

## Responses to "Disturbing Teacher Letter"

Sadly, that is not an isolated situation. Increasingly, pressure over standardized testing has forced any sort of creativity or originality from the classroom. That is why I particularly love using the Bad Wolf Press shows - you inject life into the curriculum without taking away too much time from what we are mandated to do.

Yes, this is the case at my school....I always try to squeeze one of your plays at the end of the year....wish i could do more....the kids love them and they come back years later and remember what part they played, etc.

It happens a lot, more so since NCLB. And with the current sentiment rolling through the country, I'm afraid it's going to get worse. The best teachers know that it's the interesting, different stuff that makes learning great. Unfortunately, not all administrators share that vision.

We are allowed to do a show but upper grades have to do it earlier in the year before test prep takes over. Test prep does define everything, though, especially once January rolls around (through early May).

Also, I should add that the district (or maybe NYC overall) requires that schools provide a certain amount of hours in some artistic area, and school progress reports reflect that. Otherwise, I'm sure we wouldn't be permitted. However, this doesn't mean the schools invest any money in it. So, playing classical music during math tests counts. And, as usual, it's left up to the teachers (in some non-poor areas perhaps parents contribute as well) to pay for any and all materials.

Thanks for sharing/asking,

Hi Ron...Our 1st graders (along with their fourth grade buddies) are presenting two of your plays this year. We had our ancestors unit this fall and presented "We Come From Everywhere!" Now we are rehearsing for the Life Cycles to be presented next month! WE ALL LOVE IT! The kids get so excited and the older students help the younger 1st graders with their parts and songs. I can't imagine teaching just the three Rs all day long. Boring for us and the students. Your musicals encourage reading comprehension, science & social studies vocabulary, collaboration and ENJOYMENT at the same time. English learners understand concepts better, because we are "acting out" the curriculum. The best of both worlds! Thanks again for these great, creative learning tools.

First, I wanted to thank you for following up my purchase of "California Mission...and More" with a personalized letter sent to my home address. That was an individualized touch that was the sign of a businessman who "gets it".

Secondly, yes, it is true that most teachers have moved away from the arts in order to prepare for the "Test". It's very sad and something that I will never buy into. Unfortunately, it is how we are judged by the District, the Parents, and Society. Test results are the numerical data that these constituents want to hang their hats on because it is an easy way to assess progress/achievement.

I am currently rehearsing the play with my students and they absolutely love it. We are going to perform it for the parents and the school for Open House. It is going to be a hit.

In the past, I have also used your play on the Greek myths. The song about the Minotaur is great. The students love acting it out!

Ron, this is NOT an isolated case. It happens everywhere. At my school, high SES and very few English language learners, with very high state testing scores, my former principal would not let ANYTHING that was not related to testing happen until the middle of May, when testing was over. It was hard to get a play or a field trip or a special art project done until mid-May, and then there is not a lot of time left in the school year.

Luckily, we got a new principal who loves and appreciates the arts, and our 3rd grade was able to do "We Come From Everywhere" in the fall. We will do our Orange county play after testing, as usual, but we will do two plays this year in 3rd grade! Amazing!

I am in a little bit different of a situation because I teach gifted/high achievers. However, our county's focus is on the test at level that is disturbing. I had to show proof that the arts are beneficial to convince my principal to let me do our show.

BUT she loved it and wants us to do it again AFTER testing so the other classes can see it. (Character Matters)

**So my question for you all: is this an isolated case, or do you struggle to include the "interesting stuff" in your classroom?**

Oh, most DEFINITELY :( I haven't done any play in the past 3 years. It has been "discouraged", to put it nicely.

To answer your questions, luckily at my school we haven't been told that we are not allowed to do plays or other fun activities. However, I will say that it is tough to find the time to squeeze it in. Because I am fortunate enough to have a class of advanced (or "gifted") 3rd graders who learn the curriculum pretty quickly, I am able to find the time to squeeze in play practice (although it is still tough to find the 15 minutes or so a day to squeeze it in). The general ed. classrooms have a much harder time fitting it in because they are more worried about those test scores, and honestly most of them do not do plays. It is really sad how test-driven education has

become, and how it has taken most of the "fun" out of learning. I'm still keeping my fingers crossed that things will change soon!

My kids do LOVE the plays, so thank you for that! We are currently in the process of practicing "America's Tallest Tales" and will be performing next week. It really helps bring those stories to life, and we're all singing the songs practically in our sleep! :)

This is typical in schools these days. We are under lots of pressure to get all kids "proficient" in math and ELA. Time for anything else takes a back seat. It's up to local administrators to remind staff not to "lose all the joy" in learning.

Ron, I have been doing your plays for years and the students and parents are thrilled with them. However, each year it gets harder and harder to get support and cooperation from the administration. They don't see what I see: students who "get it" finally from singing and acting it out. Also, each year I spotlight students who aren't the ones that usually get singled out for special notice. They just blossom! Both of my own children are in the performing arts. They got their start at school. I am determined to keep it up as long as I can, as long as I can keep convincing the administration that it's worth the time and effort.

Be careful what you wish for...I think if teachers have the time to write to you between all the !@#% assessments they must administer, you're going to be deluged.

I have found over the years, that the best way of ensuring student success, especially on standardized tests, is to keep them engaged in the learning process. Students are always willing to learn when school is interesting, relevant, and it the only place around that certain fun activities can happen. I have personally done at least 10 of your plays and have students come back year after year reporting that it is often the highlight of their elementary school experience.

However, I always take the approach that you can't teach language arts in isolation or with the aim of having kids do well on tests. They know when instruction is not authentic or relevant to what interests them and will check out early if they don't see why we are teaching what we teach. There is no reason why school can't be interesting and fun throughout the year.

Doing a musical or making class movies is usually the highlight of the year, but certainly is not the only fun thing that happens in my class. Students will learn to love language arts, or any subject, to the extent that they know their teaching is interested and engaged along with them.

Boredom is just a symptom of weak teaching, and like in any profession, you have people who love what they do and people who don't. I don't necessarily see anything systemically wrong, just a lack of enthusiasm. Keep up the great work. I so appreciate you guys.

Unfortunately it is true. I am one of the rule breakers. I think it's too important, so I do it anyway... but I have lots of enemies. The teachers at my new school hate me and give

me crap all the time about doing "extra stuff." It sucks, but you know what I say? They can kiss my you know what, because I, like the teacher in the letter you mentioned, have had kids come back and say it was the best part of school, and many have gone on to be in drama in high school and college. I always used your Macbeth play (brilliant, absolutely brilliant) as a jumping point for teaching sixth graders Shakespeare, and many have told me they learned so much that their college classes about Shakespeare were EASY! We need the plays and there are teachers out there breaking the rules everyday!

PS: You think it's bad now... they want to cut our budgets even more, and all the teachers with the energy and willingness to do plays all got laid off (me included). Let's just hope they don't follow through.

I just talked three friends into buying your plays and dropping the curriculum last quarter. I'm proud of myself.

