



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on July 1, 2015

Common Core: Goodbye, Homer; Hello, UN Declaration of Rights

Common Core standards require students to read less literature and more nonfiction. And, judging from the list of approved texts, it's not the sort of nonfiction most parents would appreciate.

On two separate occasions, the *New York Times* has published information regarding the reduction reading from the classics of Western literature in favor of an increase in study of selected government publications and psychological treatises.

In its report from June 20 entitled "English Class in Common Core Era: Tom Sawyer and Court Opinions," the *New York Times* reports:

In Harrison, N.Y., 10th graders [read articles](#) about bipolar disorder and the adolescent brain to help them analyze Holden Caulfield. In Springdale, Ark., ninth graders studying excerpts from "The Odyssey" [also read](#) sections of the G.I. Bill of Rights, and a congressional resolution on its 60th anniversary, to connect the story of Odysseus to the challenges of modern-day veterans. After eighth graders in Naples, Fla., read how Tom Sawyer duped other boys into whitewashing a fence for him, they follow it with an [op-ed article](#) on teenage unemployment.

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Why the change in curriculum? "The rationale is that most of what students will be expected to read in college and at work will be informational, rather than literary, and that American students have not been well prepared to read those texts," the article claims.

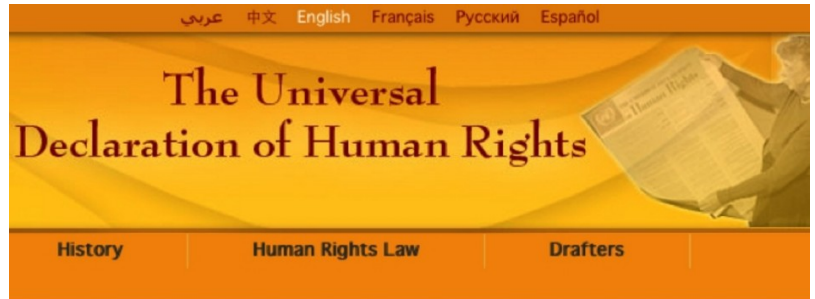
When it comes to classroom content, the *Times* reveals that under the Common Core scheme, teachers won't be "teaching an entire novel," but they will be using technical reports and government-sponsored white papers to ensure that teachers are "teaching the concepts that that novel would have gotten across."

In other words, rather than reading Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, students will read some report published about Caesar's psychic pain when he crossed the Rubicon or how Brutus was suffering from some sort of maniacal mental disorder that motivated him to murder the consul-cum-king.

Progressive pet projects are well represented in the revised reading list, too. The *New York Times* reports that in one eighth-grade class in Manhattan, "The students were more excited about a unit on women's rights, focused on speeches by Shirley Chisholm and Sojourner Truth, and a 2006 letter by Venus Williams criticizing Wimbledon for paying female winners less than men."

Somehow, though, some students seem to be less than thrilled about the dry subjects on the syllabus. From the *Times* piece:

Karma Lisslo, an eighth grader and an avid reader, said that while she appreciated that nonfiction could provide historical context for a novel, she got tired sometimes of the short informational texts





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she was assigned.

“We do so much nonfiction,” Karma said. “I just want to read my book.”

What the students want or what would engage them is apparently less important than the advancing of the Common Core (read: federal) agenda.

While that revelation is certainly not surprising, neither is the fact that one of the documents in the corpus of Common Core-mandated readings is the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The *Times* reports that this document is so important to the Common Core educators that students are required to suffer through a “a painstakingly close reading” of its provisions.

One of the authors of the language arts standards, Susan Pimentel, told the *New York Times* that “she thought that reading the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was valuable, in part because it contained a lot of academic vocabulary, which she said was critical to students’ reading comprehension skills.”

If students must learn such lessons from nonfiction, one wonders whether vocabulary and comprehension skills couldn’t be improved by reading the Declaration of Independence rather than the UN’s Declaration of Human Rights. What’s the difference?

John F. McManus, the publisher of *The New American*, set out the [significant differences](#) in the two documents: “Our Declaration of Independence states that ‘Men are endowed by their Creator’ with rights. The UN’s 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights turns that on its head and proclaims that rights ‘are granted [by a] constitution or by law,’” McManus wrote.

Similar misstatements on the source of our rights are found in other Common Core-approved textbooks. As I [wrote last April](#):

In a textbook approved by Common Core for use by students studying for the Advanced Placement (AP) history exam, the Second Amendment is [defined this way](#): “The Second Amendment: The people have the right to keep and bear arms in a state militia.”

[Another book](#) that received the Common Core stamp of approval informs students that the Second Amendment “grant[s] citizens the right to bear arms as members of a militia of citizen-soldiers.”

Then, there is a [worksheet](#) reportedly approved by Common Core for use by history teachers in preparing lessons on the Bill of Rights that “informs” students, “The Government of the United States is currently revisiting The Bill of Rights. They have determined that it is outdated and may not remain in its current form any longer.”

Actually, the statement is not a statement of fact, but an introduction to a proposed lesson asking the students to “prioritize, revise, prune two and add two amendments to The Bill of Rights.”

Finally, there is the description of the Second Amendment published in a book approved by Common Core for use in elementary schools.

Regarding the Second Amendment, [the authors of the book state](#):

This amendment states that people have the right to certain weapons, providing that they register them and they have not been in prison. The founding fathers included this amendment to prevent the United States from acting like the British who had tried to take weapons away from the colonists.



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There is, of course, nothing wrong with reading nonfiction. It is, as with most things, a question of the quality of the curriculum.

For example, wouldn't American students be better served by reading the *Federalist* and Anti-Federalist papers or the writings of the eminent men who influenced our Founding Fathers? So many of the names of the major mentors of our founding generation [have been forgotten](#), removed completely from the syllabi and memories of contemporary Americans.

Perhaps those two events — the abolishing of these writers and the exaltation of the new Common Core-approved authors — are related.

The New American's Alex Newman commented on the "[real agenda](#)" behind the implementation of these state-sponsored standards:

Totalitarian leaders from Hitler to Stalin and everywhere in between have always sought to centralize and control education. The reason is simple: Whoever molds the minds of the youth can eventually dominate the population, even if it takes a generation or two. That is why tyrants in recent centuries have demanded compulsory, government-led education. Hitler made clear that he wanted to use "education" as a tool to mold German children in accordance with the National Socialist regime's despotic and murderous ideology. So did Stalin, and numerous other infamous tyrants and mass-murderers. As Karl Marx noted in his *Communist Manifesto*, government-controlled schooling is essential to achieving the goals of socialism.

In his masterpiece *On Liberty*, renowned British philosopher and parliamentarian John Stuart Mill succinctly explained the inherent problems with government schools. "A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another; and as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government ... it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body," he wrote.

Perhaps there has been no better definition of the Common Core standards than "despotism over the mind." Of course, that was written by John Stuart Mill, a name students in the new era will likely never hear.



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