

English 101

Discussion Questions: “Learning Power: The Myth of Education and Empowerment”

Against School by John Gatto

1. In ¶1, Gatto states, “I taught for thirty years ... and during that time I became an expert in boredom.” What point is he making here? Do you agree?
2. Gatto believes that schools are designed to make sure that no one “ever really grows up.” What does he mean? How do schools and our current educational model encourage “childishness”?
3. According to Gatto, what do we claim is the purpose of education, and what is its “true purpose”?
4. Gatto refers extensively to Alexander Inglis. Who is he and what important details about his background does Gatto want us to notice?
5. What are the “six basic functions” of modern schooling according to Inglis? List them. Can you think of specific examples that illustrate how modern schools might implement each of these functions?
6. In ¶17, Gatto states, “School has done a pretty good job of turning our children into addicts.” What does he mean by this statement? How do his earlier arguments about the purpose of modern schooling lead him to this claim?
7. Gatto states, “We have become a nation of children” (¶18). What does he mean by this? What, according to Gatto, would it mean to be adults as opposed to children? What should we be doing to ensure that our children are given the opportunity to grow up?
8. Why do you think that Gatto continued to teach for 31 years? What do you think he sees as his own role (or complicity) in the debilitating effects of public education?

“I Just Wanna Be Average” by Mike Rose

1. In ¶2, Rose tells about being placed in the vocational track at his school. How did this happen? Why weren’t his parents more involved in making sure that he was placed in the right level?
2. What does Rose mean when he says that the “vocational track” is “a euphemism for the bottom level” (¶2).
3. Describe some of Rose’s experiences in vocational education (¶3-11). Why does he tell about them in such specific detail?
4. Rose states, “Students will float to the mark you set” (¶11). What does he mean by this?

5. What is the rationale for vocational education programs? How does this intended purpose differ from Rose's experience of vocational education?
6. Why does Ken Harvey say "I just wanna be average" (§15)? What is Rose's initial response to Ken's sentiment? How has Rose's response changed over time?
7. How was Rose finally moved out of the vocational track? What kinds of experiences did he have once he switched to college prep classes?
8. In ¶22-23, Rose describes what many students experience in "those so-called remedial classes." Why does he refer to them as "so-called remedial classes"? What happens in these classes? What does Rose see as the problem with them?
9. Tell about Jack MacFarland. What was his impact on Rose's life?
10. What is Mike Rose's main point? What does he want us to learn from his experiences?

"Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work" by Jean Anyon

1. What does Anyon mean when she states that her article "offers tentative empirical support" for the argument that "different types of educational experience and curriculum knowledge [is provided] to students in different social classes" (§2)?
2. How does Anyon conduct her investigation? What is the context into which she fits her work?
3. What are the four categories of schools that Anyon studies? How is each one characterized in terms of parents' occupations, income, and ethnicity? Why does she include these details?
4. What constitutes "work" in each of the four school categories (in other words, what are the children taught and for what "lessons" are they rewarded)?
5. How do the relationships between teachers and students differ at each of the four levels?
6. In ¶50, Anyon says that her analysis "suggests the following conclusion: the 'hidden curriculum' of schoolwork is tacit preparation for relating to the process of production in a particular way." What does she mean by this?
7. In ¶8, Anyon states that she "will not generalize her results beyond the sample," a point she reiterates in the last paragraph, in which she says that "further research should be conducted in a large number of schools" to test the validity of her findings. What does she mean by this? What kinds of conclusions can we draw from her work?