

The McGuffey Reader: The Origins of Composition

by

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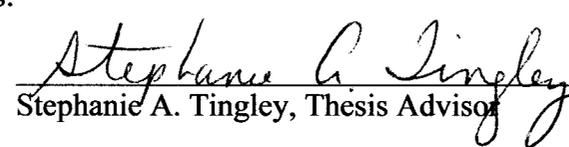
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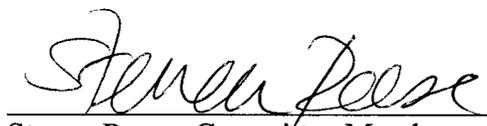
George H. Fleet

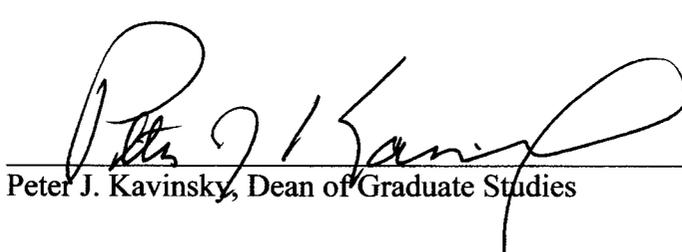
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Abstract

The McGuffey Reader: A Revolution in Composition

Modern public education in America, and in particular the teaching of writing, had its recognized origin in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was at this time that composition became a recognized subject at the college level and its inclusion in preparatory instruction at the secondary school level began

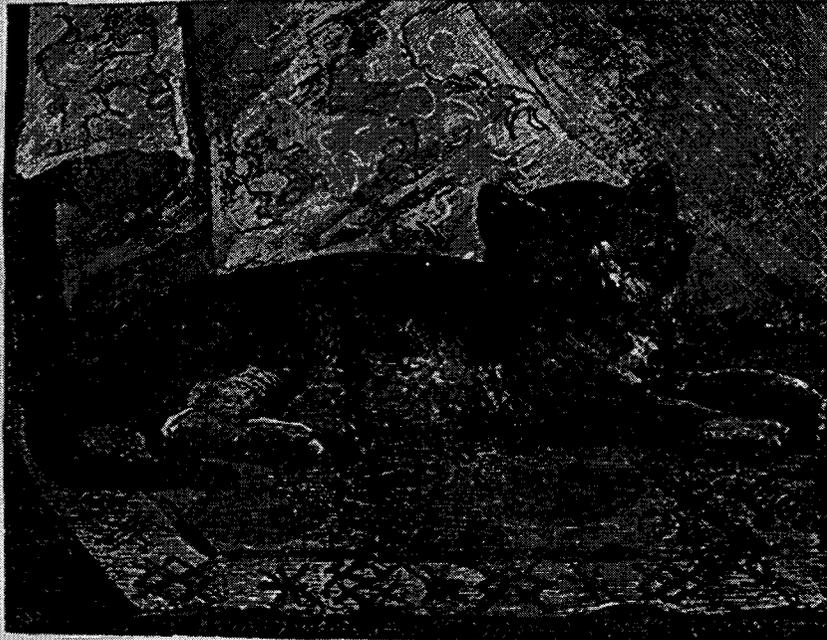
Predating these changes by thirty years, William Holmes McGuffey had created what became the most popular textbook in history. *The McGuffey Reader* taught the basics of reading, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and by expanding the existing teaching model to include analysis and critical thinking, McGuffey sowed the seeds of what would become composition training.

The McGuffey Reader was the predominant teaching tool in the early public school system of nineteenth century America, and remained in constant use for sixty years. McGuffey affected generations of American students by carefully choosing lessons that reflected his conservative Christian philosophy. *The McGuffey Readers* were as distinctive for what they neglected to include as they were for what they included. In one amazing set of textbooks, McGuffey established the foundation of what would become the modern educational system of today.

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LESSON II.



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The cat.

The mat.

Is the cat on the mat?

The cat is on the mat.

Introduction

The teaching of composition had its beginnings in the late nineteenth century. The transition from a system based on rhetoric and mnemonics to one based on critical thinking, with an increased emphasis on writing, occurred as technological changes made written communication more important.

Predating these changes by thirty years, William Holmes McGuffey had created what became the most popular textbook in history. *The McGuffey Reader* taught the basics of reading, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and by expanding the existing teaching model to include analysis and critical thinking, McGuffey sowed the seeds of what would become composition training. *The McGuffey Reader* was the predominant teaching tool in the early public school system of nineteenth century America, and remained in constant use for sixty years.

The mid-nineteenth century was a period in history that, like today, was marked by radical changes. In addition to steam power making possible railroads, large-scale publishing, and improvements in farm productivity, other inventions such as the telegraph and the cotton gin were revolutionizing society in other ways. As these changes took place, changes also took place in society; questions arose concerning issues such as the way technology changes existing social structure, the advantages and disadvantages of applying technology, and the costs associated with the application of the new technology. Many people saw the rapid change in technology as a threat to their way of

life. The increase in technology seemed to signal a move away from traditional values of God and family.

The trend toward public education accentuated these problems. In the midst of the tumult created by technological changes, a movement was under way to transform education from a private endeavor to a public, regulated school system. In the farming areas of the United States, children were expected to work on the farm, and their parents took care of not only their education, but also established their moral foundation. Now these parents were being told to send their children to a schoolhouse with other children where someone who might not share their values or ideals would instruct their children. Not only were the parents reluctant, but also many philosophers of the time were unsure how a “public” school system would work and what it would do the hierarchy that existed between the educated and non educated. In 1790, one out of every four Americans did not speak English as their first language (Lepore 28). Literacy was a privilege reserved for the upper class, and some thought that universalizing education would empower the non-English speaking population, thereby offering an unfair advantage to the immigrants who were coming to America in ever-increasing numbers.

Between 1840 and 1859, 1,361,506 Germans immigrated to the United States and between 1841 and 1851 over 1,500,000 Irish immigrated: “Because over half the Irish and Germans immigrants were Roman Catholics, a religion long feared and disliked by Protestants, religious differences acerbated economic and ethnic tensions”(Meyer 335). Ohio, and in particular the Miami valley area, where McGuffey taught and wrote, had a large number of immigrant settlements. Cincinnati, which had a population of 2540 in 1810, grew to a population of 40,382 by 1840 (336): “ By 1850 almost half the people in

the city were foreign born, most of them German, whereas only 22 percent had been in 1825” (339). This relationship between the existing population and the newly arriving immigrants is evident in McGuffey’s writing, and in addition to stories about the treatment of immigrants, are stories concerning the treatment of Native Americans and the poor.

The printing and publishing industry was one of the most affected by changes in technology, and the improvements in the printing industry in turn, had a dramatic influence on education and society. The Gutenberg press, invented in approximately 1450, had remained the standard method of printing until the nineteenth century. During the nineteenth century, the addition of steam-power to the printing process triggered a series of improvements, including the invention of the rotary and cylinder presses. These presses used a revolving cylinder to press the paper against the printing plate and allowed the printer to produce more pages at lower cost. Until this time local print shops relied on manual labor to produce printed material, and the cost of such material was high enough to make a library a sign of wealth. The advancements in printing technology occurred so quickly during the mid-nineteenth century that it has been estimated that a printing industry that was valued at about two and a half million dollars in 1830 quintupled by 1850 (Meyer 331). The modernization in the printing industry increased the quantity and speed of producing printed material and reduced the cost.

Another advancement in the nineteenth century was in paper production. Until the nineteenth century, rags were the raw material for paper. As printing volume increased, it became increasingly important to find an inexpensive alternative. In 1840, the price of producing paper decreased because of the implementation of technology that produced

paper from wood pulp. The result, as with the printing industry, was much higher production volume at much lower cost. For the first time the price of producing books was low enough that ideas and philosophical arguments could easily be exchanged, and each school child could have a book to take home for the whole school year. The idea that each child could have book from which to study is especially important when contrasted to the method in practice in most existing schools of the time. Until this change, students would read their lessons from a hornbook, a single printed page mounted on a small board with a handle. The introduction of schoolbooks coincided with a movement in the United States and elsewhere to improve and standardize the education of children. These two factors, education and the increased availability of reading material, combined to create a population that would become more literate and more educated than any population in history.

