



# **Weapons of Mass Instruction: A Schoolteacher's Journey Through The Dark World of Compulsory Schooling**

*John Taylor Gatto*

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“Gatto draws on thirty years in the classroom and many years of research as a school reformer. He puts forth his thesis with a rhetorical style that is passionate, logical, and laden with examples and illustrations.”

ForeWord Magazine

“Weapons of Mass Instruction is probably his best yet. Gatto’s storytelling skill shines as he relates tales of real people who fled the school system and succeeded in spite of the popular wisdom that insists on diplomas, degrees and credentials. If you are just beginning to suspect there may be a problem with schooling (as opposed to educating as Gatto would say), then you’ll not likely find a better exposé of the problem than *Weapons of Mass Instruction*.” Cathy Duffy Reviews

“In this book, the noisy gadfly of U.S. education takes up the question of damage done in the name of schooling. Again he touches on many of the same questions and finds the same answers. Gatto is a bold and compelling critic in a field defined by politic statements, and from the first pages of this book he takes even unwilling readers along with him. In *Weapons of Mass Instruction*, he speaks movingly to readers’ deepest desires for an education that taps their talents and frees frustrated ambitions. It is a challenging and extraordinary book that is a must read for anyone navigating their way through the school system.” - Ria Julien - Winnipeg Free Press

John Taylor Gatto’s *Weapons of Mass Instruction* focuses on mechanisms of familiar schooling that cripple imagination, discourage critical thinking, and create a false view of learning as a by-product of rote-memorization drills. Gatto’s earlier book, *Dumbing Us Down*, put that now-famous expression of the title into common use worldwide. *Weapons of Mass Instruction* promises to add another chilling metaphor to the brief against schooling.

Here is a demonstration that the harm school inflicts is quite rational and deliberate, following high-level political theories constructed by Plato, Calvin, Spinoza, Fichte, Darwin, Wundt, and others, which contend the term “education” is meaningless because humanity is strictly limited by necessities of biology, psychology, and theology. The real function of pedagogy is to render the common population manageable.

Realizing that goal demands that the young be conditioned to rely upon experts, remain divided from natural alliances, and accept disconnections from the experiences that create self-reliance and independence.

Escaping this trap requires a different way of growing up, one Gatto calls “open source learning.” In chapters such as “A Letter to Kristina, my Granddaughter”; “Fat Stanley”; and “Walkabout:London,” this different reality is illustrated.

**John Taylor Gatto** taught for thirty years in public schools before resigning from school-teaching in the op-ed pages of *The Wall Street Journal* during the year he was named New York State’s official Teacher of the Year. Since then, he has traveled three million miles lecturing on school reform.

## **Weapons of Mass Instruction: A Schoolteacher's Journey Through The Dark World of Compulsory Schooling Details**

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# From Reader Review Weapons of Mass Instruction: A Schoolteacher's Journey Through The Dark World of Compulsory Schooling for online ebook

## Spinneretta says

Every homeschooler should read this work by John Taylor Gatto, and in fact, everyone who went through the public schoolsystem, or who has a child in the public school system (that is in the American sense, not the British) should read it too.

It is a darkly descriptive book, telling why the school systems are the way they are, and how they got that way. I can summarise the basic premises in the book thus:

Compulsory schooling is a construct of a small number of people with the following aims in mind:

- (a) To instruct people in WHAT to think
- (b) To prolong childhood to make the people more easily manipulated
- (c) To prevent individual thought
- (d) To make money
- (e) To reduce the power of family by dividing and conquering
- (f) To prevent 'over production' which is an excess of inventions rapidly changing products
- (g) To make it easier for corporations to convince people to buy their stuff

Standardised tests have little to no correlation to knowledge or intelligence.

Universities teach very little that people retain later, and are run on monetary concerns.

I am sure I missed some parts, and I certainly missed out the corroborating resources that Gatto uses to illustrate his points.

Truthfully told, it was not particularly surprising. The information he gave was such that it explained more to my husband and me that I had thought. It showed us that a lot of the issues we see with modern schooling (and the products of that system) are deliberate.

But rather than try to explain it all, I urge you to read the book for yourself. To digest the information for yourself, and THEN make up your mind. After all, I am not trying to force MY ideas and beliefs upon you- unlike the typical school system does ;)

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## Ben Nesvig says

If you always hated school growing up, this book articulates why. The purpose of compulsory school isn't to prepare you to enter the real world and make a living doing what you love. The purpose is to teach you compliance and get in the habit of doing mind numbing tasks you don't enjoy for eight hours a day.

