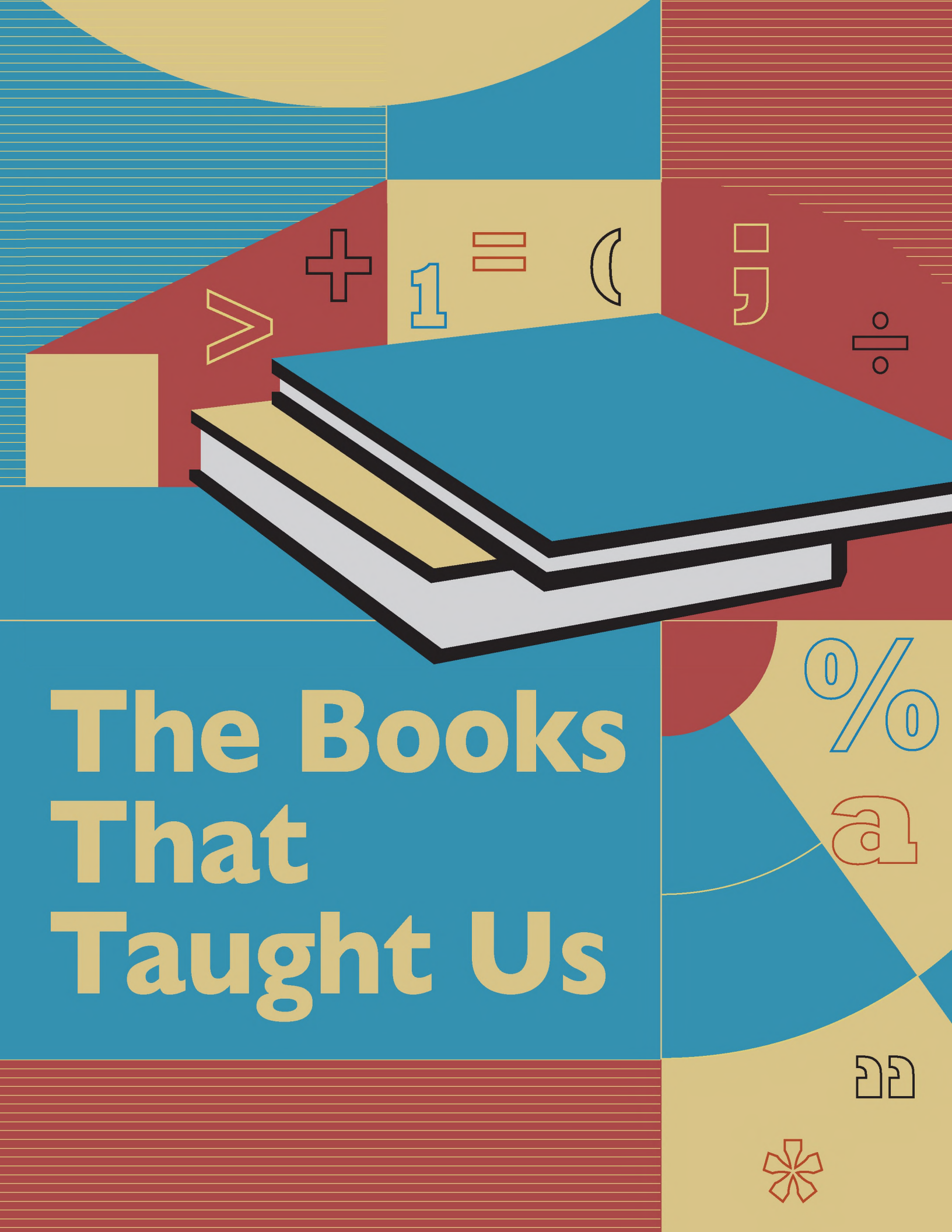

The Books That Taught Us

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CURATOR'S STATEMENT

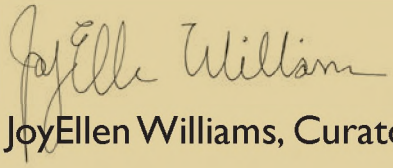
I vaguely remember my earliest textbooks. If I think hard enough, I can conjure up images of my first-grade mathematics textbook. I believe it was red and featured smiling children sporting 1990s sweatsuits on the front cover. I also have hazy memories of my fourth-grade social studies textbook. Was that the one with Geoge Washington's face on the cover? I must admit, I struggle to remember these books and much of the information presented inside them. But I have clear memories of using them. I remember wrapping my hardcover textbooks in the snazziest, brightest cloth book covers I could find at Wal-Mart and doing everything I could to keep these books in pristine condition, lest I get scolded at the end of the school year. I remember hauling those books to and from school each day and dropping my burdensome backpack down with a thud once I reached my destination. And though I never doodled in my school textbooks, I enjoyed reading the written musings of those braver than me. All these years later, I still admire those students who were determined to leave their mark on the world in any way they could.

Textbooks are living things. While their initial purpose is to instruct, they accomplish much more over time. Textbooks revive memories of childhood, archive the secret thoughts and reflections of students, and provide snapshots of evolving cultural norms and values. Textbooks teach us about ourselves.

The Books That Taught Us uses a curated selection of rare and historic instructional books to present the complexities of educational practice in the Western, English-speaking world. While most items featured in *The Books That Taught Us* were produced during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the exhibition acknowledges texts dating back to the Middle Ages

and the European Renaissance and looks ahead to changes still coming to fruition in the twenty-first century. Like the textbooks themselves, this exhibition is nostalgic, intellectually provocative, and playfully interactive. As you move through the exhibition, I encourage you to view textbooks as more than mediums for instructional content and consider how these books shape, inspire, and document the human experience.

Sincerely,



JoyEllen Williams, Curator

INVITED FACULTY STATEMENT

Educational texts have two lives. When they are first used, they might be how-to books, teaching us how to read and spell, how to bake biscuits, how to set a formal table, how to divide fractions. Sometimes they teach us subjects: history, civics, astronomy, religion.

The books in this exhibit have already lived that life. Now, they live another: windows to the past. It turns out that textbooks can tell us a lot about the society that created and used them.

McGuffey Readers, first published in the 1830s and then revised in numerous editions through the 1920s, taught millions of American children how to read. They also taught virtue, Christianity, and patriotism, a reminder of when those books began: during the religious fervor of the Second Great Awakening, which fostered social reform and Christian nationalism. Many Americans believed it was important to teach this to the children.

Textbooks published in the southern states in the early 1860s taught a different kind of patriotism. This time, God was on the side of the Confederacy, not the United States. Like the McGuffey Readers, Confederate textbooks often quoted the Bible, especially those verses that seemed to support slavery. These books are offensive today, but they provide an effective way to get at the Confederate mindset. Again, it was important to teach certain things to the children.

Cookbooks reinforced the domestic gender roles of the time. Etiquette books showed people how to interact in a society that was growing more complex.

