# Ohio Lesson Plan Pleases Parents, Irks Liberals

by Phyllis Schlafly Mar. 24, 2004

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"Why is it important for scientists to critically analyze evolution?" That's the first question in the "student reflection" portion of an optional new 22-page section called "Critical Analysis of Evolution," which is part of Ohio's 547-page science curriculum.

How could anybody object to such an innocuous question? Newspapers report a steady stream of news that scientists are questioning such dogmas as good cholesterol vs. bad cholesterol, vaccine links to autism, the causes of breast cancer, even fluoridation for children's teeth. Isn't the nature of science to question assertions and seek the proof from evidence?

The Ohio State Board of Education approved the new curriculum by a vote of 13-5 after being persuaded by 22 Ohio scientists that the new lesson plan promotes academic freedom and that it is good for 10th grade students to have an inquiring mind about evolution. "Are we about teaching students how to think, or what to think?" asked one parent supporter of the lesson plan.

And it's all optional; no teacher will be required to teach criticisms of evolution, and no students will be tested on the criticisms. So what's the big deal?

To some people, it's a very big deal, and the ACLU is ominously threatening a lawsuit. The opposition to the new lesson was led by Case Western Reserve University lecturer Patricia Princehouse (whose academic position is philosophy not science) who said, "It's sad day for science in Ohio."

Another non-scientist, Florida State University law professor Steven Gey, flew in to warn Ohioans that the lesson is unconstitutional and would almost certainly be struck down if it reached the U.S. Supreme Court. Maybe he is seeking an activist judge to rule that the Constitution prohibits allowing students to question anything in science class.

Gey's notions of constitutionality are unusual. He thinks that "moral relativism" is a "constitutional command," that the Pledge of Allegiance is unconstitutional, and that nude sunbathing should be given "constitutional protection."

There is nothing religious, or about creationism, or even about intelligent design in the new Ohio standards. What is controversial is giving students the opportunity to question evolution; it's the inquiry and debate aspect that some people find so threatening.

The new lesson encourages students to consider both supporting and "challenging" evidence for evolution. The challenges to the theory are understated and are backed up with facts.

For example, the lesson says that the fossil record supports evolution with its increasing complexity of living forms. But the lesson also observes that "transitional fossils are rare in the fossil record" and "a growing number of scientists now question that ... transitional fossils really are transitional forms," and notes that some changes in species occur quickly in the fossil record relative to longer stretches that manifest no change.

The new lesson plan presents the overused English peppered moth story found in most textbooks, which teaches that black moths survived because they rested on trees blackened by soot, while white moths were eaten by the birds. The lesson points out that "peppered moths do not actually rest on tree trunks," and that "no new species emerged" as evolutionists have long implied was the result of the soot.

The new lesson plan invites students to take a fresh look at evolutionary claims of common ancestry. The lesson observes that different genes and development have created similar anatomical structures, suggesting different ancestries.

Can it be that this kind of balanced information is so dangerous for high school students to hear that it must be censored out of textbooks? Or that it rises to the level of a Supreme Court case where judges might declare it unconstitutional?

The diehard evolutionists have enjoyed censorship of any criticism of their beliefs for a hundred years, and they won't willingly give up their academic turf. Their censorship demands became so irrational that the Ohio Board's vice president, Richard Baker, called them "a bunch of paranoid, egotistical scientists afraid of people finding out [they] don't know anything."

Ohio has become the cutting edge in the long-running evolution debate. Georgia, New Mexico, Minnesota, West Virginia, and Kansas have all wrestled with science standards and curricula on evolution in recent years.

The Alabama Senate Education Committee last week approved the "Academic Freedom Act," which says that no teacher or professor in public schools or universities may be fired, denied tenure or otherwise discriminated against for presenting "alternative theories" to evolution. The bill would also prohibit any student from being penalized because he held "a particular position on biological or physical origins" so long as the student demonstrated "acceptable understanding of course materials" which include evolution.