Improved transportation methods, due in great part to the introduction of steam power, provided the ability for printed material to be transported more efficiently. These developments affected nearly every facet of society, and, as is often the case, the introduction of one idea or device opens the door to other ideas and ultimately leads to even more advancement. While these advancements in publishing and transportation were taking place, the newly invented telegraph made possible instantaneous communication with most of the civilized world.

At the time he began producing *The McGuffey Readers* William McGuffey was aware of these ideas and advancements and was already a respected educator. He realized that what he included, and selectively excluded, from his reader could help mold this first generation of publicly schooled children. McGuffey's theories about what and how

children should be taught were the result not only of his environment, but also of his personal philosophy, a philosophy formed by contemporary theorists, by his strict Presbyterian upbringing, and by the people with whom he associated. McGuffey realized that he was a product of the sum of his influences and used this knowledge in the creation of his readers. By deciding what to publish and how to present the material he did publish, he believed he could affect society positively. Since the students of *The McGuffey Reader* would become the parents and teachers of the next generation, the ideals and beliefs he instilled in them would be perpetuated, and he could truly influence society in the present and in the future.

Because of the success of his Readers, and because of his long teaching career and life long dedication to the education of America's youth, McGuffey became known as "The Schoolmaster for the Nation." As famous as McGuffey was as an educator two areas of educational advancement, for which McGuffey has never received recognition, were his emphasis on critical thinking, and his belief that students needed to learn how to demonstrate their analytical skills by creating "original compositions." The introduction of writing, for reasons other than penmanship, marked a departure from previous education models as significant as the introduction of *The McGuffey Reader* itself, and established the foundation of what would become composition training.

(Illustration 2 is a reproduction of a table of contents from an early *McGuffey Reader*)



INTRODUCTORY MATTER	PAGE.
ARTICULATION	5
EMPHASIS	10
PUNCTUATION	11

SELECTIONS IN PROSE AND POETRY.

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1. The Shepherd Boy		18
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3. Let it Rain		18
4. Castle-building		20
5. Castle-building		22
6. Lend a Hand (Script)		25
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(iii)

(Illustration 2) McGuffey William H. *McGuffey's Third Eclectic Reader*. 1879. Cincinnati: American Book Company, 1920. pg.iii

Chapter I

Background and Philosophy

To understand McGuffey's philosophy at the time he wrote *The McGuffey Readers*, and how and why he developed the textbook he did, it is important to understand what influenced him in the period preceding the publication of the first *McGuffey Reader*.

William Holmes McGuffey was born September 23, 1800 in Washington County, Pennsylvania, to Alexander McGuffey and Anna Holmes McGuffey. Alexander's father Billy had emigrated from Scotland, fought in the American Revolutionary War, and moved to western Pennsylvania after the war with a group of like-minded devout Presbyterians. Alexander was twenty-two years old when he helped his father establish the homestead in Wheeling Creek (Washington County), Pennsylvania. Alexander left the family farm to spend some time as a scout during the Indian wars. When he returned, he met and courted Ann Holmes. The Holmes family was one of the wealthiest families in Washington County and were known for their culture and learning. Alexander and Anna had eleven children, of which William was the third. In 1802, when William was two, the McGuffey family moved to the wilderness area of the Western Reserve in Ohio that the government had opened for homesteading. The McGuffeys settled in what is now Trumbull County, Ohio. McGuffey's mother encouraged his love of reading, and his

devout Presbyterian upbringing no doubt had an effect on this, too, because Presbyterians believed each child should be able to read the word of God as young as possible.

At the age of six, McGuffey was enrolled in a subscription school (where neighbors agree to pay a teacher to instruct their children) six miles from his home near Youngstown, Ohio (Gorn 4). At the school, McGuffey studied and lived with William Wick, a Presbyterian minister and farmer. To help pay for his education McGuffey worked on the Wick farm. When McGuffey was fourteen years old, Wick certified him to teach school, and McGuffey opened a subscription school in Calcutta, Ohio, where he taught forty-eight students from twenty-three families. During the next ten years, McGuffey attended Old Stone College and Washington College in Washington Pennsylvania and in both cases, as with the subscription school, he lived with a Presbyterian minister.

This series of relationships with Presbyterian ministers is an important factor in beginning to define the philosophy of William McGuffey. Presbyterians in the Colonial United States were involved from the beginning in education. John Witherspoon, a Presbyterian minister, was the president of what would later become Princeton University and was the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence (“Presbyterianism”). The Presbyterians were conservative in their political beliefs and strongly believed that reading and education were an integral part of religious training. While the common practice of the day was to restrict reading to the privileged classes, Presbyterians believed that all children needed to be able to read the word of God.

These were among the ideas that influenced McGuffey, as he began to formulate what would become his education philosophy, and correlate the ideas that would form the

foundation of *The McGuffey Readers*. The facts that he spent twenty of his first twenty-six years living with a series of four ministers, that as a young boy he left home to work on a farm for the opportunity to further his education, and the fact that he worked so diligently on his education that he was qualified to teach at fourteen, all help show the profound influence of his parents and his early teachers, and the work ethic they instilled in him, a work ethic that becomes a predominant theme throughout *The McGuffey Readers*. This group of people helped establish the principles that guided the direction of his life.

This is important in understanding McGuffey because, until the nineteenth century, schools in the United States were private institutions, usually run by the church. Home schooling was the predominant method of teaching, and the subjects and values taught to those children were exclusively those of their parents. This limited the exposure of these children to diverse ideas. In *An Educational History of the American People*, Adolphe Meyer talks about the influence of religion on education in the United States. "Bred from the Reformation, the first American School... were scarcely more than nurseries for the faith. Preparing their novices for the inescapable Judgment Day, they put the main store in reading and particularly in piety and goodness, with never ceasing threats of brimstone just around the corner." The schools Meyer refers to were actually the forerunners of nineteenth century public schools. Their makeup began to change with the introduction of texts such as Noah Webster's speller in 1783 and his 1784 grammar in 1784(Meyer 198).

These education philosophies were at the foundation of McGuffey's ideas about educating children, but he was also influenced by the ideas of people he associated with.

While McGuffey was teaching in Calcutta, Ohio, Thomas Hughes, another Presbyterian minister, visited him, and invited him to live with him in Darlington, Pennsylvania, and attend the Old Stone Academy:

While teaching at the University of Virginia later in his life, McGuffey used to talk of the academy and his teacher Thomas Hughes. It seems that William earned his tuition of three dollars a year by acting as sexton at Hughes' church, and he earned his room and board, seventy-five cents a week, by performing chores at Hughes' home. For two years he lived with the Hugheses, ate bread and milk, worked, and studied on long seats at this primitive frontier school, which prepared youth for both college and the ministry (Venable 93).

Following his training with Hughes, McGuffey felt he was ready to return to teaching. He decided that to return to Trumbull County, Ohio and in 1820, at the age of twenty, McGuffey applied for a headmaster's job at a school in Warren, Ohio. He failed to meet the standards required for the job and, because of that, decided to attend college immediately. He enrolled in Washington College, a Presbyterian school in Washington, Pennsylvania where again, he lived with a Presbyterian minister, Reverend Andrew Wylie, the university president. "For six years William alternated between working at home on the farm, teaching school, and attending class at Washington. When he had no money for books, he copied them in longhand" (Westerhoff 34).

After he graduated from Washington College with specialties in ancient languages and philosophy, McGuffey went back to teaching, this time in a converted smokehouse in Paris, Kentucky, where he met Reverend Robert Hamilton Bishop, yet another

Presbyterian minister. Miami University had just named Bishop their first president, and Bishop offered McGuffey the job of professor of ancient languages at the new institution. McGuffey, now twenty-six years old, moved to Miami, Ohio, with his younger brother Alexander and began what became a ten-year career as a professor at Miami University.

Among McGuffey's social associations were many people who were helping to create new cultural institutions that would guide the Cincinnati and Miami Valley region. McGuffey joined the influential reform society known as the Western Literary Institute, an organization of prominent educators interested in creating a system of superior public schools in Ohio. This position gave him input on matters such as the appointment of local school superintendents and teachers. Among the people in this association were members of the Beecher family. Lyman Beecher was the patriarch of this family and one of the people who most influenced McGuffey's work in the Readers:

Lyman Beecher was perhaps the most prominent minister in early nineteenth century America. His daughter Catherine was renowned as an educator and writer of advice books for women; it was she the Cincinnati publishing firm of Truman and Smith first contacted to do a series of school readers. She recommended McGuffey instead. Writer Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catherine's younger sister, eventually gained enormous fame as the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), but in the 1830's her husband Calvin Stowe was Ohio's most prominent advocate of expansive educational policy (Gorn 7).