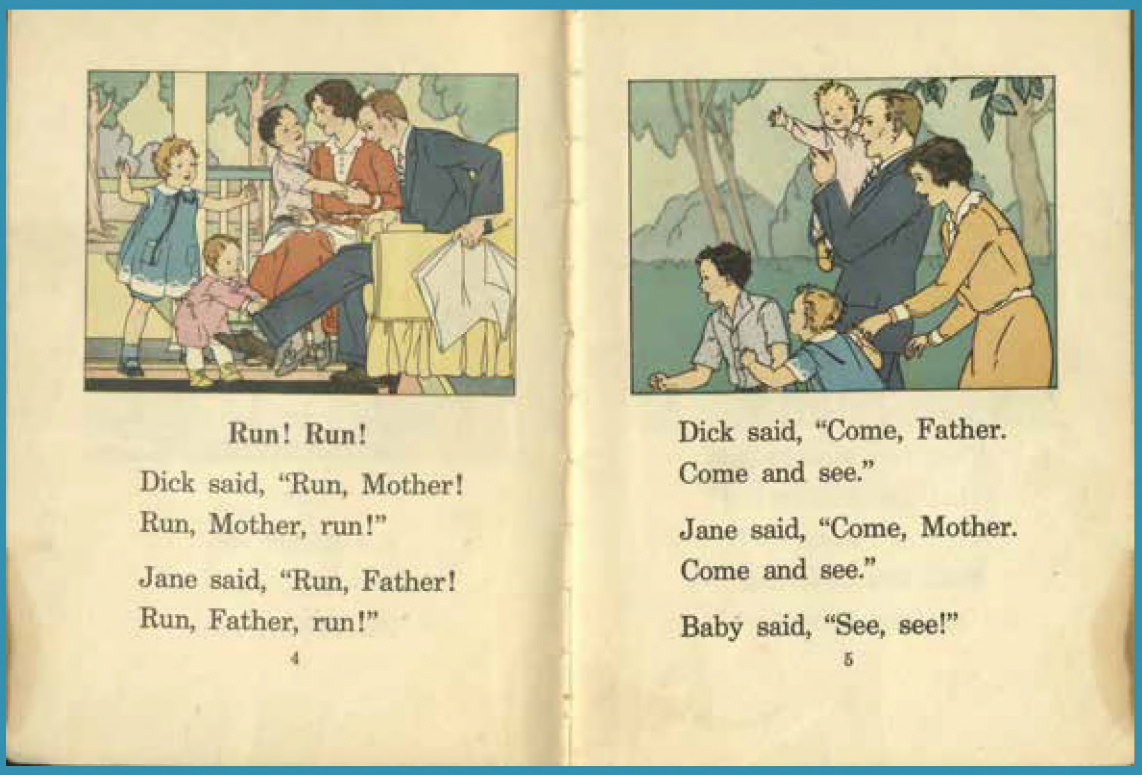
It's all about context. These books were products of their time and place. That context helps us understand the books, and the books help us understand the historical context.

Looking at the books that taught us also reminds us that the current debate over textbooks and curriculum is nothing new. In the 1950s, Frank Magruder's American Government, the most popular civics textbook of the decade, came under attack because some people thought it spoke too well of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and the international cooperation of the United Nations.

People today still have different ideas about what we should teach the children. If the library does a second version of this exhibit in twenty years, what issues do you think it might cover?

Dr. David Parker, Assistant Chair of the Department of History and Philosophy and Professor of History, Kennesaw State University

Beyond Dick and Jane



Run! Run!

Dick said, "Run, Mother!
Run, Mother, run!"

Jane said, "Run, Father!
Run, Father, run!"

4

Dick said, "Come, Father.
Come and see."

Jane said, "Come, Mother.
Come and see."

Baby said, "See, see!"

5

Illustrations from the *Elson Basic Readers Pre-Primer*. 1930. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

"See Jane. See Jane run. Run, Jane, run!"

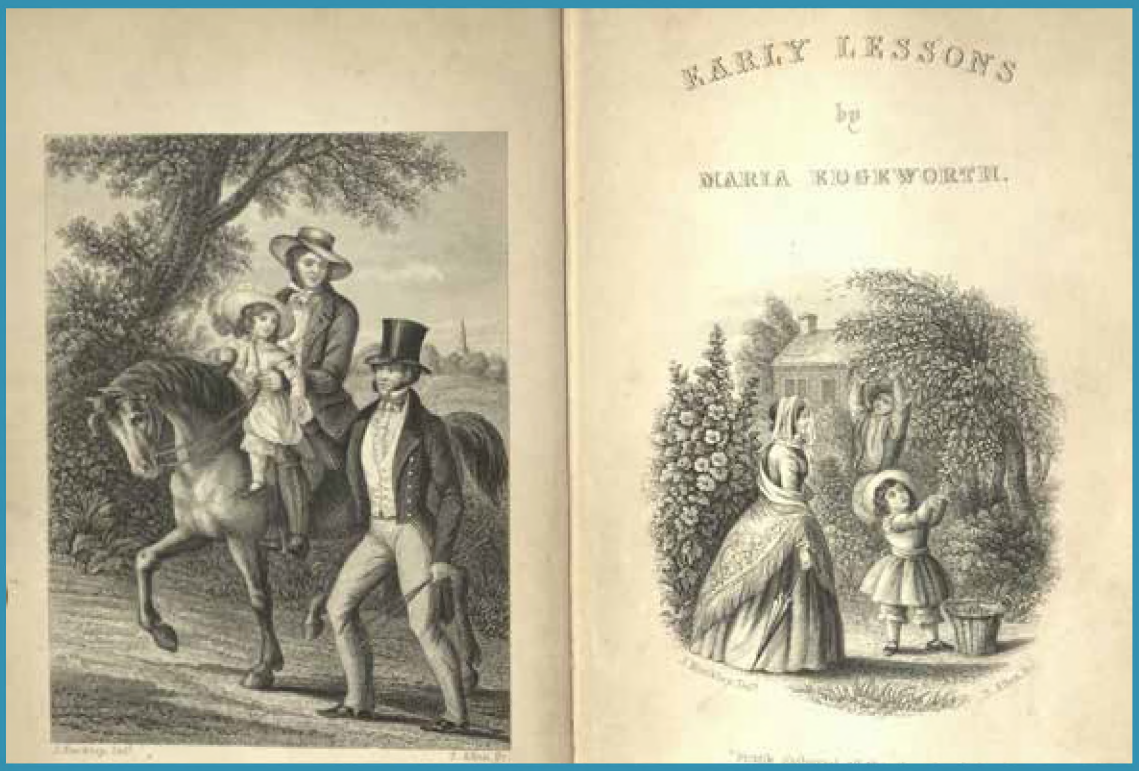
– Elson-Gray and Zerna Sharp, *Elson Basic Readers Pre-Primer* (1930)

They are tattered. They are marked. They are everywhere. Instructional texts for children are extant in both private and public library collections, often to the point of excess. But how and why do these everyday texts proliferate in antiquarian book collections? In the English-speaking world, these answers are found within the rapidly changing social dynamics of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. One of the most notable changes included the rise of public schools. During this time, publishers, printers, and schoolmasters capitalized on cultural shifts by mass-producing educational books that teachers and students needed. Now heavily worn and marked, these centuries-old textbooks are significant because they demonstrate the evolution of learning and teaching through the printed word. Even as the academic content of these books is rendered obsolete, the writings and ephemera left behind by students of yore are revelatory of both human creativity and traditions of the past.