I am extremely blessed to be teaching at a public school where the arts are valued as an integral and necessary ingredient to a child's education. However, I have met endless numbers of teachers who say they are not allowed to teach anything but language arts and math. We have one district locally that allows teachers one hour a week for history and science, but no art or music. It's a crazy time in education.

My class just started our first Bad Wolf play. We are working on We Come From Everywhere. Thanks for creating such a fun and engaging play!

In my nine years of high school biology, which is state-tested less than 3/4 the way through the course, I had to make sure to hit all important aspects that would be on the test. However, I taught those concepts using engaging activities and labs. The students remembered the stuff while having fun. Meanwhile a floater in my room spent one half of every day, yes every day, practicing test questions. All of our kids passed the test, but guess whose kids also knew biology?

You can teach any way you want and still cover everything..that's the beauty of these plays..you get reading, music, drama, public speaking, movement (p.e.), and a science, math, or social studies covered at the same time (efficient), while keeping the kids engaged (better classroom management!)...even though administrators make you prepare for a test, if you are an efficient teacher you'll cover all that along the way anyway...

I have always included your plays in my classroom. Many times it is just the music to teach a core concept through a different medium. We recently used Geology Rocks with our science unit. A full production with staging and costumes is usually in the spring....after testing. I feel very fortunate that I am able to teach in a district that allows me the **freedom** to incorporate your plays in the curriculum.

Working for the California Council of Social Studies I have heard stories from all over the state of California where curriculum is scripted. Each and every school day, each and every student and teacher better be on the same lesson at the same time. Scary stuff. Many schools are teaching only language arts, math, and some science; those items that are on the test. Social studies and science (5TH grade

only) are not tested and therefore are not a priority in many schools. If you want to get involved the California Council of Social Studies is working with a lobbyist in Sacramento to change what schools are teaching. They have the saying, "If it ain't tested, it ain't taught." They have successful getting one bill signed that would have social studies reading excerpts in the language arts portion of the test. There is still much to do.

Thank you for supporting teachers and more importantly recognizing the importance of the arts for children. Keep those plays coming. Maybe we could write a play for our government officials who don't know what is best for kids!

California Council of Social Studies ([CCSS.org](http://CCSS.org)) will be having their 51st conference next March in Anaheim. It would be great place to talk with teachers from all over the state.

Very true, especially if you are an PI (Program Improvement School) You are only allowed to teach math and language arts. 30 minutes a day is allowed for social studies, science, P.E., and art - all of these subjects combined 30 minutes a day! Sad day in education. Our future is in the hands of people who will know how to bubble in the answer "C"

Oh yes, we struggle. We are mandated to stop core instruction for 30 minutes per day while we teach ELD using approved programs. We are doing an intervention class 30/day with approved programs. We are out early one day a week for grade level meeting time (PLC) and we have 3 furlough days. This is in addition to be title 1 and so VERY aware of what our test scores are. While most of the aforementioned time takers have sound reasoning behind them, reality is, there is less and time to teach standards, let alone add in other things.

I still do your musicals though! There are enough musicals available that meet the standards of my grade level that I feel comfortable including them as part of the curriculum.

This letter is of course the reality for many schools. Teachers are evaluated with a formula that includes children's test scores. Testing, mock testing, and diagnostic testing is the common denominator for schools in NYC. Also, there are other factors besides test scores such as school culture that influences whether a teacher uses the arts.

My school does encourage music, dance, and theater. Last year, my fifth graders enjoyed putting on the show. This year, the quality review was not a positive experience for my school and my motivation to work on a play (that means expending more energy) has already been spent. Funds, time and space are also other reasons for teachers not to get involved in the arts.

There is absolutely no time to do anything other than teach to the test. Two years ago I was able to do a play with 100 5th graders because the state test came early enough in the year that we had

some time. This year the tests are in April, followed by spring break, followed by May. School ends the first week in June. I did just order Grammar Pirates hoping that I could use a song here and there to liven things up a bit. Administration has put sooo much pressure on teachers to show results, that we are all running scared, afraid to spare one minute out of our educational minutes. Aligning your plays with the California standards and letting us know exactly what standard they are teaching would maybe allow us to integrate them into our curriculum more.

The same is true here in FL. In grades 3 - 12, students are taught to the test. When I taught 4th & 5th grade it was awful! You spend from August - March cramming these kids full of information just to pass a test. Now they have pushed it a month later, and our FCAT testing is in April. The second language learners and Special Ed students also have to pass the state standardized tests. There is no time for fine arts of any kind. We feel fortunate that we have a fabulous music and art teacher, but out of a 6 day rotation, our students get 45 minutes of art and music. The other 4 days are in P.E.

That is exactly why I volunteer my time to direct the school Drama Club. It is an afterschool program that meets once a week. It is open to students in grades 3 - 5. I have seen kids with major behavioral issues change because they are in the program. Shy, introverted kids seem to shine onstage. It is a huge reward! I am truly blessed that my principal allows me to do this program for our children.

For my Reading Club second grade students, I start them out with Readers Theater and work up to memorizing parts. At the end of the school year we present our own Fairy Tale plays for the students parents. They are such stars! If only my district could afford for me to teach Drama to the entire school!

Keep doing what you are doing! You give us all smiles, laughs, and the knowledge that putting on a play is not just "fluff". These shows change kids' lives!

Luckily, I am at a school where teachers are allowed to "balance" their curriculum. Yes, I have standards which I help my students to meet, and yes, there is a state test that my students and all the other students of my district must take and be scored on.

That being said, I am allowed to be the professional and can see what techniques best help the group of students I have in front of me this year to learn the grade level content and be thinking, problem-solving human beings. If that means building a 3-dimensional object in math, exploring the newspaper for current events while seeing how an expository piece of writing is created, reading about Shakespeare and his life and times and comparing him to a Steven Spielberg and discussing why his great works are still performed over 400 years after his death, or reenacting entering Ellis Island to get my students to empathize with the immigrants who entered the US in the 1800s, or even singing some Bad Wolf Press songs and performing a musical, then I WILL do that in addition to the paper and pencil work that is sometimes necessary in a school setting.

Students who are taught how to think and how to think "out of the box" along with some test-taking tips sprinkled in, really do the best on any assessment given. I have found that a combination of all the above with high expectations and support for the students to meet these expectations are imperative to creating a nurturing educational environment.

I am privileged enough to have an administrator who realizes that I use the arts in my class. I am allowed a little freedom, but it is the norm that all we are to do is make sure our kids are ready to take the state tests. The fear that we would be a PI (program improvement ) school and be taken over by the

state is great. It is sadder that we are under such pressure when our state has no money to support us and is asking us as professionals to do more with fewer supplies and pay cuts.

I hope this does not lead your company to go out of business because we are not able to use your plays as often as we want.

That is a very disturbing letter. Over the years, my 3rd graders have performed 4 of your plays. However, my principal only allows us to "focus on the arts" after the STAR test. I always do a play during the last 2 weeks of school, although I would prefer to do one sooner. I don't think a month has gone by this year when either I or my 3rd grade colleague hasn't lamented that we don't have time to do "the fun stuff" anymore. I still sing with my students nearly every day, but the combination of decreased funding for field trip transportation (compounded by the district's fear of insurance liability if we recruit parent drivers) and pressure to improve test scores has had a severe impact on the arts. I'm grateful that our district has preserved music education with a nearly-full-time instructor and two school-wide musical programs per year, but I'm wondering how much longer that will last.

