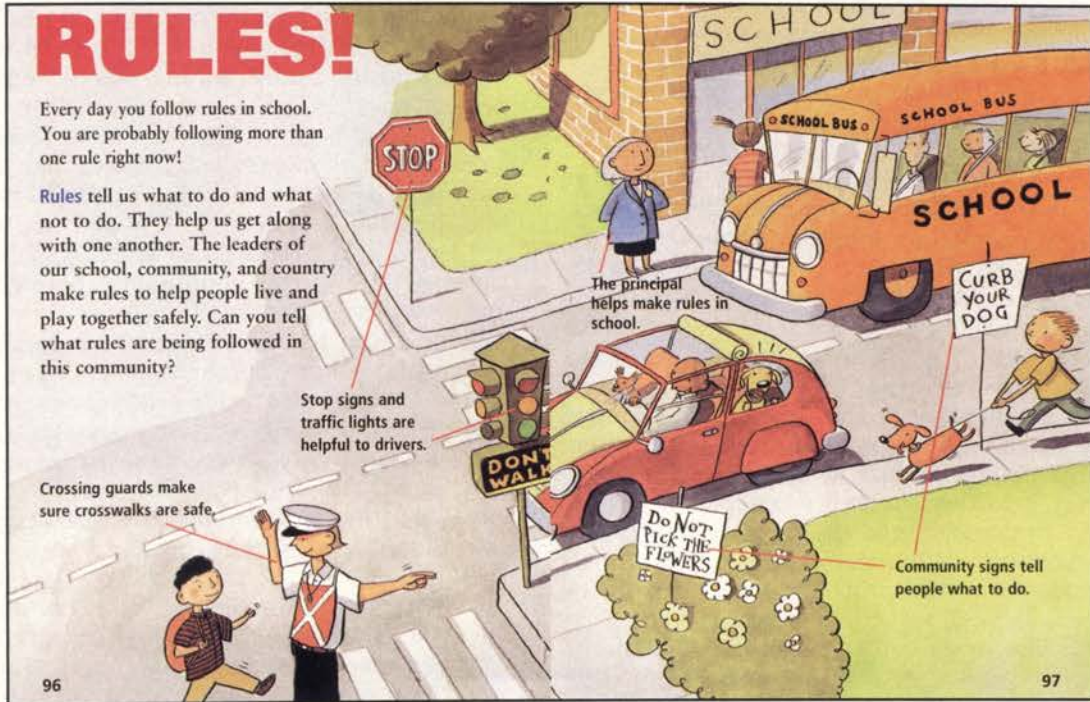
UNDERESTIMATES STUDENTS

“teaches” children very little that they don’t already know or will pick up by osmosis.

In contrast, here are the topics that Core Knowledge second-graders are taking up in the World Civilization (“Early Civilizations and History of World Religions: Asia”) section of their social studies curriculum, which builds upon what they learned in first grade: the geography of Asia, including the location of Russia, China, India, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam; India, including the Indus and Ganges Rivers, the caste system, Hinduism, and Buddhism; China, including the Huang He

and Yangtze Rivers, Confucius, ancestor worship, Qin Dynasty, Great Wall of China, the importance of silk, inventions—such as paper and the seismograph, and the Chinese New Year. In addition to these topics, students also study aspects of modern Japan, plus sections on American government; American history from the War of 1812 through the Civil War; immigration, cities, and citizenship; civil rights; and geography.

Some are skeptical that young children can master such an ambitious curriculum; but in fact, they do it and have fun doing so. —EDITOR



FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

(Continued from page 8)

helix, Niels Bohr, and supernovas in the sixth. The mathematics curriculum is traditional but rigorous, moving into introductory algebra and geometry by the sixth grade. Art and music are not extracurricular activities but part of the sequence. Students, for example, may study the work of Matisse and O'Keeffe and then be asked to emulate their style.

In all, it's a roaring avalanche of material. And the kicker is that the sequence is supposed to make up only 50 percent of the school's curriculum. The rest is up to the teachers. The introduction to the 262-page manual for the Core Knowledge Sequence states that teachers have "the freedom to decide what to teach beyond the sequence, and how best to teach it." At Washington, however, the teachers acknowledge that the sequence itself is, in reality, all-consuming.

As overwhelming as the scope of the sequence may seem, there is no question that it has made the Washington Core Knowledge School a local phenomenon. In 1993, the school opened with 125 students in grades K-4. Two years later, it enrolled 408 students in K-6. And now parents are lining up. The waiting list currently tops 200, with some parents trying to sign up their unborn children.

Just what has made the school such a draw? Washington parents say it has a lot to do with the nasty "curriculum gaps" at other public schools. Their school, they say, has closed gaps that are widening to chasms elsewhere. "When my son was in the eighth grade, I happened to ask him when the Civil War was fought," Terry Resse, Washington's office manager and unofficial spokeswoman, said shortly after she greeted me in the school's office. "Well, he said he didn't know but that he would probably get to that in the next year or so. Somehow he had missed it."

As people like Resse tell it, such gaps are the inevitable consequence of schools permitting their teachers to teach pretty much whatever they want. "Another of my sons had a teacher who went off to Japan, came back, and then said, 'Wow, I'll teach Japan,'" Resse said. "Well, in this curriculum if you want or need to teach Japan you may need to change grade levels, because at this school knowledge is designed to surface at a specific time in a student's career. This is not a student-centered curriculum; it's 'Here's what you're going to learn today.'"

The sense that the curriculum at the majority of public schools has become an informal, hit-or-miss affair is pervasive at Washington. "The district has a general guide as to what children will study but no cut-and-dried list on what needs to be taught year after year," said Sandy Ernest, who moved her two children to Washington after becoming disenchanted with their previous school. She described that school's curriculum as a kind of movie house that liked to show the same matinee week after week. "You can do dinosaurs in first grade and then do dinosaurs all over again in second grade and even in the third," she said. "Here, on the other hand, we know exactly what our children are getting. My daughter, for instance, is studying Egypt in first grade, and I know she won't get the

same information about Egypt again next year."

Ernest, who runs orientations for parents looking into the school, said, "I'm seeing parents who don't want to take a chance on what their children will learn from one year to the next. They want a curriculum that will keep the children within parameters they like."

Ernest's belief that the curriculum was more rigorous in "the old days" is one shared by many parents at Washington. Gale Dunn, a scientist who spends almost twenty hours a week working as president of the school's site-based council, said he remembers reading *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* in the fourth grade and acquiring a solid foundation in math and science, even though he attended school in a sparsely populated mountain town. For him, then, the Core Knowledge Sequence wasn't really new; putting it in place, he said, was rather like going "back to the future."

"Back to the future" means, among other things, reversing grade inflation, which has allowed C's to become B's and B's to become A's. At Washington, an A is a genuine mark of excellence rather than a way of promoting self-esteem. "If a kid at this school is asked how he's doing in school, he won't just say, 'I got an A,'" Dunn said. "He'll say, 'I got a Washington A,' because people in this community then know it really means something."

Washington teachers share the parents' belief that the public school curriculum has been allowed to erode. Veteran fifth grade teacher Susan Schlingman first visited Washington two years ago, under orders from her principal at the time to bring back some good ideas. The principal's plan backfired, Schlingman liked what she saw so much that she decided to jump ship and join the Washington staff.

"What appealed to me in the curriculum, which in this district is 'washed away,'" said Schlingman, whose long red hair, coupled with the peasant dress she was wearing, gave her a faint counterculture aura. "A lot of teachers just like to teach what interests them, which is okay with the district as long as they teach certain skills. As a result, kids may get the rain forest three years running if that's what interests their particular teachers. Teachers who go to a Core Knowledge school, on the other hand, know they're not just signing a contract to teach math or history from 8 to 3:30. You're also making a promise to teach this content—content you will not skip just because you want to."

One aspect of the sequence that Schlingman and her colleagues particularly like is the way it spirals upward, so that what is taught at one grade level is expanded upon—though never merely repeated—in a later grade. When students begin studying the Civil War in the second grade, for example, they learn about the controversy over slavery, Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad, Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation, and how all of these things pertain to the broader conflict between the North and South. In the fifth grade, the students study the vicissitudes of the war itself, beginning with the shots fired at Fort Sumter through the Union victory at Vicksburg and the eventual surrender at Appomattox. This scrutiny of the Civil War circles back to an examination of race and the often-torturous quest for equal-

Fifth grade teacher Susan Schlingman liked what she saw so much that she decided to jump ship and join the Washington staff.

ity, as the students learn about the Gettysburg Address and then Reconstruction, from which rose the Ku Klux Klan and vigilante justice.

Schlingman emphasized that the sequence was made up not of disparate elements but of dovetailing components. For example, students study the U.S. Constitution only after studying the Enlightenment so that its influences can be clearly traced.