Like Beecher and Stowe, McGuffey had come to believe that education needed to reach more children.

McGuffey had been studying education and the way in which students learned while he taught at the University, and the opportunity to create a reader would allow him to put some of the theories he was formulating into practice. In 1830 McGuffey began to gather groups of children of different ages; he read stories and lessons to them to determine which would work best with which age group and made notes concerning his findings. Using this method, McGuffey gathered a large collection of material from periodicals, literary classics, and the Bible that he used to create his famous readers. He wrote many of the pieces in the early readers himself and chose selected works from famous authors for the third and fourth volumes (the fifth and sixth readers were compiled a few years later by his brother Alexander, who had become an attorney in Cincinnati). In 1836 he published the first of the Reader series.

The popularity of *The McGuffey Reader* caused it to quickly spread beyond the borders of Ohio; its overwhelming acceptance as an educational tool and the volume in which it was produced made it second only to the Bible in readership. There is disagreement on the total number of *McGuffey Readers* sold from their introduction until they went out of print in 1920, but most sources agree that between 1836 and 1850 the publisher sold well over seven million copies. By 1841, the books and McGuffey had become so well known that the publisher changed the title of the series to *McGuffey's Eclectic Reader*. Part of the success of *The McGuffey Reader* was the fact that students could read and understand the stories in the textbook and learn lessons without memorizing facts.

The McGuffey Readers signaled the beginning of major change in education from rhetoric, orality, and mnemonics toward a new model that would eventually mark the

beginning of composition training. Until this time education had followed the traditional path that had persisted from the Greek and Roman educational process. In this process, students studied mostly Greek scholars, the Bible, and classic English literature. They would memorize passages and were expected to verbally express what they had learned, with emphasis on the oratory. McGuffey did not depart entirely from this model; he still believed in the study of classic literature and scholars and believed that some lessons were best learned when memorized. He explained his theory in a discussion on “diversity of recitation” in his “Conversations in a Schoolroom” essay when he said,

It [diversity] suggests to [the student] that neither his author, nor his teacher, nor he himself, had exhausted the subject. The difference of manner between the teacher and the examiner may and will puzzle the mere memoriter scholar—and this is one of its uses—to detect this very vicious habit of relying on memory alone. But it will give the scholar whose mind has been disciplined an opportunity of displaying that mental dexterity which the habit of thinking has given him (“Conversations”).

To the modern reader this simple declaration seems to state the obvious, but in 1837, when this article was published, this was a departure from the accepted teaching methods of the time and reflected a conclusion that McGuffey had come to after studying how students study and how we all learn.

In addition to “Conversations in a Schoolroom” McGuffey published “A Treatise on Methods of Reading” and other essays dealing with pedagogical issues. These essays offer some insight into McGuffey’s thoughts on both education and discipline. In “Conversations in a Schoolroom,” McGuffey provides some insights into his thoughts on

discipline and classroom behavior. He discusses why discipline is important in the education process:

Those persons who are most active are in the greatest danger of going wrong if they do not know how to go right... such minds are ready to stray off in a thousand unprofitable and even mischievous directions, so as to exhaust their energies, that ought to be directed to some profitable end... [these] youth require the skillful bond of discipline to repress their extravagance, to guide their growth and to lop off their redundancies

He expresses dissatisfaction with teaching as it exists in that essay and in fact, refers to schools as “slaughterhouses of minds” (Westerhoff 194). His concern is not only for the type of education he sees early public school students receiving, but also which students are eligible for that education. In an article entitled “General Education” contributed to *Western Monthly Magazine* in 1834, two years before the publication of the first Reader, McGuffey wrote,

Let but the youth of our country, in general, have a common school education as shall apprise them of their powers; form habits of study and observation; put them in possession of the facts and principles necessary to further improvement. If anything more be wanting to secure the laboring classes, at least, an equality of advantages of an extended education, it would seem to be the correction of an error common to them and a great part of even the educated (Westerhoff 167).

In this statement we see McGuffey’s concern for the “laboring class” and can understand by his use of the phrase “common school” that he was interested in creating an

educational framework that would include all children and provide, even for those who would never become professionals a basic education that would make them better citizens. McGuffey's determination of what would make them better citizens was based on his personal philosophy. That philosophy was based on values that McGuffey had acquired from his family, the group of Presbyterian ministers he lived and studied with, and others with whom he associated.

Among the people who influenced the philosophy of William McGuffey were writers of the era such as Noah Webster and Horace Mann, and McGuffey's contemporaries and acquaintances, people such as Samuel F.B. Morse and Lyman Beecher. Much of the philosophy of these individuals found its way into *The McGuffey Readers*. Some of these ideas were included purposefully, and other were included simply because they were so much a part of McGuffey's personal philosophy. Some of the earliest influences, aside from his upbringing, were the writings of Noah Webster.

By the mid nineteenth century Noah Webster was already well known as a proponent of education and had worked hard to convince people that America needed its own alphabet to help distinguish our language from that of the British. He also believed that the education of America's youth should take a new direction, a direction that would make America's students more prepared for the world. In *The American Temper*, Richard Mosier, in discussing Webster and his philosophy, says, "The tyranny of the classical tradition has been broken. 'Indeed' wrote Noah Webster, 'it appears to me that what is now called a liberal education disqualifies a man for business'" (Mosier 138). Webster believed that it was important to create, an American populace that would be prepared to take advantage of the distinct differences between America and Europe. He

wanted to break all ties with England and saw immigration as a threat to the new republic.

Noah Webster's 1790 essay entitled "On the Education of Youth in America" espoused many of the principles that would become evident in *The McGuffey Readers*. For example, Webster says, "In deliberating a plan of instruction, we should be attentive to its future influence and probable advantages.... The only practicable method to reform mankind is to begin with children, to banish, if possible, from their company every low-bred, drunken, immoral character" (42). In the 1830s, when the public school movement began, leaders intended that it would ultimately lead to universal education and the ideas and values instilled in the children they were educating would be the foundation, not only for the educational system in the United States, but for society itself. They believed they could instill Christian ideals in the young students and that eventually those ideals would govern America.

Webster was not the only contemporary philosopher who wrote about the importance of education in the new nation. Other well-known educators such as Horace Mann, not only influenced young teachers such as McGuffey, but also were influential in creating a climate in the United States that encouraged education. Mann, who has been called the "Father of the Common Schools," took the stand that religion would be best served by the schools "and that the churches were in error in their interpretation of their faith and its realm" (Rousas 18). Mann was active in the church. He was raised in the orthodox Calvinist tradition and as an adult considered himself a Unitarian.¹ At that time in America, both the Calvinists and the Unitarians considered themselves the rightful

¹"It is important to note that in the early nineteenth century, Unitarianism had not yet, as it was to do subsequently, separate from Christianity". (Rousas 19)

heirs of the Puritans in religious faith. The difference between them was in their interpretation of Christianity. The Unitarians believed the Puritans broke with the past and its bondage to create a new and freer society and America represented a great step forward: “Their view of Christianity rendered the Calvinists retrogressive, reactionary, and unchristian. The Calvinist approach to Christianity was theological, the Unitarian and Mann’s was anthropological” (20). Mann insisted that there should be more Bible in the schools than currently existed, but he was not interested in the Bible as a means of promoting Godliness but rather social efficiency. He thought religion should be used to promote civic virtue. In 1846 he wrote:

The will of God, as conspicuously manifested in the order of Nature, and in the relations he has established among men, founds the right of every child that is born into the world, to see a degree of education as will enable him, and, as far as possible, will predispose him, to perform all domestic, social, civil, and moral duties, upon the same clear ground of natural law and equity as it founds a child’s right, upon first coming into the world.