*"The possibility that dumb people don't exist in sufficient numbers to warrant the many careers devoted to*

*tending them may seem incredible to you. Yet that is my proposition: mass dumbness first had to be imagined; it isn't real."*

*If you put fleas in a shallow container they jump out. But if you put a lid on the container for just a short time, they hit the lid trying to escape and learn quickly not to jump so high. They give up their quest for freedom. After the lid is removed, the fleas remain imprisoned by their own self-policing. So it is with life. Most of us let our own fears or the impositions of others imprison us in a world of low expectations.*

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### **Brian Ayres says**

If you have, like me, spent much of your life as a student and teacher in the public schools (24 of the last 28 years), John Taylor Gatto will make you angry and want to throw his book out the window. His libertarian views on institutionalized public schooling are blunt and harsh. Compulsory schooling is a weapon that destroys the joys of knowledge, motivation to succeed, creativity and family cohesion. As I look out on my graduating seniors who have spent the last 13 years in a rat race of GPA, SAT and college admissions, I cannot help but agree with Gatto's premise. These students are drained and some are a bit angry at the system that put them through the wringer.

And if we are honest with ourselves, most of us would agree with Gatto's point that degrees do not make us smarter and successful. Degrees are simply rites of passage, proving desire more than knowledge, consumption over synthesis. To this I think Gatto makes his best argument for the deficiencies of compulsory schooling. Schools do not make us smarter. Unfortunately, for someone so bent on changing the system, he offers little information in what a transition from compulsory schooling to open-sourced learning might look like and how society would benefit, other than homeschooling or giving individuals the freedom to invent more things for the rest of us to consume. Gatto is good at hindsight bias, like any skilled historian is. However, he is short on foresight, which all leaders of revolutions are supposed to possess.

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### **TheRose says**

Undoubtedly Gatto's best work thus far! PREPARE TO CHANGE YOUR PARADIGM. This book is an excellent treatise on why our schools just keep getting worse, no matter how much money we spend, and what they need for TRUE reform (you'll be surprised by his answer!). Learn about the roots of our public education system (this might shock you, too!). He also explains the difference between education and schooling. This book is NOT for the closed-minded.

Weapons of Mass Instruction is hard-hitting and doesn't mince any words. It takes great courage to speak out as Gatto does. I firmly believe that anyone involved in the public education system should read this book. Anyone who pays taxes should read this book. Anyone who has children should read this book. Anyone who still believes in real freedom should read this book. Okay - EVERYONE should read this book!!!

Note to my religious friends: Gatto seems to come from an amoral, areligious perspective and his focus is on freedom, no matter what a person's persuasion. Please keep this in mind as you read about activities he condones which we would not. Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. :)

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## **Ben Ritchie says**

Massively disappointing. I had been looking forward to reading this for ages, ever since I heard a positive review on boing boing's podcast. The topic is one that I completely identify with - which is probably why I was so disappointed, i.e the book contain a germ of a great idea but has no substance.

From the start my alarm bells were set off by the number of unsupported assertions the author was making (no footnotes or references).

The examples of successful people that Gatto presents do not support his argument either. A bit of basic googling unravels the falsifications that he presents. e.g. Craig Venter is presented as a "beach bum drop out" He actually has a conventional academic history, high school grad, PhD. I won't list them all but a bit of basic research really undermines his arguments. And who wants their kid to be like Richard Branson anyway? He's picked some strange examples.

Other reviewers have pointed out Gatto's rose-tinted view of pre-war America. I'm not American so I don't know it intimately, but this bias was obvious. Other biases that I took more personally: Gatto completely (deliberately?) misconstrues Darwin as a eugenicist and Marx as irrelevant.

The book is unstructured, repeats itself and comes across as a rant from a bitter ex-teacher.

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## **Callie says**

So, I started this book a couple years ago, and got about halfway through it. It's one of those books that you really need to focus on and commit some brainpower to, and life has gotten more and more busy for us, so I never got around to finishing it. I finally picked up the audiobook and listened to the whole thing starting back at the beginning.

