

Read the following article by educationist John C. Holt carefully. Then, answer the questions that follow.

School is Bad for Children ⁱ

Almost every child, on the first day he sets foot in a school building, is smarter, more curious, less afraid of what he doesn't know, better at finding and figuring things out, and more confident, **resourceful**, persistent and independent than he will ever be again in his schooling – or, unless he is very unusual and very lucky, for the rest of his life. Already, by paying close attention to and interacting with the world and people around him, and without any school-type formal instruction, he has done a task far more difficult, complicated and **abstract** than anything he will be asked to do in school, or than any of his teachers has done for years. He has solved the mystery of language. He has done it by exploring, by experimenting, by developing his own model of the grammar of language, by trying it out and seeing whether it works, by gradually changing it and **refining** it until it does work. Par. A

In he comes, this curious, patient, determined, energetic, **skillful** learner. We sit him down at a desk, and what do we teach him? Many things. First, that learning is separate from living. "You come to school to learn," we tell him, as if the child hadn't been learning before, as if living were out there and learning were in here, and there were no connection between the two. Secondly, that he cannot be trusted to learn and is no good at it. Everything we teach about reading, a task far simpler than many that the child has already mastered, says to him, "If we don't make you read, you won't, and if you don't do it exactly the way we tell you, you can't". Par. B

In a great many other ways he learns that he is worthless, untrustworthy, fit only to take other people's orders, a blank sheet for other people to write on. Oh, we make a lot of nice noises in school about respect for the child and individual differences, and the like. But our acts, as opposed to our talk, says to the child, "Your experience, your concerns, your curiosities, your needs, what you know, what you want, what you wonder about, what you hope for, what you fear, what you like and dislike, what you are good at or not so good at – all this is of not the slightest importance, it counts for nothing. What counts here, and the only thing that counts, is what **we** know, what we think is important, what we want you to do, think and be." The child soon learns not to ask questions – the teacher isn't there to satisfy his curiosity. [...] Given no chance to find out who he is – and to develop that person, whoever it is – he soon comes to accept the adults' **evaluation** of him. Par. C

He learns many other things. He learns that to be wrong, uncertain, confused, is a crime. Right answers are what the school wants, and he learns countless strategies **for prying these answers out** of the teacher, for conning her into thinking he knows what he doesn't know. He learns to **dodge**, bluff, fake, cheat. He learns to be lazy! [...] . He learns to be bored, to work with a small part of his mind, to escape from the reality around him into daydreams and fantasies – but not like the fantasies of his preschool years, in which he played a very active part. Par. D

[...] And so, in this dull and ugly place, where nobody ever says anything very truthful, where everybody is playing a kind of role, as in a **charade** where the teachers are no more free to respond honestly to the students than the students are free to respond to the teachers or each other, where the air practically vibrates with suspicion and anxiety, the child learns to live in a daze, saving his energies for those small parts of his life that are too **trivial** for the adults to bother with, and thus remain his. Par. E

[...We need to get kids out of the school buildings, and give them a chance to learn about the world at first hand. [...] In school we never give a child a chance to detect his mistakes, let alone correct them. We do it all for him. [...] Soon he becomes dependent on the expert. We should let him do it himself. Let him figure out what this word says, what is the answer to that problem, whether this is a good way of saying or doing this or that. Our job should be to help him when he tells us that he can't find a way to get the right answer. Let's get rid of all this nonsense of grades, exams, marks. We don't know now, and we never will know, how to measure what another person knows or understands. We certainly can't find out by asking him questions. [...] Throw it all out, and let the child learn what every educated person must someday learn, how to measure his own understanding, how to know what he knows or does not know. Par. F

PART I: Reading Comprehension

Answer the following questions according to the text you read, by choosing A, B, C, or D.

1. Which statement best captures the author's overall argument about schooling?

- a. Schools effectively build on children's natural abilities
- b. Schools replace natural learning with structured improvement
- c. Schools often undermine children's innate curiosity and independence
- d. Schools are very useful as long as they engage children's creativity.