(21)

The idea of including God in education in order to influence society was also important to McGuffey. His Presbyterian heritage mandated that he include God in his teaching, and while he and Mann differed on the degree to which God should be included, McGuffey certainly recognized, as Mann did, that God and the Bible were important in nineteenth-century education. In addition to the social implications of using the Bible in the Reader it is important to note that The Bible, in some cases, would be the only written matter to which the young students would have been exposed. *McGuffey’s Fourth Reader*

included a story entitled “Religion the Only Basis of Society.” In a passage from that story credited to an author named Channing, the following lines appear, exemplifying the ideas and principles that McGuffey, Webster, Mann, and others espoused.

Few men suspect, perhaps no man comprehends, the extent of the support given by religion to every virtue. No man, perhaps is aware, how much our moral and social sentiments are fed from this fountain; how powerless conscience would become, without the belief of God; how palsied would be human benevolence to quicken and sustain it; how suddenly the whole social fabric would quake, and with what a fearful crash it would sink into hopeless ruin, were the ideas of a supreme Being, of accountableness, and of a future life, to be utterly erased from every mind (McGuffey 4th)

In *McGuffey’s Second Reader*, written in simpler language for a younger audience, McGuffey offers a list of “Things to Remember.” Three of the stanzas read :

Remember, child, remember,
That God is in the sky,
That he looks on all we do
With an ever wakeful eye.

Remember, child, remember,
That all the day and night,
He sees our thoughts and actions,
With an ever watchful sight.

Remember that he hates
A falsehood or a lie—
Remember, he will punish
The wicked by-and-bye (McGuffey 2nd).

These and other stories made clear to the students that God and the Christian Bible were a part of their education that they were expected to follow. The lessons of the Bible, and the stories of other authors interpreted by McGuffey, were designed to instill in students a conservative set of values, and while these values were important to McGuffey, his purpose in *The McGuffey Readers* was not religious instruction, but instead, was to use a subject he and the students were familiar with to open the door to education.

Chapter II

The Readers

Religion was an integral part of the society that McGuffey envisioned. He and other educators and textbook writers of the time followed a conservative path, closely following principles like those set forth in an essay written by Lyman Beecher. Beecher's essay was included in the *Fourth McGuffey Reader* and subsequent editions under the title "Plea for the West" or "Necessity for Education." In this essay, Beecher set forth the premise that prosperity had to be tempered with self-restraint. He felt that "the best way to create virtue in society and dispel the forces of darkness that destroyed Rome (including the rapidly growing Catholic Church) was to disseminate through the schools the idea that religion and society should have the same goals." Beecher believed that worldly ambition, when properly attained, and eternal salvation, could coexist (Mosier 33).

The frontier school gave children the opportunity to become literate; it offered them "a common belief system combining undenominational Protestantism and nonpartisan patriotism;" it introduced children to an "organized subsociety" and the process of "learning to learn." The school along with the church prepared the children for work outside the house, "where literacy and punctuality, adherence to rules and procedures, and the ability to cooperate with people of varying ages who were no kin would be expected" (Cremin 51).

These are the kinds of lessons McGuffey taught in his Readers. He wrote and selected stories not only for the purpose of teaching reading and vocabulary, but also for

their content. He used the stories to teach moral lessons and principles of good citizenship. McGuffey begins the first Reader with simple stories, told in mostly single syllable words. The stories are about simple everyday subjects and are written in a gentle and relaxed language. For example the second lesson reads, “Is the cat on the mat? The cat is on the mat.” By the end of the first Reader the vocabulary has reached a higher level, but more importantly, the lessons have begun to teach a moral. In *McGuffey’s First Reader*, lessons 61 and 62 are combined to tell one story. It is the story of a mother chicken and her chicks. She takes them to the creek and shows them how to jump to a rock in the middle and then on to the other side. None of the chicks can make the jump, and in fact, only one will try. When they return home the mother hen offers food only to the chick that tried to jump and failed. “So she called the chickens, and they all ran up to her, each one trying to get a bite at the piece of bread. ‘No, no!’ She said ‘This bread is for Chippy, he is the only one of my children that really tried to jump to the stone’” (*McGuffey’s 1st* 91). (Illustration 3 is a reproduction of a portion of “Mother and Chicks”)

The successive Readers also included some simple messages and simple readings, but continued to extol the virtues of good Christian living. For example, the version of *The Lord’s Prayer* printed in *McGuffey’s Fourth Eclectic Reader* (Lesson 35) is actually comprised of two simple prayers that include an edited two-stanza version of *The Lord’s Prayer*. As the vocabulary and sentence structure became more complex, so did the moral lessons. Lesson 46 takes a lesson from the Bible and tells it as story about a contemporary father with seven sons. There were people looking forward to the death of the father to “cheat [the sons] out of their property by making them quarrel about it.” The father offered a bundle of seven sticks and challenged each of the boys to break it.

LESSON LXI.



stōod hīmself' flāp'ping fīrst
 twēlve flāpped wālked flāp
 obey' bēt'ter Chīp'pŷ fōod
 stōne be fōre' chick'ens kēpt

There was once a big, white hen that had twelve little chickens. They were very small, and

the old hen took good care of them. She found food for them in the daytime, and at night kept them under her wings.

One day, this old hen took her chickens down to a small brook. She thought the air from the water would do them good.

When they got to the brook, they walked on the bank a little while. It was very pretty on the other side of the brook, and the old hen thought she would take her children over there.

There was a large stone in the brook: she thought it would be easy for them to jump to that stone, and from it to the other side.

(Illustration 3)

McGuffey William H. *McGuffey's First Eclectic Reader*. 1879. Cincinnati: American Book Company, 1920. pg. 89.

When they could not he separated the sticks and gave one to each boy and asked them to break it. Of course, the sticks broke easily and the father, looking at the pile of broken sticks on the ground said, “As it is with these sticks, so it is with you my sons” (*McGuffey 3rd 115*).

This lesson helps teach a social lesson to the students; a group divided is easier to defeat than a group united.

Another lesson in the same book is “The Insolent Boy,” Lesson 62. This lesson tells the story of a boy who is mean to everyone he sees. James liked to insult people or throw things at them and run away. One day he saw a man walking through town with a bundle on a stick over his shoulder. He insulted the man and when it had no effect threw stones at him. A stone hit the man and knocked him down. James got frightened and ran home. When he got home he learned that his uncle had just arrived in town, left his carriage and was walking to their house with a bundle of gifts on his shoulder when he was hit with a stone by an insolent boy. When James’ father found out that James had been the boy, he would not allow him to have the watch or the books his uncle had brought for him and “The rest of the children were loaded with presents. James was obliged to content himself with seeing them happy. He never forgot this lesson so long as he lived. It cured him entirely of his low and insolent manners” (158). The lesson teaches students that it is good to be kind to everyone. In this story the lesson is taught at the simplest level; although kindness may have rewards, bad behavior also has consequences.

The McGuffey Readers exhibited a marked lack of diversity; they presented an image of an America that was rural, innocent, and homogeneous. Just as McGuffey helped to form the minds of the students by deciding what to present in the readers and

how to present it, he also affected those young minds by what he omitted. Not only are there many examples of patronizing attitudes toward the less fortunate in the readers, but blacks and women are also treated with condescension. There is very little mention in *The McGuffey Readers* of African or Native Americans and very little mention of women, except as wives and mothers. In *Making the American Mind*, Richard Mosier discusses the exclusion of women from *The McGuffey Reader*: “The relative position of men and women... acknowledge that men are the monarchs of the home, while women, however much one may respect them as wives and mothers, are of subordinate station” (Mosier 28). Although these ideas permeated *The McGuffey Reader*, they were not always the ideas shared by McGuffey’s closest friends and associates. The Beecher family in particular was outspoken in its opposition to slavery and the belief that women were more than mothers and housekeepers.

In “Treatise on Domestic Economy,” Catherine Beecher says,

No American woman, then, has any occasion for feeling that hers is a humble or insignificant lot. The measure of what an individual accomplishes is to be estimated by the importance of the enterprise achieved, and not by the particular position of the laborer. The builders of a temple are of equal importance, whether they labor on the foundation, or toil upon the dome (Beecher, C. 14).