The Books That Taught Us draws from the Bentley Rare Book Museum's rich collection of historic instructional books to intersect the history of education – mainly in England and the United States – with the industrialization of print that peaked in the nineteenth century. Supported by panels, interactives, and a selection of archival records, this exhibition embraces many elements of historic textbooks, including those that are messy and complex. *The Books That Taught Us* does not attempt to address all aspects of textbook history. Instead, this exhibition uses a curated selection of rare books to reveal how printed texts pass knowledge from one generation to the next. Finally, this exhibition reckons with the power of print to empower, harm, and inspire young minds in educational spaces.

Cover of *Student and Schoolmate and Forrester's Boys & Girls Magazine*. 1858. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

Early Lessons



Frontispiece and illustration from *Early Lessons*. 1841. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

"There is a great deal of difference between innocence and ignorance."

– Maria Edgeworth, Preface to *The Parent's Assistant; Or, Stories for Children* (1796)

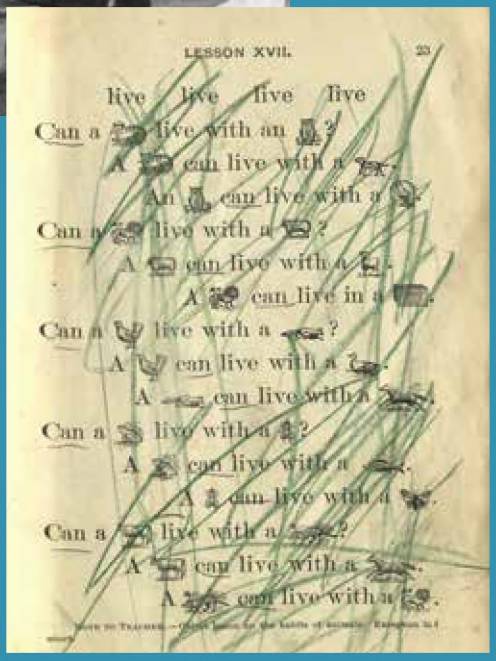
In Renaissance Europe, educational opportunities for children were generally afforded by religious institutions or, in the case of the aristocracy, offered at home. It would be another few centuries before publicly funded schooling would make educational opportunities more accessible to children. The development of the European printing press in the mid-fifteenth century was the first major event to democratize education in the West. While pre-fifteenth-century instruction methods relied on oral traditions and emphasized rote memorization, printing enabled textual instruction, which brought Europe another step closer toward a more literate and liberated public. The print revolution also facilitated entirely new teaching tools that made learning tangible for children. One example was the hornbook – a single sheet pasted on a wooden paddle, usually containing the alphabet and the Lord's Prayer.

For the next three centuries after the development of print in the West, nearly all books for children were instructional in nature. These texts included primers, readers, catechisms, and books of courtesy that instructed children in both academics and proper deportment. For example, *The New England Primer* (circa 1690) and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) were two instructional books made available to Puritan children in the U.S. colonies during the seventeenth century. These books helped indoctrinate Puritan youth with the religious values of the community. The rise of the novel in eighteenth-century Europe also brought a renewed focus on instruction. Displeased by the extreme sensibilities and passions that characterized many novels, writers like Maria Edgeworth, Amelia Opie, and Hannah More embraced the power of prose to imbue children with moral values and advocate for educational rights.

Frontispiece to *History of the Hornbook*. 1896. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

Books for School

Students studying geometry in a classroom in Washington, D.C. 1899. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



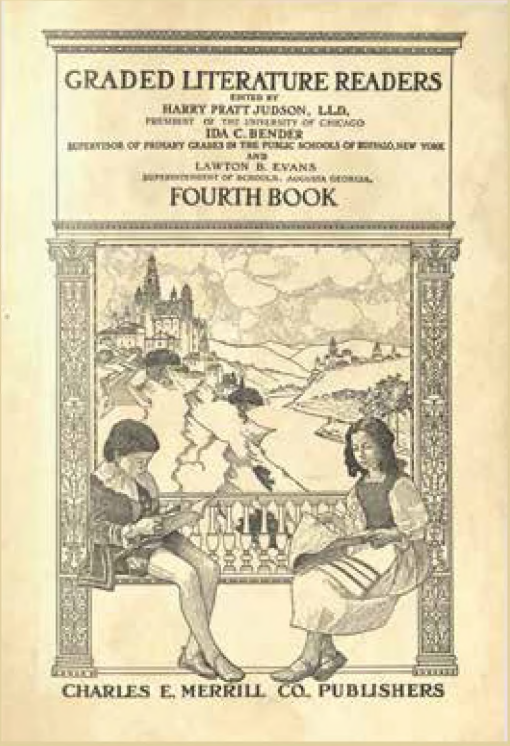
Textbook scribble in *Pollard's Synthetic Reader*. 1891. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

"Take this book my Daughter and study it well."

– Inscription written by Willis Hembree to Eulah Hembree in her textbook (1907)

