

We Be Dumb

by Alfred Adask

“The City of New York High School Math Proficiency Exam” contains ten questions. Here’s the first three:

NAME: _____

GANG NAME: _____

1.) Little Johnny has an AK-47 with a 30 round clip. He usually misses 6 out of every 10 shots and he uses 13 rounds per drive-by shooting. How many drive-by shootings can Little Johnny attempt before he has to reload?

2.) Jose has 2 ounces of cocaine. If he sells an 8 ball to Antonio for \$320 and 2 grams to Juan for \$85 per gram, what is the street value of the rest of his hold?

3.) Rufus pimps 3 whores. If the price is \$85 per trick, how many tricks per day must each ho turn to support Rufus’s \$800 per day crack habit?

Some reports indicate that this was a real exam created by a high school teacher trying to make education “relevant” to his inner-city students. Others say this test is pure satire.

But whether you find the previous “exam” disturbing or amusing, the next test was, in fact, given to Kansas eighth graders in 1895 and this exam is almost *scary*. When you read the questions that Kansas *eighth graders* were expected to answer over a century ago, it’s hard to doubt that the quality of American education has suffered a massive decline.

In fact, the following exam implies that schools provided a level of education to 1895 *eighth graders* that was fundamentally superior to the education received by most modern *college* graduates.

This 1895 eighth-grade final exam was last given in Salina, Kansas. The original test document is on file at the Smoky Valley Genealogical

Society and Library in Salina, Kansas and was originally reprinted by the *Salina Journal*.

To understand the test, a little historical background is helpful. In 1895, many children quit school as soon as they could master the fundamentals of the 3 R's (reading, writing and arithmetic). Most never went past the 3rd or 4th grade since that was all the education needed for the farm and most city jobs. Child labor laws did not exist. As a result, the 8th grade was considered upper-level education.

Also, some of the exam's terms (such as "tare weight" and "bushel") are no longer commonly used. Other terms are now obsolete. Some questions reflect teaching methods no longer used to teach sentence structure and grammar.

Today's education is much more focused on technology and sociology than the grammar and geography of 1895. It's a different world, today, with different requirements and capabilities needed to succeed. Nevertheless, most of the 1895 questions are still appropriate. They stress a depth of education which is not merely lacking today, but seemingly impossible.

Grammar (Time, one hour)

1. Give nine rules for the use of Capital Letters.
2. Name the Parts of Speech and define those that have no modifications.
3. Define Verse, Stanza and Paragraph.
4. What are the Principal Parts of a verb? Give Principal Parts of do, lie, lay and run.
5. Define Case, Illustrate each Case.
6. What is Punctuation? Give rules for principal marks of Punctuation.
- 7 - 10. Write a composition of about 150 words and show therein that you understand the practical use of the rules of grammar.

Arithmetic (Time, 1.25 hours)

1. Name and define the Fundamental Rules of Arithmetic.
2. A wagon box is 2 ft. deep, 10 feet long, and 3 ft. wide. How many bushels of wheat will it hold?
3. If a load of wheat weighs 3942 lbs., what is it worth at 50 cts. per bu., deducting 1050 lbs. for tare?
4. District No. 33 has a valuation of \$35,000. What is the necessary levy to carry on a school seven months at \$50 per month, and have \$104 for incidentals?
5. Find cost of 6720 lbs. coal at \$6.00 per ton.
6. Find the interest of \$512.60 for 8 months and 18 days at 7 percent.

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7. What is the cost of 40 boards 12 inches wide and 16 ft. long at \$20 per m?
8. Find bank discount on \$300 for 90 days (no grace) at 10 percent.
9. What is the cost of a square farm at \$15 per acre, the distance around which is 640 rods?
10. Write a Bank Check, a Promissory Note, and a Receipt.

U.S. History (Time, 45 minutes)

1. Give the epochs into which U.S. History is divided.
2. Give an account of the discovery of America by Columbus.
3. Relate the causes and results of the Revolutionary War.
4. Show the territorial growth of the United States.
5. Tell what you can of the history of Kansas.
6. Describe three of the most prominent battles of the Rebellion.
7. Who were the following: Morse, Whitney, Fulton, Bell, Lincoln, Penn, and Howe?
8. Name events connected with the following dates: 1607, 1620, 1800, 1849, and 1865?