Catherine Beecher had become famous primarily as an author on domestic subjects, and she was respected as a spokesperson for women's issues. Her “Treatise on Domestic Economy” was reprinted annually from 1841 to 1856. In the introduction to Beecher’s essay in *Antebellum American Culture*, David Brion Davis says about the essay, “Its

impact has been likened to that of Dr. Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care* in the decades after World War II" (Davis 13). Her view of a woman's place in society was clearly different from that of McGuffey, who felt, "that woman, who is the mere dependent and ornament of man in his happier hours, should be his stay and solace when smitten with sudden calamity" (Mosier 29).

Most nineteenth-century school textbooks contained very conservative messages concerning women and their place in society. According to Elliot Gorn, "Despite a powerful feminist movement during the mid-nineteenth century, school texts generally depicted women in service to men and their families. Women's role was the domestic one of bringing moral refinement to the American family" (Gorn 17). In general, McGuffey and other contemporary textbook authors avoided social controversy, and instead, strictly taught the virtues of hard work and self-control. In "On the Education of Youth in America," Noah Webster said, "In all nations a good education is that which renders the ladies correct in their manners, respectable in their families, and agreeable in society. That education is always wrong which raises a woman above the duties of her station" (Webster 70). This quote from Noah Webster exemplifies the image McGuffey portrayed for his female characters. Young women were expected to learn the lessons of *The McGuffey Readers*, but the goal for the female students was not the same as it was for the male students. The boys were clearly being prepared as leaders, if not in the work world at least in the family. While women had actually begun to make strides in the areas of social and political equality, McGuffey chose to ignore the fact. According to Richard Mosier in *Making the American Mind*,

When the first editions of *The McGuffey Reader* were published in 1836 and 1837, women had no legal control over their children and their property, and of course, they could not vote or hold office. By 1839, however, they had already won from Mississippi some ratification of the laws regarding property; and within a decade Texas, Indiana, Pennsylvania, New York, California, and Wisconsin had followed the precedent set by Mississippi (27).

Mosier points out that McGuffey “continued to describe how man is the monarch of the little kingdom of the home.” Many of the examples in the Readers enforce this opinion. For example in *McGuffey’s Fourth Eclectic Reader* one story tell how

A married man, falling into misfortune, is more apt to retrieve his situation in the world than a single one; partly because he is more stimulated to exertion by the necessities of the helpless and beloved beings who depend on him for subsistence; but chiefly, because his spirits are smoothed and relieved by domestic endearments, and his self-respect kept alive by finding, that though all abroad is darkness and humiliation, yet there is still a little world of love at home, of which he is monarch (29).

Although Catherine Beecher believed that a woman’s lot was not “humble or insignificant,” to a certain degree, she still held to the traditional guidelines. She is quoted as saying, “Heaven has appointed one sex the superior, and to the other the subordinate station, and this without any reference to the character or conduct of either... as much for the dignity as it is for the interests of females, in all respects to conform to the duties of this relation” (Calhoun 83). Her use of words like “superior” and “subordinate” speaks

volumes about her “don’t rock the boat” attitude. This opinion, offered by one of the most influential women of the time, points out how non inclusive society still was at this point and how difficult the task was of making education a right for everyone instead of a privilege for some.

Not only are there many examples of patronizing attitudes toward women in the Readers, but the less fortunate are also treated with condescension. In *McGuffey’s Third Eclectic Readers*, there is a story entitled “The New Year” about a young man named Edward helping a poor German family. Edward’s father gave him two silver dollars as a New Year’s gift, and Edward immediately went out to spend the money on new books. On his way, he met a poor German family that had no food or money, so Edward gave the family his two silver dollars. When he returned home, Edward’s father asked how he had spent his money, and Edward told him what he had done. His father said, “I saw you give the money to the poor German family... be thus ever ready to help the poor and wretched, and distressed; and every year of your life will be to you a happy New Year” (*McGuffey’s 3rd* 69). The mention of less fortunate people whom one should help served as not only an example of Christian duty, but also the tone of the story clearly portrayed Edward and his father as superior to the poor immigrants. Another example of the way McGuffey treats the subject of social position is in a story in the *Second Eclectic Reader* about a poor boy who learns in the end that “the poor, if they are but good, may be happy: indeed, I think that when I am good no one can be happier than I am.” This is a theme that McGuffey repeated often and to help prove the argument that a strong moral foundation is ultimately more important than material gain.

Another change that began to develop during this period was the movement against slavery. There was growing abolitionist sentiment in the Miami, Ohio, area, but McGuffey avoided much of this and eventually found himself in direct conflict with Robert Bishop, the man who had hired him at Miami University. Bishop felt that educators should take a strong stand against slavery. Eventually this issue and criticism of McGuffey's vanity and ambition forced McGuffey's resignation from Miami University. Bishop, and other Presbyterians in the northern states, were outspoken proponents of the abolition movement and McGuffey not only ignored the abolitionist movement but also never wrote at all about slavery, the Underground Railroad or even the Civil War.

In an even more pronounced way, the exclusion of non-white and non-protestant characters in the lessons had an effect on both the included and the excluded students. Many slave masters were reticent to educate their slaves, often because they were concerned that educated slaves would be more likely to rebel. Similar reasoning applied to the education of Native American children since many people considered them inferior and thought educating them could create problems. To complicate the Native American children's case even more was the reluctance on the part of the leaders of their own society to have children educated in the ways of the "white man." McGuffey endeavored to teach that while society viewed these individuals as inferior, he felt students needed to be taught the same lesson about other races and genders that he tried to teach about the poor; it is our duty to help those less fortunate. McGuffey believed as Elliot Gorn says, "Stewardship, the responsibility of the well born for the less fortunate, was an age-old tradition among Protestants... self-appointed moral stewards, who saw themselves as

champions of a better way of life, one that any sensible person would willingly embrace” (Gorn 13). In referring to the American Indians for example, William Mosier says:

The McGuffey Readers clearly reflect the waves of humanitarianism that swept over the nation as tribe after tribe was mistreated and dispossessed. Yet, it was mostly the west that hated and distrusted the Indian, for in the west conflicting claims to land, broken peace treaties and opposing economics and modes of livelihood brought into the open a mutual fear. In all this, however, *The McGuffey Readers* argued for justice, humaneness, and the Christian spirit of brotherly love in the treatment of the Indian”.

(Mosier 148)

McGuffey preached the same lesson for all those people who were not members of conservative Christian fellowship of which he considered himself a member. The pattern he established in his first Reader and continued throughout his future publications included teaching from a perspective that included the virtues of hard work and the Christian ethic. In all these cases, McGuffey stayed strictly within a narrow set of guidelines. He dealt with almost every subject in relation to the Christian virtues of thrift, hard work, honesty, and fairness. McGuffey chose not to speak out on most of the major social issues of the day, but he continued to use the lessons he did include to teach the basic lessons of reading, vocabulary, and critical and deductive reasoning; all of which were designed to help the students better express themselves, and would eventually lead to their ability to express themselves in writing.

One marked exception to this reluctance to speak out was the matter of temperance. McGuffey considered drinking a sin, and therefore he felt free to discuss this

issue in the readers. William McGuffey and Lyman Beecher agreed wholeheartedly on the subject of temperance. Beecher had become an outspoken advocate in favor of the movement. In *Antebellum American Culture*, Davis Brion Davis says of Beecher, “No other writer appealed so brilliantly to the anxieties of moderate drinkers or succeeded so well in dramatizing the social and psychological allures that had led many of his friends and fellow ministers to the habitual consumption of alcohol” (Davis 394). Beecher preached a series of sermons and later published essays under the title “The Six Sermons” dealing with temperance. In these essays he said, “Intemperance is the sin of our land...and is a river of fire, rolling through the land, destroying the vital air, and extending around an atmosphere of death” (394).

Beecher’s fear, and likewise McGuffey’s, was that once someone started to drink the slide into drunkenness was almost imperceptible. Beecher says in the same essay, “A part of the heedlessness arises from the undefined nature of the crime in its early stages, and the ignorance of men, concerning what may be termed the experimental [empirical] indications of its approach” (395). McGuffey echoed this sentiment in his *Third Eclectic Reader* where he included (and probably wrote) a story entitled “Beware the First Drink.” It tells the story of a good man who “fell into bad company” and would go to the theater instead of staying home reading. Soon he learned to play cards and lost all his money gambling. It is important to note that after all that he returned home and his friends forgave him. He gave up his bad habits, married and was happy; however, he had “learned to take strong drink, and said once that when a man begins to drink, he never knows where it will end.” The mother and the wife of the drunkard die from “grief and shame,” and Jim, the drunkard, eventually goes to prison for stealing. This story

apparently was being told to young boys by their uncle who had known Jim since youth, and he attests to the fact that “There was not a more decent, well-behaved boy among us”[than Jim] (*McGuffey’s 3rd* 112).