If you've never heard of John Taylor Gatto, he's a former Teacher Of The Year, who quit and has spoken out against compulsory schooling since then. In this book he argues why compulsory schooling and many aspects of the school system we've been working with over the last hundred years, is more in the interest of special interest groups and not in the best interest of children. I found this book interesting for obvious reasons, since we are homeschooling and Gatto has an inside look at the public school system that I'll never have. His arguments in this book are really interesting and thought-provoking, and to me, convincing. I especially found it interesting how he connected many practices in the public school system, and even the system itself, to Marxist and Darwinian ideas.

He did take a couple shots at John Calvin and Calvinism - since I was listening to the audiobook and was admittedly slightly distracted, I was a little confused at what he was getting at, and I wanted to re-read his points to see what connections between the school system and Calvinism he was trying to make...but of course, I couldn't find my physical copy of the book to check. From what I remember, he was criticizing the idea that all people, including children, are basically evil (the doctrine of total depravity) and the idea of predestination by saying it influenced the system to apply those ideas by treating children harshly and directing people's work destinations after graduating from the public school system - like I said, I wish I could find my physical copy so I could quote his points and address them more thoroughly. I think I knew what he was trying to say, but I'm unsure about his assertion that those ideas affected the school system as it developed. And if they did affect the system just as he said, the way in which those doctrines were supposedly applied to the system wasn't even a right or biblical application of those doctrines. In my opinion, he didn't develop that point as well as he could have (if it even was a fair point, like I said, it felt underdeveloped), and he seemed to be working with rather a superficial understanding of those doctrines

which he separated from the wider doctrines of Christianity, so I don't think he was necessarily presenting them accurately, and I couldn't take him totally seriously there.

However, the rest of the book, though a little meandering, was very interesting. He raised a lot of points about the public school system that I would never have thought about, and it made me consider how I could give my own kids a more rich experience as homeschoilers. I definitely recommend this one, whether you love it or hate it, it will get you thinking.

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### **Tracy says**

I almost gave this just 2 stars. The author raises some good points, and I give him a full third star for clueing me in to the idea that 12-13 years of compulsory schooling is not the best use of our time, at least not the way we go about it. However, his arguments are anecdotal, he meanders all over the place, and has a few post hoc fallacies going, never mind the borderline conspiracy theories.

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### **RP says**

This seems mostly like an abbreviated version of his "The Underground History of American Education" which I am currently reading. I thought it served its purpose effectively and agree with its conclusions.

My wife commented on the book's lack of formal foot- or endnotes, but the author describes his reasons for doing so, calling out many references on the fly in the text and opining that the ideas are more important than the specific location of facts anyone can check online. This may or may not suit you.

Most people would think it beyond radical to contemplate the idea of dismantling our public education system completely, but I'm also completely comfortable with the idea of completely dismantling many other taken-for-granted institutions, so this work is right in my wheelhouse.

When you pause to consider the baggage of money and influence involved in education, and the fact that the correlation between increased funding and results is actually *\*negative\**, not to mention that the schools are Lord-of-the-Flies pits of violence and alienation, you have to recognize that the current system is an epic disaster.

Additionally, if you think that certain things just *\*have\** to be taught (pick your issue: evolution, various characteristics of government, morals, religion, whatever), you might also pause that for every thing to force people to learn, some other group is forcing your kids to learn something you don't like. Like they say, compromise is the art of reaching a solution that doesn't make anybody happy.

Basic reading takes about 30 hours to learn. Basic math is about the same. Everything else can flow from there naturally.

Why all the overhead?

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## **Meghan says**

John Taylor Gatto is one of those... voices in the wilderness that we all really need to listen to. And one of the things that really sticks out to me is that he is a very gentle man: just watch his interviews on youtube.

I have both read this book, in my early days of homeschooling, and listened to it on audio. I think the thing that really strikes me, here, is: What Exactly is the role of public school in our society?? I won't get into my own homeschooling journey (and search for answers to that question) but I will say Mr. Gatto's work opened my eyes in a way they hadn't been opened before. His understanding of children, what they are actually capable of compared to how we treat them, was almost enough to bring one to tears. His struggles to create an educational environment for his pupils border on heroic.

I will warn you: John Taylor Gatto is a bit of a 'gateway drug' into the darker underbelly of public school. His books lead me to an almost horror-filled fascination with this subject, and answers to questions I hadn't yet asked. Even if you find Mr. Gatto's claims a bit farther-fetched than you are prepared for, it doesn't take long before you realize Mr. Gatto was actually painting things rosier than how they really stand.

