

# **How to Teach History to Children**

**By Samuel L. Blumenfeld**

Several months ago a mother brought her 12-year-old son Daniel to me to be tutored. I had taught the child to read at the age of four with Alpha-Phonics, after which he could read the New York Times with ease. He's an intelligent child with great intellectual curiosity. But in public school he is considered a trouble-maker, uncooperative, and a poor student who does sloppy homework. His mother brought him back to me because she wants him to be educated. She had been in constant conflict with Daniel's teachers concerning his intellectual needs, but the school is incapable of providing what she wants. That's why she decided to come back to me.

Since I hadn't seen Daniel in years, I didn't know what his academic deficiencies were. So I began asking him questions. I asked him to name America's wars in chronological order. He couldn't do it. He knew about the American Revolution and the Civil War, but he had no idea when the Civil War took place. In fact, he knew very little U.S. history, and what facts he knew were isolated events that had no connection with one another. His chronological knowledge was zero. In public school he was being taught social studies in which he was learning a lot about Ancient Egypt and how mummies were embalmed.

So I knew what had to be done if Daniel were ever to be educated. He had to be taught history. He had to be taught the proper chronological sequence of events. He had to be taught cause and effect. But how did one start? The reason why the public schools no longer teach history is because they start with evolution and the primordial ooze. Human beings are animals and therefore theoretically have no more history than other animals. Have you ever asked a cat about cat history? Have you ever asked a dog to tell you of the great events in dog history?

But of course even the evolutionists know that human beings are different from their animal cousins. Being intellectually dishonest, they can claim with a straight face that history has nothing to do with a chronological sequence of events. The notion of history must therefore be perverted so that it illustrates social arrangements on the evolutionary road to socialist utopia. That's what "social" studies are all about. Therefore, children are to be taught about the Eskimos and how they send their elderly grandparents on ice floes to die—a humane sort of euthanasia. Or they are taught about ancient Egypt and the climate that influenced that civilization. Mummification is studied at length because it's spooky and fits in nicely with death education. Why would you want to teach a child about a dry piece of parchment called the U.S. Constitution? What good would that do if life is essentially meaningless and traditional history has no social value?

When William Spady, the tireless promoter of Outcome-Based Education, was asked if history was going to be taught in OBE, he said that there should not be a separate course called history "that starts at some ancient time and moves forward to the present." The

students should “thoroughly examine current problems, issues, and phenomena in depth and ask why, why, why, about their origins and relationships.” But how will the students be able to get an answer to their “whys” unless they know history? Easy. They will use psychology to analyze why something happened. Current problems will be understood in terms of behavioral psychology—with a little Freudian psychoanalysis thrown in to spice things up. And their solutions will also be spelled out in terms of psychology.

But if you believe that man was created by God, in His image, then you require an approach to history that takes that into account. And so, when Daniel came for his first session, we started by reading Genesis and discussing what God had in mind when he created the universe and man. Daniel had never read the Bible before, and therefore it was a revelation to him. It was important for him to know that there was a Creator with the power to create the universe, to create the earth, and to create man. We read that God gave man dominion over the natural world, and we discussed the difference between this understanding of man’s responsibility as a steward of the natural world, and the environmentalist view that man is a polluter of the natural world.

We then read how God brought the animals “after their kind” before Adam and told him to name them. What did this mean? It meant that God had made man into a scientist, an objective observer of the natural world, and a lexicographer, an inventor of names and words. God had given man the power of speech, but it was up to man to create his language.

Daniel liked the word lexicographer and had to repeat it several times before pronouncing it correctly. I began to realize that the Bible should really be the first book in history, if one is to teach history as the story of man on earth and his relationship with his Creator. It is that relationship that not only gives meaning to one’s life, but gives meaning to history itself.

We then read further into Genesis, God’s creation of Eve, the temptation of Eve by the serpent in the Garden of Eden, the eating of the forbidden fruit, and its consequences not only for Adam and Eve but for all mankind. In God’s words, “In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.” That’s powerful stuff. But if you want to instill a deep sense of morality in a child, is there a better way to do it? Is it too difficult for a 12-year-old to understand the reason for man’s fall—disobedience to God—and realize that he will be morally tested every day of his life? The old primers used to teach, “In Adam’s fall, we sinned all.” That was the source of early America’s moral backbone.

Deuteronomy tells us that that is what we must teach our children, if they are to begin to understand the power and goodness of God and why they must obey His commandments. And is not history the story of man’s struggle with good and evil and of his long sorrowful trail of disobedience?

How much of the Bible should be read before getting into historical narrative? That’s a subject for any parent or educator to deal with. My plan, at present, is to have Daniel read well into the Bible, covering the major stories, before getting into traditional history.

Over the years I have collected a number of old history text books written at a time when historians believed in God. They are the books that educated early generations of Americans, and they are the ones we shall use. They are limited, of course, in that they usually end before the Civil War. We then shall have to find historians who have written books taking us at least to the turn of the century. Ridpath comes to mind as a good historian with a readable narrative style. Robert Welch, at the age of seven, read all nine huge volumes of Ridpath's *History of the World*, which kindled his lifelong love of history. We shall see.

