

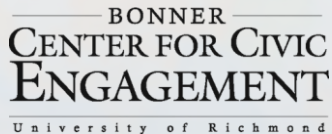


# Welcome

to our conversation on

LITERACY: WHY IT MATTERS  
AND WHAT YOU CAN DO

# TONIGHT'S CONVERSATION IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY



# CIVIC ACTION CONVERSATIONS

Explore regional critical priorities

Possible action steps for every Richmonder



September 20, 2023

# Literacy, Public Education, and American Democracy

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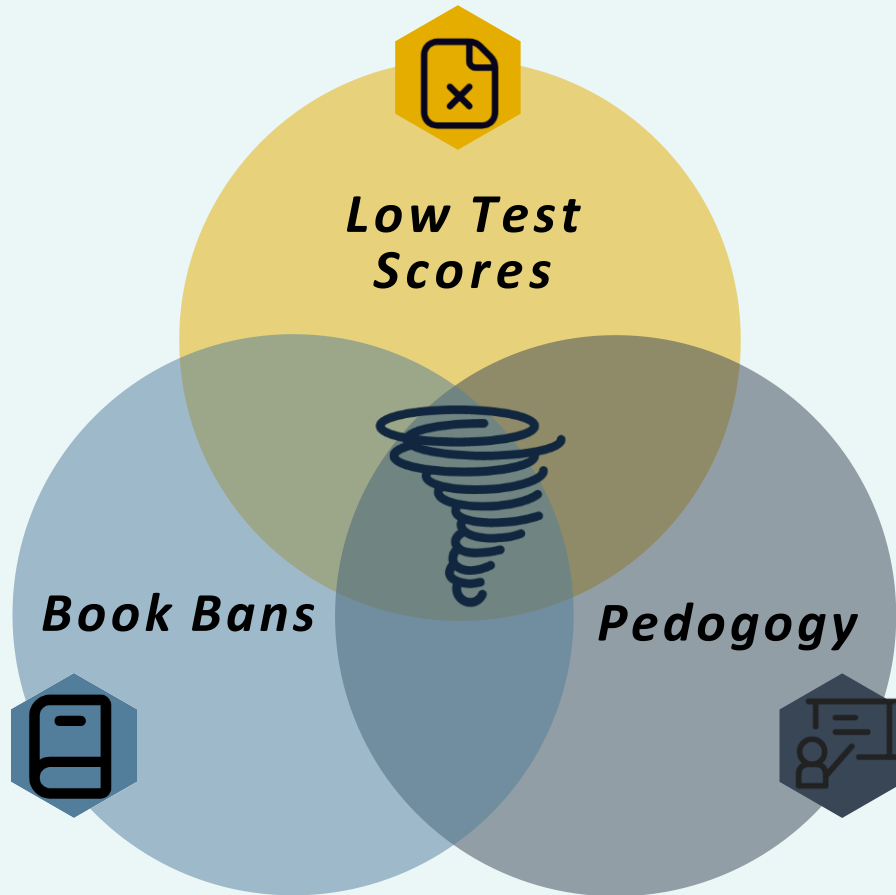
# The Power of Literacy

Individual  
Good

Public  
Good



# A Perfect Storm: Angst Over Literacy + Public Schools



# Early Literacy Panics and First Calls for Schools in the US

"It being one chief project of that old deluder Satan to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures...It is therefore ordered, that every township in this jurisdiction, after the Lord hath increased them to the number of fifty households, shall then forthwith appoint one within their town to teach all such children... It is further ordered that when any town shall increase to the number of 100 families, they shall set up a grammar school."

*Massachusetts' Old Deluder Satan Law, 1647*

# New England Primer, 1690

( 12 )



**A**

In Adam's fall  
We sinned all.



**B**

Thy life to mend,  
This Book attend.



**C**

The Cat doth play,  
And after slay.



**D**

A Dog will bite,  
A Thief at night.



**E**

An Eagle's flight,  
Is out of fight.



**F**

The idle Fool  
Is whipt at school.

( 13 )



**G**

As runs the Glafs,  
Man's life doth pass.



**H**

My Book and Heart,  
Shall never part.



**I**

Job feels the rod,  
Yet blesses God.



**K**

Kings should be good,  
Not men of blood.



**L**

The Lion bold,  
The Lamb doth hold.



**M**

The Moon gives light  
In time of night.



corporation court, until the case shall be finally disposed of by the superior court to which the writ of error is returnable.

5. All acts and parts of acts coming within the purview of this **Repealing clause.** act shall be and the same are hereby repealed: *Provided always,* That nothing in this act contained shall be construed to repeal any act heretofore made, for so much thereof as may relate to any of those committed or done, or claim which may have accrued, before the commencement of this act.

6. This act shall be in force from and after the first day of May **Commencement.** next.

CHAP. XXXIX.—AN ACT to amend the act concerning slaves, free negroes and mulattoes.

[Passed April 7, 1831.]