Core teachers say the spiraling, or recursive, nature of the curriculum promotes an ever-deepening engagement with the subject. In other schools, students may cover a subject thoroughly, but only in the course of a single year. They are likely to get American history in the fifth grade but then have no further exposure to the subject until the eighth grade. The child who moves to town in the fifth grade, or is ill or simply out of touch, may be out of luck—his or her “American history gap” may never be bridged. At Washington, on the other hand, a subject is not so much covered as repeatedly traversed, the student exploring the landscape from myriad perspectives.

This all sounds impressive, assuming, of course, that the teachers themselves have a firm grasp of the material contained in the sequence. I spent an hour looking through the sequence and found that I had only a scant familiarity with many of its topics. I asked Schlingman if teachers wanting to use the sequence wouldn't first have to spend a great deal of time re-educating themselves.

“Absolutely,” she said. “I myself did a phenomenal amount of research last year, studying everything in the fifth grade curriculum. The problem is that we teachers are, in college, inundated with methods, yet there's almost no emphasis on being educated yourself. It's like being asked to take care of flowers without knowing much about them. Sticking them in the ground and watering them is not enough; you have to know what's special about each kind of flower if you're going to make it grow.”

Because there are no textbooks that encompass the Core Knowledge Sequence, teachers at Washington and other Core Knowledge schools have to track down their own instructional materials to use with their students. Schlingman, for one, spent much of one summer in the library, gathering a diverse collection of resources that she could spin into her lessons.

Monte Peterson, assistant superintendent of the Poudre public school system, which includes Fort Collins, and district officials and board members were

initially skeptical about the ability of teachers to learn and present such a comprehensive curriculum. But according to Peterson, teachers rose to the occasion. In fact, he says, the school has been so successful and become so popular with parents that the district now plans to open a middle school incorporating an extended version of the sequence.

“Washington Core has helped us set the bar higher and focus more intently upon academic rigor,” Peterson said. “And parents like the fact that the sequence is clear and crisp in terms of what their kids should know. It's free of the jargon educators like to put out. In fact, we're rewriting the district curriculum now so that it has that kind of clarity.”

CULTURAL LITERACY, the book that led to the creation of the Core Knowledge Sequence and schools, is one of the best-selling education books of all time. An immediate success when published in 1987, it appeared on the bookshelves of hundreds of thousands of parents and catapulted its author, English professor and literary critic E.D. Hirsch, to instant fame.

The book's popularity can perhaps be traced less to its title than to its subtitle, “What Every American Needs To Know,” and cover blurb, “Includes 5,000 essential names, phrases, dates, and concepts.” Indeed, many book buyers undoubtedly flipped immediately to the back of the book to see just what on that list of 5,000 might ring a bell. Cultural literacy, as an educational approach as well as a book title, became indelibly associated in the popular imagination with a high-octane game of Trivial Pursuit.

While this may have given the book a great boost in terms of marketability, it distracted readers from Hirsch's central message, which has little to do with attaining glory at a cocktail party of would-be literati. In simplest terms, what Hirsch wants to tell us is that learning begets learning. If you know nothing, you will find it very hard to learn something. If, on the other hand, you know a little, you can learn a little more, until you finally get to the point where you know a lot.

By knowing a lot, Hirsch does not mean a thorough knowledge of his list of 5,000, or any other list for that matter. He knows that's impossible, and unnecessary, too. What he wants us to acquire, rather, is a general familiarity with the kinds of cultural knowledge he considers essential for an educated American to have at the close of the century. But the word “essential” is a bugaboo. What, we may well wonder, gives Hirsch, or anyone else, the right to decide what everyone needs to know?

In both *Cultural Literacy* and his later works, Hirsch answers the question of what's “essential” in two ways. First, and most obviously, what's essential is what makes further learning possible. (Learning begets learning.) If you know something of the world's geography, you'll be able to understand broad climatological trends and their impact on countries' economics. If you're familiar with the outlines of the U.S. Constitution, you'll be able to follow contemporary political debates about citizens' rights. If you have a good command of basic mathematics, you'll be able to tackle trigonometry and calculus down the road.

Somewhat more subtly, Hirsch also argues that what's necessary is knowledge—or basic cultural literacy—that enables citizens to communicate with one another in more than a superficial way. If we are to keep our nation from disuniting, we must know certain things in common. First graders should become familiar with *Aesop's Fables* not just because they are important morality tales but because many of our common expressions, such as “sour grapes” and “cry wolf,” are derived from them. Sixth graders should learn about Ancient Greece so they understand the influence the polis had on the development of modern democracy.

For Hirsch, then, school should primarily be about the transmission of specific knowledge that will, ideally at least, be shared by students of all religions, races, and economic classes. Such is the precise mission of Core Knowledge schools like Washington.

The sequence, which all the Core Knowledge schools have in common, is somewhat different in focus from Hirsch's original list of 5,000. Put together in 1990 by dozens of teachers, scholars, and scientists, and substantially revised in 1994, the sequence is more diverse than Hirsch's original compendium, which was adamantly attacked by left-leaning teachers and scholars for its emphasis on the accomplishments of white males. Now, alongside Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* are Indian and African folk tales; alongside James Madison are Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Cesar Chávez.

In a telephone interview, Hirsch acknowledged that his original list had changed in terms of content. “That first list was descriptive of what bankers and lawyers knew and of what poor people didn't know,” he said. “The accusation made was that we should be more inclusive. Well, I said ‘Okay,’ because I had no political agenda. I had a social-justice agenda, so I was perfectly willing to make the list more multicultural. I was less interested in what the shared knowledge was than in the necessity of there being shared knowledge.”

Despite changes in the list, Hirsch insisted that the theoretical basis of cultural literacy has not changed at all. Schools must yet be about, as he wrote in *Cultural Literacy*, “the early and specific transfer of knowledge.”

Hirsch told me that the attacks on him by the academic left for his putative Eurocentrism were “an '80s phenomenon.” Graduate students are now interested in him once again; the academy is coming around to his point of view. “I have a black professor friend who said, ‘I'd like to talk about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but my students don't know what it is.’ She's right. Our students have to know something so we can teach our classes.”

If the academy has become less hostile, Hirsch said, “the ed school people would hate our position no matter what because they like process.” This point is an important one. For Hirsch and the people at his Core Knowledge schools, subject matter always comes first, while most educators, Hirsch asserts, emphasize thinking, feeling, and the development of skills. It's not, Hirsch says, that these “processes” are unimportant but that they are meaningful only when brought to bear upon content of genuine consequence.

Hirsch said he had no objection to “progressive” re-

form projects that emphasize critical thinking, such as Theodore Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools, as long as students get a strong elementary school foundation. “I once said to Ted Sizer, ‘Look, I'm like the Jesuits; let me have the kids to the sixth grade, and then you can coalition all you want because then it will work.’ One of the reasons the evaluations for Sizer's schools have not been as favorable as you'd like is that students come into high school without adequate background knowledge.”

Several times during our conversation, Hirsch insisted that implementing his cultural literacy program is simply a matter of doing what works. Recent research in cognitive psychology, he claimed, has established its efficacy: Learning does beget learning.

One noted cognitive psychologist I talked to, David Geary of the University of Missouri, believes that Hirsch's curriculum does indeed mesh with how youngsters actually learn. “Some people like to say that children are innately curious and that they'll construct knowledge for themselves,” Geary told me. “To an extent, that's true; children are innately interested in socialization and sex, for instance. But that doesn't mean they are innately interested in history and math. These things have to be taught, and Hirsch's curriculum does that with carefully sequenced building blocks.”

The sequential, subject-driven nature of Hirsch's initiative is apparent at the Washington Core Knowledge School, where there is a near-scorn for consciousness-raising programs that mark the calendars of many public schools. DARE Day, for example, a drug education campaign sponsored by the federal Drug Abuse Resistance Education program, was practically ignored; the faculty didn't want to give up teaching time to make posters and ribbons. AIDS education, self-esteem raising, social adjustment—at Washington these are perceived as mere digressions.

Resse, Washington's office manager, said, “We do not set aside special time here for affective learning: ‘How do you feel today? How do you make friends?’ We are all—parents, teachers, administrators—involved with these issues and deal with them day to day as they arise.”

Even African-American history month gets scant attention at Washington Core Knowledge School. Principal Art Dillon said this isn't because the contributions of African Americans aren't valued; to the contrary, people like Crispus Attucks and Sojourner Truth are essential parts of the ongoing curriculum. “The problem with African-American history month is that the people studied may come from completely different centuries,” he said. “And we want kids to know the historical context in which these African Americans lived their lives.”

