

Opinion

Free Press Viewpoint



There is still time

From the Lawrence Journal-World
Americans, young and old, are "illiterate" in a lot of ways and the field of geography seems to be one of our cultural and educational weaknesses.

A recent Roper poll indicated that nearly two-thirds of young adults cannot find Iraq on a map despite three years of war and more than 2,400 U.S. deaths there. Too many of us, regardless of age, are not conversant with the location of Louisiana, site of New Orleans and Baton Rouge, despite all the misery from hurricane damage.

There were 510 participants ages 18-24 in the Roper poll, which showed young Americans cannot find many countries prominently featured in the daily news. Even worse, many of those questioned showed little interest in gaining geographical knowledge and recognition about global politics, economics and language.

So what else is new, and why does this seem alarming to some? The beauty is there is time to remedy all this.

We hear so often about multilingual citizens in other countries and how marvelous it would be if Americans grew up learning such languages as Spanish, French, Arabic or even Mandarin Chinese along with English. But we haven't and we don't because we have not been forced to do so. While it would be much better for everyone if more of us were more curious and involved in world identifications and affairs, the world is not going to end if high-schoolers and collegians are not totally familiar with the location of Iraq, Fiji, Chile, New Zealand and Myanmar. When there is a need to learn that, we often do, whether the cause is good or bad.

We would expect our educational system to be considerably more penetrating and lasting than it seems to be, but there's always the fact that "you can look it up," whether geography books, the Internet, dictionaries and similar reference materials are employed.

Ah, but there's the rub! Increasingly we are turning out youngsters and adults who cannot read or write well enough to do the research.

Reading and writing have always been the key to education for any field; that has not changed. Young people these days have a lot thrown at them in our schools, and often geography, art, music and other important elements of life get shortchanged, though they should not be.

But if they can read and write decently, they can fill in a lot of squares on their learning chart over a time. Even if they cannot find Iraq or Cape Horn right away, if they have literacy skills they can overcome that instantly. That is far, far more important than rote learning, which may win trivia contests and even television game shows but is not necessarily the essence of education.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansan.com or pdecker@nwkansan.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the Free Press.

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EXPRESS-NEWS

There's a science to science-fiction

I'm a fairly die-hard science fiction fan. It takes a lot for me to add a new show to my "must watch" list and thankfully, I decided to take a chance on the latest incarnation of "Doctor Who."

The show is the most well known British contribution to science fiction. It's about a time-traveling individual simply known as "the doctor."

He is the last of the race called the Time Lords, and travels through the ages in a time machine (the TARDIS), which is disguised as a 1950s London police call box.

I enjoy "Lost" but haven't really had a show capture my attention like this since "The X-Files" and "Farscape."

Engrossing is a fitting way to describe this series, but at times it's also creepy, endearing, sweet and shocking.

The Doctor is played by British actor Christopher Eccleston, who brings a touch of innocence to a character who, at 900-years-old, has definitely been there, done that, and bored by it.

Glee on the face of someone in a dire situation is unusual, but it's one of the many attributes making this show so watchable.

It's not without humor either, although I'm not sure how many people would enjoy the sight of giant green aliens exploding into gobs of goo when doused with vinegar.

I'm glad the SciFi Channel picked up the show, and I'm not the only American.

The latest incarnation of the good Doctor was first shown March 26, 2005, in Britain, and had a run of 13 episodes. Those are the episodes showing here in the States right now while the second season of the new series is about half-way



Tisha Cox

• Off The Beaten Path

through its run.

Confusing? Definitely.

That's why this new series has its advantages. A newbie like me can watch without having to worry about the more than 40 years of backstory.

This latest version of the science fiction class could be considered a fresh start for that very reason.

Something original and engrossing is almost unique these days, I think. Especially when considering most everything on the airwaves now is either reality programming which isn't so real, or the rest of the stuff the networks are passing off as entertainment.

The two most recent episodes, "The Empty Child," and its sequel, "The Doctor Dances," were both thrilling and at times, touching too.

