

Why Is School Teaching Kids Ethnic Slurs?

What's worse?

1. Teaching a kindergarten student an ethnic slur.
2. Teaching a kindergarten student a pejorative for a part of the female anatomy.
3. Teaching a kindergarten student fake words.
4. All of the above.

Ashley Zola selected option 4. Her daughter is a kindergarten student at Lakeside Park Elementary School in Hendersonville, Tennessee, and Ashley was upset after she discovered that her daughter's homework assignment included an ethnic slur for Italians and a pejorative for a part of the female anatomy.

But she was even more disturbed to learn that her child and all the other kids in the class were being taught imaginary words.

"I'm very offended and upset about this," she told me in a telephone interview from her home in Hendersonville.

The first homework assignment included a list of words that her daughter was supposed to practice at home. Among the words were *nist* and *plad*.

"Her grandfather was going over the words, along with their definitions, so she could understand what she was reading," Zola told me. "But there were two words that had no meaning."

So she wrote a note to the teacher asking for an explanation.

The teacher replied, "They are make-believe words. It is part of our curriculum."

A few days later, her daughter returned home with another

assignment.

"Please practice these words at home tonight," the instructions read. "Remember not all of these words are real words. Some are made-up words."

Among the made-up words were *tid*, *rok*, *rix* and *hep*.

Zola sent back the homework assignment with a note written to her daughter's teacher.

"We do not teach our child anything fake," she wrote.

But the assignment also included two other words that made Zola furious: *wop* and *mut*.

"If you were to look up either of those words, they would not be something you would discuss with a 5-year-old," she told me.

Wop is an ethnic slur used against Italians. You'll just need to Google the other word.

"You wouldn't put *Polack* in a reading list for a child," she said. "That's offensive to Polish people. So why are you teaching them *wop*?"

I spoke to the principal of the school—a very nice lady—who assured me the assignments had nothing to do with Common Core.

And while she was unfamiliar with the specifics of the classroom assignment, she said it's not unusual for teachers to use fake words to teach children about phonetics.

Really? Why not just use real words?

The principal never answered that question. She never returned my subsequent telephone calls. And neither did the Sumner County Schools spokesperson. (I called him three times. It's really impolite not to return phone messages.)

So here's the bottom line from Zola.

"I want my daughter to be able to know what she's reading," she said. "There's a difference between reading a word and knowing what that word is—and comprehending it. I have a hard time doing it when the definitions of those words are inappropriate for someone her age."

That seems like a pretty reasonable request to me.

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