NO ONE, Hirsch included, claims that following the Core Knowledge Sequence will magically ensure excellent teaching. A teacher can be handed a good program, but that does not make teaching—fussy and idiosyncratic as it inevitably is—programmatically. A teacher, therefore, is not necessarily a good teacher just because he or she has the “core.” Washington principal Dillon said as much when he told me that his school had teachers at the “crawl, walk, and run

No More 'Mickey Mouse' Inservice

ONE OF the less obvious effects of the Core Knowledge curriculum is its impact on the nature of inservice and professional development. As teachers are called upon to teach everything from medieval African Kingdoms, world religions, and the reign of Peter the Great to basic chemistry, optics, and early theories of matter, they are no longer willing to waste their time in dumb inservice sessions, the kind one teacher characterized as "101 ways to use milk cartons for student projects."

Certainly, the vast majority of teacher training institutions do not provide teacher candidates with the rigorous liberal arts education that would prepare one to teach an ambitious, knowledge-based curriculum. In a recent report on teacher education published by the Council for Basic Education, teachers' biggest complaint was the lack of content in their college courses.* "The weakest part was content," one teacher summed up the problem. "My classes touched very little on detailed content in the various subject areas I was certified

to teach in."

The Core Knowledge curriculum brings this problem home in spades. "We don't know anything about the Byzantine Empire!" one group of Core teachers laughed. But they didn't seem to mind the effort that awaited them. "Because the curriculum is so exciting," commented Joan Falbey, a third-grade teacher at Three Oakes Elementary in Ft. Myers, Florida, "I've enjoyed doing this. I think it's natural to the teacher in all of us."

And if the Core Knowledge teachers are fortunate enough to have nearby a university education department as tuned into their needs and as helpful as Trinity University in San Antonio is, all the better. Through its chairman John Moore and associate professor of education Bruce M. Frazee, Trinity University has pioneered a unique partnership (a longer story that deserves to be told in full sometime) with Hawthorne and other Core Knowledge schools in the area.

One of the many features of this partnership is the undertak-

ing by Trinity and the schools it works with to literally redefine inservice education. The teachers decide what they need to know, and Trinity sets up a seminar with an expert on that topic. Recently, fifth-grade teachers attended a session on the chemistry topics covered in Core Knowledge, while third- and fourth-grade teachers brushed up on their knowledge of art history. In addition, teachers at the same grade level from the different Core schools meet monthly to share lessons and activities and to reflect upon concerns and practices. Both these types of gatherings help teachers gain confidence and expertise: "At first it was scary, real scary, because I didn't know some of the content," explained one teacher, "But now it gets easier each year because now I know more and so do the students." Concluded another: "Inservice now relates to what I want to teach and learn."

—EDITOR

**What Teachers Have To Say about Teacher Education*, Fall 1996



stages." The new teachers just out of college were at the crawl stage; they might become outstanding teachers, he said, but you couldn't expect it to happen overnight.

Furthermore, as the Core Knowledge Foundation's material fastidiously points out, the sequence only specifies what to teach, not how to teach it. That is completely up to the teacher and school. "I've been very careful to avoid telling people how to teach the content," Hirsch told me. "I do want people to use what works. People think of cultural literacy in terms of a lecture, of people sitting in rows. But I've never recommended that."

True to Hirsch's words, the teaching I observed at Washington varied greatly in terms of style and approach. In some classrooms, it was rote. In others, it was "hands-on." Some lessons demanded substantial "seat work," while others were highly participatory. Sometimes it seemed that the only common denominator was the "core" itself, which was apparent everywhere. In the corridor were posters delineating the five pillars of Islam; in the classrooms were banners laced with bold-faced aphorisms: "One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel"; "A feather in your cap"; "Don't beat around the bush."

In one third grade classroom, the teacher used the conventional question-and-answer approach to review the feats of Roman engineering. It went something like this:

"Did they have aqueducts in colonial times?" the teacher asked.

"No, they had wells," the students answered.

"What did the Romans have?"

"Pipes."

"Were the Romans pretty advanced then?"

"Yes."

Down the hall, in another third grade classroom, the students were studying the same Roman material, only in small groups with project-oriented tasks. In one group, students were drawing up "blueprints" for a Coliseum; in another, they were constructing a small-scale aqueduct.

The all-consuming nature of the sequence generally makes digressions impossible, but sixth grade teacher Tinka Greenwood permitted her students one during the course of my visit. The students begged off a discussion of the 17th-century English Civil War so they could rehearse for me *Julius Caesar*, which they would be performing the next week for the entire school. They had undertaken the play—an abridged edition drawn from the Shakespeare for Young People series—during a segment of the curriculum fusing Shakespeare with an expanded study of Ancient Rome.

We traipsed off to the auditorium, and the students immediately launched into the performance, which was remarkably well-oiled. They all had memorized their parts and mastered the rather complicated entrances and exits. When the performance came to temporary halts, it was because the students, as much as the teacher, wanted to discuss voice intonation or the choreography of the assassination scene. At the end of the rehearsal, several of the students gathered around me, asking for my critique.

Then it was back to the classroom. Seven minutes of

The students seized the initiative whenever they could, offering up definitions, providing explanations, and drawing parallels.

class time remained, and in keeping with the inexorable nature of the sequence, not one of them was wasted. It was right back to Cromwell and the Puritans.

"Who were the Puritans?" Greenwood asked.

"They believed God spoke directly to the heart," a student said.

"What were the Puritans fighting for?"

"To get rid of the monarchy."

"That's the good news. What's the bad?"

A student answered, "Cromwell dissolved Parliament and established a Protectorate, of which he was supposedly 'Protector.' But he ended up making a military dictatorship."

"That's right," Greenwood said. She then concluded the period on an epigrammatic note. "Don't forget, people, 'history is a pendulum.' It swings back and forth before finding the middle."

In one respect, this brief exchange was no different from discussions that take place in so many classrooms: The teacher asked questions; the students answered. Here, though, the students did more than grunt their monosyllabic assent; their responses had an aspect of give-and-take that could provoke further commentary. There was a textured nature to the discussion that was typical of the other Washington classrooms I visited: For the most part, the students seemed highly engaged.

In no classroom were they more engaged than that of Susan Schlingman, the fifth grade teacher who had liked the Core Knowledge Sequence so much that she had transferred to Washington on its account.

On one of the two days I visited her classroom, Schlingman and her students were exploring what she termed "the beginning of the end for Napoleon." Essentially, Schlingman told the students a story about Napoleon's demise. As she went along, she interspersed cues and inquiries to get student reaction. After talking about how Napoleon had prohibited European countries from importing goods from England, she asked, "You're a shopkeeper depending on exports who suddenly finds out you can no longer sell to Holland, one of your key buyers. What happens to you?"

Later, after discussing how Napoleon "gave" conquered countries to his family members, she asked, "Would that be a good idea—giving your brother or sister a country to govern?"

And after exploring the strategies Napoleon used to keep his empire intact, she asked, "How many of you play chess?"

A student answered, "I love that game; it really makes you think."

"Checkmate," another said. "That's exactly what Napoleon was trying to do to the enemy."

As in Greenwood's class, the students seized the initiative whenever they could, taking cues from Schlingman's narrative to offer up definitions, provide explanations, and draw parallels. Napoleon was arrogant, one said, "because he set his mind on a task history has shown cannot be accomplished—defeating Russia." This led a student to repeat the old Russian expression: "We are beaten, but never defeated."

The students had a clear grasp of why Napoleon had found it so difficult to conquer Russia. They talked about the Russian winter and pointed out that Napoleon was encountering difficulties on other fronts. They also expounded upon Russia's scorched-earth policy, which undermined, as one student pointed out, Napoleon's usual strategy of having his troops plunder the land they overran so that "they could travel light."

Schlingman's tale had an air of poignancy, perhaps because she painted Napoleon not as a hero or villain but as someone who was, in some respects, all too human. "Napoleon was forced to retreat, and many of his men dropped from exhaustion, perishing in the snow," she said. "He lost hundreds each day. This was devastating for Napoleon, for one of his greatest virtues was that he deeply cared for his men."

It is impossible to say to what extent the sequence and the overarching philosophy of cultural literacy are responsible for the apparently high level of engagement at Washington. After all, the school has a number of things going for it. Because it is a choice school—parents choose it for their children—the families have *a priori* bought into the notion of cultural literacy. Also, the school was founded by parents who still have a strong voice in its governance. Seven parents sit on the fourteen-member site-based management council, and each year parents spend thousands of volunteer hours working at the school.

Still, Schlingman gives the curriculum a great deal of credit for piquing student enthusiasm. "Now, I'm not saying that sending a child through a Core Knowledge school will guarantee that the child will be excellently educated," she said. "You've got to have good teaching. But with good teaching, the kids will soak it up. History, for example, we present as a story, and the kids always want to know what happens next. We talk about how the Renaissance started in Italy because it was a trading nation, which meant that it was crossing cultural lines in terms of religion and language. People began to ask questions, and the result was a whole change from the medieval philosophy where you sat around and waited for God to make your life better. With the Bible in translation, with the printing press, people said, 'I can do something to make my life better.' And kids understand all of this. Ask our kids what they learned today and you'll get, unlike the typical elementary school, all kinds of interesting responses. Why? Because it's all presented to them."

