

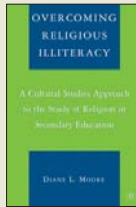
NEW IN PRINT

CULTURAL LITERACY

Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education by Diane L. Moore (Palgrave Macmillan, www.palgrave.com; 248 pp., \$26.95 paperback).

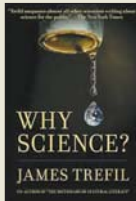
The debate over whether to teach about religion in public schools is moot, says Moore, a professor at the Harvard Divinity School and the director of its program in religion and secondary education.

Teachers, perhaps unintentionally, already interject their beliefs and biases in everyday lessons. Moreover, she continues, given the United States' diversity, its involvement abroad, and the culture wars at home, not to mention religion's long-standing role in the arts and history, it is essential that all students gain at minimum a basic understanding of the world's major religions. The real question, she asserts, is not whether religions should be taught, but how. Her answer frames the second half of the book, and is based on her high school teaching experience. Taking as a case study an "Islamic Cultural Studies" course, Moore discusses practical matters in teaching about religion, such as getting classroom dynamics right. For the vast majority of educators, who do not teach courses on religion alone, she also offers advice on including the subject in other classes in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences. Her blending of theory and action may be welcome to those seeking direction in a murky area.



Why Science? by James Trefil (Teachers College Press, www.teacherscollegepress.com; 224 pp., \$19.95 paperback).

Much of the conversation on science education emphasizes the need to increase the number of scientists and engineers in the workforce, to maintain the United States' competitiveness in a globalized economy. Less is said about science education for the majority of students who have no intention of entering the field. But at a time when issues such as global warming and stem-cell research dominate headlines and influence elections, the scientific knowledge of the average citizen cannot be overlooked,



argues Trefil, a physics professor at George Mason University and a co-author of *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*. Writing in the spirit of that earlier work, he describes in this book what "scientific literacy" comprises, explains its importance, and gives guidance on how to impart it to students. He also examines how science education in the United States has evolved, and suggests ways it could be improved, from the elementary through the collegiate levels. More a plan for building on science education's strengths than a call for radical change, the book, written for the scientific layman, takes a democratic approach to a topic often focused on those at the top.

SCHOOL CHOICE

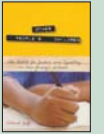
Not as Good as You Think: Why the Middle Class Needs School Choice by Lance T. Izumi, Vicki E. Murray, & Rachel S. Chaney (Pacific Research Institute, www.pacificresearch.org; 253 pp., \$24.95 paperback).

When buying a house, it's a good idea to search in well-to-do neighborhoods, because their schools provide a high-quality education, right? Not so, say the authors of this book, three fellows at the Pacific Research Institute. They analyze standardized-test results in some of California's wealthier communities, where average house prices can range from \$200,000 to over \$1 million, and discover that in 284 schools, more than half the students in at least one grade level score below proficient in English or math. (An accompanying pullout breaks down data for each school in areas such as level of education attained by parents and percentage of teachers with emergency credentials.) In addition, their research shows that significant numbers of middle-class high school students are not college-ready when they graduate. The authors consider reasons for the disparities in perceived and actual performance, such as fiscal mismanagement and collective bargaining agreements, and propose as a solution the expansion of school choice from the cities to the suburbs. Though based on California's experience, their arguments are ones that advocates of wider options in education could see as equally applicable nationally.



ALSO OF NOTE

Other People's Children: The Battle for Justice and Equality in New Jersey's Schools by Deborah Yaffe (Rutgers University Press, rutgerspress.rutgers.edu; 352 pp., \$25.95 hardback).



A detailed history of the state's *Abbott v. Burke* education adequacy case.

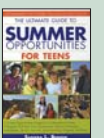
Lessons Learned: What International Assessments Tell Us About Math Achievement

edited by Tom Loveless (Brookings Institution Press, www.brookings.edu/press; 275 pp., \$26.95 paperback).



Scholars and researchers weigh in on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.