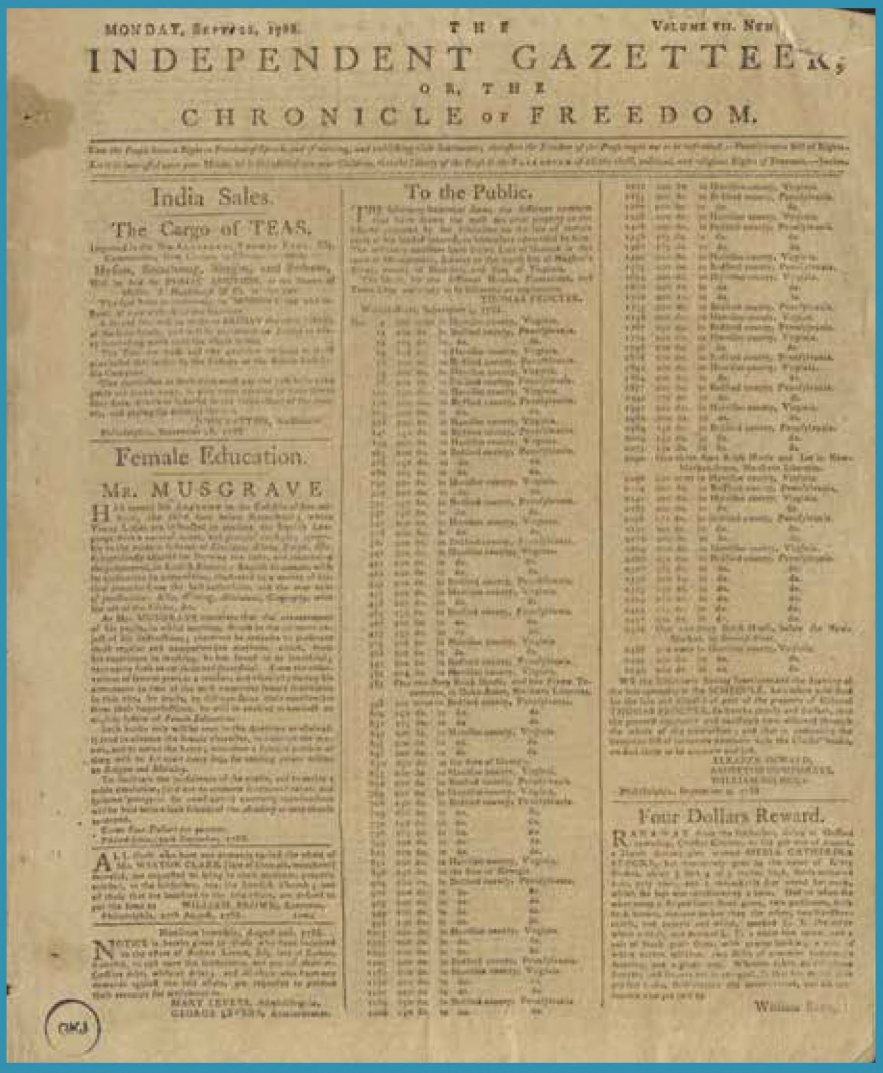
National education systems and the emergence of modern public schools began in the nineteenth century. These establishments developed alongside the passing of compulsory school laws which spread throughout Europe and the United States until the early twentieth century. In the UK, landmark changes began in 1870 with the introduction of the Elementary Education Act, which established school boards to build and maintain schools in areas that lacked them. In the United States, the idea that state funds should not only subsidize but fully fund public education gained strength during the 1820s and 1830s, largely owing to the voices of public education advocates like Horace Mann. As a result of this advocacy, the numbers of public-school students swelled from 1.8 million in 1840 to 10 million in 1880.

The expansion of public schooling created a competitive market for instructional books. In the late eighteenth century, influential grammarians competed with local schoolmasters to place grammar books in the hands of communities. Between 1711 and 1851, the sale of grammars was only surpassed by that of the Holy Bible. In 1836, William Holmes McGuffey – a former teacher – introduced the McGuffey Reader Series which would sell 7 million copies by 1850. Meanwhile, publishing houses cashed in on this deluge of textbooks, frequently consolidating with one another to further dominate the textbook industry. Today, centuries-old school textbooks contain evidence of the people who used them through bookplates, doodles, marginalia, playful poetry, ex-library stamps, and more. These elements advance modern-day understandings of schooling in local communities and show how students engaged with the printed books that taught them.



Title page to *Graded Literature Readers, Fourth Book*. 1911. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

Gendered Learning



MONDAY, [illegible], 1788. THE VOLUME VII. NEW

INDEPENDENT GAZETTEER;

OR, THE

CHRONICLE OF FREEDOM.

India Sales.

The Cargo of TEAS.

Female Education.

MR. MUSGRAVE

To the Public.

Four Dollars Reward.

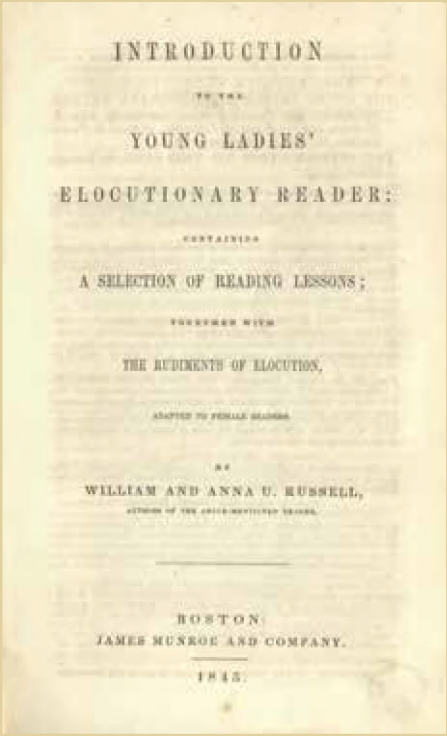
Advertisement for "Female Education." 1788. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

"Such books will only be read in the Academy as obviously tending to advance the female character, to improve the morals, and to mend the heart..."

– Advertisement for "Female Education," *Independent Gazetteer* (September 22, 1788)

Educational texts of the past show evidence of gendered curricula and instruction. During the first few centuries after the development of the printing press, educational opportunities for women and girls were extremely limited or nonexistent. By the eighteenth century, prominent women such as Abigail Adams in the U.S. colonies and Mary Wollstonecraft in England, called for greater educational opportunities for girls and women. These viewpoints were considered radical for the time period. Even as the vast expansion of formalized schooling took shape in the nineteenth century, it was still atypical for British and U.S. communities to view educational opportunities equitably among girls and boys. The dominant social purview of "separate spheres" cast women as eventual homemakers with little need for higher education, and the textbooks available to them reflected this viewpoint. For example, *The Young Ladies' Elocutionary Reader*, first published in 1845, is a book of oration and reading lessons specifically "adapted to female readers" and crafted to suit "feminine taste[s] and habits." Most reading selections included in this book are biblical in nature or poetic, as these were socially acceptable topics for girls to intellectually consume. Educational texts for boys showed fewer limitations. Some employed exciting plots and wartime legends to simultaneously teach and entertain school-age males. These "Popular Stories for Boys," as they were advertised, became exceedingly well known and were often riddled with racial stereotypes and inaccuracies that elevated the putative white male hero.

Despite numerous societal and curricular barriers to educational equality, women persisted. Many women of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries achieved post-secondary education in various ways, ranging from normal schools to women's colleges and, as time progressed, co-educational colleges and universities.


INTRODUCTION

TO THE

YOUNG LADIES'

ELOCUTIONARY READER:

CONTAINING

A SELECTION OF READING LESSONS;

TOGETHER WITH

THE RUDIMENTS OF ELOCUTION,

ADAPTED TO FEMALE SCHOOLS.

BY

WILLIAM AND ANNA U. RUSSELL,

AUTHORS OF THE SERIES MENTIONED BELOW.

BOSTON:
JAMES MUNROE AND COMPANY.
1845.

Title Page to *Young Ladies' Elocutionary Reader.* 1845. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

Representation Matters

Photograph of Carter G. Woodson. Undated. Courtesy of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.