I asked Schlingman what she thought of those progressive educators for whom it was almost a tenet that you "begin where the child is," following his or her interests wherever they may lead.

"That's like telling a child to educate himself and

find what he can find," Schlingman said. "That doesn't make any sense. How is a child going to know what he or she is interested in if not provided with things to choose from? There's something I've always found funny. In a lot of schools, teachers say, 'We're getting ready to cover mammals,' but cover means to hide. Well, we don't want to cover, to hide; we want to put it out there for the children so they can see it and work with it. We're not going to sit back and watch while the child tries to put all these things together for himself. No."

DO PEOPLE really need to know about Achilles and Falstaff, or Kublai Khan and Marco Polo, or A. Philip Randolph and Thurgood Marshall to be considered well educated? For many critics of Hirsch and his list, the answer is an emphatic "no." Any such package of the cultural goods, they say, is hopelessly contingent on and vulnerable to cultural shifts. The treasure trove is, in fact, a grab bag, as indicated by the fact that Hirsch has allowed his own list to be substantially revised since it first appeared in 1987.

More absurd, some say, is the idea that the sequence represents some kind of common cultural language. As Ted Sizer has pointed out, advertising is now our common language; the grammar of consumerism rules our speech. It might well be a good thing for Americans to know about Cézanne or the Constitutional Convention of 1787, but to suggest that knowing these things is necessary for economic success or personal fulfillment is a blatant exaggeration. America is full of successful business executives and cardiac surgeons who cannot tell the difference between a mural by Diego Rivera and a Nike ad sprayed over the side of a brick warehouse.

Still, there is something that remains undeniably compelling about the Core Knowledge Sequence and the idea of cultural literacy, even a decade after it was first conceived. While it may not be necessary for someone to know the music of Duke Ellington or the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, almost everyone can agree that they are good things to be familiar with. And what parents wouldn't be pleased to have their children understand the impact of the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education* or appreciate Michelangelo's "The Creation of Adam"?

Furthermore, the very existence of the sequence allows parents to know specifically what their children are studying and to ascertain if they are indeed learning it. Vague curricular goals leave parents in the dark; specific ones invite parents into the academic process.

Not surprisingly, it's parents themselves who provided the strongest case for the sequence. Over and over, they spoke of how their children had been lost but were now back on track and engaged at Washington. Mary Pat Barlow was one such parent. Her once-tight-lipped son, she said, now comes home from school talking about what he has learned.

"Once, in Texas," she said, "we visited a cathedral that my son said was an excellent example of Gothic architecture. I thought he was putting us on, but then he spoke of the buttresses, the stained-glass windows. He knew what he was talking about—he really did." □

THE WAY THINGS WERE

BY JACK SCHIERENBECK

With attacks on teacher unionism the fashion of the day, it might be useful to recall what things were like before collective bargaining brought conditions of dignity, equity, and security to the teaching profession. The following excerpt is taken from part one of a six-part series on the history of the United Federation of Teachers, New York City. The series ran periodically over the last year in the union's newspaper.

As Sandra Feldman, president of the UFT, remarked in her introduction to the series last February, "These stories show that most of the day-to-day rights and dignities we take for granted had to be wrested from a system that would never have changed on its own.

"Thirty-six years later, we're still fighting. Today our union is fighting for a contract that acknowledges our true worth to this city and its future, our students, and for a school budget that provides the means for us and our students to teach and learn. Nothing will change unless we make it change."

JEANNETTE DILORENZO remembers coming home from her first day as a teacher in "total shock." She and her husband John had come into teaching at the tail end of the 1950s as a second career after organizing investigators, accountants and clerks at the city's Department of Finance for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. "We were adults where we were and we'd come into a system where the teachers were treated as if they were children. It was almost a throwback to feudal times. The principal was the lord. You were the serf."

Lou Carrubba had done a hitch in the service, so he was familiar with authority. But life in uniform was nothing compared to the nitpicking bullying that teachers suffered. "There was no real grievance machinery, no protections, no due-process procedures.

Jack Schierenbeck is a staff writer for the New York Teacher/City Edition.

Besides, if you complained, they'd make your life even more miserable."

So did teachers have to "eat a lot of crow" back then? "Today's teachers have no idea. I'm telling you, hardly a day went by when we weren't humiliated in one form or another," responded Carrubba. "Let's just say eating crow is a nice way of putting it." Authoritarian rule had always been a sore spot for teachers. The original Teachers Union was founded in 1916 in no small part "to fight oppressive supervision."

The Principal as Tyrant

"The principal was a real matriarch, a tyrant," recalled Alice Marsh, who started as a teacher in 1929. "They thought we were their children."

Marsh recalled how she and her colleagues devised a system of shared monitoring that would have saved them all from climbing five double flights of stairs four times a day. Marsh was chosen emissary and walked into a frosty reception with the principal.

"She looked at me with those steely blue eyes and said: 'I am the principal of this school. Good day!'"

Around the same time, a first-year substitute teacher at a Brooklyn elementary school got an early lesson in the doctrine of principal infallibility. "She [the principal] came in and thought [my class] was too noisy and disorderly," Si Beagle recalled shortly before his death in 1985. "Being a wise guy, I said to her, 'But this is creative disorder.' She immediately told me to look elsewhere for work.

"In those days, the principal had the power to bring me up on charges by simply saying, 'Mr. Beagle has shown conduct unbecoming a teacher.' It was as simple as that.

"'Conduct unbecoming a teacher' meant anybody could be fired. Teachers would be asked to do work after school and you couldn't refuse." Beagle said. "When my principal said, 'Stay after school and coach



the track team,' you did."

Abe Levine did likewise when ordered to skip lunch in favor of "yard duty." Even by the early 1950s a teacher was still very much under the thumb of the principal. "I felt very much taken advantage of," said Levine. "You were completely beholden to the principal. He was the king. We had absolutely no rights. We were afraid to speak up."

Cheap Labor

Along with monastic-like obedience came a vow of poverty, or something close to it. So pitiful was the pay that there was a long-standing joke that whenever teachers were introduced to each other they'd ask what the other did for a living.

A *New York Times* editorial in January 1955 titled "Teach or Wash Cars" posed the question why anyone would take a job teaching at \$66 a week when washing cars paid \$72.35.

The fact is, it wasn't just anyone who went into teaching. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, schoolwork was woman's work, a natural extension of the home schooling that women had always done. Besides, as Diane Ravitch writes in her book *The Great School Wars*, school officials preferred women. With other "respectable occupations" all but closed, they'd be happy to take the job and all that came with it.

Low salaries were easily explained away. Teaching, after all, was only a "temporary" occupation before a woman settled into her real career as wife and homemaker. Besides, as unmarried women they could "af-

ford" their jobs because they lived at home with their parents. Later, officials used marriage as a convenient rationale for miserly wages. When Brooklyn schoolteacher Mary Murphy successfully mounted a court challenge in 1905 that allowed women to keep their jobs after marrying, the official line was that with husbands to support them, women didn't need the money.

Things began to change after World War I. Due in large part to stricter enforcement of child labor laws, more and more children were going beyond grade school. As the number of high schools quadrupled in the decade after the war, an acute shortage of teachers developed. At the same time, there was an audible concern among school officials and others that the teaching of older male students would be better left to men. To attract male teachers in the post-war boom economy, salaries were raised—so much so that by 1928, teachers' wages were competitive with most private sector jobs. As an added inducement, the board maintained separate eligibility lists from which men were often given preference in hiring. Slowly more men began to enter the teaching field, including many Jews who could not find work in WASP-dominated banking, insurance, and law.

Still, it wasn't until the Depression of the 1930s that many men, desperate for any kind of job, thought about teaching. The promise of a steady job drew out-of-work Ph.D.s, accountants, and even lawyers—men like Jules Kolodny, Dave Wittes, and Charles Cogen

who, over the coming decades, would play pivotal roles in the growth of teacher unionism.

Together with equally brilliant but professionally thwarted women, there evolved what many have argued was the greatest assembly of brain power ever in the schools. But if it was the Golden Age of talent, it was anything but golden for the teachers themselves.

These mind workers came cheap. The deepening Depression had all but wiped out the salary gains. With more qualified candidates than openings, teachers were in no position to bargain. The city had the upper hand and used it, cutting salaries and imposing one-month unpaid furloughs—even going so far as to coerce teachers into “voluntarily” contributing 5 percent of their pay for needy children.

The School Relief Fund, as it was called, raised close to \$6 million at the height of the Depression. While there's no denying that the money went to a good cause—everything from a hot lunch program to clothing and eyeglasses—it amounted to yet-another shake-down scheme. A little nudge from a supervisor or principal was all it took to leave teachers in a giving mood.