Orthography (Time, one hour)

1. What is meant by the following: Alphabet, phonetic orthography, etymology, syllabication?
2. What are elementary sounds? How classified?
3. What are the following, and give examples of each: Trigraph, subvocals, diphthong, cognate letters, linguals?
4. Give four substitutes for caret 'u'.
5. Give two rules for spelling words with final 'e'. Name two exceptions under each rule.
6. Give two uses of silent letters in spelling. Illustrate each.
7. Define the following prefixes and use in connection with a word: Bi, dis, mis, pre, semi, post, non, inter, mono, super.
8. Mark diacritically and divide into syllables the following, and name the sign that indicates the sound: Card, ball, mercy, sir, odd, cell, rise, blood, fare, last.
9. Use the following correctly in sentences, Cite, site, sight, fane, fain, feign, vane, vain, vein, raze, raise, rays.
10. Write 10 words frequently mispronounced and indicate pronunciation by use of diacritical marks and by syllabication.

Geography (Time, one hour)

1. What is climate? Upon what does climate depend?
2. How do you account for the extremes of climate in Kansas?
3. Of what use are rivers? Of what use is the ocean?
4. Describe the mountains of N.A.
5. Name and describe the following: Monrovia, Odessa, Denver, Manitoba, Hecla, Yukon, St. Helena, Juan Fernandez, Aspinwall and Orinoco.
6. Name and locate the principal trade centers of the U.S.

7. Name all the republics of Europe and give capital of each.
8. Why is the Atlantic Coast colder than the Pacific in the same latitude?
9. Describe the process by which the water of the ocean returns to the sources of rivers.
10. Describe the movements of the earth. Give inclination of the earth.

When you compare the satirical “New York City Exam” to the 1895 Kansas exam, which seem more incredible? Even if the New York exam is fictional or an aberration, that exam at least seems *possible* in modern America. However, the 1895 Kansas exam seems so incredible that it seems impossible that it might ever been a high school exam, let alone an exam for eighth graders.

I’m a grown man who writes for a (modest) living. Some people think I’m intelligent and (fairly) well-educated. And compared to most Americans, I am. But I don’t think I could pass that 1895 test for eighth graders. And that bothers me. Not because I’m less educated than I might’ve imagined, but because I *know* that virtually all Americans are even more “dumbed down” than I.

The 1895 exam implies that today’s average high school graduate may be no better educated (at best) than the average 1895 6th grader. That’s intolerable. If modern public schools can’t provide high school graduates with an education at least equal to that of 1895 *eighth graders*, why waste our time and money sending kids to public school?

I’m even more troubled, however, by the fact that I’m almost incapable of even *imagining* that eighth graders could *ever* have been so well-educated. That 1895 exam not only pokes fun at my own shoddy education, it shows that my understanding of people, of children and their *potential* is incredibly shortsighted. Somehow, we’ve lost sight of the fact that eighth graders are even *capable* of such remarkable educational achievement.

And once we lose sight of that capability, we certainly won’t challenge our schools and students to pursue that level of excellence. But if we underestimating our children’s potential so badly, is it any wonder that kids find school boring and lose interest in intellectual pursuits?

The stark contrast between the 1895 eighth grade exam and a 2001 college education, implies that American students have, in fact, been “dumbed down” to an almost incomprehensible degree.

The first question inspired by this massive decline is “*How* could

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they do this?" In other words, *how* could our government, Department of Education, schools, teachers and politicians have been persuaded, seduced or deceived into acting in a coordinated manner to slowly impose or accept such a massive and universal decline in our public education system?

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I could understand if the occasional school or even State produced a substandard educational curriculum. But how could “they” (whoever “they” are) slowly manipulate virtually *all* schools in *all* states into accepting less education each year until what passes for “higher” education is virtually no education at all?