2. According to the passage, how are children when they first enter school?

- a. Less curious and more dependent
- b. Highly curious and confident learners
- c. Uninterested in learning
- d. Unable to think independently

3. The author's reference to a child "solving the mystery of language" mainly serves to:

- a. Emphasize the importance of early childhood education
- b. Demonstrate that children can master complex tasks independently
- c. Criticize teachers' lack of linguistic knowledge
- d. Suggest language is the most difficult subject in school

4. What is the first thing schools teach children, according to the author?

- a. How to read and write
- b. That learning is separate from living
- c. How to behave politely
- d. That knowledge is power

5. What contrast does the author make between learning before and after entering school?

- a. Informal learning is slower than formal learning
- b. School learning is more creative than early learning
- c. Early learning is active and self-directed, while school learning is passive
- d. There is little difference between the two

6. The phrase “a blank sheet for other people to write on” suggests that schools...

- a. Encourage creativity in students
- b. View students as lacking individuality and agency
- c. Provide equal opportunities for all learners
- d. Focus only on academic subjects

7. Which of the following best explains why the author believes children become dependent on teachers?

- a. Teachers provide too much encouragement
- b. Children are naturally dependent on adults
- c. The school system prevents children from identifying and correcting their own mistakes
- d. Teachers are more knowledgeable than students

8. According to the passage, why do students end up using strategies like “bluffing” or “cheating”?

- a. They are inherently dishonest
- b. They want to impress their peers
- c. The system prioritizes correct answers over understanding
- d. Teachers encourage competition

9. Why does the author criticize grades and exams?

- a. They are too easy
- b. They waste time
- c. They cannot truly measure understanding
- d. They are too expensive

10. Which alternative approach to education does the author most strongly advocate?

- a. Encouraging teachers to have a more active role in education
- b. Improving textbooks, lessons and tests
- c. Encouraging self-directed learning and real-world experience
- d. Reducing the role of teachers entirely

PART II: Vocabulary

Explain what the following words mean **in the context of the article you read** by selecting the correct option, A, B, C, or D. All words appear in the text in **bold** font.

1. A **"resourceful"** person (Par. A) tends to be...
 - a. easily confused or forgetful
 - b. able to find quick and clever ways to overcome difficulties
 - c. lacking energy or motivation
 - d. focused only on one idea

2. Something that is **"abstract"** (Par. A), is...
 - a. based on real-life experience
 - b. clear and easy to understand
 - c. existing as an idea, not concrete or physical
 - d. loud and attention-seeking

3. **"Refining"** (Par. A) is best understood as...
 - a. making something pure, improved, or more precise
 - b. destroying something completely
 - c. ignoring details
 - d. repeating the same process without change

4. If a person is **"skillful"** (Par. B), they are...
 - a. acting without thinking
 - b. showing great ability or expertise
 - c. easily distracted
 - d. unwilling to try

5. What or who does the pronoun **"we"** (Par. C) refer to?
 - a. Adults
 - b. Teachers
 - c. Parents
 - d. All the above

6. What is **"evaluation"** (Par. C)?
- a. A quick guess without evidence
 - b. A detailed judgment or assessment
 - c. A random decision
 - d. A type of argument
7. If you're **"prying"** answers out of somebody (Par. D), you are...
- a. respecting privacy
 - b. working quietly
 - c. inquiring too closely into something private
 - d. ignoring important facts
8. A person who is **"dodging"** (Par. D), is trying to...
- a. move quickly to avoid something or someone
 - b. carefully examine something in detail
 - c. openly admit a mistake
 - d. remain completely still
9. What is a **"charade"** (Par. E)?
- a. A serious and honest conversation
 - b. A physical challenge
 - c. An act intended to deceive others
 - d. A scientific experiment
10. Something which is **"trivial"** (Par. E), is...
- a. of great importance
 - b. difficult to understand
 - c. of little value or importance
 - d. extremely dangerous

ⁱ Adapted from *The Underachieving School* by John C. Holt