The Depression had given the Board of Education the chance to keep thousands of teachers in a permanent state of job insecurity. Instead of appointing a teacher to a regular position whenever there was a vacancy, the board filled it with a substitute. These “permanent substitutes” had no sick pay, no paid holidays or vacations, no pension, no health insurance—and they could be let go at any time with or without cause.

With as much as 25 percent of the teaching force employed as substitutes, management's already considerable power got even stronger. Lacking even the slightest leverage, all teachers were forced to work under the most demoralizing conditions.

Pregnant? Leave Now!

Double and even triple sessions were not uncommon, especially during the post-WW II baby boom years. As part of a series called “The Scandal of Our Schools,” the *New York Post* reported in January 1952 that one Queens elementary school built for 1,140 students had an enrollment of just under 3,000.

The forty-eight children who jammed Alice Marsh's first-grade class were typical. “My first year I had to leave twelve children back because I couldn't get to them when they were slipping. This was par for the course.”

Lunch was no break. For elementary school teachers, there was no such thing as a duty-free lunch period. Lunch, what there was of it, amounted to a sandwich gobbled down in makeshift, overcrowded rooms. “You lined up with your kids in the schoolyard and stayed with them the whole day, even eating with them—not even a bathroom break,” remembers Janet Miller.

As for sick pay: You needed a doctor's note if you were out sick for even one day. No note, no pay.

Sabbaticals were a luxury few could afford, since the pay was only 40 percent of the regular salary.

It wasn't until 1957 that teachers, along with other city employees, were allowed to participate in the government retirement and disability program.

\$3-a-Week Raise Fails To Halt Stoppages

Teachers Continue Revolt Against Activities — K-6B Group Protests

Mayor O'Dwyer's \$150-\$250 salary increase proposal for the teachers staff drew no expressions of gratitude from teachers today. Instead, they seemed more resentful at the “token” increase offered than they had been before.

The executive committee of the High School Teachers Assn., spearheaded in the stoppage of extracurricular activities, is recommending a salary differential for high school teachers.

New York Sun, Feb. 16, 1947

How Pupils Are Jammed

Double and Triple Sessions in Classroom Do the Work of Two or Three

The New York Times
Oct. 2, 1952

SIX CITY TEACHERS FACE OUSTING FOR DEFYING

Refusal to Tell They Are Red Dismissal U

TRIAL OF 8 O

Week's Delay

The New York Times
Feb. 6, 1956

TEACHER MORALE AT NEW LOW HERE

Money Is Root of a Growing Rebellion in School System, With Pupils the Losers

By BENJAMIN FINE
The morale of teachers, super-

And pensions? You got one, but not until you were either sixty-five or had logged thirty-five years of service.

Until 1937, teachers were forced to take a two-year, unpaid maternity leave. Though this was a far sight better than in the private sector, where maternity protection was rare, the practice of forced leave was a huge financial hit. Even later when the rules were relaxed, teachers were still required to report to their principals as soon as they became “aware” they were pregnant. But since admission meant you were required to leave immediately, teachers usually hid their condition until there was no denying the evidence.

SCALE
to LISTEN
DANCE to!
DOWN
with us!
April 30th
P.M. - 5:00
D.H.C.

The Bulletin

Democracy in Education Education for Democracy

VOL. 31, No. 14 MAY, 1948 BY SUBSCRIPTION

TEACHERS GUILD

"How to Prevent Future Salary Crises . . ."
COME TO POINT MEMBERSHIP AND DELEGATE ASSEMBLY MEETING
Wed., May 19th
4 P.M. promptly
COMMUNITY CHURCH
46 East 126th Street

Fight Looms As Teachers Denied City-Wide Raise; Increments Given

Guild Paraders at City Hall Hearings
Denial of the city-wide 5% raise to teachers' wages is being met with a fight for a 25% raise and a 10% cost-of-living allowance.

Guild and AFL Leaders Urge Mayor to Include Staff
The city's 10,000 teachers and 10,000 school employees are being asked to support a resolution to include them in the city-wide raise.



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ACHERS
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Last Minute Appeal For Voc. Teachers
The city's 10,000 vocational teachers are being asked to support a resolution to include them in the city-wide raise.

EXODUS FROM CITY LINKED TO SCHOOLS

Deterioration of Neighborhoods Also Held Factor in Move of 75,000 a Year to Suburbs

SLUMS FOUND SPREADING

Municipal Facilities, Though Vast, Are Seen Inadequate to Meet Citizens' Wants

the night before," Marsh remembers the principal saying.

Board and school authorities were intent on teachers setting a "proper example" to their students—so much so that very little about a teacher's appearance, speech or even personal politics escaped their scrutiny. For example, while the board never had an official standard of "school attire" for teachers, many a principal drew the line when it came to sporting facial hair or men's not wearing jackets, even in the hottest weather.

The Board of Examiners, which had the final say in the issuance of licenses, was a law unto itself, functioning as the educational equivalent of the medieval Star Chamber by allowing anonymous complaints against the character of candidates.

Free Speech Denied

In 1937, Albert Smallheiser, president of the Teachers Guild, challenged the Board of Examiners for capricious practices such as disqualifying candidates with a foreign accent for having "speech defects." Even as late as 1950, "people who had foreign accents could forget it," said Carubba. "Even a distinct Brooklyn or Bronx accent was looked down on."

It was an open secret that many racial and ethnic minorities were not welcome. In her book *Having Our Say*, Sadie Delaney tells of how she, a young black woman, had outwitted a bigoted principal. An elementary school teacher, Delaney had made it to the top of the seniority list for a high school appointment. All that stood in her way was an interview with the high school principal.

"At the appointment they would have seen I was colored and found some excuse to bounce me down the list," wrote Delaney. Instead, she skipped the appointment and just showed up at the all-white Theodore Roosevelt High School on opening day. "Child, they just about died when they saw me."

For Eastern European Jews and other immigrants, on the other hand, getting a job meant long hours learning how to break the board's sound barrier. In anticipation of the dreaded oral interview, many a would-be teacher took the mandatory speech course at City College and fretted over how to avoid the dead giveaways.

Just how much of the board's standards can be explained by simple prejudice will never be known.

There was no question, however, that certain forms of "speech" could get a teacher into trouble. In her book *My Daughter, the Teacher*, Ruth Markowitz tells of how one teacher in the 1930s was censured and warned by her principal not to "plant any seeds of doubt in her pupils' minds." Her crime? She asked her high school civics class "to debate whether President Roosevelt had too much or too little power." Another was chastised for calling a number of congressmen "racists." Still another was transferred after posting a union notice on the school bulletin board. □

"You stayed until you showed," said Phyllis Wallach, who favored loose jackets during her pregnancy in 1962.

Wallach scoffs at the idea that the board was simply worried about a woman's health. "It was Puritanism, pure and simple," she said. "God forbid students would see that their teacher was having sex. For them, exposing children to a pregnant teacher was akin to corrupting the morals of a minor."

Three decades earlier, Alice Marsh's elementary school principal had made known her disapproval of female married teachers. "I don't see how you can stand in front of a class after you've slept with a man

CHILDREN HELPING CHILDREN...

A Child Labor Project Update



PHOTO: ILO

CHILDREN AND adults in the U.S. and abroad are mobilizing to stop the problems of child labor, forced labor, and sweatshops. As part of this effort, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) initiated its Child Labor Project, calling for children to be in school rather than at work. The AFT seeks to educate and activate its members on the problems of child labor and other similar abuses.

At the AFT biennial convention last August, this project was launched with speakers, a rally led by students and teachers, and a raffle to support schools for children freed from bonded labor in the carpet industries of Bangladesh and Nepal. In conjunction with the convention, the article "Children without Childhoods," which originally appeared in the Summer 1996 *American Educator*, generated a large response from members. After reading the article, this class of first and second graders from Yonkers, New York, began their own efforts to combat child labor...