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## **Naum says**

An infuriating book... ...not that there is no truth to be culled from it; rather, the author, Mr. John Taylor Gatto is on target with most of his rant. But within his harsh condemnatory words of the U.S. education system is a lack of imagination, at least at a macro level.

After purchasing, I discovered a great bit of this material is already accessible on Gatto's website -- The Underground History of American Education, and this newer published installment just a culling and rehashing of the same spiel Gatto has been emitting over the course of the past two decades, after his accolades for winning New York City "Teacher of the Year".

I believe most passionate teachers who've toiled in the public education system could echo Gatto. And I am mostly in agreement with Gatto about the diagnosis, but his prescription, IMV, is far off the rocker. I cannot envision how extrapolating a one-on-one style of instruction to mass education and rolling back "compulsory education" could be a net plus in the aggregate. It would restore a condition of a time when only the affluent could attain an education (a fact Gatto conveniently omits from his rants and anecdotes about the founders or other exceptional individual anomalies). Instead, I wish Gatto would apply that same sort of passion, vigor and energy to reforming the present system, be it top-down or bottom-up (as his career experience vividly illustrates).

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## **Jeremy Zilkie says**

During my years as a student in the Romeo public school system, I always felt as if something was broken. I could never put my finger on it though as a student and product of the system. There were so many fractures within the student body based on appearance, grades, athletic ability, popularity, disciplinary action, etc. Also, it was "frowned upon" to mingle with those a grade or two younger than you and you were in danger if

you tried to mingle upwards in grade and age. These are just to name a few of the dysfunctional components present in the system in which I grew up.

Then after graduating and heading off to college I quickly realized that little to nothing of what I learned or experienced in school was ever experienced again in my life. I spent time in college, 5 years in the Marine Corps, worked numerous jobs in different fields, and the culture and environment I experienced in school was never encountered again.

I quickly learned all that school had not taught me which was vitally important in the real world of adulthood. Things like personal financial management and avoiding indebtedness which is a HUGE burden around the necks of young people today who graduate from college with ridiculous loan amounts but not with a job capable of paying them off in any reasonable time-frame. I had not learned how to work effectively with people, be part of a team that is learning, growing together, and encouraging the best in each other even at our own personal expense and sacrifice. I also did not learn how to work hard and study well, knowing that if I acquired the information the night before a test I could do well enough to excel but not really learn anything long term or of real value. Also, most of the school faculty seemed detached and many disinterested in truly engaging my adolescent heart when I really could have used love and personal encouragement during some very confusing and difficult years. I could go on, but I think you get my point.

I had always wondered what that end game was for school, knowing that what was being produced did not seem like it was worth the time, money and effort being invested because most people hated, found meaningless, or felt their school experience a waste. Ferris Bueller said it best when talking about "licking his palms" and pretending to be sick says this, "It's a little childish and stupid...but then again, so is high school." Watching that 27 years ago, something within me said "YES!!! It is!!!"

John Gatto has put onto paper well documented proof and extensive research that the system I and so many felt was truly a waste on so many levels, was in fact designed to be. Wow!!! The system I grew up in in the 1980s was the byproduct of decisions made on the highest levels of government with billions of dollars of lobbyist money and was not being preserved by the self interest of companies, corporations, and institutions whose life depend on its existence as is and not on a system of true value and worth for the masses who have to grow up and live through it.

I LOVE Gatto's big picture overview of the corruption of compulsory schooling and his accusation and substantial proof of its insidious intentions. When reading about the true history of compulsory schooling, it makes complete sense. I HIGHLY RECOMMEND this book to anyone who has gone through the system or having to decide whether to send their own children through the system. In my opinion, parents need to raise our children with the "end objective in mind" and not simply act like sheep being herded and then encouraging our children to follow as little sheep themselves. Everyone must make their own decisions about schooling and I judge no one for the decisions they make concerning their family. But to do so...giving the best hours of a child's day in the most formative years of their life, over to this "system" and its "institutions", without investigating the obvious warning signs and dangers is a shame and cause of potential harm depending on how the dice roll for your child at his or her school, and all the unknown variables waiting for them there. I could say more, but I digress with my critique...

