



Study Guide:

***Dumbing Us Down:  
The Hidden Curriculum of  
Compulsory Schooling***

by John Taylor Gatto

Prepared by Rachel DeMille

This Study Guide is prepared as a companion to the Mentoring in the Classics Audio Series.

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## Suggested topics for writing or discussion:

1. How do I unintentionally teach confusion in my own school?
2. How do I unintentionally teach indifference?
3. How can I get my students more emotionally engaged?
4. How can I get my students more intellectually engaged?
5. What does Gatto mean (p. 16, 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary addition) when he says that the seven lessons are “prime training for permanent under classes”?
6. Why does Gatto say that the 7-Lesson system “profoundly anti-educational”? Do you agree or disagree?
7. Gatto says, “School is a 12-year jail sentence where bad habits are the only curriculum truly learned. I teach school and win awards doing it. I should know.” How do you feel about this statement? Is it too strong? What was your experience in school – did it feel like jail or did you love it? Why do some parents who loved school feel frustrated when one or more of their children feel like it is jail?
8. (p. 33) What does Gatto mean, “The ‘curriculum of family’ is at the heart of any good life. We’ve gotten away from that curriculum – it’s time to return to it.”? Do you agree or disagree?
9. (p 84) What do you think about Gatto’s statement: “It is possible that compelling people to do something guarantees that they will do it poorly, with a bad will, or indifferently...”?
10. Though Gatto clearly outlines a number of problems with compulsory schooling, what did you find to be the most positive message in his book? The most healing theme or idea?

## Suggested readings:

- Oliver DeMille, [\*A Thomas Jefferson Education\*](#)
- Oliver and Rachel DeMille, [\*Leadership Education: The Phases of Learning\*](#)
- Paul H. Price, [\*Childhood Dying\*](#)
- John Holt, [\*How Children Learn\*](#)

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## Additional resources for further study:

- Sir Ken Robinson, TED: [“How Schools Kill Creativity”](#) (video)
- Logan LaPlante, TED: [“Hack-schooling Makes Me Happy”](#) (video)
- Ethan Young, School Board Meeting: [“In Protest of Common Core”](#) (video)
- Oliver DeMille, [\*The 7 Keys of Great Teaching\*](#) (audio mp3 \$)
- [\*The Hobart Shakespeareans\*](#) (DVD \$)
- [\*Freedom Writers\*](#) (DVD \$)
- [“Changing Education Paradigms”](#) (RSA Whiteboard Animation)
- Oliver & Rachel DeMille, [\*Core & Love of Learning Seminar Highlights\*](#) (audio mp3 \$)

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