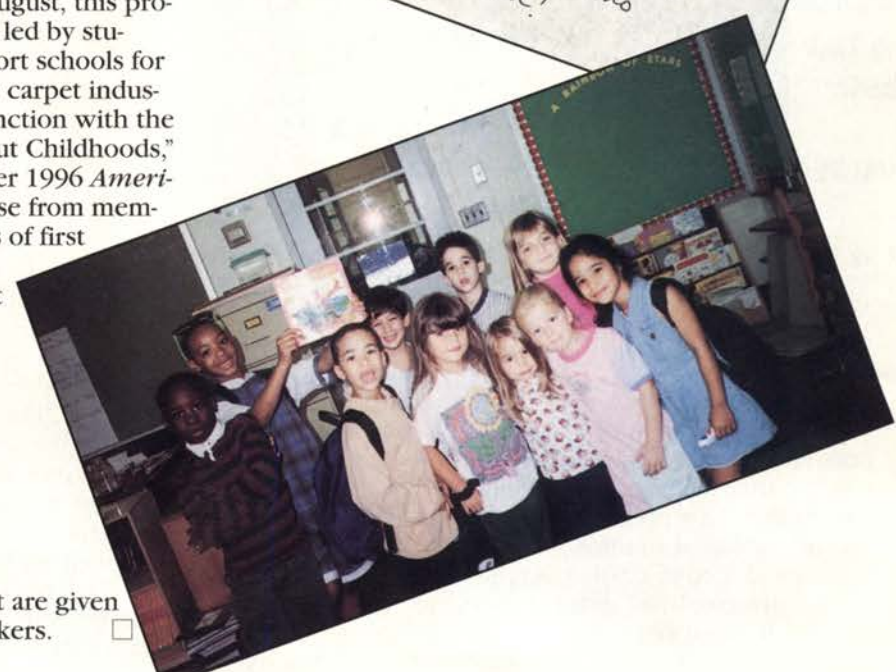
For more information, please contact:

The Child Labor Project
 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W.
 Washington, DC 20001-2079
 Tel: (202) 879-4400 x3616
 email: iadaft@aol.com
 Fax: (202) 879-4502

Contributions to the Child Labor Project are given to support schools for former child workers.

To Whom it May Concern, 11/9/96
 I am a Yonkers public school teacher at School 31. I read the article "Children without Childhoods" in the summer issue of *American Educator*. Having spent some time in India, where I saw the realities of child labor, the article touched a real chord in me. I presented it to my class of first and second graders and we all decided to save our lunch money to contribute to the Child Labor Project. The students in my class are mostly inner-city children and are not very "lucky" and generally can't afford to buy the things they want. If you could write to us, telling of the good work we're doing, it would mean a great deal to them. I'm sure they would appreciate your contributions.

Thank You!
 (address on back) →
 Thanks again,
 Kerry Poterly
 P.S. - I enclosed a photo of the students I so love. You can see the faces I care so much for!



Dear Child Labor Project,

We are a class of first and second grade students at School 31.

We learned about the children who have to work every day instead of going to school and playing. We feel terrible that this happens. We gave our money to you so you can help these kids.

Sincerely,

LA-ASIA

SEAN

Ms. Doherty

KARINA Oliver

GARY

PATRICK-T

Jeffrey Batis

Vanessa

JASON HALL

Tiffany

Men Gan

Tom MGP MURPHY


Michelle

Christina Sarah Charles

CHRISTOPHER

Patrick J





LIBRARY: THE DRAMA WITHIN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DIANE ASSÉO GRILICHES

From Library: The Drama Within, published by the University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, in association with the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Reprinted with permission. Photographs copyright © 1996 by Diane Asséo Griliches.

I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.
—JORGE LUIS BORGES

Bibliothèque Nationale

Paris, France

The glorious reading room took my breath away. It was built in 1862 by Henri Labrouste, who also built the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, and has nine domes, each with an “eye” providing natural light from above. The roof is supported with twelve slender iron columns. Currently an enormous modern library is nearing completion in Paris, the infamous TGB (“Très Grand Bibliothèque”), and the Bibliothèque Nationale is preparing to merge with it to become the Bibliothèque de France. Perhaps it will be a “very grand bibliothèque,” but nothing can have the majesty or the grace of this one.



Pierpont Morgan Library

New York City

Dwight Peters was on a class field trip from Brooklyn to the Morgan Library. I doubt he'd ever seen a book like this medieval illuminated manuscript. The library, an Italianate palazzo, designed by Charles Follen McKim, was built in 1906 by the financier and voracious collector of literature and art, J. Pierpont Morgan. In 1924, the library was made public by Morgan's son, who felt that its holdings were too important to keep private. As one guest said, "I love the Morgan... especially for being open to me." The collections contain masterpieces documenting man's creative achievement. ▶

Boston Public Library, Bates Reading Room

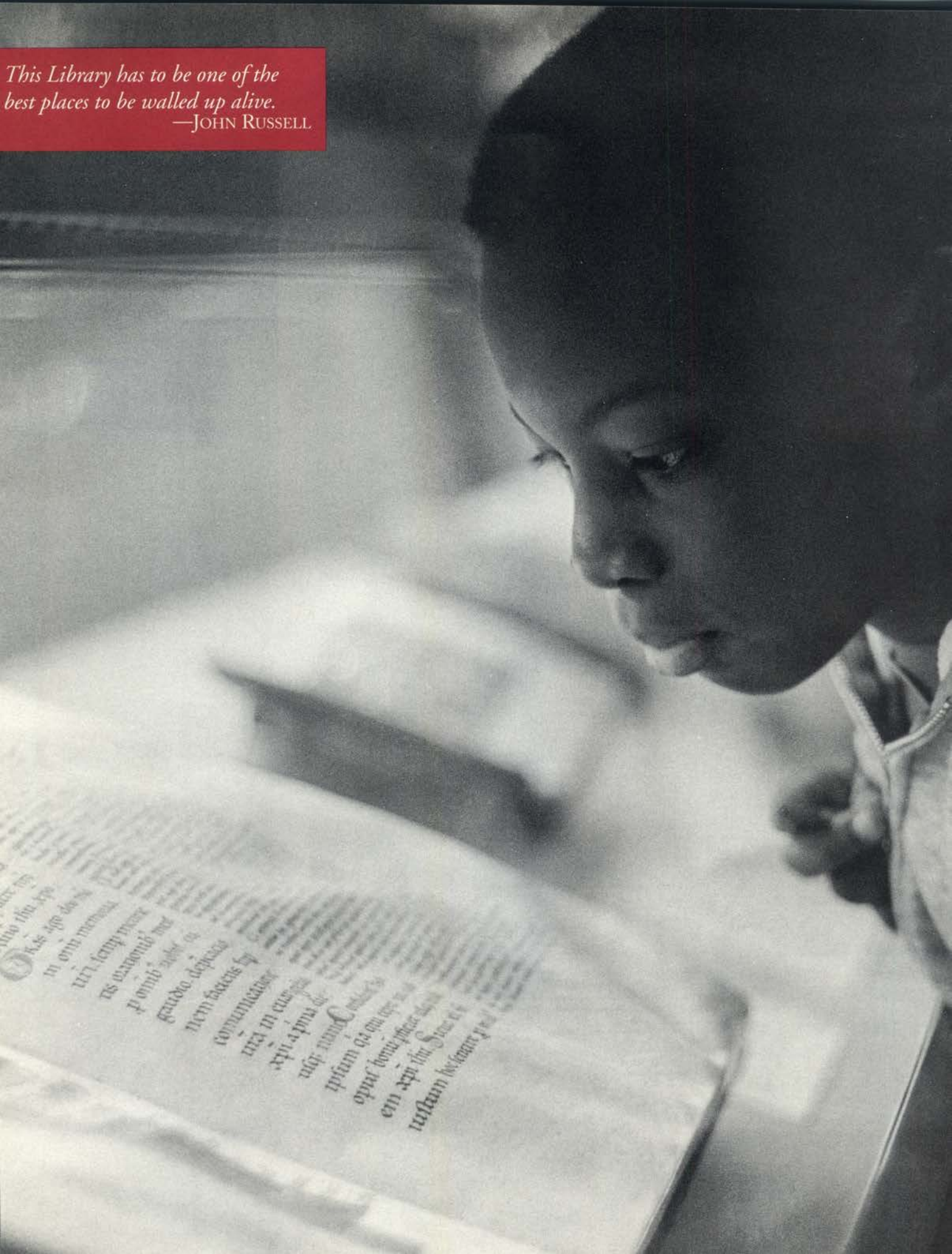
Boston, Massachusetts

David Osborn was sitting there before the computer screen, another beautiful head among the marble busts of New England worthies. I asked permission to take his photograph and to send his parents a release form, since David was only seventeen. He said sure, but would I please not tell them what time he was in the library as he was supposed to be in school. (His mother now knows he was in the library, and it's okay.) ◀

He grew dutifully, conspicuously studious, spending long afternoons in the town library, watched over by a white plaster bust of Ben Franklin.