"I would have given my eye teeth to know when I was a high school boy in California – the story that my history books scarcely mentioned."

– Arna Bontemps, *Story of the Negro* (1948)

It is believed that Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, the Afro-Latino scholar and bibliophile, began his book-collecting efforts to counter the false assertion of a schoolteacher in the 1880s who assured him, "The Negro has no history." Schomburg's experience as a Puerto Rican youth in the late nineteenth century is but one example of how people of color faced exclusionary and discriminatory practices in education. In nineteenth-century America, Indigenous children faced atrocities in boarding schools that were established to strip them of their Native cultures and enforce a Euro-centric education. Likewise, racial inequality was woven into the U.S. public education system through de jure and de facto segregation laws, most notably *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896). Although such rulings mainly targeted African Americans, they impacted students of color from many diverse backgrounds.

Instructional books perpetuated these injustices by omitting or misrepresenting the experiences of people of color. Dr. Carter G. Woodson was instrumental in changing these circumstances for African Americans by founding the *Association for the Study of Negro Life and History* in 1915 and developing numerous educational resources to supplement and replace racist textbooks. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Civil Rights Movement and the establishment of ethnic studies programs at institutions of higher learning brought forth changes in the educational space. Writers, scholars, and activists produced content specifically designed to teach and empower students of color. These trends continue into the twenty-first century, as many mainstream educational publishers now make efforts to increase the representation of diverse people in the texts they publish.

Cover of *Golden Legacy* magazine, volume 2. 1967. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

Dick said, "Come, Father.
Come and see."

Jane said, "Come, Mother.
Come and see."

Baby said, "See, see!"

Various doodles and marginalia found in school textbooks, circa 1900-1940. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum and Addi McDowell.

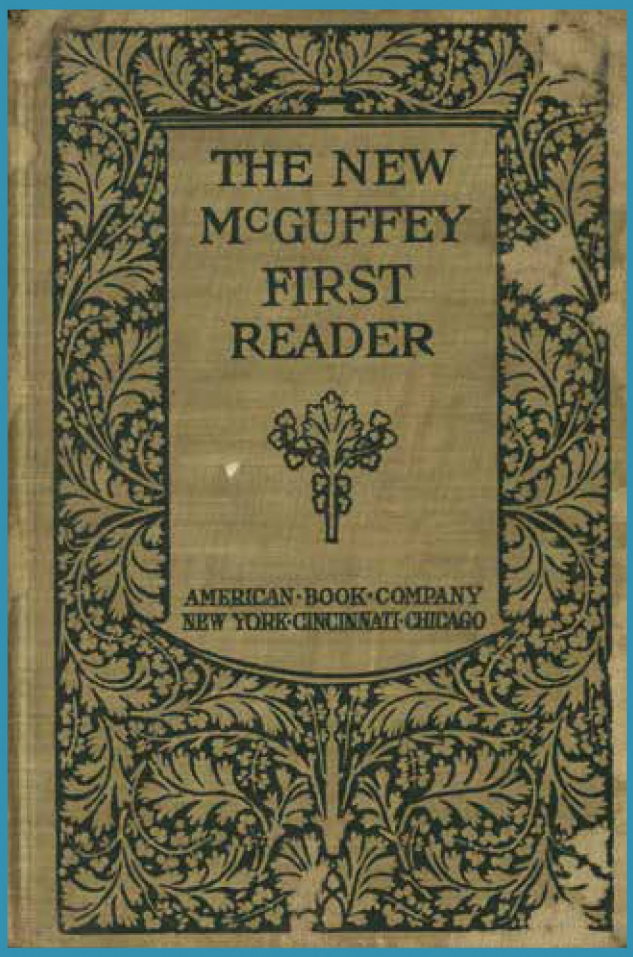
Learning at Home

Cover of *Mother's Book: Pretty Pictures, Poems and Stories for The Little Folks*. 1888. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

For most children, some form of learning takes place in a home environment. Lessons at home may take an academic shape through private tutoring or homeschooling; for many others, home instruction during early childhood is focused on imparting moral values, proper behavior, and the basic responsibilities necessary to thrive in society. In the nineteenth century, publishers compiled books of didactic literature, poetry, and illustrations suited for the entertainment and instruction of young minds during their days at home. These texts show how the responsibilities of home instruction generally fell upon women. The titles, illustrations, and front matter of the books often speak directly to mothers and female caretakers.

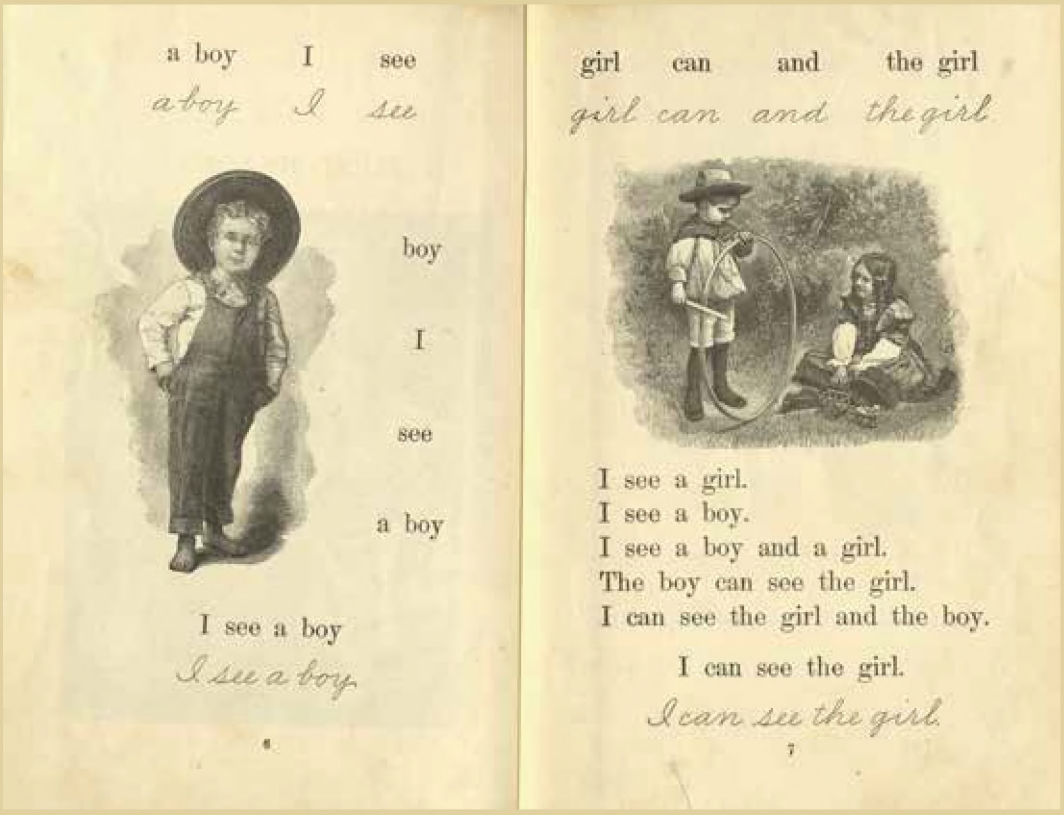
Frontispiece and title page to *Mother's Book: Pretty Pictures, Poems and Stories for the Little Folks*. 1888. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

