PS1 for 4-21-88#THE DUMBING DOWN OF SCHOOL EXAMS

Let me share with you a very interesting comment that was made at an education seminar I recently attended. Here it is.

The following questions are taken from a high school (BF)entry(end BF) examination given to 8th graders in Indiana in 1911:

1. In what state, and on what waters, are the following: Chicago, Duluth, Cleveland and Buffalo? State an important fact about each.

2. A rope 500 feet long is stretched from the top of a tower and reaches 300 feet from the base of the tower; how high is the tower?

3. Write a brief biography of (BF)Evangeline(end BF).

4. Give the structure of a muscle and the spinal cord. Define arteries, veins, capillaries and pulse.

Now compare those questions with the following taken from the current Alabama High School Graduation Examination, which is given to 11th graders and is commonly referred to as the (BF)exit(end BF) exam. Every question is multiple choice.

1. Next to a picture of a circle, the question reads: This is called a: (a) rectangle, (b) circle, (c) triangle, (d) square.

2. Amy bought a notebook for $1.98 and a pen for $.89. She also paid $3.41 for additional supplies. How much did she spend all together?

3. Mary left _____ books in the car. (a) his books, (b) its books, (c) her books, (d) them books.

4. Basketball scores would be found in what part of the newspaper? (a) classified section, (b) editorial section, (c) entertainment section, (d) sports section.

The lowering of the level of academic achievement is obvious. The question is (BF)why(end BF)? Are today's youngsters dumber than our grandparents and great-grandparents? Are they slower to learn?

I don't think so, but I do think that today's youngsters have not

been taught as much as their ancestors. Today's schoolchildren haven't been taught basic knowledge about history and geography or simple, useful arithmetic skills. They haven't been exposed to the great works of literature.

That begs the question. We still want to know (BF)why(end BF). Most school personnel, when pressed with this question, start talking about today's social problems, everything from discipline to drugs, television to broken families.

The real reason, I believe, is that the schools failed to teach today's schoolchildren to read in the first grade. When a child is not taught to read in the first grade, classroom assignments become more and more of a blur and a bore with each passing year, and he falls farther and farther behind.

The highest correlation between high school dropout and any other factor is illiteracy. The highest correlation between teenage pregnancy and any other factor is illiteracy. The highest correlation between prison population and any other factor is illiteracy.

Surveys show that at least 27 million adult Americans have been through the public schools and are still illiterate, and another 45 million adult American are marginally illiterate. That means they cannot read any important book.

ABC-TV 20/20 reported recently about a millionaire businessman who had graduated from high school and college, been given his teacher's certificate and worked as a public school teacher, but was illiterate. Finally, with grown children, having left teaching and built a successful business, he decided to "turn himself in" to a literacy clinic, admit his handicap, and get someone to teach him how to read.

While it isn't fair to blame the public schools for all the social ills we face today, it certainly is fair to blame them for the appallingly widespread illiteracy. Teaching children to read is the

school's principal task.

The best proven method of teaching reading, namely, phonics, was censored out of the schools in the years immediately following World War II. Despite massive evidence of the failure of the methods that were substituted, about 85 percent of the schools still refuse to use the authentic phonics method (which means teaching the child the sounds and syllables of the English language so he can put them together like building blocks).

The latest silly fad in public school education is to require kindergartners to pass a test for entrance into the first grade. What we really need is a reading test that first graders must pass before exiting the first grade, because, if they can't read, school is a colossal waste of time for the child, and a fraud on the parents and taxpayers.