

Is School Literature Driving Our Dysfunctional Society?

Over the weekend, I traveled with some friends to tour the [Betsy-Tacy houses](#) in Mankato, Minnesota (shown in the image above). The refurbished homes are replicas of the ones discussed in the famous children's book series of the same name, written in the mid-twentieth century by Maud Hart Lovelace.

For those unfamiliar with the books, the series follows Betsy Ray, her parents and two sisters, and their ever-widening circle of friends through the scrapes and hilarity of small town life in "Deep Valley." While the books are officially fiction, they are largely based on the people, places, and experiences the author had growing up in Mankato. Thus, those who make the trek to her hometown recognize many of the sites mentioned in the books.

In the course of our little tour it was not the breezy front porch, the quaint wooden lace, nor the period pieces which impressed me the most. Instead, it was a comment our tour guide made. During her presentation she mentioned that she once had a mother and her three adult daughters tour the house. The young ladies laughed and chatted happily with each other as they walked ahead of their mother and the tour guide. The mother nodded her head toward her daughters and said, "I grew up in a dysfunctional family. You know what helped me raise the happy, functional family I have now? The Betsy-Tacy books."

Having read the books, I can understand her sentiment. The families in them are in no way perfect. They deal with sibling rivalry. They live in cramped quarters. They experience the death of a child. They wrestle with religious differences.

They deal with imaginative children who get into crazy mischief. Yet through it all, they depict the happy childhood which results from life in a stable, two-parent home.

In today's world, many would brush off such books as too idealistic. Modern students, it is argued, live in a much different world. Feeding them reading material which corresponds to the issues we deal with in modern life is what they need, we're told. And so we give them a [variety of fiction](#) that deals with troubled youth or political issues.

Such a trend continues into college, where students are fed a [continual stream](#) of material which fixates on issues such as racism, multiculturalism, and other trendy attitudes.

Now to be perfectly clear, there is nothing inherently wrong with introducing students to these issues. They do need to be aware of what is going on around them. The question is, are we fixating on these issues so much that today's students have a lopsided view of the world?

Whether we like it or not, the literature we read makes a huge impact on the way we think and the life we live. The woman who raised her family by the tips she gleaned from Betsy and Tacy is a prime example.

Is it possible that we would see a more stable society – not only in families, but also in the political and cultural realms – if the literature we provide students in school focused less on the dark, disturbing elements that divide our society, and more on issues which build the ideas and values which encourage strong families and well-adjusted children?