—DAVID MCCULLOUGH

*This Library has to be one of the
best places to be walled up alive.*
—JOHN RUSSELL





Newton Free Library

Newton, Massachusetts

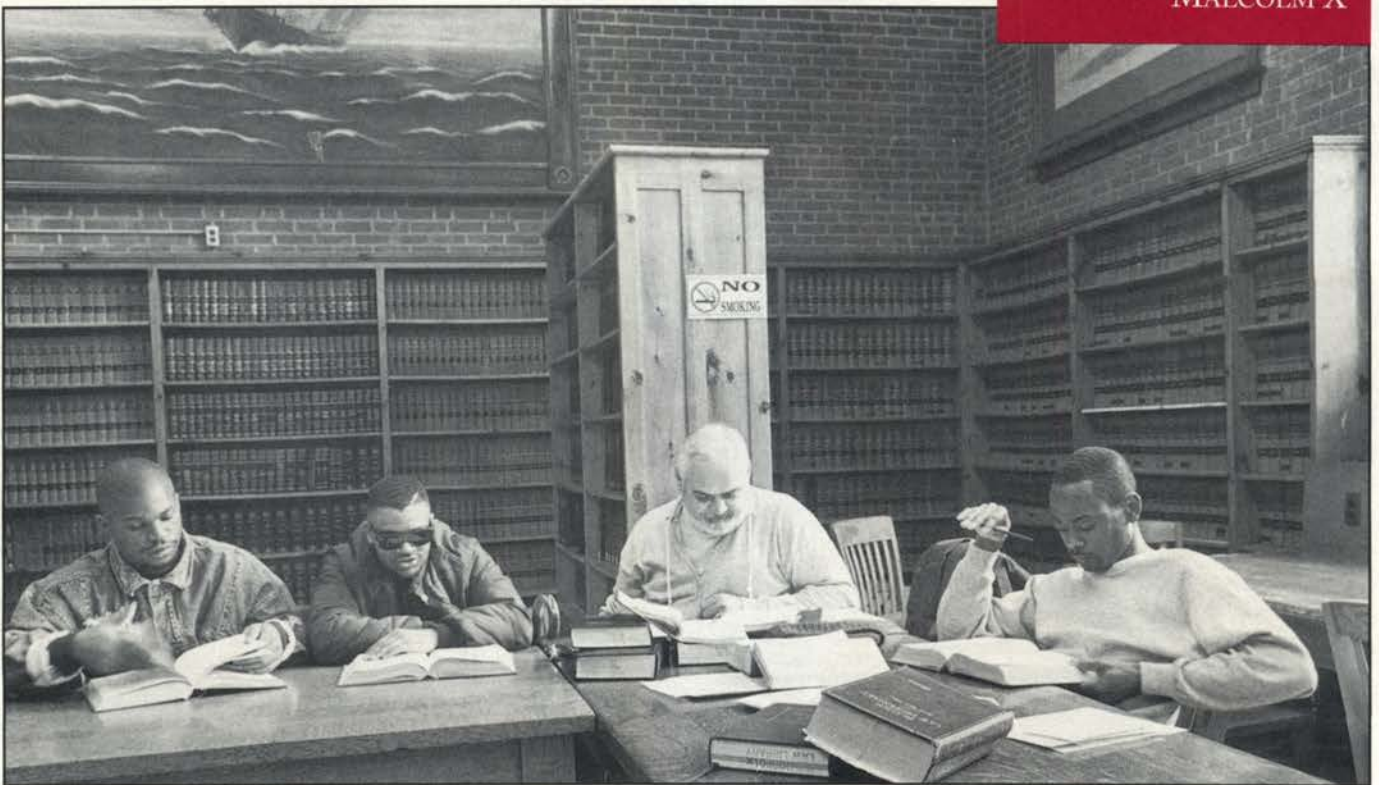
*Read meanwhile....
Hunt among the shelves,
as dogs do grasses...*

—RANDALL JARRELL

Ten guards and the warden couldn't have torn me out of those books. Months passed without even thinking about being imprisoned....

I had never been so truly free in my life.

—MALCOLM X



Massachusetts Correctional Institution Law Library

Norfolk, Massachusetts

The library is in the medium security prison where Malcolm X was held. He was transferred to Norfolk on the request of his sister, since the library and the educational-rehabilitation program are its outstanding features. Malcolm X started slowly reading a dictionary from beginning to end, copying out each entry. He went from there to reading and understanding books for the first time. "My alma mater was books and a good library. I don't think anybody ever got more out of going to prison than I did."

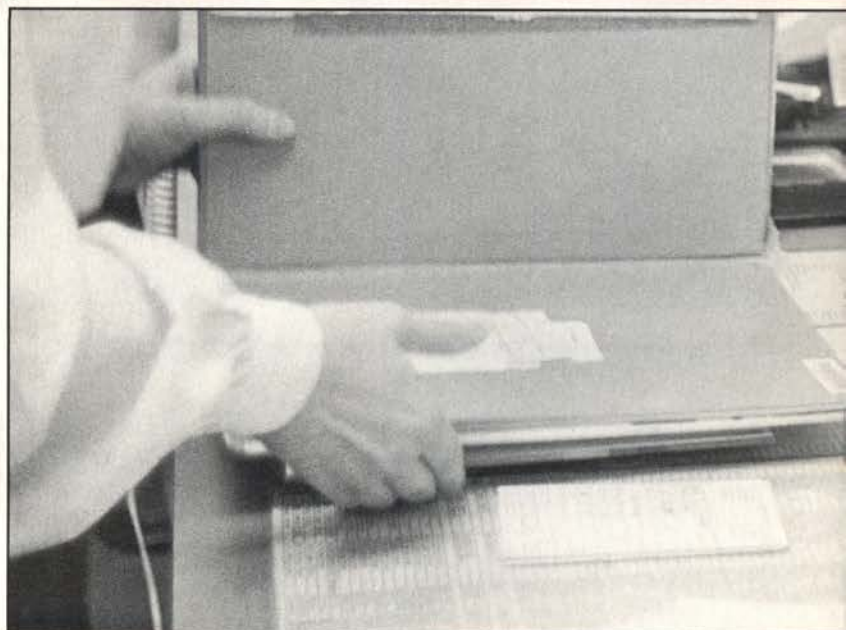


**Cambridge
Public Library,
Central Square
Branch**

*Cambridge,
Massachusetts*

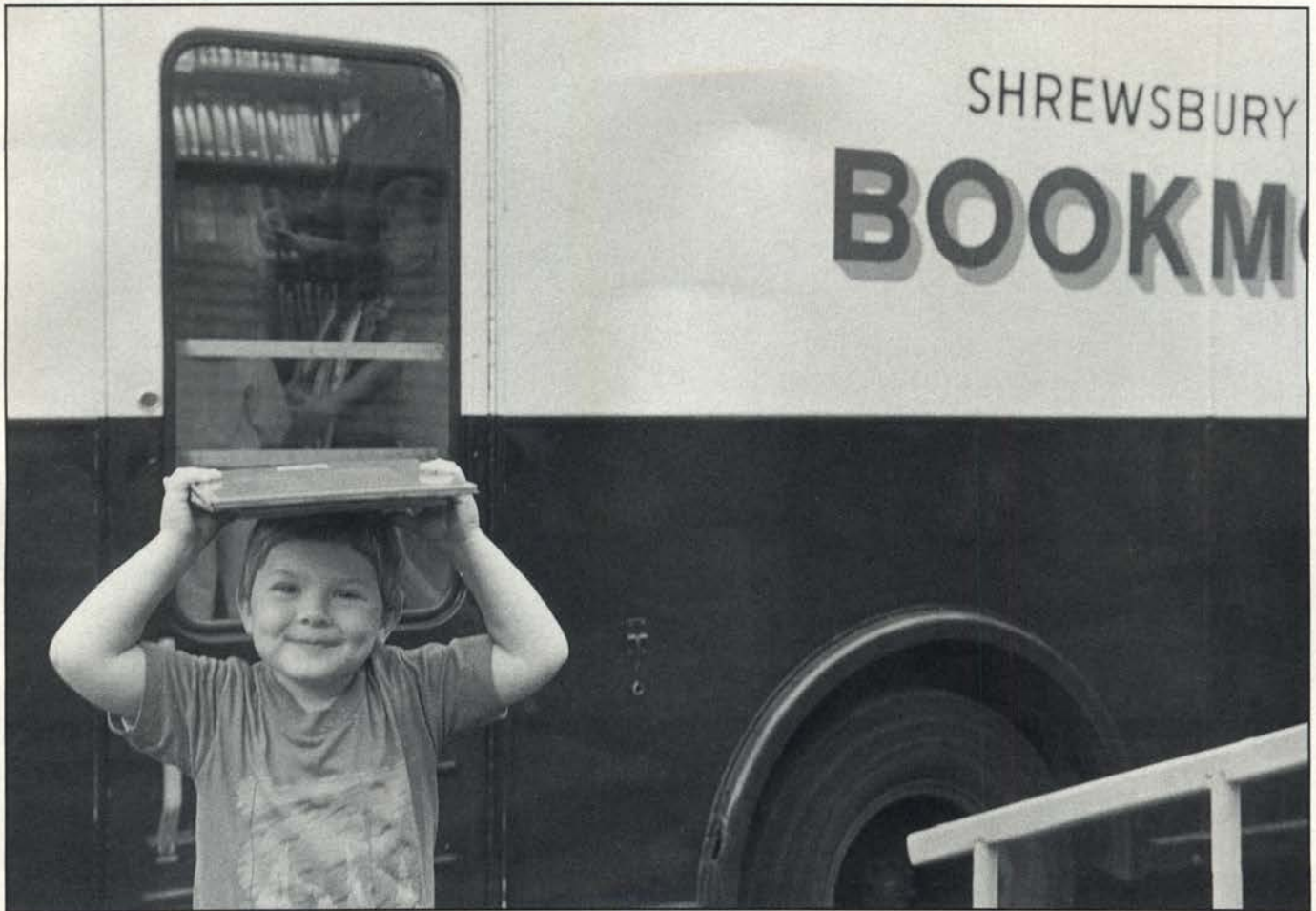
The kids had entered into the world of the story. Neither the librarian turning pages nor the presence of a photographer could bring them out of it. ▲

...their grave eyes reflected the eternal fascination of the fairy tale: Would the monster be bested...or would he feed?
—STEPHEN KING



When I...discovered libraries, it was like having Christmas every day!