This book is a collection of excerpts from a much larger and more extensive book called "The Underground History of American Education" That resource is too much for many people so Gatto was wise to break it down into some introductory pieces as they are present in Weapons of Mass Instruction. This does make the book somewhat jumbled and without a clear stream of logic or thought. The editing of this book could have been improved upon and additional commentary could have been added to help connect the excerpts and

chapters as they are included. Nonetheless, I am so thankful for this book and will take the time to read the larger and original work in the near future.

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### **Christy says**

While it might seem heretical to recommend this book on teacher appreciation "week" (yes, it used to be a day of thanks, but has been perverted into a week-long orgy) but I cant hold back my own anger over all the time wasted by compulsory schooling. While I don't want this to sound like a rant against teachers, of whom there are many I am very fond of and have a great deal of respect for. As parents we need to critically examine the system in which our children are trapped in 6 hours a day, 5 days a week, 9 months a year for 12+ years of their lives. It is very complicated, but it is a lot more important than who wins American Idol.

"In 1995 a student teacher of 5th graders in Minneapolis wrote a letter to the editor of the Star-Tribune complaining about radically dumbed down curriculum. She wrote that 113 years earlier 5th graders in Minneapolis were reading William Shakespeare, Henry Thoreau, George Washington, Sir Walter Scott, Mark Twain, Benjamin Franklin, Oliver Wendall Holmes, John Buynan, Daniel Webster, Samuel Johnson, Lewis Caroll, Thomas Jefferson, Emerson and others like them..."

While this week my own 5th grader complained about the snails pace at which her "gifted class" was reading the book "Where the Red Fern Grows" a lovely little book, but not Shakespeare. Have you looked recently at the text books checked out to high school students? Why are we not paying attention to this chicanery? Is it because the testing they take says that they are gifted or average or special ed, and we have become so complacent that we allow the "experts" put our children into a box that will either give them a false sense of security or a self loathing that that get to live in for the rest of their lives. While some students may be lucky enough to find their niche (like music,sports,debate,drama etc) and have a teacher who expects more than fact regurgitation and high test scores, but actual self reliance, personal discovery and inventiveness, it saddens me to think how many never do.

I have always thought home-schoolers a little bit odd and stifling for keeping their kids out of "mainstream" education and not wanting them to grow up in the "real world". But after learning more about the travesty that is the history of the education system, and meditating on my own experiences both as a student and as a parent, I concede that compulsory education is far more likely to produce childish adults then independent learning. Maybe there should be a "home school appreciation week", however I think that they might be too sensible to go for it!

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### **Rachel says**

"There were vast fortunes to be made, after all, in an economy based on mass production and organized to favor the large corporation rather than the small business or the family farm. But mass production required mass consumption, and at the turn of the twentieth century most Americans considered it both unnatural and unwise to buy things they didn't actually need. Mandatory schooling was a godsend on that count. School didn't have to train kids in any direct sense to think they should consume nonstop, because it did something even better: it encouraged them not to think at all." (p.xx)

"I've concluded that genius is as common as dirt. We suppress genius because we haven't yet figured out how

to manage a population of educated men and women. The solution, I think, is simple and glorious. Let them manage themselves." (p.xxiii)

"The great purpose of school [self-alienation] can be realized better in dark, airless, ugly places....It is to master the physical self, to transcend the beauty of nature. School should develop the power to withdraw from the external world. [The Philosophy of Education, 1906]" (p.13)

"When you flip hamburgers, sit at a computer all day, unpack and shelve merchandise from China year after year, you manage the tedium better if you have a shallow inner life, one you can escape through booze, drugs, sex, media, or other low level addictive behaviors. Easier to keep same if your inner life is shallow. School, though Harris the great American schoolman, should prepare ordinary men and women for lifetimes of alienation. Can you say he wasn't fully rational?" (p.14)

"In every age, men of wealth and power have approached education for ordinary people with suspicion because it is certain to stimulate discontent, certain to awaken desires impossible to gratify." (p.15)

"Twelve to twenty years of stupefying memorization drills weakens the hardiest intellects." (p.17)

"We want one class to have a liberal education. We want another class, a very much larger class of necessity, to forgo the privilege of a liberal education and fit themselves to perform specific difficult manual tasks. [Woodrow Wilson, in 1909 to an audience of businessmen in New York City.]" (p.23)

"...in open source, teaching is a function. Not a profession. Anyone with something to offer can teach. The student determines who is or is not a teacher, not the government. In open source, you don't need a licence to teach any more than Socrates did. Right there you can feel how different the basic assumptions of open source are. No student faces failure for deciding not to learn from you." (p.31)

