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Drama and art programs should be part of school curriculum

As a future teacher, I am writing this letter to encourage all members of the Johnson City Board of Education who will read this to support drama and art in the school system.

Recently I taught a lesson on a very important person in America's history, Samuel Gompers. While pre-assessing my students for this lesson, I quickly realized Samuel Gompers was not well known among the fifth-grade students.

According to state standards, students should be able to identify key ideas/facts about Gompers upon completing the fifth grade.

I knew that incorporating drama into this lesson would be beneficial to these students in providing them with the knowledge they need to obtain to demonstrate comprehension about Gompers.

My stated objectives were to "dramatize the working conditions in the early 1800s" and "role play the importance that Samuel Gompers and the AFL (American Federation of Labor) had on these conditions with 100 percent accuracy." The students did just that because drama was a part of this lesson.

The people in the 1800s worked under terrible conditions. As a class, we put ourselves into their shoes and expressed our emotions about these conditions through role play.

Each student had a role in a work environment. They were underpaid and they were working in dangerous atmospheres. Gompers came into the set after employees started to team up together and he provided better working conditions to all employees.

I took this lesson a step further and incorporated art into the lesson. The



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students made signs out of poster board that they used to go on a strike for these terrible working conditions. Students designed their signs using art that expressed the feelings they had toward this issue.

They used vivid words in creating the sentence that they wrote on the poster board. This was a great way to incorporate writing through art.

Keeping drama and art in our schools is very important for student success. **KELLY HUDLER**
Milligan College

Higher ed funding

I once again read with great glee several stories on the state budget in relationship to higher education. Once again we have a governor, and possibly the legislators, talking about Tennessee's "Race to the Top" in education. Yet higher education continues to get the "used wrapper" in funding — not even the fuzzy end of the lollipop. Yet some other state employees are proposed to get significant step raises?

A recent article quotes the governor as saying, "If we are going to have a great higher education system and hard-working state employees, we cannot continue to ask them to go without raises." Hallelujah. After many years of no raises he recommends that higher ed employees get a 1.6 percent pay raise. That equates to \$53 a month (30 cents an hour) for many of us. In the meantime, our benefits package costs more and more each year so in fact we are losing ground.

According to the newly released report, East Tennessee State University's full professors rank dead last in the nation in terms of salary and associate/assistant professors rank second and third from the bottom. Our "Race to the Bottom" has been successful. This is not the fault of ETSU — every year there are budgeted equity raises, but the Tennessee Board of Regents and the state will not allow them. Tuition rises every year as do books, fees, dorms and food. No increase in salaries though and the cost of paying the faculty a fair wage actually gets worse.

Imagine if you worked a job and your

salary was less than 50 percent of what the average salary is? And by the way, we work more than 40 hours a week, more than five days a week and we work throughout the year.
DAVID CHAMPOUILLON
Johnson City

Radiation questions

It is gratifying that my April 10 column on nuclear power plants has started a conversation on the subject. B.A. O'Neal's letter of April 15 brings out a very important point that must be carefully and seriously considered — the danger of radioactive materials outside power plants.

The point of my article was a rather narrow one — that no one had ever died or been seriously injured as the result of radiation from a commercial nuclear power plant, Chernobyl excepted. O'Neal points out, correctly, that long before a power plant generates the first watt, workers from miners to machinists to truck drivers are at risk. Indubitably true. These materials are, quite simply, the most dangerous on the planet. And there have been cases, some of them egregious, where inadequate attention was paid to the risks.

But have thousands died from radiation-induced cancer, as O'Neal states? We may be thankful that the answer is no. A quick Internet search did not give me a good number to cite, but there is nothing in any of the literature that I found, outside of so-called "studies" by avowedly anti-nuclear groups, that puts the number anywhere near that. In fact, when I searched "deaths from

low-dose radiation" I got a surprise — the first few pages listed numerous articles about studies that found low-dose radiation may be good for us, and at least one that found it's necessary for the proper functioning of our immune systems.

Well, count me skeptical. Nonetheless, with only a handful of exceptions, peer-reviewed epidemiological studies have shown no statistically significant increase in cancer rates among nuclear-industry workers, or at most an increase of a few percent. (By the way, studies of Erwin are consistent with this, and show no unusual levels of cancer.) This, of course, drives anti-nukes crazy, as they are convinced beyond all reasoning that any exposure to radiation is a guarantee of death by cancer.

The fact remains that radioactive materials are extraordinarily dangerous. But this does not argue for the elimination of nuclear power plants, it only argues for extraordinary care in handling, processing and disposal, the same as with any number of dangerous materials.

KENNETH D. GOUGH
Johnson City

Beautiful flowers

I would like to thank whoever planted (and maintains) the beautiful rose bushes at the underpass on East Market Street. They are an absolute joy to behold on my way to work each morning. I am so grateful to the people who work hard to keep the common areas of our city beautiful.

ANGELA STANBROUGH
Johnson City