I teach 6th grade at an "underperforming" school in Santa Rosa, California. We are only suppose to use the adopted curriculum to teach. With the amount of time we are required to spend teaching to the test there is very little time left to teach Social Studies and Science. There is no time allowed to use the arts to teach now. It's very sad for teachers like me who enjoy the creative part of teaching. I've had many sixth graders come back and remember the time we performed *Theis and the Menotaur*. I know they remember what they learned about Greek Mythology from the play. I have it copied to do as a readers theater once testing is over. A sad day indeed.

EVERY teacher has the opportunity to make learning interesting, engaging, and fun! Teaching the standards is how you prepare students for standardized tests. No teacher needs to be "provided the time" to teach the arts because you can implement it while also teaching language arts, math, science, social studies, writing, and even physical education.

Students at our school are 80% + English Language Learners so my colleagues and I are constantly looking for ways to THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX when it comes to our teaching! Using plays/musicals is a fantastic way to teach fluency, intonation, vocabulary, and literary elements. I personally do not have time to teach science or social studies every single day, so I am integrating it with Rumpus in the Rainforest! My kids are SO excited to be learning about the layers of the rainforest while singing and dancing through your beautiful story. I even teach multiplication facts through song/rhyme and am constantly having kids move around in the classroom through various activities just to keep their attention!

I too, read the comment on your Facebook page last week, but with all due respect, feel it is a cop out or (if I may be harsher) laziness of the mind! Teaching is the most difficult job in the world! But teaching in an low socioeconomic neighborhood <with LOW parental support, a HIGH number of English Language Learners and a HIGH number of unmotivated children> is an IMPOSSIBLE job to have! However, I have been doing it for 8 years by continually pushing myself, my students, and their parents to the height of potential (and beyond)!

Today we had a rough run-through of our musical. I have been busting my butt through rehearsals with my 3rd graders trying to choreograph dances and memorize lines. When we performed for our buddy class, my heart filled with JOY, EXCITEMENT, and PRIDE because they truly shined!!!!!!!!!!!! And it all happened in a few short weeks!!!! Rumpus in the Rainforest has caused my students to feel confident in themselves. It's also keeping them focused on other curriculum because I am keeping them accountable in order to be a part of the performance. It's a domino effect I wasn't expecting.

Thank you for letting me share my thoughts with you!

Thank you for asking!

AND thank you for caring and inspiring!

The pressure to teach to the standards has increasingly been stronger each year. Student success is driven by standards testing. I have in most part been performing two to three plays each year with my second grade class and now 4th grade class. But, this year, the pressure is so intense that I am only doing one play... "Gold Dust or Bust" We are performing for family fun night and also for the high school drama class. On the same evening that we are performing for drama club, we have decided to do two evening performances for the parents. We have 60 4th grade students performing.

I am a homeschool mom and fun is a big part of our school. I am sorry to hear that this is not always the case with public schools.

Yes, my instructional minutes are monitored and I am to use state adopted curriculum during these times, but I still get to do "Little Red" after state testing gets underway at the end of April. My current 3rd graders saw my last crop of 3rd graders perform it last year and they can't wait to perform it for 2nd graders this year. I have also snuck in a couple of little Readers Theaters and plays here and there, but don't tell anyone, please:)

It certainly isn't isolated in my case! I have colleagues that look at me like I'm crazy for making time for an afterschool enrichment just so that I can incorporate plays like yours into their lives. I used to do it as a classroom thing and invited the parents but haven't had time to do that in the last 2 years. This is very frustrating for me and kills me that it seems the teachers and the students seem to only be judged by their scores on a test (that some of my third graders don't even have enough time to finish!)

Sadly this letter is not isolated. High stakes testing has taken a lot of the fun out of school. I know of schools where principals have told teachers that they have no time for anything but reading and math. Schools in program improvement (not meeting testing goals) have it worse. We get some visual arts in school, thank to PTA purchasing a program, but performing arts are often overlooked.

That is why I just bought a few of your products. I want to do a full on play for my class when testing is done so we can spend our ELA time on a fun way to keep moving through the curriculum. After testing is my favorite time of the year because I can teach and meet those standards not on the test in a fun and meaningful way. I bought Pirates of Grammar Island that I can do in pieces here and there along with



test prep ELA to keep things fun while still teaching those standards that need to be covered prior to testing.

Thank you for the good work you've done with your plays. I look forward to using them.

What do classes do after tests are over? We're in school a full month after standardized tests and we've done a play for the past six years end of May-early June. It makes for a great ending of the year. The whole school sees us and we usually do an evening performance for family and friends. Yes, we're a highly test-score conscious district, what district isn't? But it's still possible to do a play.

Kids don't learn by drill and kill. My students do well because they learn in a fun way. I did Missions and More last year and I am doing Gold Rush or Bust this year. I use music and art to teach math, language arts, science etc.

My English Language Learners are belting out the songs to the play like the rest of the class even though they seem quiet and not as sure of themselves at times. Ask my students about the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. They know a lot and will always remember the information because they learned it in song. I teach the standards my way. I am not about to cut out art and music, so I use it as a hook to learning the core standards.

I'm allowed to do plays, simulations, and experiments...as long as my kids test scores stay up, the administration doesn't seem to have a problem with it. However, our staff development, staff meetings, and many other communications are based entirely upon what we can do to raise our test scores. We are constantly being asked to assess our students. For instance, we now have to give "benchmark" tests three times a year in addition to the standardized tests. This takes up approximately 3-4 weeks of instructional time when all is said and done. If not for all this testing, I would probably actually be able to allow my students to read real literature books and fill in fewer worksheets that are designed to prepare them for test success.

I try to implement joyful activities into the day to make up for all the stupid test prep my kids have to do. We listen to silly theme songs during transitions, watch Brain Pop videos to introduce new topics in all subject areas, and play Jeopardy to memorize all the skills they need for the tests. I think we just have to be more innovative with how we are teaching...I mean, if I had to make the phone book interesting for my students, I would do whatever it takes. If they must do well on the tests to have opportunities open to them in the future, then, like it or not, it is my job to teach them how. Just teaching them the skills in an authentic way is no longer enough. They must learn how to watch for the tricky ways they are asked to show what they know on the tests.

I think all this focus on testing is going to eventually backfire in that young people entering the workplace for the first time are going to lack the authentic skills necessary to solve problems in reality. Therefore, I will continue to use plays and simulations to fill in that gap.

I have many of your plays, but I do not dare start them with the kids (4th graders) until after our state tests. I (and the kids) are really looking forward to performing "The Weather Show" in MAY!!! So sad...

