

The American Biology Teacher

Vol. 13

FEBRUARY, 1951

No. 2

The Most and Least Helpful Features of a Biology Text as Seen by Students in Course

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An author has the instinctive interest of an artist in creating his book. The publisher's stake in the production sponsored is likewise not small. A teacher approaches the adoption of a text from a somewhat different direction yet not without concern. The student usually suffers the consequences, whatever they may be, and constitutes at best a rather forgotten factor in the quadruple situation.

Much depends on the producer. If he has done his work well the other three parties should be satisfied. But the users sometimes are not, for they are human, individualistic, and not too well informed. Mankind likes variety. Tastes differ within wide ranges. This makes for change and prevents stagnation. The factor of ignorance is overcome with experience. The writer who does not keep his effort up-to-date and fresh in appeal soon finds himself without a market. He should welcome proper reactions from his clientele, and mostly does.

A textbook, fine in all essentials, is an indispensable tool for good teaching. It was the original well-organized visual aid and still retains great appeal to brain and mind through the medium of the eye. Its illustrations become ever more attractive and effective. The photograph has been adapted to the teaching page with excellent results. As a direct issue from so many modern improvements today's product is a very finished affair, uniformly pleasing and fruitful.

Teachers generally like to choose a readable text with appeal, one calculated to meet with a favorable reception by the users. If the choice is not well received repercussions follow, sooner or later. Perhaps too frequently the initiative for discovering how the selection is accepted does not stem from instructional sources. Checks may, however, be made without too great difficulty and lead to important consequences. Recently two brief questions were asked, calling for short, to-the-point answers, but non-

compulsory, of a class of forty-one in a course catalogued as *Introductory Biology*. The main text used has had a successful run, is authoritatively written, and has been revised to keep factual content reasonably new.

The questions were (1) What was the most helpful feature of your text? (2) What proved to be the least helpful to you? The course itself forms part of a cultural science program and is often referred to as *Human Biology*. This title is not completely accurate since all phases of human biology are not discussed. It is essentially, in content, human anatomy, physiology, and hygiene. The thirty-six replies to question one, and the thirty-four submitted to number two have been condensed for tabulation. They reflect the substance of the outline followed for teaching purposes. In a number of instances a student included more than one point in his response.

Most Helpful Feature

Treatment of Reproductive System (Diseases, Prostate)	8
“ “ Systems as a Whole	5
“ “ Diseases in General	4
“ “ Circulatory System (Heart function, Ailments, Heart diagram)	3
“ “ Nervous System (Insanity)	3
“ “ Excretory System (Kidneys) and General Health Problems, one each	2
Text Features (Organization, Style, General)	
Explanations	6
Well-Written Subject Matter	6
Illustrations, Diagrams	4
Complete Index	3
Easy Reading (Understandable)	2
Heavily Printed Headings, Sticking to Subject, All Chapters Excellent, one each	3

Such descriptive adjectives as “careful, clear, interesting, detailed, understandable” were used to apply to these various helpful properties. It was not intended that an exhaustive survey be made but that only a single quality

should be decided upon. No doubt many could have written at some length upon the diverse manner in which the book had proved useful. Some could not forbear mentioning more than one.

Unfavorable criticisms are not as easy to categorize, tended to be longer. The following constitutes a fairly accurate summary.

Least Helpful Feature

Clearness, Explanation, Understandable	9
Technical descriptions sometimes difficult; certain diagrams incompletely labeled; digestion and circulation not explained well; occasional unexplained words; definitions not always clear (“placenta”); certain explanations poor; some deviations from topics; more diagrams of muscles, bones and nerves would add to understanding; failed to integrate functions of systems effectively.	
Detail	7
Too many unnecessary medical terms; too much emphasis on unimportant things; skeletal system had too many bones to memorize; too much unnecessary material for time allowed; too detailed explanations of various diseases; could have had less about technical and secondary problems.	
Presentation	4
Could have been more objective; some chapters too long; treatment of minor diseases too great; arrangement of some chapters and systems could have been better.	
Digestion (Enzymes, Vitamins)	4
Heredity (Too wordy, not clear)	2
Some Diseases (“Allergys”!)	2
Poison Gases	2
Table of Contents, Diagrams, Tooth Structure, Urinary, Nervous, Muscular, Bone Systems, one each	7
Price of Book (!)	1

Thus the favorable points with a score of forty-seven outnumber the unfavorable ones which total thirty-eight. The following was included with the undesirable qualities and is quoted in full: “He did not expressed himself well on the sex of life, the unbibluca cord has not expressed very well at all.” This choice sample of illiteracy rules itself out by default.

How the author might answer his critics can be readily imagined. Indeed, the validity of a number of judgments, at least, is decidedly open to question. For example, only a selected list of the more prominent and conspicuous bones was required for remembering and with each some distinctive use or landmark was connected. Large sections were assigned for reading only, such as the allergies and nature of poison gases. It was recognized and so stated that the single semester was insufficient in which to cover the subject matter in detail.

The point was to gather and present an uninfluenced reaction. Opinions clashed, for what some found most help-

ful others found least so. The reproductive system impressed itself upon receptive minds, indicating that here is a field neglected in secondary school and home training. Some of the destructive criticism was discerning and well taken. It is this author's feeling that altogether too much space in the particular book is allotted to what well might be in the appendix for reference or else omitted altogether as more pertinent to pathology. On the whole the class found much which aided it, however, in securing an adequate grasp of the important phases of structure, function, and care of the human body.

The Trial of the Insect

Cast of Characters:

Time: About 45 minutes

Judge Insecticide

Bailiff

Attorney for the Defense

District Attorney

Clerk

Witnesses (dressed according to their profession):

Jane Smithers

Miss Barton

Doctor Hercermer

Professor Studybug

Farmer Jones

Miss Honeybee

Mrs. Hunt

Jake Plowsomemore

Mrs. Housewife

Doctor Killem

Policeman

Insect

Scene: The scene is the courtroom of the Superior Court of the State of ———. As the curtain rises the court session is ready to open, but the judge has not yet made his appearance. The prosecution and the defense are ready at their respective tables; the attendants are around. The Insect (with wings and antennae) occupies a prominent place on the stage.

BAILIFF: Court attention! (All rise quickly and stand at attention, as Judge Insecticide enters in his robes and mounts the steps leading to his chair on the platform.) Superior Court Number Five of the State of ———. The Honorable Judge William Insecticide presiding. The clerk raps, the Judge sits, and everyone moves quickly

into position.)

JUDGE: The people of the State of ——— versus the Insect.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY: Ready, your honor.

ATTORNEY FOR THE DEFENSE: Ready, your honor.

JUDGE: The clerk will draw a jury.

CLERK: (Steps to the front of the stage with