The Ultimate Guide to Summer Opportunities for Teens by Sandra L. Berger (Prufrock Press, www.prufrock.com; 310 pp., \$16.95 paperback).



A directory of 250 programs organized by type and state.

Chicken Soup for the Soul in the Classroom: Elementary Edition, Middle School Edition, & High School Edition by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, & Anna Unkovich (Health Communications Inc., www.hcibooks.com; 448 pp., \$29.95 paperback each).



Lesson plans for using the motivational series in teaching language arts and character.

—ANNE E. DAS

TEACHING

Innocence and Experience

Two women, both professional writers, reflect on the highs and lows of teaching from their very different perspectives in two memoirs, *The Emergency Teacher*, by Christina Asquith, and *Notes From a Classroom*, by Kay McSpadden. Asquith was a young journalist with a passion for education when she responded to Philadelphia's plea for teachers, choosing a position at a run-down middle school in the inner city. In her book, which she self-published previously, she recounts her struggles as a novice teacher working without textbooks, a curriculum, or support from her school's administration. Her first year of teaching would prove to be her only; now a freelance reporter, she spent 18 months in Iraq covering the rebuilding of its education system. McSpadden, in contrast, is a 30-year teaching veteran, as well as a nine-year community columnist for *The Charlotte Observer*, in Charlotte, N.C. Much of her career has been devoted to teaching high school English in rural South Carolina, an experience, she writes, that has given her lessons in both joy and humility. A selection of her columns, McSpadden's book reveals her life as an educator, her love-hate relationship with adolescents, and her thoughts on literature. Together, the two works highlight issues common to a wide swath of teachers.

"Can I really teach without any experience?" I asked Eppy, the recruiter for the Philadelphia school district. Most districts require new teachers to have graduated with a bachelor's degree in education from a four-year college. Additionally, aspiring teachers had to log at least 40 hours in the classroom training alongside a real teacher.

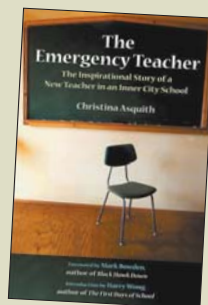
Eppy waved my concerns away. "Believe me, we need you more than you need us," he said. ...

We spent about two hours together on that first day, and by the end Eppy convinced me to take middle school. He warned me to hurry with my application forms, though, because it was already July.

"It's not the 11th hour, Christina. It's quarter to 12." ...

At 25, I was full of determination to change the world and make a difference. A year as an inner-city teacher would be a chance to help children in need. Why were inner-city schools failing? Maybe I'd find the solutions, perhaps even write about it afterward. But I'd worry about that part later. I hadn't been in middle school in more than a decade. I didn't even know any 12-year-olds. The school district wasn't really going to let me do this ... were they?"

—From *The Emergency Teacher: The Inspirational Story of a New Teacher in an Inner-City School* by Christina Asquith (Skyhorse, www.skyhorsepublishing.com; 232 pp., \$24.95 hardback).



Among those teachers gearing up for a new year are a special group of people, many of them born the year I started teaching. These young people are not yet teachers, though they have diplomas which indicate their mastery of special curricula and the certificates required by the state examiners. This morning as they meet their fellow faculty members and sit in meetings or put up posters on their very own classroom walls, they may at times feel like impostors. They worry about living on a teacher's salary, making friends in a new city, staying alive the first day that those now-empty classrooms teem with squirmy kids. They try to peer into the future to see what they should do, how they can become real teachers—not just in name only.

I have never been very good at looking into the future, but my hindsight is 20/20. I can see with startling clarity every misstep, every wrong turn, every bad decision in my past. My mistakes have become channel markers and constellations to help me navigate my own teaching career. Surely my gifted backwards clairvoyance can benefit any novice teachers who may feel at sea."

—From *Notes From a Classroom: Reflections on Teaching* by Kay McSpadden (Stampley, www.stampley.com; 336 pp., \$22.95 hardback).