1. *Be it enacted by the general assembly,* That all free negroes and mulattoes, who shall be convicted of remaining in this commonwealth contrary to law, and who shall become liable to be sold according to the provisions of former laws and of this act, shall be publicly sold by the sheriff or sergeant, at the front door of the court-house of the county or corporation, on a court-day in pursuance of notice of such sale, posted at such court-house door, at the court held in the preceding month.

Free negroes and mulattoes remaining in state contrary to law, to be sold.

Notice of sale required.

2. *Be it further enacted,* That the several superior courts of law, as well as the county and corporation courts, shall have jurisdiction of all prosecutions against free negroes and mulattoes, offending in manner aforesaid, and may try and determine the same according to law.

Jurisdiction in such prosecutions given to superior as well as county courts.

3. *Be it further enacted,* That it shall be the duty of all commissioners of the public revenue, once in every year, to present to the grand juries of the several courts aforesaid, a list of all free negroes and mulattoes, who, in the opinion of such commissioners, may have remained within the commonwealth, contrary to law, upwards of twelve months from the time of their emancipation.

Commissioners of revenue to present free negroes, &c. so remaining in state.

4. *Be it further enacted,* That all meetings of free negroes or mulattoes, at any school-house, church, meeting-house or other place for teaching them reading or writing, either in the day or night, under whatsoever pretext, shall be deemed and considered as an unlawful assembly; and any justice of the county or corporation, wherein such assemblage shall be, either from his own knowledge, or on the information of others, of such unlawful assemblage or meeting, shall issue his warrant, directed to any sworn officer or officers, authorising him or them, to enter the house or houses where such unlawful assemblage or meeting may be, for the purpose of apprehending or dispersing such free negroes or mulattoes, and to inflict corporal punishment on the offender or offenders, at the discretion of any justice of the peace, not exceeding twenty lashes.

Meetings for teaching free negroes, &c. reading or writing, prohibited.

Justice to issue warrant to apprehend and disperse such persons.

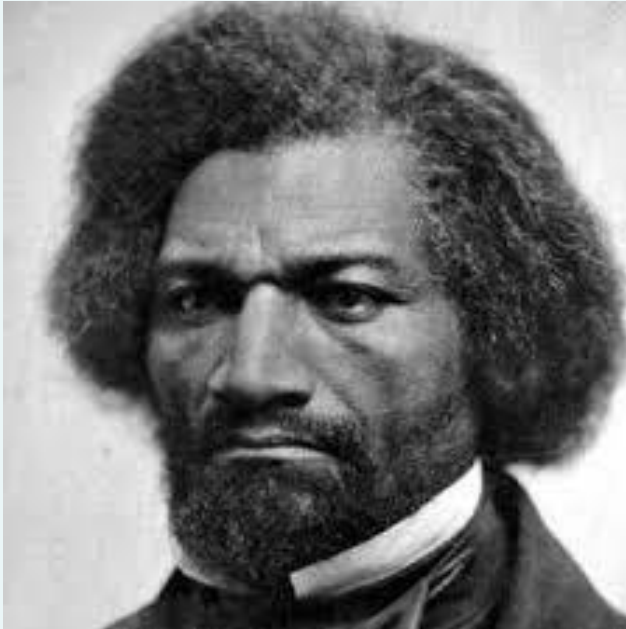
Punishment.

5. *Be it further enacted,* That if any white person or persons assemble with free negroes or mulattoes, at any school-house, church, meeting-house, or other place for the purpose of instructing such free negroes or mulattoes to read or write, such person or persons shall, on conviction thereof, be fined in a sum not exceeding fifty dollars, and moreover may be imprisoned at the discretion of a jury, not exceeding two months.

Penalty on white persons for assembling with free negroes to instruct them in reading and writing.

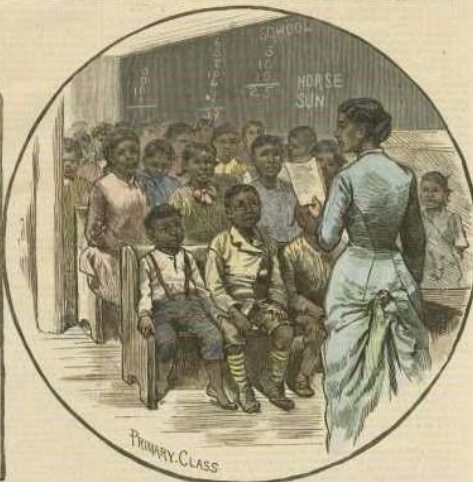
# Laws Banning Literacy for Enslaved and Free African Americans

# Risking Everything for Literacy



*"Once you learn to read, you  
will forever be free."*

*Narrative of the Life of  
Frederick Douglass, an  
American Slave, Written by  
Himself (1845)*



EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS IN VIRGINIA—THE SCHOOLS FOR COLORED CHILDREN IN RICHMOND.

FROM SKETCHES BY G. UPHAM.—THE PEARL CO.