Making a Profit



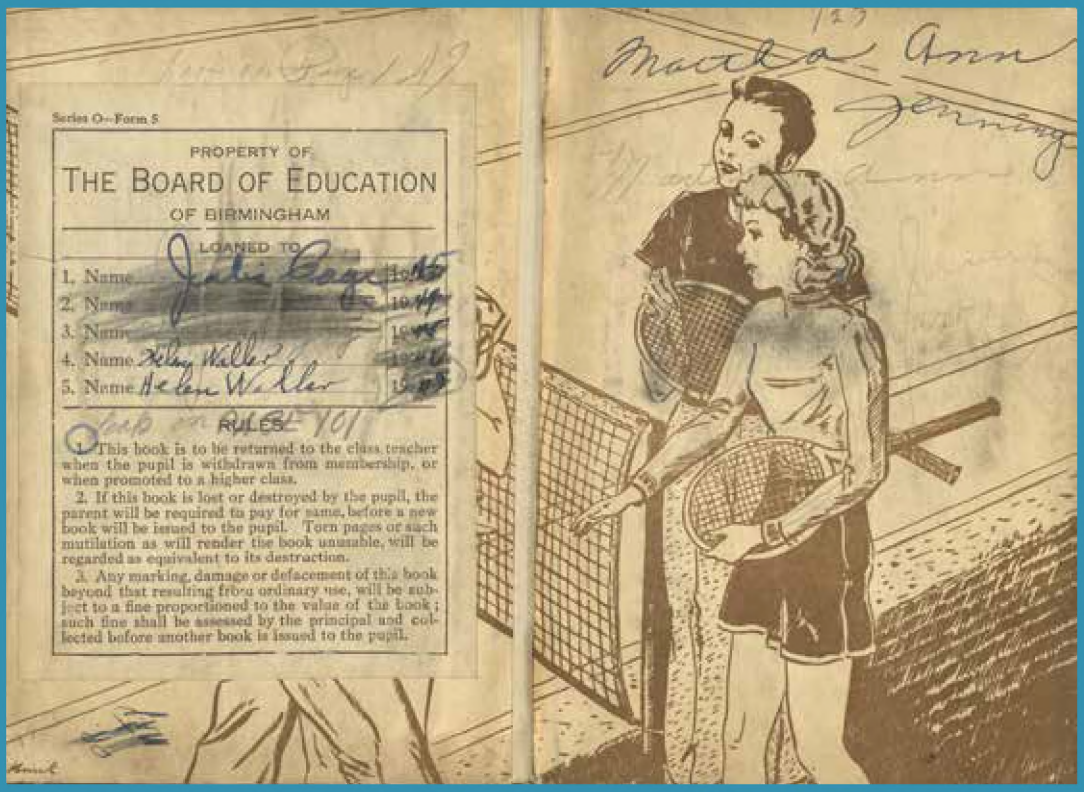
Cover of *The New McGuffey First Reader*. 1901. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

Upon opening a late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century textbook, a reader is likely to find a preface written by the publisher to the educator, explaining why the text at hand should play a critical role in the educator's classroom and curriculum. The book itself is likely one of many in a "graded" academic series that increases in complexity as children progress from one grade to the next. These characteristics show how competitive and lucrative the textbook market was in the decades following the Industrial Revolution. It was during this time that publishers like the American Book Company rose to prominence and later purchased entire textbook divisions of other publishers. For nearly 100 years, The American Book Company distributed some of the nation's leading textbooks, most famously the McGuffey Readers series which sold roughly 120 million copies by the first half of the twentieth century.



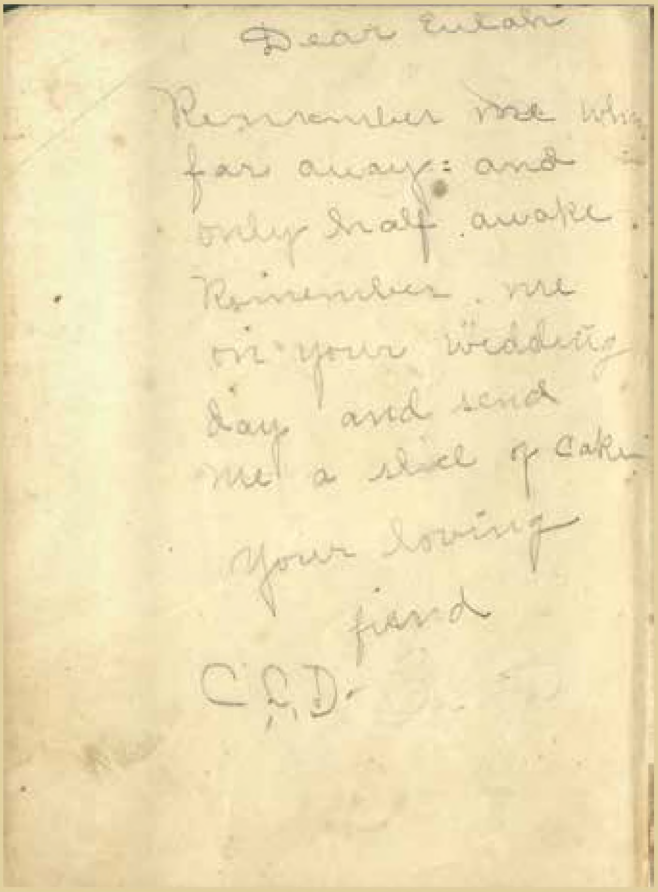
Illustrations and text from *The New McGuffey First Reader*. 1901. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