I have no idea how long Daniel's mother will want me to tutor him. He may go off to a private school away from home. But this business of teaching history to children is one that is very much worth thinking about.

Recently I had dinner at a friend's house and was chatting with his 12-year-old daughter who attends a local public school. I asked her how she was doing, and she told me that she hated school—not merely disliked school, but hated it. I had hoped that her parents would home-school her. But they just couldn't do it. I told her I thought I knew why she hated school—because it was boring. Yes, she replied. It was boring. I thought, education without God is inevitably boring.

And then I said, "And you're probably not learning much also." She wanted to know what I meant by that. So I asked her to name the first three wars that the United States was involved with. She got the first one all right, the Revolutionary War. But the only other war she could think of was the Civil War, and, like Daniel, she had no idea when that took place.

The second war, I told her, was the one fought against the Barbary pirates of North Africa who kidnapped Americans for ransom. An American invasion of Tripolitania brought that war to a victorious end. My friend's daughter had never heard of that war. The fact is that most Americans have never heard of it. But the anthem of the U.S. Marine Corps should remind us: "From the halls of Montezuma, to the Shores to Tripoli..."

The third war was the War of 1812. She had never heard of that one either. She had never heard of the Battle of New Orleans, or the burning of Washington by the British, or Andrew Jackson, the hero of that war who later became our seventh President.

"But I know all about the Industrial Revolution," she volunteered. It turned out that her class had been studying the cotton mills of New England and how young girls were being exploited by the mill owners who were rich and mean. So, at the age of 12, she was already being indoctrinated to believe that the Industrial Revolution consisted mainly of factory owners exploiting poor young girls.

She had heard of Eli Whitney and the cotton gin. But she had never heard of Robert Fulton and the steamboat. In other words, the public schools were teaching "social studies" not history. Their aim was to indoctrinate children in a pro-socialist view of our history by emphasizing the meanness of capitalism.

I have no doubt that this young girl will go through life associating the Industrial Revolution with those poor girls working in the mills. She accepted the views of her teacher as truth, and they are imbedded in her head unless somewhere down the road of life she realizes that she was indoctrinated by a pro-socialist teacher--as many conservatives learn when they get rid of the socialist notions their public schools inflicted on them.

What kind of nation are we going to have with its best "educated" people devoid of any sense of history? The educators can't solve the reading problem. But they don't even believe that there's a history problem. History as a subject in the public schools has simply been destroyed, and nations that destroy their history end up destroying themselves.

Perhaps the best way to judge a school curriculum is by the way it treats history. In the federal education reform plan known as School-to-Work, we know that the purpose of the curriculum is to create young adults willing to serve the state and the industries that will hire them. Obviously, a knowledge of history is unnecessary in a such a curriculum in which students are supposed to demonstrate their skills as potential members of the workforce. American history is simply irrelevant to what will be taught in School-to-Work. As for immigrant children who at one time studied American history so that they could become Americans, they will be trained to become the willing workers of tomorrow, without a knowledge of our glorious history as a nation.

But all is not lost. Many young adults discover history for themselves by reading popular books about historical events or watching the History Channel. There are also thousands of biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs that have been written over the centuries that provide important keys to history. Our publishing houses are bringing out new ones all the time.

Then we have the 1997 publication of Paul Johnson's monumental *History of the American People*, an extraordinary book. Its opening lines create a great sense of anticipation: "The creation of the United States of America is the greatest of all human adventures. No other national story holds such tremendous lessons, for the American people themselves and for the rest of mankind." So, despite "social studies" with all of its perversions of the truth, the idea of history is anything but dead. But what percentage of the children coming out of our public schools will ever discover that, particularly those who can't read or won't read?

As one would expect, home-schoolers are very much interested in history. All you have to do is look at the books being sold at a home-school convention to realize that history is one of the most popular subjects among them. And since most home-schoolers are Christian, their keen sense of history comes from their study of the Bible, the greatest history book of them all.

Modern technology has given us some very effective new tools to bring history to anyone who owns a tape player. Rev. J. Steven Wilkins' 16-cassette-tape history, *America: The First 350 Years*, can be listened to in one's car, or at home while doing chores. Rev. Rushdoony's 18-tape cassette course, *American History to 1865*, not only provides the student with an insightful and engrossing view of our early history narrated by one of the great theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but provides a philosophical foundation for understanding what is happening today.

In other words, even those who can't read can learn history by listening to historians tell it in their own words. Thus, the tutor has the additional tools of cassettes and video tapes made by learned Christian historians to teach children history. Since families do a lot of automobile travelling these days, rather than have the children play electronic games in the back seat, let them listen to tapes narrating the great historical dramas of the past.

Without history, we are indeed like the cats and the dogs. The story of human existence is the story of human experience, from which there is much to learn. To that effect, George Santayana summed up the problem very nicely when he said: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Or as Konrad Adenauer put it: "History is the sum total of the things that could have been avoided."