**Schweizer, Bernard** Bernard Schweizer grew up in Switzerland. He was a health care professional until he began his university studies at age 26. Bernard Schweizer attended the French-speaking University of Lausanne for two years before immigrating to the United States to continue studying at the University of Minnesota (B.A., 1992) and at Duke University (Ph.D., 1997).

Cultural Literacy: Is it Time to Revisit the Debate?

Vocabulary

**Curriculum**: what is taught in a school or a course

**Inculcated:** instill an attitude by persistence

**Rearguard action:** A defense of a retreating army

**Diction**: choice of words

**Ominous:** an impression that something bad is going to happen; foreboding

**Idiom** (atic): expressions that are not literal (rain cats and dogs/ a piece of cake)

**Dystopia**: a world where a utopia has been tried and it failed to some large degree...often totally

(social) **stratification**: layered without mixture

**Coterie:** a small group of people with shared interests or tastes, especially one that is exclusive

of other people.

**Utterance**: something said aloud...mentioned

**Onerous**: burdensome

**Argot:** particular group’s jargon/slang

**The canon**: the group of readings that everyone feels “should” be taught/read.

**Ephemeral:** lasting a short time

**Polity:** A politically organized unit/group (or the entirety of the/a government and its people)

**Accede:** to enter an office (he acceded to the throne) (also to agree to/ acquiesce)

References

**Culture Wars** (Grad School in mid-90’s) a conflict between conservative and progressive

ideas...in the 90’s racial sensitivity was used as a weapon against the right wing. Also,

the sensitive 90’s man became a trope of the era.

**Great Books Approach:** The idea that there should be a few books we all read

**Banking Concept of Education:** students are empty vessels to be filled

**Gandhism:** non-violent resistance. (truth and non-violence) Being like Gandhi

**Quixotic:** foolishly [impractical](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/impractical) especially in the pursuit of ideals. *especially* : marked by [rash](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rash#h2)

lofty romantic ideas or extravagantly [chivalrous](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/chivalrous) action (from Don Quixote by Miguel de

Cervantes)

**in the offing:** in the distance/ soon. From nautical “off in the distance” the horizon.

**The excretions of our economy:** byproducts that have no real value…(shit)

**The snows of kilimanjaro:** Tanzania/kenya border...Hemingway wrote a short story about a

man who is dying from a preventable infection (themes of mortality and regret)

**Some will be hotter than others**: reference to Orwell’s *Animal Farm*... “more equal than

others”

**Mahatma Gandhi**: He made a name for himself by leading a peaceful revolution using

non-violent means of protest (The English controlled India from 1858-1947).

**Ernest Hemingway**: wrote “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” American author. Important to modernist

movement. Tough guy who liked to drink and box. He wrote clearly and hated flowery

language.

**Thoreau**: Transcendentalist author and thinker. Believed nature was essential to man’s spirit,

and that we have a oneness between all humans.

**George Orwell**: Dystopian author...wrote 1984 and Animal Farm

**Mao Zedong/ Mao Tse-tung** (and his little red book): Communist leader of China. The tenets of

Chinese communism written simply for the semi-literate populace.

People to Know

E.D. Hirsch-pro- cultural literacy

Paulo Freire-against the ideas of cultural literacy

Quotes:

“Deep, rich, and associative”

“My students are perhaps performing so poorly on general knowledge issues because most of them come from underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds (e.g., poor inner-city high schools) and diverse ethnic backgrounds (e.g., immigrants).

“How to read information within a web of references”

Questions for reading:

1. Define “Cultural Literacy”
2. How culturally literate do you think you are?
3. How might this text explain why the first two articles were so hard to read for you?
4. What led to “Cultural Literacy” becoming frowned upon?
5. Does it deserve to be discussed as a relevant literacy?