I'm sorry this is the first you've heard of this! Classroom teachers are sad that the "art of teaching" is being replaced by very strict curriculum requirements including "pacing guides" - which are already unrealistic without trying to add something fun! Learning styles and child development are not ever mentioned in this high stakes world of standardized testing. At my school, teachers do use Reader's Theater and plays into their literacy block. Since research shows that fluency improves comprehension, they are able to use these tools. I teach music so I am still FREE to help children develop their skills and explore their innate creativity ! Thank you so much for your Aesop's Fables -- my students took your songs, added them to their versions of the fables, and added special effects with instruments, props, and dances. There was tremendous student ownership -- and so much learning AND fun! Thanks for what you do!

Our school is a private Montessori school. We have 125 students, from 2 1/2 years old to a 12 year old. We do not test. We are not mandated to follow the local school district or the state requirements for a standardized curriculum. As a result, we guide the students through math, reading (language arts), science, geography, history and anything they want to learn - at their own rate. In learning at their own rate, the child learns to solve their own problems, and generally has a much more extensive background in many subjects over that which is taught from a standardized curriculum.

When students from our school go to public schools, we have heard from their parents that they, typically, are very successful in taking standardized state directed tests.

My wife and I are very thankful that we do not have to worry about "meeting the state standards", and thoroughly enjoy working with our kids on the two Bad Wolf Press programs they present to the school and their parents every year.

I've taught 2nd grade for 11 years and it often seems to depend on the priorities of the principal what you are allowed to do or not do. It also depends on the district. I've been lucky to be able to do many of your shows with my classes over the years. I do know that other schools in my district are not allowed to "waste" time on the arts because the focus is getting kids to pass the test. If you don't pass "the test" then the state comes in and basically watches every move you make to make sure you are focused on Math and Language Arts. If this happens you are called a "Program Improvement School."

My way around all the issues is that I do not start rehearsal until after the Standardized Tests are completed for the year. It is sort of an end of the year activity for me. If you are a creative individual you will find a way to make it work. Your plays are awesome and the students love them! Please keep writing and creating!

I'm a teacher in SAUSD (Santa Ana, California) and the only thing we do is or prepare for the district and state tests or test. We don't have much time to do anything that is not standard based and test related. I make time anyway to have music, art, theatre, dance but not as much as I wished.

Unfortunately this not unusual at all. As an eighth grade English Language Arts teacher I have trouble getting my students to think creatively because they've become inured to thinking that anything they do has to have an A, B, C or D answer.

P. S. My partner teacher and I have done quite a few of your plays in the last five years. Every time we choose to do a play we have to get permission from the administration and we have to wait until the state testing is completed. This means that we end up having auditions, rehearsals, and performances in less than a month which is why your shows wonderfully fit our needs. It is a tradition at our school that the oldest grade class performs for the younger grades as a goodbye and a "look what you get to do if you study and work hard" message. So we feel it is worth begging for permission so that our students can feel accomplished and that the other grades have something BESIDES testing to look forward to it at the end of the year.

What that teacher said is, sadly, very true. I used to do several plays (especially loved Bullies Anonymous and Vacation to Mars) however, there's no way that it's workable since we have pacing guides and district administration expects to see every teacher at every grade on the same story at about the same time. Boo. So true. Teach to the test is what we do.

It is sad, but true, there is so much pressure to stick with the core! I usually do a play in the Fall and then early Spring. This year I chose the Martin Luther King Jr. mini play (loved it) and will consider a play after STAR testing.

I'm really glad you bring this up. I've worked at two schools in my 10 years of teaching. My first was a low-performing, low SES, high English language learner population school. We had NO wiggle room for instruction. We HAD to teach from the core curriculum and we were absolutely not allowed to do things that were creative and fun.

My second, current school is a wealthy, high performing, mostly English speaking school. I rarely crack open the boring old core curriculum, and spend most of my day teaching creatively.

Think there's a correlation? Absolutely. It's a sad state of affairs out there with the "No Child Left Behind" bullshit that we have to deal with in education. Thankfully I'm at a place where I love now, and next week we're performing "California Missions... and More." This will be my 3rd year doing it. My first year, we had 12 students. Last year we had 40. This year I'm doing it with 80 (two casts). Wish me luck!

I have had a 15 year teaching career and 12 of those years have been spent at a private independent school because the public schools will not allow or encourage creativity. They allow time for shows but it is minimal and the time is restricted. In private school we do plays with kids as young as 3 and 4 years old and play and theater is part of learning. Thus, they love to learn!

When people say their children are getting a good education because the test grades in their district are high or the acceptance into Ivy league colleges is high, I think so many of them are missing the point. Are their kids learning with joy and experiencing creative processes?

Ron, I can still recite every line from my first grade play (I am 55 years old). I still know the names of all the states and Presidents from singing a song. (All things I enjoyed learning!) Things are not right with the public education system on Long Island, New York and many other places. However, the private independent school I work at is an exception and I am so happy to be working there.

I am a parent volunteer who started a drama club for 4th, 5th, and 6th graders because I saw a need. I saw exactly what your letter was describing. A language arts curriculum that was void of any arts at all. I have been told outright that my afterschool program can not interfere with on the clock school time at all.

The support for the drama club is weak at best. For example, my final performance is Wednesday the 23rd of March. I had to submit forms to the school administrator in order to use the stage and the adjacent multipurpose room. The stage has two black curtains at the rear of the stage that conceal the back stage area (that the school uses to store copy paper).

Yup, sounds familiar...We do a Character Ed play every year (rotating thru Character Matters, Bullies Anonymous and Character MattersII) but it's getting harder and harder to squeeze in the time to work on the play. Character Education is something my inclusion class teaching partner and I feel very strongly about, but ever-increasing curricular demands present us with an ever-increasing challenge!

I work in a private, Quaker school, and we are given two weeks on the school stage to put together a play. My third grade class memorizes the lines for homework before we step foot on the stage, since two weeks is not very much time to block things out and practice with props. The music teacher works on the songs during music class one month prior to going on the stage. Once we are "in production" we practice one hour a day, and the children love every minute of it. I take time from Language Arts, Reading and History, since I mostly do history plays. The children do a little extra homework to keep up with their academic load.

Is it worth it? You better believe it! It builds confidence, teaches children to work together for a

common goal, builds self esteem, helps them discover talents they did not know they possessed, and is just plain fun! Many children say this is the highlight from the school year. Their parents also thoroughly enjoy our efforts every year. I am delighted to work in a school that values culture and understands that through creativity children can learn.

This teacher speaks for me too. We have not had a music program in my preschool – grade four school for the past ten years. I teach fourth grade in Massachusetts and the pressure to perform on our state tests is incredible. Our administrators would like the children to read boring short stories from a basal reader and do mindless worksheets for our reading program. The writing program is to practice writing for the state test with prompts such as “Write about a day that was fun, write about a day off from school, write about a time you were helpful, and other similar prompts. Most teachers claim we don’t have time to teach them to write about things they love but if you know how, it can be done and still have them write well for the test. We were told to forgo teaching science and social studies to fit in more math, reading, and writing.

The stress of bucking the trend is tremendous but I do it anyway. My class just did a huge unit on the rain forest and the children were so excited about it and it made them want to save the planet. They did a lot of meaningful reading and writing of fiction and nonfiction and it changed the way they look at the world.