Learning in the Classroom



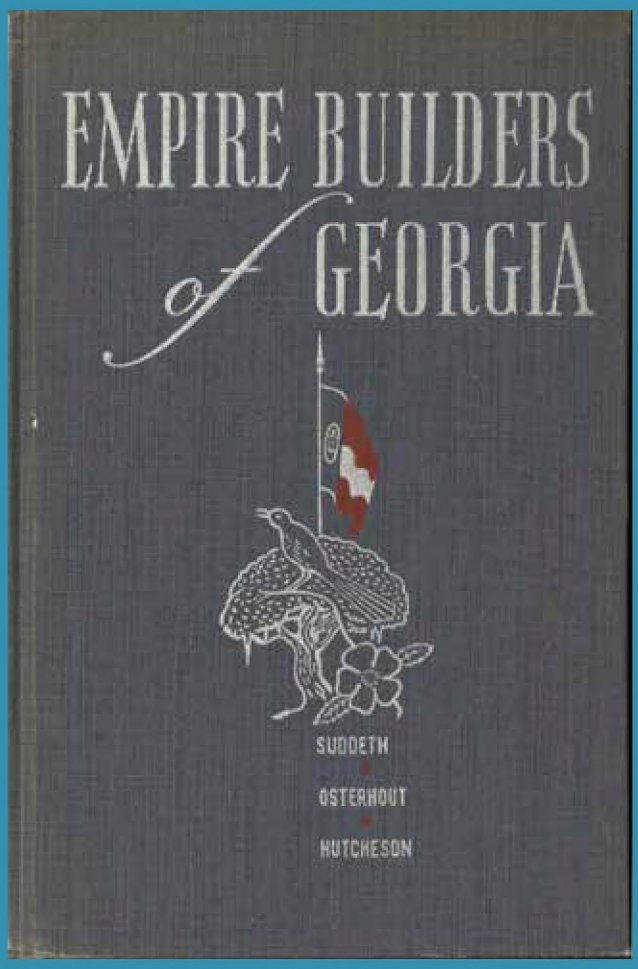
Bookplate and title page to *Champion Arithmetics*. 1937. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

Books that spent the majority of their lives in classrooms are easy to spot. In addition to showing signs of wear and tear, these books often contain evidence of the school systems that circulated them and the many students who made the books their own. Doodles, scratch work, and even poetry have been found in the schoolbooks of yesteryear; these ephemeral notes can be rich sources for local history and genealogical research. The printed contents of these books are equally important because they show how knowledge was conveyed to children and which subjects were prioritized for teaching at the time they were written. Antiquarian schoolbooks are commonly passed down in family collections and cherished for generations.


Dear Susan
Remember me when
far away: and
only half awake.
Remember me
on your wedding
day and send
me a slice of cake
Your loving
friend
C. L. D.

Poem inscribed in *Lessons in Physiology and Hygiene*. Circa 1907. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

Teaching Inequality

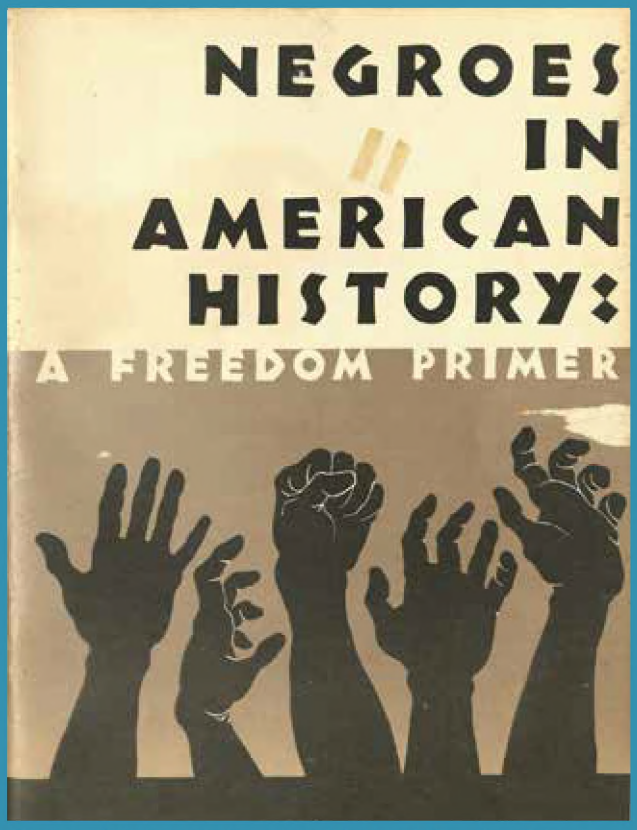


Cover of *Empire Builders of Georgia*. 1951. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

Schools in the United States perpetuated systemic oppression in several ways during the first half of the twentieth century. Due to segregationist policies, the condition of textbooks, teaching materials, and virtually all facilities provided to non-white schools was consistently of inferior quality. Scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois studied these circumstances and their impact on Black communities in the early 1900s and later published these findings for the broader academic community. The content of school textbooks was also problematic, especially in Southern states. Many textbooks glorified white supremacist ideologies and presented inaccurate depictions of historically marginalized groups such as Indigenous communities and African Americans. By inundating young minds with false or incomplete narratives, these books helped perpetuate stereotypes and increased educational barriers that still impact U.S. society today.

Illustration of the Trail of Tears from *Empire Builders of Georgia*. 1951. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

Educating to Empower



Cover of *Negroes in American History: A Freedom Primer*. 1965. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

The cultural vibrancy of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, followed by the spirited social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, propelled the publication of historical counter-narratives. Fed up with textbooks that shortchanged African American history and minimized the agency of Black people, some African Americans chose to reclaim power through print. Black writers worked with Black-owned and mainstream publishing companies to produce instructional texts that empowered young African American audiences. Some writers used traditional textbook formats to center the Black experience in history and acknowledge the Black diaspora. Other writers used verse and illustrations to teach foundational lessons in self-affirming ways. Some efforts were more assertive in nature and folded elements of social justice into academic content.

Illustration from *Negroes in American History: A Freedom Primer*. 1965. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

The Bentley Rare Book Museum supports the educational needs of K-12 students through collection development, public programming, exhibition tours, and hands-on engagement with rare books and special collections. The images presented on the next few pages showcase the Bentley Rare Book Museum's commitment to serving the needs of school-age students.

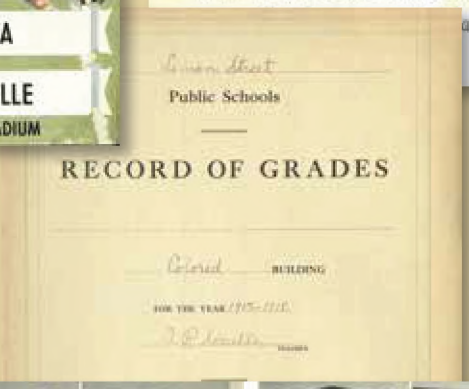
"The rare book programs that JoyEllen Williams presents at the public library are such a gift for the children and teens that attend. This level of access to history and culture is not typically available to most children in grades K-12, and the benefits of that access are enhanced all the more through the engaging, hands-on learning experiences she designs. Not only are the students' literacy skills deepened, but their horizons broaden and their ownership of unique community resources like the Bentley Rare Book Museum grows!"