McGuffey did not look at these as social issues but moral issues. He presented the sins of drinking and gambling in the same way he presented greed and ambition. Some of the strongest lessons in *The McGuffey Readers* were the stories dealing with these subjects. Some of these were stories written by McGuffey himself, but even in stories by other authors selected by McGuffey for inclusion, the stories dealing with moral issues are the sternest. This moral tone is a reflection, too, of McGuffey’s strict Presbyterian upbringing and the strict conservative tenor he established in producing the Readers.

The subjects that McGuffey included and those he chose to exclude in his Reader series established a pattern that continued throughout not only the four editions that William McGuffey edited but also the future editions that Alexander McGuffey edited. The majority of the stories teach kindness and love; the most prominent theme in *The McGuffey Readers* is the Golden Rule. However, when he presented themes dealing with vices such as “The First Drink” he presented them with a stern and almost frightening edge. These lessons would have had an effect on the young readers not only when they studied them in school but years later when they became adults. According to Richard Mosier, “*The McGuffey Readers* accepted the premise that the Christian virtues of thrift, labor, industry, honesty, punctuality, and good –will carried men to the successes which daily could be witnessed by the humblest man.” This principle is evident in the literature that flooded America in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, and it is important in evaluating *The McGuffey Readers* (Mosier 122).”

While *The McGuffey Readers* were not the only influential books published in the nineteenth century, they were books people were introduced to at an early age and they were books that offered examples of the proper way to live. Since *The McGuffey Readers* were a series of books and not a single publication, the lessons became more sophisticated as the students progressed and did the teaching. Each story still contained a guide to articulation, assuring the students would retain their oratorical skills, but beginning with the third Reader each story contained a series of questions that allowed the students to begin to formulate their own thoughts about the stories instead of reciting a set of accepted lessons the story taught.

This marked a move toward an educational system centered more on the individual. A system that allowed for individual thought and individual interpretation of the lessons that would become more important as education became more universal and more inclusive.

Chapter III

The Evolution of Composition Training

As critical thinking and analysis of written material became a more important part of education and as education became universal, the ability to read and write became more prevalent and society began to change. Part of this change was based on the increasing inclusiveness of the school system. According to Elizabethada Wright and Michael Halloran, in their essay “From Rhetoric to Composition: The Teaching of Writing in America to 1900.”

The many improvements in writing technologies coincided with the century’s new emphasis on the individual. Through the eighteenth century, individualism was, in this country, chiefly a matter of political rights, but during the nineteenth century, the idea that everyone has a “right” to rise socially and economically took root. People came to see the socioeconomic status of their birth not as a place they ought to occupy for life, but as a starting point from which to climb upward in competition with their fellows (Meyer 229).

The technological improvements they refer to are not only those of printing and distribution, but also the more basic improvements in writing instruments and paper. These improvements allowed the average person to communicate more effectively than had ever been possible before. As Egerton Ryerson, president of Canada’s Victoria College, said in his 1842 inaugural address:

In an age of printing and writing—in all its varieties—to write well is of the last [ie.most] importance. The power, which an eloquent orator exerts over an assembly, an able writer exerts over a country. The “pen of a ready writer” has frequently proved an instrument of more potent power, than the sword of the soldier, or the scepter of the monarch (229).

In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault takes a detailed look at the changes that took place in the way people accessed knowledge in the nineteenth century. He says, “Knowledge in the sixteenth century was still a secret, albeit a shared one. Even when hidden, knowledge in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is discourse with a veil drawn over it.” The secret Foucault refers to is the link to language and literacy that those members of society who had the ability to read and write had. They retained a power over the uneducated that acted as a dividing line between the knowing and the unknowing. “The nineteenth century was to dissolve that link, and to leave behind it in confrontation, a knowledge closed in upon itself and a pure language that had become, in nature and function, enigmatic—something that has been called, since that time *Literature*” (Foucault 89).

This recognition that writing was at least as important as oratory marked the beginning of a change in teaching philosophy. This also marked a departure in teaching methods. Those who preceded McGuffey emphasized the classical method of education; the concept that rhetoric, mnemonics, and oratory were the hallmarks of a good education. As noted earlier, beginning with McGuffey this began to change, the emphasis moved, if not to composition training, at least to expository thinking. In his “Conversations in a Classroom” McGuffey talks about the way he thinks a student’s

progress should be measured. One of his devices for conducting examinations his through what he described as *extempore compositions*. In the essay, McGuffey defines what he means by that phrase. He says he means they should be essays “written by a whole class upon a subject suggested by the examiner, without time for previous reflection or any aid from grammars, dictionaries, common place books, or authors” (Conversations). In addition, “In responding to a report concerning methods for teaching English composition, he [McGuffey] supported those newer methods that encouraged and employed original composition” (Westerhoff 51). McGuffey published very little material apart from the Readers. It is therefore significant that he made mention of composition twice in that limited collection.

In the late nineteenth century, the curriculum began to include composition and composition became critical in the evaluation of students,

The larger numbers of students [entering universities] made the old method of recitation and disputation unworkable. Composition courses provided a means to teach larger numbers of students at once, assessing their success by measuring their adherence to prescribed standards. The new competitive spirit of the society gave a much greater importance to the business of sorting students, that is, of determining which were superior and which were merely adequate, and her too writing recommended itself as a means. Since written work could be evaluated more precisely, it allowed for a more meticulous sorting of the students (Meyer 230).

The fact that students were required to write meant that they also had to learn to express their thoughts in a different way. This meant an expansion of the method of instruction that McGuffey employed. The method of instruction before McGuffey, and to some degree including him, is aptly described in Paulo Freire's book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire describes the teaching practice of teachers like McGuffey as the "banking theory" of education. He says that instead of communicating "the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which students patiently receive, memorize and repeat." This exemplifies *The McGuffey Reader*, where the students were lectured in print by the all-knowing teacher (author), who instructed them with the conservatively structured dogma that he felt they needed to know, or as Freire said, these teachers viewed "knowledge as a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those they consider to know nothing" (Freire 58). However, McGuffey also marked the beginning of a change in pedagogical style. McGuffey's predecessors left no room for experimentation or freedom of thought. They also chose the way in which the lessons should be presented, again based on their own judgment, and shaped by their background, with no thought to including diverse ideas or philosophies. In terms of composition training, credit was only given for penmanship, punctuation and spelling.

In light of these facts, it is important to note that while McGuffey began the change in training, his model still stayed close to the older classical method, and because *The McGuffey Reader* was an influential instrument of instruction for over sixty years it affected not only the students in the classroom, but also the families of the students, and eventually society itself, as students of McGuffey became teachers using *The McGuffey Reader* as their primary textbook. This method of teaching and its influence on the

generations of McGuffey students is important in the origination of composition training at the University level.

In their essay entitled “A Century of Writing Instruction in School and College English”, Catherine Hobs and James Berlin take a detailed look at the evolution of composition training.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the required classical course was generally abandoned... this had much to do with the wider access to education, which also spurred the earliest debates over the composition courses in the high school. Because high schools had seen their mission as preparing students for college, they had emphasized classical language and literature. In contrast, the new high school and college would organize around the study of English. By the nineteenth century, the rhetoric course had come to be taught in English. As a result the original courses in the emerging English department, most conspicuously at Harvard, were in composition (History of Writing 251).

In his essay, “The Language of Exclusion: Writing Instruction at the University.” Mike Rose talks about the origination of composition as a distinct course of instruction:

Freshman composition originated in 1874 as a Harvard response to the poor writing of upperclassmen. When turn-of-the-century educational psychologists like E.L.Thorndike began to study the teaching of writing, they found a Latin and Greek-influenced school grammar that was primarily a set of prescriptions for conducting socially acceptable discourse, a list of the arcane do’s and don’ts of usage for the ever-

increasing numbers of children—many from lower classes and immigrant groups—entering the educational system... The twentieth-century writing curriculum, then, was focused on the particulars of usage, grammar, and mechanics (Cross Talk 528).