We did your plays [Rumpus in the Rainforest](#) and [The Environmental Show](#) and the children loved it more than I can say. I was fortunate to have a parent volunteer who plays the piano and taught my children to sing all the songs thanks to your sheet music. I felt guilty for having play practices, and my principal wasn’t thrilled with me, but my class understood that we had to work harder during the day than other classes in order to be able to do the fun things and they rose to the challenge. We will do another play at the end of the year when the test pressure is off. I’m looking for some good Greek Myths to do with my class because that would fit in with the Massachusetts Language Arts Frameworks and the kids love them. I will have to check to see if you have any. If not that’s a suggestion for you.

I refuse to spend all year teaching children how to take state tests. I was hired to teach children to love learning, reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, and the arts. Children get so much out of music and doing plays. My role model is Rafe Esquith who wrote [Teach Like Your Hair’s on Fire](#) and [There are no Shortcuts](#). Thanks for helping teachers like me make school enjoyable, memorable, and educational for my students. Your plays are amazing.

I have had the same worries in terms of state mandates. The bottom line is that you plays hit a TON of standards. I just document what standards I teach with each play. I do four productions a year. My hope is to do even more next year with all of the mini plays. I loop my class so they benefit so greatly from the eight big performances over the two years I have them. We also share them with many other grades during our performance piece.

We just performed the Biomes play last Friday. It was wonderful!!!

Ron, it simply gets harder every year. In light of upcoming budget cuts, larger class sizes... it will be almost impossible. Meanwhile, my kindergarteners are enjoying Hansel and Gretel Eat Right!

Ron, just a quick note...I have had my students perform your plays for several years. When I'm teaching 5th we perform 13 Colonies and when in 3rd my class worked on Geology Rocks! I loved them both and so did the kids. Though the State mandated tests are important (5th grade must pass the Reading and Math in order to move on to Middle School, 3rd must pass reading, etc.) if it consumes the teacher, kids will miss out. After all, there is more to teaching than just the core subjects!

I use the plays above to review what we've learned for the year. My 5th graders this year are looking forward to our play because they remember seeing it performed by my class last year. I realize that this means that I only do one play a year...but we really do a great job. We memorize, have a few performances, use microphones, and perform in our library. I want to make sure the audience hears all the incredibly humorous lines. Three years ago I had a Middle School History teacher come to me and ask about the play. He said the kids in his classroom were busy one day repeating their lines and singing their songs. He wanted to know more about it! Wow...3 years later and the kids STILL remember. I'd say you're doing a great job!

I thank you for your creativity and talent. Keep up the super work, guys!

Funny you should ask. In our district we “seasoned” teachers have the option of doing a project as part of our evaluation. I decided that since 3<sup>rd</sup> grade science includes a focus on the solar system I'd take that opportunity to do “Vacation on Mars” as my project. The other 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers bought in and we produced an awesome event that both other classes and parents enjoyed. As part of the evaluation of both me and the students we observed their confidence improve, along with their test on science content. It was cute seeing them sing some of the songs to themselves as they were answering various questions.

The play alone doesn't teach them everything they need to know, however there is an AMAZING amount of content material “hidden” in the lyrics. Once encountered in other material of study they will point it out – like “Oh, Venus really is hot!”

Yes, we teach to the test. This is another modality. Thanks!

This is most definitely the case. I have to do my plays as an before or after-school enrichment class.

It is a shame, because so much learning takes place when students perform in plays and they don't even realize it. However, test scores are what “counts” according to those who make the decisions, and we work for those people.

Teachers are no longer preparing children for the real world; we are preparing them for the tests.

I think that's why your plays are so wonderful! They are what learning should be... FUN! We have to continually find a way to include this in our day-to-day teaching- even if it's just reading the play aloud.

So far our district has not mandated anything about not doing plays etc. It is the one thing I do for certain every year because it's the one thing my kids come back and tell me they remember...singing. We do all kinds of songs in here and they remember all of them. They don't remember the math pages, the stories in our anthologies, or all of the science lessons. They remember the songs and I too remember the singing from elementary school and that is it. So, here we are still allowed to sing!

I work at a charter school because my experiences in traditional public school were similar to those you posted. Let's hear it for alternative education!

It is sad, but true. Idaho has just passed legislation that ties teachers' salaries to how well their students perform on a standardized test. One measure! Can you believe that? There's more. Freshman high school students will be provided with lap tops because they will be required to take at least 4 on line courses. (One student said that all this will do is make students better cheaters.) This will allow the state to lay off about 700 teachers.

Savvy teacher-technicians have always taught to the test through the curriculum provided by the districts. They run around waving the test scores claiming that their students are "learning." One that I know of has her 6th grade students write out each multiplication fact 100 times whether or not they have already mastered multiplication facts.

Teacher-educators teach children. Each child is unique and wonderful with strengths and weaknesses. We teach to the child's strengths whether it be through movement, song, drawing, or discussion. These students learn more than just facts. This is the type of teacher I aspire to be. It is not always supported, but so far, I have managed to stay in teaching profession for 17 years.

Please continue writing your wonderful plays. I am certain that there are a pocket of teachers that teach children, not curriculum.

This is very very very common in our district. I own the plays and have never got the courage to do them since they may interfere with "academic time." It really stinks!!!!!!!!!!

It is true. I have tried to do plays for two years now. I have not had the "time" and the afterschool participation drop rate is so high, I have had to cancel both plays. Sad, very sad.

I am the music director at a special ed. school and have been using your plays for the past several years. Besides the integration with core subjects that the plays offer, they are full of humor and inuendo, something in particular, our students need to learn to understand. The parents of our students LOVE the plays we mount and can see the difference they make all across the board. It seems that these benefits might be difficult to measure in testing, which is perhaps the problem. Yet, the performances *are* visual, auditory proof that the students are actually making significant learning gains in reading, language and social studies (oh, and music and drama to boot).

As a long time music educator I will have to add that many in education do not seem to trust that students can and do learn while enjoying themselves...

I have heard this from many of my fellow teachers as well. This teacher is not alone, and in the past two years I have heard more and more from teachers about the time and teaching requirements for administering standardized tests resulting in the loss of other valuable instructional experiences. I have worked many hours focusing on advocacy for the performing arts. You should know that so many of the teachers I work with value their time to work on projects and productions and were hurt when told that they could not take away from 'instruction time' to work with their classes on endeavors such as these. We thank you and the many others that create opportunities like these for providing such a valuable resource for us as teachers and outlet for our students.

I think you will be overwhelmed at the response of the challenge to keep plays and programs like Bad Wolf within curriculum and daily planning. I cannot say enough good things about the joy, learning, and sense of community that resulted from including Bad Wolf plays in my teaching. My students were elated to produce a play--learning content for the standards all along the way. They showed a sense of pride that was priceless!

In our school district, we are required to teach the adopted curriculum. Other teachers in our district have been told by administrators that the preparation for a play or production takes too much time away from the curriculum. I continue to perform plays and incorporate the lessons into the curriculum. For example, Pirates from Grammar Island was a great way to learn about writing conventions AND the kids loved it!