"Degrees should never stand as proxies for education." (p.35)

"You're on the road to being educated when you know yourself so thoroughly you write your own script instead of taking a part written by others." (p.36)

"Childish people are not only obedient (if we discount their occasional tantrums), but they make the best consumers because they have little natural sales resistance." (p.41)

"The trouble with open source learning, as far as policymakers are concerned, is that it almost guarantees an independent mind will develop- not a cosmetic simulation of those things, which schooling cultivates. Even worse, taking charge of mixing your own education leads to a healthy self-regard – and confident folks are considerably less manageable than anxious ones." (p.42)

"...the enormous American military has not, for a very long time, been primarily about protecting common American citizens from harm. It exists for several never-discussed reasons: to provide employment for the underclasses; to avoid uprisings at home; to act as a centrifuge in distributing wealth through contracts back to the managers of the system and their allies; and it exists, in the gravest extreme to "go domestic"..."(p.43)

"The collective rituals of lower grades are about habit training, about practicing attention and fealty to authority. In this way, independent consciousness can be undermined in its formative stages." (p.43)

"Complex minds are always dialectical." (p.43)

"...imaginative individuals are notoriously unmanageable and unpredictable, because they are irrepressibly inventive." (p.47)

"What American has to show for 50 years of continuous warfare against weak, stone-age opponents, is this: besides crippling our future with a reckless expenditure of capitol on products which produce nothing, like weaponry, and destroy themselves in use, we have notified every corner of the world that our overwhelming military isn't overwhelming at all and can be beaten by ordinary people of courage, with primitive military hardware, who refuse to be intimidated." (p.57)

"Formulaic schooling is worthless to common citizens, even destructive. It's only useful to policymakers and managers. It must be killed, not modified." (p.57)

"Real education can only begin out of a foundation of self-awareness. Know the truth of yourself or you are nothing but a pathetic human resource. Your life will have missed its point." (p.60)

"Education must be largely self-initiated, a tapestry woven out of broad experience, constant introspection, ability to concentrate on one's purpose in spite of distractions, a combination of curiosity, patience, and intense watchfulness, and it requires substantial trial and error risk-taking, along with a considerable ability to take feedback from the environment -to learn from mistakes." (p.62)

"School is the first impression we get of organized society and its relentless need to rank everyone on a scale of winners and losers." (p.63)

"Dumb people are no longer merely ignorant. Now they are dangerous imbeciles whose minds must be conditioned with substantial doses of commercially prepared disinformation for tranquilizing purposes." (p.86)

"Important people believe, with the fervor of religious zealots, that civilization can survive only if the irrational, unpredictable impulses of human nature are continually beaten back and confined until their demonic vitality is sapped." (p. 89)

"The principal reason bureaucracies are so stupid is that they cannot respond efficiently to feedback." (p.92)

"People become dangerous when too many see through the illusions which hold society together." (p.107)

"...it's the widespread understanding among the young that school isn't about them (and their interests, curiosities and futures), but exclusively about the wishes of other people. School is built around the self-interest of others. (p.110)

Thanks to the vast new ball of connections, official truth in every conceivable area is subject to verification by a promiscuous collection of uncertified critics armed with the tools to back up their contrarian critiques. Thanks to the Internet, the concept of mass schooling by experts is nearly exhausted." (p.113)

"But if life were found to be inherently better where cooperation rules, as Wallace said, the privileged world would turn upside down."(p.116)

"...when competition is seen as essential to a good life, when winning against one's neighbors is put at the heart of society, business thrives. To win, others have to lose: the more losers, the better winning feels." (p.116)

"Educated people, or people with principles, represent rogue elements in a scheme of scientific management; the former suspect because they have been trained to argue effectively and to think for themselves, the latter too inflexible in any area touching their morality to remain reliably dependent. At any moment they may announce, 'This is wrong. I won't do it'. Overly creative people have similar deficiencies from a systems point of view." (p.126)

"The logic of collectivization seeks to disconnect each child from his or her own unique constellation, particular circumstances, traditions, aspirations, past experiences, families, and to treat each as the representative of a type." (p.129)

"Most of all, the educated mind is connected to itself. There is not a major philosopher of Western history since Socrates who didn't discover that knowing yourself is the foundation of everything else." (p.130)

"Even at seven don't rush to edit the truth out of things. If the family has an income kids need to know to the penny what it is and how it's spent. Assume they are human beings with the same basic nature and aptitudes that you have; what you have superior in terms of experience and mature understanding should be exchanged for their natural resilience, quick intelligence, imagination, fresh insight, and eagerness to become self-directing.

