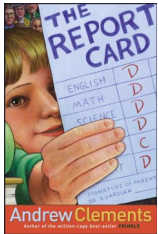


The report card

Testing, Testing, Testing...



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It's test time again for Indiana students. Children in grades 3-8 are taking the *Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus (ISTEP+)* tests to measure student achievement in the subject areas of English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science (Grades 4 and 6), and Social Studies (Grades 5 and 7). This seasonal event - and the recent news that teachers and parents in Chicago decided to boycott the Illinois Standards Achievement Test, an annual test for Illinois students in third through eighth grade - brought to mind the book: *The Report Card* by Andrew Clements.

Clements is one of my favorite authors. He writes thoughtfully about school-age students, the issues they face, their relationships with each other and with their teachers. And many of his books pose a "what if?" question that make for marvelous discussion opportunities. In *The Report Card*, it's 5th grader Nora who ponders: what if students just all refused to take tests? What if they intentionally answered all the questions incorrectly?

Nora is an exceptionally brilliant child who enjoys reading the Encyclopedia Britannica for fun. Because she doesn't want to be "different" she does just enough schoolwork to get mediocre grades and cruise contentedly along in the middle. But when she observes the emotional toll the state mandatory test has on many students, she starts questioning the value of these tests: "All the kids started keeping track of test scores and homework grades. School was suddenly about the competition, and grades were how you could tell the winners from the losers."

Nora knows she is smart and can master the subject matter presented to her. She doesn't need a grade to confirm that. So she makes a choice. She sets out to get all Ds on her report card. And now Nora is no longer coasting along unnoticed by her teachers. She quickly realizes: "Most kids think that if they get bad grades, it's their problem. But that's not true. The fact is, when a kid gets a bad grade, it's like the teacher is getting a bad grade too. And the principal. And the whole school and the whole town and the whole state. And don't forget the parents. A bad grade for a kid is a bad grade for everybody."

The novel doesn't address how students should best be evaluated to make sure they are learning, but it does raise intriguing questions about intelligence, opportunities to be creative and thoughtful, and working to the best of your ability. In her effort to help herself and fellow students not feel categorically defined by a grade or a test score, Nora and her teachers and parents get to discuss these and other questions.

Find *The Report Card* and other thought-provoking books by Clements, such as *Frindle* and *No Talking in the Library* in the [Library Catalog](#). Click on "More Information" to the right of a title and scroll down to find reviews of the title with age or grade-level recommendations. *The Report Card* is recommended for children in grades 3 and up. Interested in questions about Indiana's state mandatory tests? Read news reports of this and other education issues on the website: [StateImpact ? Indiana: Education, from the Capitol to the Classroom](#)

Posted by Lisa C. on March 5, 2014

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