High stakes testing is a reality in our education system. No Child Left Behind requires all students to meet minimum standards by 2014. The repercussions are huge if our school does not perform well on the state test and could lose federal funding. It's tough out here in the trenches.

Lucky for us, our tiny school (32 kids K-8) does 4 of your plays a year! We do include art, music and drama constantly AND our test scores are the highest in our district! However....due to budget our school may be closed next year. Thank you for the excellent plays that you provide. I think unfortunately, no arts is a trend especially in low income schools. The affluent schools have parents that raise money for the "extras" like art, music, p.e. and science.



I included your plays in my 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades in Irvine Unified School District for about 14 years. I chose the plays that most closely matched the curriculum to avoid controversy. Some years, I did as many as three plays. I guess Gold Dust or Bust was my favorite, but I did many others. The kids loved them! Parents raved. Many former students went on to do theatre in Middle School and High School and invited me to their plays. Many said that our class play was their first experience that led them to love theatre. I even had 3 students who majored in theatre in college.

Last June I retired. 2009-2010 was the first year that I was not able to include a play mainly because of reluctant teammates and the RTI schedule for reading and math. It left little time for anything. It was a hard decision to make, but I had fought the battle for many years to include your plays. I guess I just got tired that final year. No support whatsoever.

Yes, the teacher that wrote you is not alone. I was considered a maverick and an innovator for many years. There is little room for creativity any more. Irvine Unified School District was one of the last to fall to the vendor-driven curriculum where the pages in the workbook reign supreme. I hated it. I retired a year early (after 30 years) because I was too tired to fight it anymore.

I miss the kids. I miss the plays. In the future, I hope to find another venue to work with kids in the theatrical language arts. I tutor privately and hope to create a small group of students to work with over the summer. I've moved to a new town so I don't have the references I once had.

I use Grammar Island and Grammasaurus to teach Language Arts. We are doing Munchkin Mediation to teach self control since that is an issue this year. I am using it with my second graders. I won't give these up.

Sorry to say this but she is right. It is a sad time for teaching- it is all about the test! We can't even display the kids artwork on the bulletin boards anymore- it has to be data from the testing!!!! For some kids art was the only place they could shine! Like kids want to stand around and discuss data.

I've been teaching forever and never thought I would teach to the test but we don't have a choice. I love your plays and somehow sneak them in! They are kids for crying out loud!!!! I guess I've vented enough.

I would have to say that this case is more the norm than the exception. I work in a district that prides itself on an emphasis on the arts. However, it is still near impossible to find the time to do a play or creative project and still get done with all the mandated curriculum and meet district expectations regarding standardized test results.

Your plays and songs have been a huge help to me and my colleagues

because they allow us to incorporate fun, creative works into our instruction without too much preparation. Without them, I would not get barely any arts into my program.

I have a few trusty favorites that I pull-out depending on the grade level I am teaching, and they are always a huge success for me, the students, and their families to enjoy.

I have used your plays for many years. I usually cannot do them until after the state testing in May. Even when I taught first grade (they don't test) I had to wait until we had completed the curriculum. But I have used the songs all year, especially Grammarasaurus. I use it for ELD and grammar (at least until the boom box it was in was stolen). I also regularly use songs from The Case of the Missing Paragraph. I play songs from many of the plays when it applies to what we are learning. As long as we align things with the state standards, I've been able to use the plays. I have used them with first grade, second grade and fourth grade. I have done The Weather Show (5 times), Gold Dust or Bust (twice), Geology Rocks, Bullies Anonymous and The Garden Show.

I find that the plays make a huge difference in student achievement. I assign my lowest students the biggest parts. By the time we are done they have a huge memory bank of sight words that leads to increases in comprehension and fluency. My English Language Learners gain confidence in not only reading but in writing and speaking as well.

The story you heard is not an isolated one. It is common, especially in schools that are in Program Improvement. I have been lucky to have the support of my principals. I love your products and use them frequently in my classroom. Thank you for all the work involved in making such a quality product.

I am happy to say that I consider plays part of the curriculum. They help to fulfill requirements in language arts such as public speaking and oral presentation. After all is said and done I think my kids deserve to be kids, and will probably remember the plays we have done this year more than anything else. I am under tremendous pressure to just teach the basics but I would rather take a lower core grade than neglect the arts. In the end it is all about what is best for kids...not test scores.

I am happy to report that our school still encourages the arts in all forms: singing, dancing, acting, painting, creative writing. We still believe that an art rich environment is important. I have done several of your plays and so have many other teachers at my school. Thanks for your creativity. We appreciate it.

I have produced Bad Wolf Press plays with my Third Graders, and this year, 3/4 Combination Class. We do the plays after CST Testing, and we begin learning the songs over Spring Break. The musicals are always the highlight of our students' year, and have become a "rite of passage" for the Third Graders.

Our school PTA pays a consultant to come in and direct a production with each of the 4th and 5th grade classes, as well. The 1st and 2nd Graders also produce a yearly musical with each class. Our parents and administration strongly advocate the fine arts, including art and music (every 3rd grader learns to play the soprano recorder).

Like the teacher in your e-mail, I am feeling the pressure to "test, test, test" and "raise those API scores!" I am so thankful that there are quality musicals out there for our students! Thank you for all the plays Bad Wolf Press has created. I will continue to share the joy of drama/music with my students, because I believe that every student has gifts, and not of all them can be assessed by a standardized test!

As a new teacher it is a real struggle. We try so hard to do the fun and engaging activities, like hands on sciences experiments and play, but the state is so concerned with test scores. What they fail to realize is that if we had more flexibility to teach them "the fun stuff" in "a fun way", the test score would go up. But drilling the information into them so they can score well on the test is obviously not working in my eyes. I am currently doing your friendly neighborhood helpers play with my kindergarten class. We are practicing for a show in April. They love it!! I plan to do more of these types of things as I start my career as a new teacher.

No Ron, unfortunately, this is the case in almost all schools. This is the direction education has taken. I have only been a teacher a short while but I am ready to change professions. If those in charge were asked if teachers only have time to prepare for the test they would deny it and say of course not. I know that in several school systems teachers are now required to assess their students by a program and it has to be done on a palm computer. It takes about 5-7 days to complete and we have to fit it in. Well I can tell you most days during the testing window that's all I get done and my students are left to do handouts since the assessments are one on one and timed so I can't be interrupted. Keep up the good work and maybe one day things will change.

Where have you been that this is news to you? My gosh the only time we have fun is after testing. Everything is about the test scores. We have more students, less resources, virtually no parental support and higher standards.

I've been a Kindergarten/Pre K teacher for 27 years. They'll drag me out of my classroom holding on to my piano and painting easel! My show Goldilocks and the Three Bears was the hit of the Kindergarten last year. Looking forward to another great show this year!

My teacher friends and I have had many discussions about this very topic. I have been teaching many years and have used plays as a tool for preparing my students for a successful life. It is difficult to find the time. Making time for the interesting stuff is also good teaching. Students retain more that way. We need to make the time.

