



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 12, 2011

Teacher Fired for Critical View of Evolution

An Ohio judge has ruled against a public school science teacher who was fired for allegedly pushing his religious beliefs on his students, and for keeping a Bible on his desk. The Rutherford Institute, the legal advocacy group representing him in an appeal of the termination, insisted that the charge has more to do with the teacher's efforts to get students to think critically about the issue of evolution.



According to the [Associated Press](#), Knox County Common Pleas Judge Otho Eyster ruled on October 6 that the Mount Vernon, Ohio, school board was justified in dismissing John Freshwater, a 24-year teaching veteran with an exemplary record. "Eyster noted in his two-page decision that he reviewed more than 6,300 transcript pages from a hearing held before a state referee," reported the AP. "That hearing officer recommended ... that Freshwater's contract be terminated, and the school board formally fired him within days."

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The [Rutherford Institute](#) explained that in 2008 the Mount Vernon school board voted to suspend the science teacher, citing concerns about his conduct and materials found in his classroom, specifically those related to his views and teaching on the issue of evolution. "Earlier that year," recalled the legal advocacy group, "school officials reportedly ordered Freshwater ... to remove 'all religious items' from his classroom, including a Ten Commandments poster displayed on the door of his classroom, posters with Bible verses, and his personal Bible which he kept on his desk. Freshwater agreed to remove all items except for his Bible."

According to news reports, as the case against Freshwater heated up, students showed their support for their teacher by wearing t-shirts with crosses painted on them and carrying Bibles with them to school.

The school district's own policy stipulated that because of varying religious traditions, teachers were encouraged to offer unbiased instruction on issues such as evolution so that students could evaluate them "in accordance with their own religious tenets." Nonetheless, noted the Rutherford Institute, "school officials suspended and eventually fired Freshwater, allegedly for criticizing evolution and failing to teach the required science curriculum."

John Whitehead, president of the Rutherford Institute, explained that the main charge against Freshwater was that he had referred his students to some resources targeting the theory of evolution, including the popular Ben Stein documentary [Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed](#). "Many people have



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seen that film that critiques evolution,” said Whitehead. “But he also referred children to movies which upheld the theory of evolution, so he did both sides of it, and he just raised questions about the theory of evolution, which I think any good teacher would do...”

Added Whitehead: “This is a question of someone who’s gone against the orthodoxy. Evolution is treated much like a religion in most schools; you can’t question it. This man dared question it, and he got in trouble.”

He added that the judge’s ruling “is unfortunate because academic freedom is the bedrock of American education. What we need today are more teachers and school administrators who understand that young people don’t need to be indoctrinated. Rather, they need to be taught how to think for themselves.”

Whitehead said the Rutherford Institute will appeal the ruling to a higher court on the grounds that in terminating Freshwater, the school board violated his First and Fourteenth Amendment guarantees.

Illustration: An 1870s-era caricature of Charles Darwin with an ape or monkey body symbolized evolution.



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