

## **THE MCGUFFEY READERS - 1836 version** (<http://www.nd.edu/~rbarger/www7/mcguiffey.html>)



In 1833, a small publishing company called Truman and Smith based in Cincinnati, Ohio, became interested in the idea of school texts. Truman and Smith began scouting for an eminent educator who could create a series of readers. They happened upon Rev. William Holmes McGuffey.

Rev. William Holmes McGuffey had already planned a series of readers and had published his first reader. This first reader of 1841 introduces children to McGuffey's ethical code. The child modeled in this book is prompt, good, kind, honest and truthful. This first book contained fifty-five lessons.

The second reader appeared simultaneously with the first and followed the same pattern. It contained reading and spelling with eighty-five lessons, sixteen pictures and one-hundred sixty-six pages. It outlined history, biology, astronomy, zoology, botany; table manners, behavior towards family, attitudes toward God and teachers, the poor; the great and the good. The duties of youth are stressed. Millions of pioneer men and women were alumni of this second reader. They were able to read and write English.

The third reader was much more formal. It contained rules for oral reading of its fifty-seven lessons. This book contained only three pictures and was designed for a more mature mind, of junior high standing today.

The fourth reader was an introduction to good literature. It contained British poetry and used the Bible among its selections. This text was addressed to the highest grade in schools, its difficulty compared to that of American secondary schools. It discussed Napoleon Bonaparte, Puritan fathers, women, God, education, religion and philosophy.

The fifth reader was designed for elocutionary exercises to increase articulation, inflection, pitch, accent, rate, emphasis and gesture. It contained poetry and prose by Sigourney, Montgomery, Addison, Irving, Young and Byron.

In the sixth and final reader of 1855, there were 186 selections, 111 great authors were quoted such as Shakespeare, Longfellow, Dickens and Addison. The theme of the selections included several forms of composition, description, narration, argumentation and exposition. In this book there were also seventeen selections from the Bible.

The readers were very moralistic in tone. They presented the White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant as the model American.

These "eclectic readers" - meaning that the selections were chosen from a number of sources - were considered remarkably literary works and probably exerted a greater influence upon literary tastes in the United States more than any other book, excluding the Bible.

Prepared by Shannon Payne

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