I have seen in my class students who struggled to read, memorize lines for a play and come back and say that these plays changed their lives. This is not an isolated case, it happens each year. I won't stop because it is not extra, it is core teaching. I guess I am saying I feel as passionate as you do about plays as a tool for teaching. I agree, this is not the education I want to see either. I am committed to not let that happen in my classroom.

I agree with the letter, but BWP materials help me keep my fist in the air, chanting "Make learning fun! Make learning fun!" We did a play this week, and it received RAVE reviews from parents, teachers, and students. Talk about motivating a child to read, memorize, show confidence, take an academic risk, work collaboratively, the list goes on and on. My students were energized to read the play. They took it home in their spare time, they read it and sang songs in the car. If you want to bring up test scores, appeal to the lowest motivated student, the one who is discouraged by all the rote, repetitive information. Use plays as a carrot if you must, to encourage students to get through the "dry stuff" we all have to learn. I'm lucky that my principals' have always let me do what's best for my students, but that's not the norm in many schools. My scores are high due to my students' socio-economic background and what they bring to the learning table, AND because they buy into my class culture that says "Be the best you can be!" Part of them seeing themselves as worthwhile is providing real life opportunities like a play to encourage them to be their best. To teachers out there, begin covert operations to bring fun back into the classroom with rich educational content. Bad Wolf Press is that in a nutshell (sometimes more "nut" than shell, but that's what makes it fun!)

Ron, it is sad to say, but the letter you received is not an isolated case. Here in my little California town we are expected to assess, assess, assess. We give our elementary students 3 district assessments, some with 5+ pieces that must be administered one-on-one to first graders. The data must be "bubbled" for each individual answer, for each individual student, then scanned on a specific scanner and the district receives the results. Then the teachers are contractually bound to meet to discuss, compare and explain the results to one another and administrators. All of this happens at least 3 times a year. Second through sixth graders must also take the California standardized testing in the Spring. So, we jump from one test to another. I usually have an Authors' Tea Party in the Spring so that students can share a piece from their anthology of writing with their classmates, parents and grandparents. In addition, the upper grade teachers want Open House in May so they can finish testing and prepare for families to "tour" their rooms. All of this to say, I was hoping to have my students perform "Friendly Neighborhood Helpers" in May, but I am worried I will not be able to teach and practice with the students in the flurry of everything else!

My husband, two children and I are all very involved in our local theater company and we work together to produce my school's talent show. We know the arts are so valuable and have watched the positive impact it has had on our own children's lives, that is why I try to introduce performance theatre to my first graders. Just wanted to share a glimpse from a first grade California teacher's perspective.

My class has recently performed your play "Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock" and it was fantastic. I have a shy group of first graders who took on that musical with a passion. I was very pleased with the material you provided (especially the songs with and without lyrics). I followed the directions about not sending home the script with music and we sang everyday the songs that were to be for our performance. It was fantastic.

On the subject of what we can teach, Berkeley Unified has a set curriculum that they have

us cover. However, in our curricular day, we have freedom to be creative and do things that will benefit the education of the students. We still take time for art, drama, P.E., Music, Garden, Cooking and feel stressed and harried over trying to make sure we keep up with our reading, writing, social studies, science and math standards. Some teachers feel the extra stuff is too much and takes time away from what we need to accomplish in our reading, writing and math curriculum. Some teachers feel as if they can integrate the drama and art with their curricular goals. It is tough to do both when there isn't time for planning, prep., etc. But, in the end, it is worth it.

I struggle to include interesting stuff only because I am expected to move my students toward the curricular goals of second grade. But it is only me that makes it a struggle because I feel it is an integral part of learning. My district encourages us to do what is best for the students as long as we follow our district reading, writing and math expectations and that our programs improve the education of our students. It is pro-arts, music and drama.

Again, I think we are lucky in Berkeley to have these opportunities in teaching. I'm not so sure about other school districts.

This is not an isolated instance. Fortunately my test scores are among the highest in the district, and our school consistently has made AYP (Acceptable Yearly Progress) since this nonsense began. Therefore I have freedom to put on plays, go on nature walks, create literature groups, build pet rock houses with legos, set up simulations, etc. However, even teachers at our school, including me, have seriously and sadly cut back teaching time of things not tested like social studies, art, health, etc.

Schools that have not made AYP usually have administrators that think the answer to their problems are more drill and kill with "research based programs." (None of these research-based programs seem to mesh very well with brain research, but...details, details.) I know first hand of schools and teachers where, for example, teachers are not even allowed to take their students outside of the classroom to teach their weather units, all language arts time spent can be done only with the district-adopted series and not supplemented by other materials. I could go on and on, but it's too depressing. "THEY" (whoever they are) just don't get the importance of motivation and background knowledge. We may be having more kids that can decode words, but very few of my fourth graders at the beginning of the year could give their city, state, and country.

So, after 40 years of teaching, a bunch of them when I was fortunate enough to run into Interact Learning units and Bad Wolf Plays, I am going to take early retirement in June--well, not too early, I'm 62. But I've only put in 27 years in Utah, so it's early retirement for here. I still plan on subbing about half the year until I'm too old to do so. The other half of the year I plan on volunteering in small villages, rural schools, and indigenous areas in Costa Rica.

No it is not an unusual case. I purchased one of your plays last fall and it is still sitting on my desk in the mailing envelope it came in. I do not have time in my afternoon (I am half time) to do it. I will however make time at the end of the year when all the scores are in and we can breathe. It will be a great way to end the year. Too bad we don't have time to do it all year.

I have been doing "Gold Dust or Bust" with my 4<sup>th</sup> graders for many years. It has become a well loved tradition at our school. It teaches so much about the subject, especially since the Social Studies text has been replaced with a workbook, (It is not a tested subject area). Sadly, we have had to change much of what we do to accommodate the "Test". In order to fit it in around the necessary focus on testing in my 4/5 combo, I have held practices after school. We are going on with the show because it is such a rich experience, letting many talents come alive that might otherwise not have had the chance. My students love it! My own child, now grown, who participated in her elementary years said, "There are just some things you can't show on a scantron".

**It is sad to say that getting ready for a test is the major focus of educating students in Ohio. It has to be our focus because we are all judged on the performance of our students. The pressure is on our administration and teachers to make sure that every student meets all of the learning targets. Happily, I can say that the performance of my students has been excellent while performing your plays! I say that because my students love performing the comical, entertaining, educational plays that you write and in turn perform well on the state tests that they must take.**

**As you have mentioned many times, it does not take a great deal of time to learn the songs. We practice reading them in unison, as duets, trios, quartets, etc. (Vocabulary we need to know) We research the phrases, words, and jokes they don't understand, (dictionary, online research skills), we read scripts as readers theater, (build reading fluency), we learn to speak so others can understand us, and while transitioning between subjects or cleaning up to go to lunch or home, we sing and dance. I mark each song with the learning goal that we are practicing. I choose plays that have the content we are learning before our tests. We are working on our second play this year. We performed *The Pirates of Grammar Island*, in January and are just starting to work on *Munchkin Mediation*. After our tests in May, we will put more time into the play and perform the last week of school. That gives us something to look forward to, keeps us learning and will allow us to teach the rest of our school through drama and song.**

**I hope that answers your question. We can still have fun and be creative teachers in Ohio, at least in my school. My principal sees the benefits that these plays bring to my students and to those who watch the performances. I am thankful that I searched the web six years ago and found your plays. Keep them coming!**

I do your plays every year in my class, and my principal loves them. No worries here.