Don't buy into the calculated illusion of extended childhood." (p.137)

"Most of us let our own fears or the impositions of others imprison us in a world of low expectations." (p.141)

"The biggest danger to the social order comes from those who retreat into the secret recesses of their inner lives where no snoop can penetrate." (p.141)

"...hard reading has been discouraged in the schools; if you read too much the official stories wear thin and blow away like smoke." (p.166)

"Refusing to allow yourself to be regarded as a 'human resource' is more revolutionary than any revolution on record." (p.204)

"College is a business before it's anything else; already a business starving for customers." (p.205)

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### **Robina says**

I really enjoyed this book, respect John Taylor Gatto, and agree with most of what he's saying. But a few things stopped me from giving Weapons of Mass Instruction 4 or even 5 stars. Most importantly:

1. His overblown admiration of the colonial and early national period of American history. Arguing that that period was a time of unparalleled promise and opportunity is not only morally suspect (in my opinion) but also historically inaccurate. Sure, maybe if you weren't one of the one-fifth of the population considered property, a member of half the population who had vaginas and were therefore essentially property, one of the millions of Native Americans slaughtered or dispossessed, or one of the majority "motley" proletariat/propertyless who fared no better in their newly independent democracy than they had under British rule, sure, then maybe you had access to an AWESOME education in early America. The systematic injustices that Gatto argues the school system perpetuates is not an aberration of the "founding fathers"

vision, it was a structuring component of it. Period. Thus, I think this book could have been a lot stronger if it didn't repeatedly suggest that we need to return to the good ole days of early national America.

2. Structure. As in, this book had almost none. I thought it started off strong, but very quickly became a meandering rant punctuated by a few case studies of people who dropped out of school but are still successful. Which is not to say it's not an entertaining rant, but still. This lack of cohesiveness undermines, in my opinion, his larger argument about the point of schools.

3. Related to point #2, there were times where I wondered if Gatto had an editor for this book. I know, I know, English is a dynamic language and blah blah blah it's lame to get hung up on grammar blah blah blah (I say this as someone who taught English in college, and really hated when my colleagues emphasized traditional -- and virtually useless -- grammar instruction at the expense of nurturing critical thought). But some of the grammar mistakes in this text were DISTRACTING. Paired with the structure I sometimes I felt like I was just intuiting Gatto's unedited thoughts straight from his brain.

Which is, again, not to say that they're not very important and interesting unedited thoughts. I just thought this book lost a lot of steam as it moved forward and could have been a lot stronger.

4. I think the idea that schools should be turned over to the free market (the same free market that appears to be at the root of all the other problems Gatto bemoans?) REPREHENSIBLE. 'Nuff said.

I would recommend *\_Dumbing Us Down\_* (although it shares some of these problems, particularly #1) before recommending this one.

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### **Jeff Raymond says**

I'm extremely sympathetic to the homeschooling/unschooling movement. It may be something my wife and I have an epic battle on when it's all said and done, but I get it - I see the inherent flaws in the current way we do schools, and I don't want my future spawn to be a part of it.

John Taylor Gatto, former teacher, gets it as well. As someone who was a teacher for 30 years, he possibly gets it better than most, and this book is his treatise against modern education and what needs to change about it. If you're at all involved/interested/knowledgeable about homeschooling/unschooling, this is not a lot of new stuff, but the vitriol and anger he has toward the system as well as the strong ideas he has in terms of fixing what is clearly a problem is worth noting.

The flaw in this book as written, however, is twofold. One, it spends much too much time on the problem and not nearly enough on the solution. Granted, the solution *is* self-evident in many ways, but a person who needs the problem spelled out to them is going to need the solution as well. Problematically, however, the solution is coming from someone who comes across as extremely radicalized (with merit). This is a message that *needs* to be heard, disseminated, implemented, but I'm not convinced this is necessarily the guy to do it.

It's worth reading. Either you'll hear what you recognize from someone with the experience to back it up, or you'll be exposed to a new idea that might have never crossed your mind. This should, however, result in being a starting point, not an ending point.

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