As James Berlin assesses it in *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth Century America*,

Children of the lower orders were now asked to prove their worthiness for a place in the upper ranks of society... by learning this dialect.

Composition teachers became the caretakers of the English tongue, and more important, the gatekeepers on the road to the good things in life, as defined by the professional class (Berlin 72).

In his essay, Rose talks about the psychology of writing by examining what educational psychologists had observed. He says, “Educational psychologists had demonstrated that simply memorizing rules of grammar and usage had no discernible effect on the quality of student writing. What was needed was application of those rules through practice provided by drills and exercises”(Cross Talk 529).

Composition training as described by Rose, Berlin, and others was moving away from classical rhetorical and mnemonic training, yet the drill and exercise method being called for was the backbone of McGuffey’s training style. McGuffey believed that a solid foundation of general knowledge, coupled with an ability to communicate one’s ideas either orally, or through the written word, would prepare a student for a life that would be a credit to society. He helped introduce and supported the idea of composition training and he could see that the changing makeup of the student body, combined with the increasing availability of writing materials, paper, and printing presses meant that the

study and practice of composition was a necessary ingredient in the education of the youth of America.

In order to initiate discussion topics, and yet keep the students grounded in the fundamentals of oratory and vocabulary, McGuffey always included a section at the end of each story called, “definitions and articulation” where he offered short definitions of difficult words and a pronunciation guide for the students. He also included a section entitled “exercises” that listed questions likely to pique the student’s curiosity and lead to a more in depth analysis of the lesson. This introduction to critical thinking provided a good introduction to the practice of writing. Just as an increase in written material increased the number of books available for students to read, the ready availability of paper and writing materials like pens and ink, made it easier to introduce the concept of putting the ideas, deduced from critical thinking, into written form.

For example, in *McGuffey’s Fourth Eclectic Reader* is a story entitled “Knowledge is Power.” In the story, a father of young boys is talking to an older man about how smart and better educated the younger generation is. “Do you not think that knowledge is an excellent thing?” the parent asks. “Why sir, that depends on the use to which it is applied.” The conversation continues between the two men with the older man comparing knowledge to power. The examples he uses include the comparison of a horse pulling a load, to a horse running wild and destroying things, and of a man made pond used to irrigate, as opposed to a damn bursting and flooding the field. McGuffey then asks the students the following questions: “What is the subject of this lesson?

Is knowledge always a power?

Is it always a blessing?

If we use the powers that God has given us for bad purposes, what will our knowledge prove to be?" (Minnich 142)

McGuffey uses these questions to begin a discussion among the students. While today we see this as a common teaching tool, classical Greek teaching methods including inquiry, had disappeared in the seventeenth and eighteenth century and been replaced by the lecturing of the all-knowing teacher as mentioned earlier in the discussion of Freire's "Banking Theory of Education."

Freire also says in *The Politics of Education*, "If we do not transcend the idea of education as pure transference of a knowledge that merely describes reality, we will prevent critical consciousness from emerging and thus reinforce political illiteracy" (Freire-*Politics* 104). Freire, in his discussion of political literacy essentially describes what McGuffey started, or at least helped to start: "We have to transcend all kinds of education in order to achieve another, one in which to know and to transform reality are reciprocal prerequisites. The essential point is transcending a domesticating educational practice for one that is liberating" (104).

Because of his years in the classroom and because he took the time to try out his lessons on students, McGuffey realized that the changing world would require a changing educational system. By creating a solid foundation for the young students, he was providing the tools with which to maneuver in the new world to come.

Freire does not propose "thoughtless spontaneity," he does not believe the educator should "never stop being present," but also that the educator should never "exacerbate his [her] presence by transforming his learners into his shadow" (105). McGuffey stayed engaged with the learners both through his books and through his

association with and publication by The Western Literary Institute, but his lectures, in particular, point out that he favored change and progress in education. In 1834 McGuffey contributed a series of essays to *Western Monthly Magazine*. In the first essay “General Education,” McGuffey says while the people are the government and “general intelligence is the only palladium of our free institutions,” it is impossible to prevent political ruin if the citizenry is “ignorant of his duties and rights, and where the legislator, the judge, and the executive are unacquainted with the principles and obligations of their respective offices” (Westerhoff 164).

McGuffey understood that that citizenry would be made up of the current students and that educators needed to be involved in all of society: “It may safely be affirmed, that none of the systems of education hitherto, or now in use, will ever effect this desirable object...but let our common schools be properly managed, and elementary studies properly distributed in reference to the several branches to be pursued” (164). The discussion is continued a year later in “Lecture on the Relative Duties of Parents and Teachers” which was presented to the Fifth Western Institute and College for Professional Teachers. In that lecture he insists that everyone can benefit from education, “There are in the community abundant resources, both physical and moral, for the education of the people—the whole people—to any extent that may be found desirable” (165). The impetus of McGuffey’s lecture was that to accomplish the desired result it would be necessary to change the method of teaching and to increase the number of teachers available to teach the people.

There must be an increase of teachers...the work must be done. The existence of our institutions depend on it.... Besides the effect of correct

knowledge, in promoting the general prosperity of society, and in enhancing the value of property already acquired...it is knowledge that renders available facilities for the accumulation of property.... It is knowledge, and morality, the offspring of knowledge that alone can give general prosperity to society, and thus benefit all (165).

McGuffey realized that the education he described could only be accomplished if the teachers he proposed were of the proper type, and it is here that McGuffey's true feelings about equality and diversity becomes evident. In the lecture he says, "Let us divest ourselves of all selfish views; of every narrow prejudice. Let us remember that those who are now our pupils shall have become the legislators and governors of the republic" (165). In this one lecture he has touched on nearly all the points that drove him to create *The McGuffey Readers*, and the points that made them successful. He began his effort to insure that every student in the country would receive an education and that education was as important to the survival of the nation as it was to the student. He also realized that within that group of students being educated were not only future farmers and merchants, but also future national leaders.

McGuffey had succeeded in creating a series of books that acted as the basis for reading and writing education for generations of American children and in doing so influenced their political and social opinions. His Reader taught the basics of spelling and grammar and began the process of inclusion in the academic environment. His introduction of analytical analysis and critical thinking as a discipline signaled the beginning of composition training and helped lay the groundwork for composition theorists who followed. Mina Shaughnessy, a noted composition theorist says in her

essay “Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing” that, “Diving in is simply deciding that teaching [students] to write well is not only suitable but challenging work for those who would be teachers and scholars in a democracy” (Cross Talk 295). This statement echoes McGuffey’s thoughts from over one hundred years ago that “everyone can benefit from education” and that “those that are now pupils shall have become legislators and governors of the republic” (Westerhoff 165). What had been groundbreaking original theory in the era of “The Schoolmaster for the Nation” has become the acceptable method of instruction today to provide inclusive instruction to an increasingly diverse population.

Conclusion

During the nineteenth century, the entire makeup of America and indeed, the world changed. The horse that had been the primary mode of transportation for thousands of years was replaced by the steam-powered locomotive and the steamship. Printing that had gone from hand transcription to mechanical reproduction in the fifteenth century was now being transformed again by the steam printing press. Because of these changes, society was changing. The new inventions meant new jobs, but the jobs required more skill than work that had existed before. The new workers would have to be better educated, and that meant that along with the other changes occurring in the world, the education system would have to change. Future workers would need more education than could be provided by learning to read the Bible or a simple grammar at home. The new world would require an education that included lessons on not only how to read, but on how to live and communicate in a society, that because of increased travel and communication, was bound to become more diverse and more complex.

William McGuffey spent his whole life teaching and studying how and what to teach. He was the one person who had the background and training to prepare a text and propose a teaching method to prepare students for that future world. In much the way composition researchers do today, McGuffey tried out texts and lessons on groups of children to find out which types of lessons helped them learn the lessons he was trying to teach. Using this information, he created a new model for educating children. He wisely did not abandon the framework of teaching that had been in place for centuries but instead modified it to fit the new requirements. By doing this he not only did not alienate

his contemporary educators, but actually enlisted their help through his association in The Western Literary Institute and his reputation as an educator.