# The Fight for Literacy and Schools for Democracy

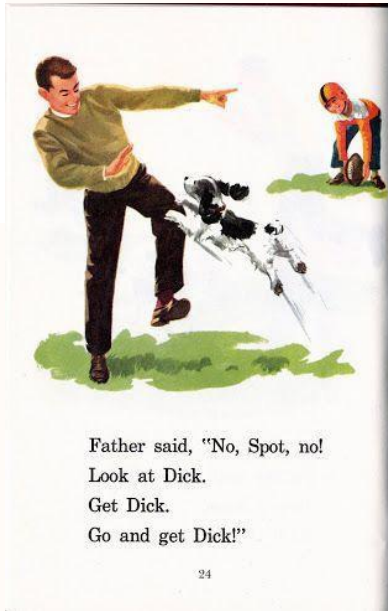


Teacher and students in a segregated school  
Georgia, 1941

# Literacy Debates: Fighting to Control How Kids Understand Their World



They were . . . until Yertle, the king of them all,  
Decided the kingdom he ruled was too small.  
"I'm ruler," said Yertle, "of all that I see.  
But I don't see *enough*. That's the trouble with me.  
With this stone for a throne, I look down on my pond  
But I cannot look down on the places beyond.  
This throne that I sit on is too, too low down.  
It ought to be *higher!*" he said with a frown.  
"If I could sit high, how much greater I'd be!  
What a king! I'd be ruler of all I could see!"



Father said, "No, Spot, no!  
Look at Dick.  
Get Dick.  
Go and get Dick!"



**Mother and Sally**

# Virginia Literacy Act

“Like children across the nation, Virginia’s children are in the midst of a literacy crisis. Across the Commonwealth, one in three kindergarten to second grade students are reading below benchmark, and far too many third graders are not passing their Reading SOL. This impacts students for years to come; students who are not proficient in reading by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers.”

*Starting 2024-2025*



*Core literacy instruction*



*Evidence-based instruction*



*Reading specialists*

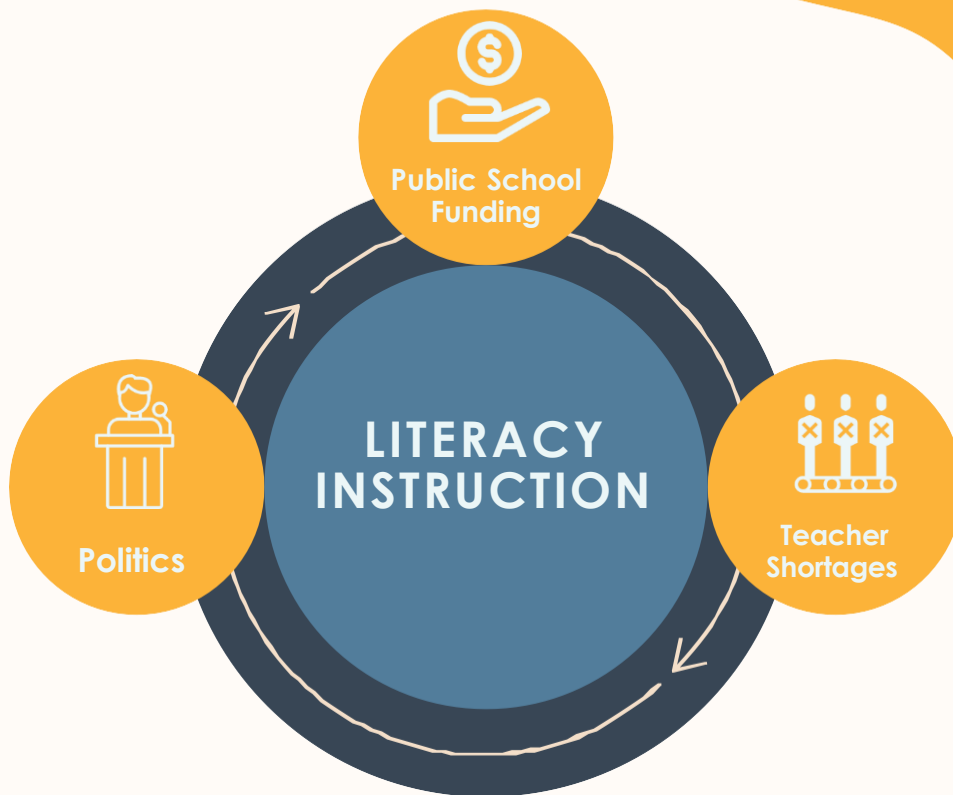


*District-wide plans*



*Educator Preparation Requirements*

# Literacy Debates & The Retreat to the Margins



## ACTION STEPS FOR EVERY RICHMONDER

- Learn about the Virginia Literacy Act
- Reach out to your legislators to encourage budgetary support for better literacy outcomes
- Advocate for the civic value of well-resourced and equitable neighborhood public schools
- Read aloud to children and encourage others to do the same
- Partner with schools and teachers to advance literacy
- Volunteer at your local library or a literacy-focused nonprofit