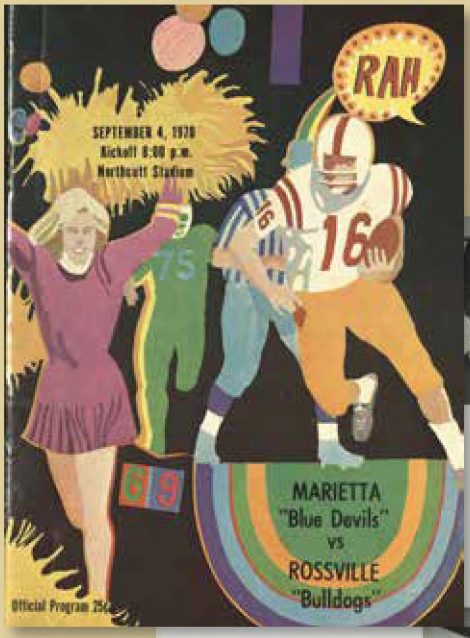
– Kate Jacobson, Assistant Branch Manager, North Cobb Regional Library

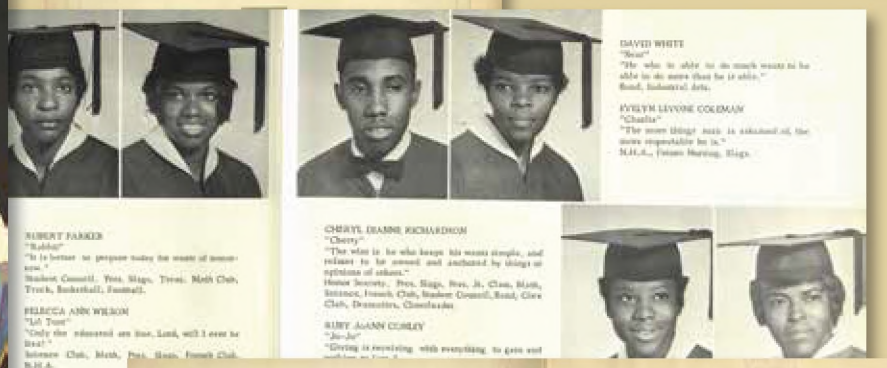
Students enjoy visiting the Bentley Rare Book Museum and the University Archives and Special Collections during exhibition openings, scheduled field trips, and summer camp tours.

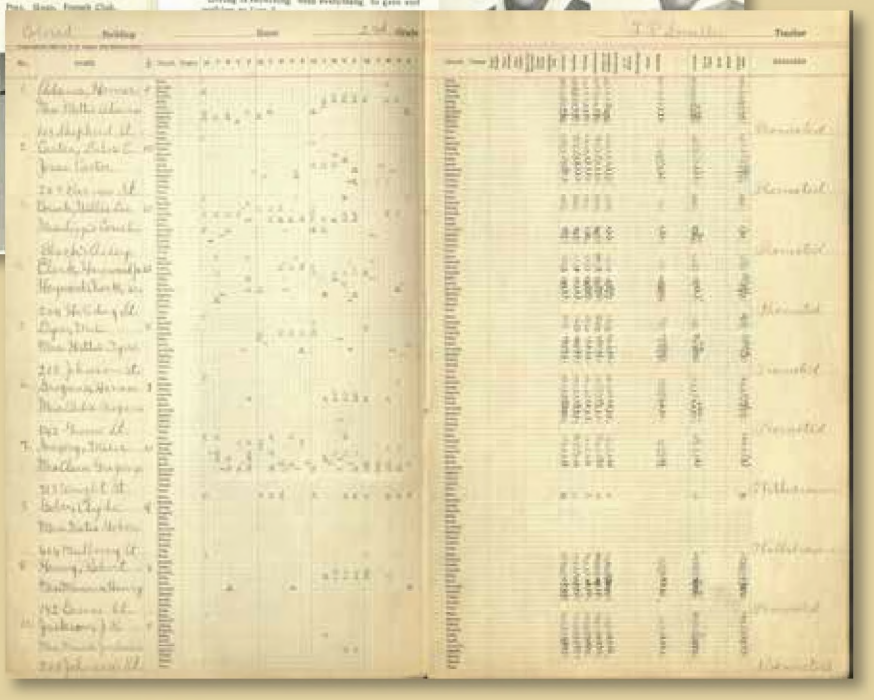
Curator JoyEllen Williams facilitates rare book programs for children at local libraries so that students from diverse backgrounds can engage with rare texts in a communal space.

A love of books often blooms at a young age. Memories of reading in bed underneath the covers or snuggling up in a reading corner at school remain vivid for many people who consider themselves bookworms. Despite the numerous transitions that take place between childhood and adulthood, books are the steady comforters and endless wells of knowledge and imagination that abide with us throughout our lives. Feel free to peruse the titles inside this Little Free Library, and select a book that looks interesting to you. In the future, consider replenishing this free community resource with a book of your choice. Happy Reading!









Selected archival materials from the Marietta City Schools Collection, 1917-1964. Courtesy of the Kennesaw State University Archives and Special Collections.

Printed materials that enable learning in non-traditional formats, 1896-1970. Courtesy of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Books That Taught Us would not have been possible without the support of several people and organizations. First, I'd like to thank Curator Emeritus Mr. Robert Williams and the late KSU benefactor Mr. Fred Bentley Sr. for envisioning the Bentley Rare Book Gallery in 1986 and two years later, opening this unmatchable collection to the public. Without you two, this collection and this exhibition would not exist. I would also like to acknowledge the strong collaborative forces within the Department of Museums, Archives and Rare Books (MARB) at Kennesaw State University. I would like to personally thank Dr. Catherine Lewis and Dr. Tamara Livingston for their empowering leadership of MARB and wise counsel during the curation process. I would like to thank MARB staff members Zoila Torres (exhibit design), Tony Howell (exhibit installation), Stefanie Green (purchasing and logistics), Diana Matson (purchasing and logistics), Amber Smith (event planning), Addi McDowell (research assistance and collection loans), Kelly Hoomes (research assistance), Brittany Sealey (editing), and Adina Langer (editing) for helping to make this exhibition and its opening reception come to fruition. I profusely thank all MARB and KSU Library staff members who provided feedback in any form during the curation process and helped promote this exhibition among university and community audiences.

I extend a huge thank-you to the Alpharetta Historical Society, the Bramlett Family, Caitlin Hobbs, Maggie Horne Thomas, Robin Revennaugh, Nancy and Terry Lapierre, Addi McDowell, the Pickens County Historical Society, Dr. Thomas A. Scott, the Girl Scouts of Greater Atlanta Archives Committee, and Marietta City Schools for donating and loaning items used in this exhibition. The exhibition is truly a communal effort. I would like to thank Dr. David Parker for writing the faculty statement featured

in this catalog and for lending his expertise as I prepared this exhibition. I also want to thank the Bentley Rare Book Museum's local partners – Read 4 Unity and Black Coffee Atlanta – for supporting the exhibition opening. Finally, I am immensely grateful to Kennesaw State University's President Dr. Kathy Schwaig and Provost Dr. Ivan Pulinkala for their strong leadership of the university and unwavering support of the Bentley Rare Book Museum.

KENNESAW STATE
UNIVERSITY
MUSEUMS, ARCHIVES AND RARE BOOKS
Bentley Rare Book Museum