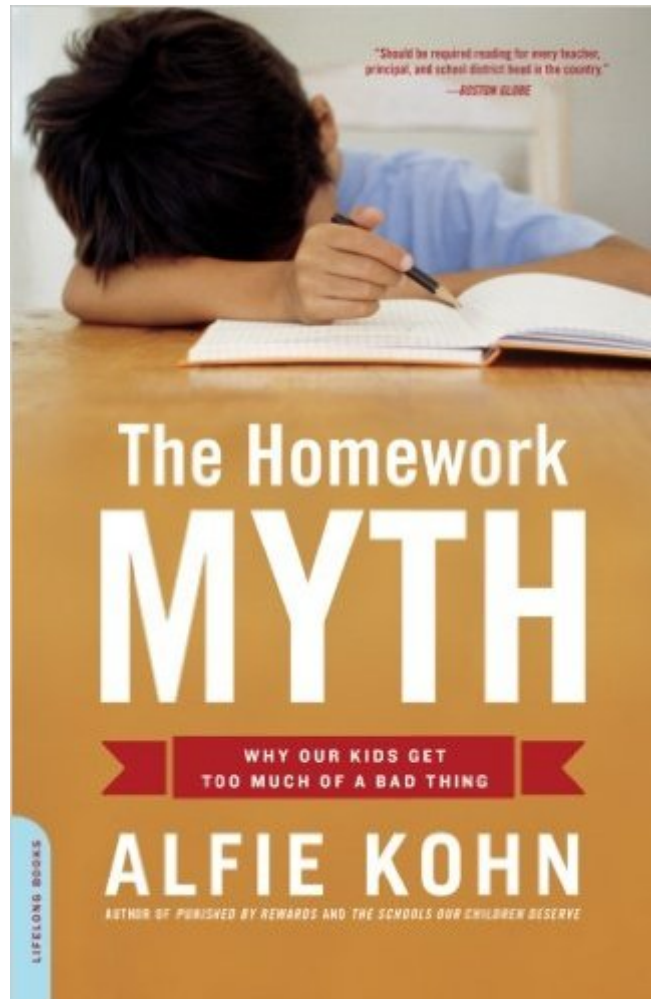


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The Homework Myth: Why Our Kids Get Too Much Of A Bad Thing



Synopsis

So why do we continue to administer this modern cod liver oil-or even demand a larger dose? Kohn's incisive analysis reveals how a set of misconceptions about learning and a misguided focus on competitiveness has left our kids with less free time, and our families with more conflict. Pointing to stories of parents who have fought back-and schools that have proved educational excellence is possible without homework-Kohn demonstrates how we can rethink what happens during and after school in order to rescue our families and our children's love of learning.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Growing up, I was a gifted student who absolutely hated school and teachers with the end result of becoming a proud college drop out. I picked this book up to, frankly, justify my educational opinions and to perhaps collect ammunition for when my own daughter goes to school. That's not the book I got. I got an even better one. People seem to think this book is about how homework is bad for you. It's not. The premise of the book is that homework isn't good for you, an important distinction. This isn't a book about homework. This is a book about the homework myth - why we believe it, why we want to believe it, why we can't ignore it, and why we are controlled by it. When the author quotes Chomsky, you know the subject has moved beyond the usefulness of worksheets. This is a book essentially about faith. I may actually be doing a disservice to the book when I describe it that way, since I've made a polarizing connection with the material, but it's really what the book is about. When faced with the lack of evidence, why do we still choose to believe things? Like why does

Harris Cooper, despite his own research either having nothing to say or even contradicting his opinion, still conclude that homework is good for you? He goes from point A to point C. This book is about that hidden point B. The first part of the book is basically tearing down a bunch of preconceived notions about homework. Rather than saying homework is bad, he spends considerable effort convincing us that there is no evidence that homework is good. To some people, that's not enough, but his point is, I think, that it's plenty enough to at least open a serious discussion on the matter.

I didn't realize I got this book from a bookstore on the first day it was available. I've read half of it so far, and must say that Kohn makes some excellent points about how homework is something we don't consider doing without. Nor do we tend to consider whether or not it is even helpful. Thinking back on my experience as a student growing up, homework was just a chore I had to do. Of course it helped me remember the forgettable facts I was being tested on, but to justify assigning homework based on that is to assume memorizing forgettable facts is a productive and valuable experience. He brings up a valuable point that homework does not play upon any intrinsic desire to learn something but is just more forced learning that can even make students hate certain subjects or even learning in general. If only teachers knew how much making me read a bunch of stories I didn't want to read caused me to hate literature. If only teachers knew how much all the performance-based math homework and testing made me hate mathematics when I may have loved learning it with a focus on understanding the concepts involved and possibly considering how it could be applied to something practical. All I got was math homework and grading from math teachers. Although this book is good, I would recommend reading Kohn's *What Does It Mean to be Well Educated* first to get a good idea of his perspective on education in general. Kohn displays his brilliance and revolutionary thinking in 18 concise essays that should be seriously considered by students and teachers alike. There are two things Kohn has not mentioned so far. First, sometimes students do homework at school. I don't mean during lunch or recess or other non-instructional times, but during classes so they don't have to do it at home.

In *The Homework Myth*, Alfie Kohn has some good things to say. Take this (from p. 59): "People are active meaning makers. They are not passive receptacles into which knowledge, or skills, or dispositions can be poured." This is a powerful statement which has wide implications in the field of education. And, in fact, Mr. Kohn has a number of other good things to say in this book beyond his insistent calls to eliminate homework. But he does little with his big ideas. They are hidden beneath

his avowed purpose in this book: to convince us that homework is a bad idea. But, no matter how you feel about Mr. Kohn's thesis, it is a bitter pill to swallow since his tone is so stridently negative and he falls into the same traps that he accuses the supporters of homework of sliding into. I speak mainly of his selective use of research data. In fact, there is not enough valid research to support either eliminating or sticking with homework. And yet, Mr. Kohn has no trouble reinterpreting past studies that "proved" the usefulness of homework to support his thesis. And, in any case, he says, in the face of indecisive research we should throw homework out. That's not a very "scientific" argument or conclusion. This goes beyond his tendency towards hyperbole and otherwise overstating his case. Is it really so easy for educators to face down parents who want their kids to have homework? Does he really believe that, given the free time elimination of homework would provide, kids would drift into idyllic pursuits like "hanging out with their parents," "read[ing] for pleasure," or "get[ting] some exercise"? Does he really believe that colleges and universities should accept low-performing students?

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