Let me back up a little. The Doctor and his companion, modern London girl Rose Tyler hop back in time to 1941 London during the height of the German blitz. Thrust into the middle of a bomb raid, the two encounter a ghostly child looking for his mother.

From there, it's a race to find out if the child is merely a specter, or a living being, and save the human race at the same time.

I think the series is an amazing bit of television, and the writers have a deft touch with balancing so many different themes and emotions, and it doesn't come off hokey.

Da Vinci Code mayhem...

"The Da Vinci Code" film comes out Friday, and the hype is building to a crescendo. I heard over the weekend Christian groups are putting out videos with titles like "The Da Vinci Delusion."

Of course, they're entitled to do so because of freedom of speech.

However, all the hype and controversy over a work of fiction makes me scratch my head in wonder.

I keep telling myself it's just a book — but I know it deals with a subject that is making many people very uncomfortable.

Author Dan Brown has created a debacle with his best seller. People are tangling with history versus myth and more importantly, faith versus fiction.

Many aspects of his story are rooted in historical fact, and include real places and works of art. Therein lies the rub on this one.

He's made it hard to distinguish between fact and fiction, and it will be interesting to see how well director Ron Howard brings the story to life on the big screen.

Maybe it will encourage people to find out the truth for themselves.

Tisha Cox is a general assignment reporter/photographer for the Free Press. Her column appears on Mondays. tcoc@nwkansan.com.

Education was the stalling issue

The stalling issue for the Kansas legislatures was education. Many of you will see I have voted against many of the school finance bills and for many as well. I have voted for large amounts up to \$600 million and amounts as low as \$400 million. I have even voted against some plans that provide more money for every one of my district schools. More money does not always equate to future stability and increases.

I know a few of you have made the statement "Raise Taxes for the Schools." You need to know that education may not benefit simply by raising taxes or providing more money. The last high dollar plan (I think it was \$575 million) that I voted against provided more money to all my schools in 2007 and 2008 then we began to receive less money as the higher enrollment "correlation weighting" numbers began to lower and shift cash from the low enrollment districts and base amount per pupil to the higher enrollment schools. Over a relatively short period of time we would actually then be receiving possibly less money than previous years unless we had enrollment increases or consolidation.



Jim Morrison

• Capitol Review

So, what you may not realize that voting for the higher dollar amounts could easily equate to voting to consolidate small rural schools. That potential consolidation would come at a time when reappointment will likely have us see the loss of two or more legislators in Western Kansas. A time we will not then be able to prevent the consolidation request of the Legislature as we have been successful in defending by one vote in the past.

In other words, go ahead and raise more money for the schools and risk forced consolidation without having to pass consolidation legislation. Consolidation can be built into the

funding of schools such that over time smaller schools will see monetary decreases so severe that districts, will have to consolidate to see increases in revenue. That is part of the play behind school finance reduction in the number of school districts and administrative personnel over time.

What I expect to see passed is a \$466 million dollar three-year education plan that will provide more money for all schools in my district than any bill we have so far seen. In addition I expect that we will fare well in the out years and not see forced consolidation. So far however, no such bill exists (at the time of this 11 a.m. May 9).

Our phones are off and secretary's not allowed to return so the only way to contact me is via e-mail at jmorrison@ink.org

The final day (Sine Die) is scheduled for May 25th. I plan to have a session wrap up prepared shortly after that time to distribute throughout the district. Thanks very much for your support, prayers and kind notes and letters.

About those letters . . .

The Free Press encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. These are used for verification of the writer only. If, however, you want your address and telephone number to appear with your letter, please ask us to do so when you submit your letter, or include a note with your letter. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive or libelous. You can expect your letter to appear in print within 24-48 hours of receipt. Letters to the Free Press allow readers to become engaged in public debate on topics they deem important. Please consider sharing your thoughts with the family of Colby Free Press readers. Thank you.

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• Gary Trudeau

