

# Readicide

- How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It
- by Kelly Gallagher - ©2009
- Steakhouse Publishers: Portland, Maine
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# A proposal to Websters

- Read-i-cide: noun, the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools. This is Gallagher's proposed definition of the title of this book. In his 20+ years as an educator, administrator, and consultant, he has seen many teachers and administrators push practices that kill many students' last chance to develop into lifelong readers.

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# Overemphasis on Testing

- When most schools say they value reading, what they mean is that they focus intensely on raising state-mandated reading test scores. They feature the kind of reading that students will rarely, if ever, do as adults. As a result, these schools are working against developing independent readers. Students who perform poorly, get more of the same ineffective treatment. Two thirds of college-bound students still have to take remedial courses. If students are taught to read and write well, they will do fine on mandated tests. If they are only taught to be test-takers, they will never learn to read and write well.

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# Too Many Standards

- Standards are necessary, but the problem with state and local standards in the US is that there are too many of them. The biggest danger of sprinting through content is that we graduate students who do not develop an interest in any content area. We have courses that are a mile wide and an inch deep. By sacrificing deep, rich teaching, we chip away at student motivation. We turn students into memorizers instead of thinkers.

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# Who is this Al Qaeda person?

- Students who constantly prepare for tests do not build cultural literacy. They do not engage in authentic reading, high-interest reading or voluntary reading. You need prior knowledge to connect with the words you are reading. By limiting reading materials, we remove invaluable opportunities for students to widen and deepen their knowledge that is foundational to developing readers. In one study, students were asked to read a passage about baseball. Struggling readers who were knowledgeable about baseball out performed strong readers who knew little about baseball. Students who are feed a steady diet of academic reading become sick of reading by 9th grade.

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# The Chop-Chop Curriculum

- Gallagher sites a 122-page curriculum guide for “To Kill a Mockingbird” that features twenty detailed lessons that slice up the novel. If your students are taking several weeks to read a novel, readicide will most certainly occur. We tend to over-teach reading material as we fail to give students time to read in school. Gallagher recommends that we frame the text before students read it with a hands-on guided tour of the first half of the book. Half way through you can switch to the budget tour mode. Students should be able to read the second half with much less assistance. Books should provide students with imaginative rehearsals for the real world. Try to augment books with interesting articles related to the book’s theme.

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# Finding the "Sweet Spot"

- This chapter talks about how to frame difficult reading for students without over teaching. With some texts, you can just let students go and read for recreation. Others require active teaching so that students can get past unfamiliar vocabulary and settings. The trick is finding the balance between too much teaching and not enough. Reading the first part aloud is one technique as is giving students a specific purpose for each assigned passage. Never assume that students have the tools. Provide strategies that good readers use, but not all at once.

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# Concluding Thoughts

- Although test scores are going up in elementary schools, one suspects it is because the tests are getting easier and teaching to these tests explains why there is a reading falloff in middle schools. The Internet is also seen as a culprit. (Doug: See my post on "What the Internet does to your brain" for reasons why.) Reading First, a cornerstone of NCLB, has not produced better readers. Some suspect this is due to an over emphasis on decoding skills. Yong Zhao is cited to support the claim that our obsession on testing could kill students' creativity. Other countries like China realize this and are moving away from testing. (Doug: See my summary of Yong's book "Catching Up or Leading the Way.") Finland has top reading scores with very little testing, starting school at age 7, no gifted classes, free materials for parents, and limited homework. They focus on creativity and deeper thinking, not drill and kill.

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# Cool Quote

- “Learning without thinking is labor lost: thinking without learning is dangerous.”  
Confucius

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# What I Left Out

- To promote sales of the books I summarize, I leave out parts that will encourage my readers to at least have the institution they work for purchase these fine books. If you teach reading at any grade, you should get this book.
- Gallagher gives abundant examples of assignments that you can use to fight readicide. I hope my summary gets you excited about fighting this problem. The book contains lots of specific ways to do so. There is also a lot of help with finding the right balance between over teaching and under teaching. Page 117 contains a great list of ways to develop recreational and academic readers.
- The appendix contains "101 Books My Reluctant Readers Love to Read." It also contains forms that students use to report on the books they read and a "Hard Talk Checklist" that will help you determine if your school is on the Road to Readicide.

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