

# How Last Night's Debate Proved the Dumbing Down of America is Real

Like many Americans, I tuned in last night to catch part of the first presidential debate.

Part way through, I had a horrifying “the emperor has nothing on” moment when I realized that neither candidate seemed to know what he/she was talking about.

The content was so low on substance, that I decided to check the reading level of the transcript and compare it to those from the last 56 years of presidential debates. Perhaps, after all, I was wrong and had misjudged both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

Unfortunately, I was not.

In the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, the reading level of the presidential debates measured at an eighth or ninth grade level.

By the 1990s, that number had fallen to a seventh grade level, and except for a slight uptick in 2008, continued at that measurement through 2012.

But last night reached a new low. Through 40 pages of debate transcript, the reading level only measured at a sixth grade level.

Whether we like it or not, the presidential candidates are a representation of the American public. If they can only communicate their ideas to the public at a basic, ground floor level, then what does that say about the rest of us?

Thomas Jefferson [once said](#):

*“Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves therefore are its only safe depositories. And to render even them safe their minds must be improved to a certain degree.”*

If the level of discourse at last night's debate is indicative of the American public's knowledge and understanding, are we liable to encounter a further degenerating government? Is it too late to reverse the dumbing down of America through her schools and the rhetoric which comes out of the mouths of politicians and the media?