Is it even be *possible* that there could be seemingly forces at work that are so sophisticated and persistent that, over the course of a *century*, they effectively disabled American education *without anyone even noticing*? That’s another one of those questions that you can’t ask without being labeled as “paranoid”. But even Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter seemed to embrace conspiracy theories when he warned, “The real rulers in Washington are invisible and ex-

ercise power from behind the scenes.” If a Supreme Court Justice can believe in “invisible rulers,” I see no reason to doubt the possibility that “invisible forces” are also at work in public education.

But if the question of “how” education could’ve declined so precipitously seems disconcerting—try answering “*why*” those unseen forces want us ignorant. What could the masters of such forces have planned for us? *Why* are “they” doing this?

Clearly, there’s no “why” to explain the decline in American education that’s consistent with the general welfare of the American people.

I suspect the “why” is partially explained by the fact that the essence of law is *words*, and those words can’t be properly understood and communicated without a solid grasp of *grammar*. Judging from the 1895 exam, Kansas eighth graders understood grammar better than modern law school graduates.

If so, those 1895 kids were capable of understanding the law and *enforcing their rights*. But, today, who among us understands enough grammar to reliably comprehend the *words* of the law and enforce our rights? Without a solid grasp of grammar, what rights can we possibly

claim or enforce? What's left to us besides ignorant submission or incoherent violence? The Bible warns of the dangers of such ignorance when it declares,

“My people *perish* for lack of knowledge.”

Thomas Jefferson offered an implicit explanation for the “why” behind “dumbing down” the citizens of America’s democracy:

“If a Nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be . . . If we are to guard against ignorance and remain free, it is the responsibility of every American to be informed.”

Jefferson knew ignorance and freedom can’t coexist. Thus, to enslave a people with maximum efficiency and minimum violence, simply render them ignorant. Dumb ‘em down. After all, how could any individual discover and assert his God-given, unalienable Rights against the forces of oppression, if that individual can’t even *read* his history, politics and law? Thus, the road to oppression and the loss of individual rights may be paved with a public school education.

Thanks to public education, we be dumb . . . and we be slaves. But I repeat myself.

If the Bible and Jefferson are right, the *only* lasting defense against oppression is education. And if the past century is any indication, that education will not be found in public schools—and not because our schools are under-funded or overcrowded, but because mysterious forces seem determined to diminish our educations.

These “forces” are invisible to us because they seem unbelievable. Again, speaking of unseen forces conspiring to “get” us is usually a good way to be written off as “paranoid”. But just as Supreme Court Justice Frankfurter spoke of “invisible rulers,” former FBI Direc-

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tor J. Edgar Hoover warned that, "The individual is handicapped by coming face to face with a conspiracy so monstrous he cannot believe it exists"

Just because we can't see things, doesn't mean they aren't there. How many of us could "see" the force of gravity if Sir Isaac Newton hadn't "discovered" it and then taught others to "see" it? Similarly, just because we can't see the mysterious forces behind our declining education, doesn't mean those forces aren't real. It's entirely possible that the reason we can't "see" those forces is that our educations have been intentionally diminished to render us increasingly "blind" to our oppressors. In the extreme, we might even argue that the

apparent purpose of modern public "education" is not to educate, but to distract our children during those formative years when real education might be most easily achieved.

The third sentence in the "Declaration of Independence" explains that the sole purpose of just government is "to secure these rights" (meaning the unalienable Rights given to each individual by God). But the current constitution of CA (aka "STATE OF CALIFORNIA") declares that the purpose of government is to "protect the people". Do you *see* the difference? Do you *comprehend* the difference? The Declaration provided principles for a "Republican Form of Government"; the CA Constitution provides principles for a collectivist democracy.

Do you understand that a government that protects your God-given, unalienable *Rights* is far more precious than a government that merely protects the "*people*"? Is your understanding sufficient for the CA Constitution to make you *angry*? Or are you merely a little perplexed, or even unconcerned that some states value people more than God-given rights?

If you're not angry. . . if you're not frightened. . . if governments dedicated to protecting *people* rather than *God-given Rights* don't scare the hell out of you, you be dumb.

And you be slaves.
But I repeat myself.



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