—JEAN FRITZ



Cambridge Public Library

Cambridge, Massachusetts ▼

Shrewsbury Bookmobile

Shrewsbury, Massachusetts

As the library bus rounded the corner and assumed its usual place, children and adults poured out into the street. It was as attractive as an ice cream wagon. ▲



When I got my library card, that's when my life began.

—RITA MAE BROWN



Houghton Library, Hyde Oval Exhibition Room, Harvard University

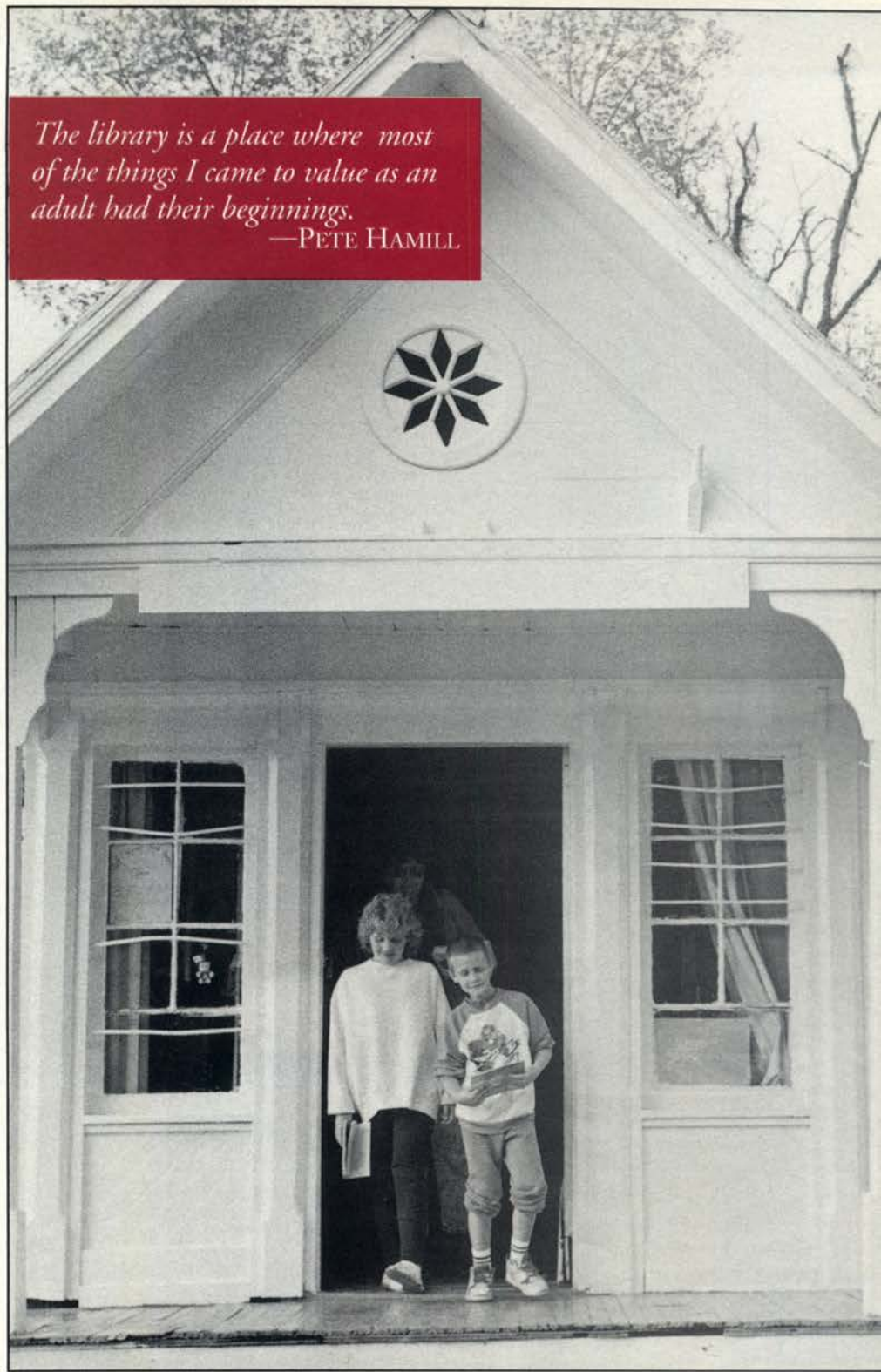
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Its eighteenth-century English literature collection, delicately illuminated, the cast-in-London plaster ceiling, and Italian marble floor are all a part of the beautiful room created by Mary Hyde (now Viscountess Eccles) in memory of her first husband, Donald Hyde. Samuel Johnson's portrait presides over this room; the one on the far wall is by Sir Joshua Reynolds. Marty Hyde Eccles has the largest collection of Johnsoniana in the world, and it includes many other images of Dr. Johnson.



My dream was to live in this heavenly building and know all its secrets...to be allowed to go behind the curving book-clad walls into the stacks and have keys to unlock the cabinets of bookish rarities.

—GERMAINE GREER



The library is a place where most of the things I came to value as an adult had their beginnings.

—PETE HAMILL

Pembroke Public Library

Pembroke, Virginia

I found this library only because I was chatting with a customer at a local antique store who happened to be the president of the County Historical Society. He sent me to this little library that used to be the town's post office. It is certainly the tiniest library I've ever seen, and with five people inside, I had to stay outside and photograph.

*Scholar examining an 11th-century manuscript
of a Hebrew translation
of an Arabic commentary
on the logic of Aristotle.*



National and University Library of Israel, Manuscript Room

Jerusalem, Israel

It is communication across the centuries: the ancient texts, copied onto film, are accessible by the latest technology. Unlike national and university libraries generally, this one is open to the public for reference and borrowing.

National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo

(now destroyed)

In August 1992, the Serbs bombed the library for three consecutive days with incendiary grenades. Only the walls now remain. Almost the entire written record of Bosnia's multicultural heritage went up in flames—one and a half-million volumes, including 155,000 manuscripts and rare books. I made my photograph in 1991, not having a clue that very soon the library would be destroyed. Enes Kujundžić, the library's current director, said that this was an extremely reading-oriented population and that the Bosnian Serb forces "knew that if they wanted to destroy ['cleanse'] this multi-ethnic society, they would have to destroy the library."

I warned myself that it would take only a few wars...or a single period of brutality or savagery...to destroy forever the ideas passed down with the help of these frail objects in fiber and ink.

—MARGUERITE YOURCENAR



The remains of the library. Photograph by Esad Bakira Tanović, February 1993.



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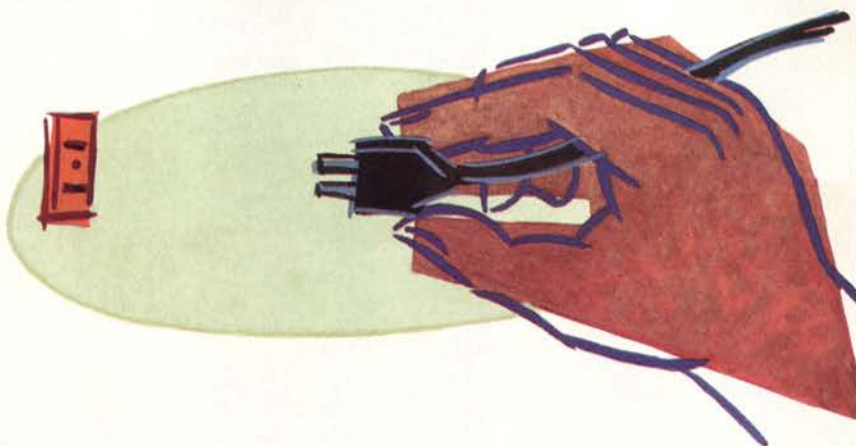
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