With an emphasis on Christian values and the Golden Rule, McGuffey published lessons that taught vocabulary, reasoning, and critical thinking, and at the same time instilled in the students a strong sense of purpose and clear understanding of right and wrong. His books were in constant use for fifty years and had an impact on millions of students, but his philosophy has outlasted even that, and can be seen today. McGuffey believed that learning needed to be taken seriously, but he also realized that students learn differently, and that it is the teacher's responsibility to recognize this and offer specialized training, where necessary, to help those students. He also realized that teaching is about more than teaching a student how to read and write, it is about teaching a student how to live a fulfilling and productive life in an ever-changing world.

One hundred and fifty years after the creation of *The McGuffey Reader* William McGuffey is recognized as one of the originators of the public school system and the creator of the most popular textbook in history. His method of trying out lessons on selected students to make sure they accomplished his intended purpose, along with his lifetime of teaching experience combined to make his textbook the standard by which all textbooks of the era were measured. In addition, his contributions to the birth of composition training began a trend in education that continues today.

Epilogue

His students included many of the leaders of the early twentieth century, people like Henry Ford and Clarence Darrow. To these men McGuffey was the man who helped establish their view of what life should be like. He established a set of guidelines concerning morality and hard work. His textbooks provided skills along with the lessons that allowed generations of American students to leave school more prepared for the work world than any generation that had come before. According to Richard Mosier,

McGuffey portrays the principles of honesty and hard work throughout the Readers as virtues that will reap rewards: All the virtues of success were taught in *The McGuffey Readers*; the stories of success in many of the lessons rivaled those of Horatio Alger; and the middle-class virtues stressed in *The McGuffey Readers* were those stressed by many authors of success literature (Mosier 122).

In 1836, J.M. Stowe a teacher from Lexington Kentucky wrote a testimonial to the publisher:

The books are such as to impart clear and well-defined ideas to the minds of pupils. The proper graduation is observed in the selection and arrangement of lessons—keeping pace with the increasing ability on the part of the reader to overcome new difficulties, a deficiency of most of the juvenile books hitherto published. A fine moral effort is made in these lessons which should be ranked among the prominent merits of these books. (Westerhoff 65)

The praise for the new Reader came from other sources, too. Testimonials from college professors and presidents, from school principals and teachers and testimonials from religious publications like *The American Presbyterian* and *The Baptist Journal*, all attested to the success of *The McGuffey Readers*.

Henry Ford rose from a position paying two dollars a week to the leadership of the automotive industry. Ford would often sit at a desk and read *The McGuffey Reader* in the schoolroom of Greenfield Village, the nineteenth-century village he reconstructed:

Most youngsters of my day were brought up on *The McGuffey Reader*.

Most of those youngsters who still survive have a profound respect for the compiler of the Readers. The moral principles Dr. William McGuffey stressed, the solid character building qualities he emphasized, are stressed and emphasized...today (Westerhoff 15).

Ford did more than reproduce *The McGuffey Reader* and write about the influence William McGuffey had on him and his generation. He put the lessons into action. On a return trip from a vacation in Florida in 1923, the Fords decided to visit the Berry School in Georgia. The Berry School combined agricultural training with academics to provide help for poor mountain children. The school imitated Ford's idea of what education should be. It ran with a great deal of efficiency; it opposed waste; and there was high degree of cooperation among the campus personnel. The students all worked and earned all or most of their way through school. Ford decided almost at once that this school, struggling for existence, was a project worthy of his support: "The financial records of the Ford Motor Company Archives reveal the building program for the Berry Schools during the 1920's as costing almost four million dollars" (Wik 201).

Ford saw this as an obligation he had to take on. Like the young boy in *The McGuffey Reader* who stops to help the German immigrants, he saw it as his duty, as instructed by William McGuffey, to help the less fortunate.

Henry Ford supported many other educational projects, including The Carver School, a school he built for African American students in Bryan County Georgia. He paid all expenses related to the running of the school and contributed half a million dollars to finance these projects between 1936 and 1947. The most well known of all Ford's educational enterprises was the famous Greenfield Village School in Dearborn Michigan, this school, an exact replica of the one-room school house Ford attended as a child, was furnished with period furniture and paraphernalia.

A bit later, the McGuffey School for primary grades opened in Greenfield Village. The class met in a log cabin, a replica of the one-room school, which William Holmes McGuffey attended in Ohio. Since Ford found *The McGuffey Readers* to be the greatest intellectual influence in his life, he used them in his schools, reprinted thousands of them for general distribution, and urged educators to re-adopt them in the elementary school (Wit 204).²

Ford particularly liked the fact that the Readers stressed the ideas of industry, thrift, temperance, kindness and patriotism. He believed that this type of education could enhance human potential, especially in rural environments. He saw education as encompassing a person's total experience and he resented the reduction of history to dates, wars, textbooks, and rationalizations.

² Ford was such a fan of *The McGuffey Readers* that he had the 1857 edition of *The McGuffey Reader* reprinted and gave away thousands of copies to friends and admirers, as well as to high school and college libraries (Gorn 32).

Ford's belief in McGuffey's ideals is apparent in much more than his support of education. It is apparent in his entire business paradigm. He began, with friend Thomas Edison's urging, by concentrating on the use of the gasoline engine in behalf of farmers. From there he launched into a multitude of projects to "provide a better life for farmers and mankind. He thus became a great demonstrator of innovative techniques that he believed would benefit mankind" (Bryon 13). Ford continued to follow the principles he learned from *The McGuffey Reader*.

The children of the nineteenth century who studied with *The McGuffey Reader* seem to have taken the lessons to heart and only later in life realized that perhaps not all that McGuffey told them was true. For example Clarence Darrow, the famous attorney of the early twentieth century who grew up in Kinsman, Ohio, reading *The McGuffey Reader*, says in his autobiography,

How could one man know so much and be so good? I am sure no set of books ever came from any press that was so packed with love and righteousness, as were those readers. Their religious and ethical stories seem silly now, but at the time it never occurred to me that those tales were utterly impossible lies which average children should easily have seen through (33).

Darrow voices what most readers probably think when they read the stories William McGuffey published in his readers. When we read McGuffey, we have the luxury of reading them after having received an education. We obviously bring a more sophisticated approach to the stories than a child would, and certainly, a child raised in rural America of the nineteenth century.

The McGuffey Readers have enjoyed a resurgence in popularity; the stories, now one hundred years removed, are even more implausible than they were then but because they are so well constructed and to the point, some conservative educators believe they are the perfect tool to help teach young children the proper moral direction. A longing for the past, when life was more innocent and simpler, probably drives much of this and conservative private schools and many parents home-schooling their children opt for the revised *McGuffey Readers* over the modern textbooks that they see as too liberal. Some parents and schools object to the inclusion of subjects like homosexuality and hedonism in modern textbooks.

People of the nineteenth century, experiencing the turmoil of the Industrial Revolution and the rapid westward expansion of the United States, probably felt much the same about the eighteenth century, and *The McGuffey Readers* helped to retain that feeling of blamelessness. In much the same way that people find the amount of information available on the Internet overwhelming, people of the nineteenth century must have found the amount of information suddenly available overwhelming, as the publishing industry began, and the amount of information available increased rapidly.

The McGuffey Readers represented a conservative, traditional look at society. The parents of the mid-nineteenth century felt comfortable seeing their children taught lessons they saw as morally correct. As those children grew to adulthood and the speed with which the world advanced increased *The McGuffey Readers* continued to be a source of familiar and comfortable refuge. President Harry Truman would often praise *The McGuffey Readers* to White House guests. He has been quoted as saying that he felt the

Readers greatest benefit was “educating for ethics as well as intellect, building character along with vocabulary” (Gorn 32). McGuffey’s strong moral message and his attention to fundamentals are certainly, what he is remembered for, but as important are his contributions to the advancement of education. William McGuffey achieved certification as a teacher at fourteen years of age, became a college professor at twenty-two years of age and spent the rest of his life attempting to mold the minds of the children of the United States. With dogged determination, he pursued a course of teaching within a framework of God, moral certitude and the Protestant Work Ethic. Often his rigid adherence to his principles put him at odds with even his closest friends, but he continued, undaunted and ultimately created a legacy. The one lesson that McGuffey taught that is as important as any other, he taught not to the students, but to the educators; if education is going to keep pace with technology, it is imperative that teachers keep pace with the, sometimes rapidly occurring changes.

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