I teach at a Montessori private school in Northridge, CA. I had my students perform your "Name That Internal Organ" play while I was associated with another school in Memphis, TN a few years ago. I thought it would be a great opportunity to perform it here at Casa Montessori as my students had just begun studying human organ systems. It, as previously, was a great experience for our students and parents. I have never received such accolades for anything done in the past as we did for these performances (we had two in order to accommodate all parents). Parents can't believe that their children are so well versed and able to do such a great job. I had a parent tell how much it meant to her daughter, who was having a stuttering problem, to have such a large part. She had no problem with either dialogue or the great songs. My students have learned more about human organ systems from this play than they ever would have just studying the topic.

There is an emphasis in Montessori schools to teach across the curriculum. We incorporated their reading practice, visual art, music, performance and of course human biology into our sessions. What more could you ask for? Our students score very high on their standardized tests and still have time for the aspects of education that contribute to their overall growth as human beings, not just vessels of facts. This kind of learning is fun and productive. They enjoyed it so much they immediately wanted to plan a new show.

I feel very fortunate to work in a district where the arts are still valued. We are just getting ready to start learning the music/parts to one of your plays- either Geology Rocks or the Gold Rush play. Kids love your plays and they learn and have fun at the same time. Plus it's a great change of pace on rainy days when they can't get outside! We have other plays that we just do for fun at the end of a unit to kind of wrap it up (We Come From Everywhere, and California Missions), so don't stop doing what you do because it's great for kids!

**I am a 4th grade teacher in Napa. We rarely, if ever, get to teach creatively. Our school is all about test scores and are always the main topic of conversation in any staff/district meeting. If you do not get your kids to perform on these tests there are consequences, they are subtle in that you get labeled a poor teacher, parents don't want their kid in your class, and you are scolded and criticized. As a matter of fact, last year my knees were literally shaking when I passed out the test.**

**Almost everything I love about teaching has been cut or we can't do it. My kids are tested not only by the state, but by the district's mandated "multiple measures" testing (assessment). My kids HATE these bubble in tests, and we do them twice monthly...they take about 2 full days.**

**I get fed up sometimes and teach what I am not suppose to....for example we are reading HOLES by Louis Sachar. The kids CLAP when we get out the book because they LOVE it. They cheer when we read our pioneer play (I wrote it).**

**I am so sick and tired of the public bashing teachers...we are on the SAME SIDE.**

**I still love my job, but what I am forced to teach and how I teach it leaves much of my "teaching magic" on the side, literally locked in a closet. My own 2nd grader doesn't like school because of this type of pressure, she cries at night sometimes because she doesn't want to go. It rips my heart out. I so want her to love learning.**

**It's the kids missing out, and we teachers miss the joy, feeling like our magic worked on a child. There's nothing like it.**

**Don't people care? It seems not here.**

**Thanks for asking. Wow, I really went off here!**

This is not at all my experience. I do two plays per year with my class. One is a major production, which we just performed on Thursday, and one is in support of my social studies curriculum (for which I have used your awesome 1776 play). In addition we have an amazing hands-on science program, and the kids are excited about all areas of the curriculum. The best way to prepare for any test is through quality education. Those that change their methods to cater to test are foolish. Don't stress. I'd say most of us still strive to provide a quality education that we can be proud of.

I do not think the teacher you mentioned was an isolated event.....we are a K & 1 grade bldg so we do not test, but we constantly prepare them for the test they will be taking in the 2nd grade.....i am an elementary music teacher in this bldg. I also do reading interventions daily as part of my job to help prepare for future testing and current requirements on literacy assessments. While I feel the 3 R's should be the focus at this level, I feel the arts also should be there to continue to encourage the creativity in this early childhood age. By the way, I taught a "testing" grade (3rd) classroom for 14 years....I was so burnt out due to the emphasis on testing I was ready to quit.....it was very refreshing to go back to music...thanks for your interest in this very sensitive subject to we educators.

P.S. I love your plays.... I do 4 per year with my music classrooms and "hook" it to the classroom curriculum. They looooooove it!!!! Keep up the good work.

I am a fourth grade teacher, who like so many feels frustrated at the amount of test prep we must do and the lack of art, theater, and song in our classroom. As a struggling student I would have been one of those students who got left behind or ended up disliking school had it not been for teachers who sang and did plays and had art and most especially allowed me to write poetry. It is for that reason that I love to teach your plays in my classroom. It helps with fluency and learning of key



concepts as well as instills energy, humor, and confidence in every student. So, thanks for plays. I look forward to the day when those who have the power to make decisions realize that a well rounded education is of greater value to our kids than bubbling in multiple choice questions!

I teach in a small rural school in Arizona. We are still allowed to teach multiple strategies for our students. I am teaching math right now so I am struggling with how to incorporate plays, but I will do it. Glad our district is not just "teaching to the test."

I love your plays. From *Shakespeare Unshackled* to *Character Matters*, I find material that ALL my students enjoy. Sadly, the disturbing letter you received is becoming more and more common. Currently, I teach 8th grade language arts and nobody really dictates what--or how--I have to teach as long as my curriculum is aligned to state academic standards. The state legislature is in the process of revamping teacher pay and the result will probably be merit pay based on test scores, principal and community evaluations. When that day comes, I will continue to teach my own way using your plays as necessary. As the Indiana Department of Education drags me from my classroom, the kids will stand on their desks saying not, "Captain, my captain," but singing, "Guess we'll see some Shakespeare at the Globe, Globe, Globe..."

Our governor is on record as saying he'd like to hear from people besides teachers. If you are disturbed by the letter you are distributing, how about you give 'ole Mitch Daniels a call--he has his eyes on the White House and could soon become the whole nation's problem. Just don't tell him you're a teacher, that you know a teacher or that you support the teachers. For some reason, we've become the bad guys in this thing called Public School.

This is the norm, I think in the upper elementary.., esp. 4-5 - I teach 4th... However, I am doing a play this year, as I do every year...and I have had to be creative with getting it ready. My young new principal said that she didn't see how I could make the time to do this because of the TEST...but, during the winter, and indoor recess, we began singing the songs. The kids automatically come in now, turn the stereo on, sing the songs and practice desired parts...so they are rehearsing on their own, while having fun. I plan on presenting the play the end of May...without quite as many formal rehearsals as in the past...but, I refuse to give it up. I feel that this is an important part of their overall education and school experience. I will let you know how it goes...

What about highlighting the emails that said the opposite!? What about commending the teachers who are busting their butts to make sure it ALL happens: teaching the core curriculum, teaching test-taking strategies, AND integrating hands-on learning ie. musicals!? It IS doable and I am proof of it! Working in a low-income high-ELL neighborhood with apathetic students and ZERO parental support, I AM DOING IT ALL!!!!



