

# The Truth About Textbooks

[OR WHY CHILDREN IN CANADA HAVE SOMETIMES FELT SLIGHTLY OUT OF PLACE]

Satu Repo, a writer and former editor of *This Magazine*, summed up the past. "Canadian public-school readers," she said, "differ from public-school readers in most other countries in that they don't attempt to give children a sense of *patria*, either geographically or ideologically."\*



For the first hundred years or so life was viewed in Canadian classrooms from the vantage point of London or Chicago or Mount Sinai.

The first official textbooks in Canada, *The Irish*

*Readers*, were introduced in 1846 by Egerton Ryerson, Upper Canada's Superintendent of Education; and they remained the authorized readers for twenty years. Designed to reduce tension in Ireland by stressing Old Testament biblical virtues and British  
*continued on page four*

\* All direct quotations are from Satu Repo, "From Pilgrim's Progress to Sesame Street: 125 Years of Colonial Readers," in George Martell, ed., *The Politics of the Canadian Public School* (James Lorimer & Co., 1974), pp. 118-133.

## In Saskatchewan It Is Impossible to be Kept Back in the Sixth Grade But in Ontario You Can Flunk Grade Thirteen

All Canadian children from six or seven to twelve, fifteen or sixteen (depending on the province or territory) must go to school. About 97.5 per cent of them go to publicly-controlled schools.

A publicly-controlled school in Canada is not always the same as a public school in the United States. In most provinces there are "public" schools without affiliation, but in some, "separate" schools may be organized on denominational or linguistic bases. When Newfoundland consolidated its three-hundred-odd denominational school boards to thirty-five in 1971, it ended up with twelve Roman Catholic districts, twenty-one integrated Protestant, one Pentecostal and one Seventh Day Adventist. In Quebec most children go to the publicly supported Catholic schools, and most of the remaining children to schools with Protestant school boards. Most Jewish children are part of the Protestant school system.

At present there are about 460,000 Canadian twelve-year-olds in school. If they go to school in Saskatchewan, their elementary school has a continuous progress plan. The first six years are divided into two divisions, each the equivalent of three grades. Within each division the pupil

moves at his own best pace in each subject. So far the plan has been implemented in Divisions I and II, and soon a twelve-year-old may enter Division III instead of the seventh grade.

High schools also differ from province to province. Ontario youngsters can go through grade thirteen and receive a Secondary Honour Graduation Diploma. Those who finish grade thirteen need only three years at university for a B.A. Quebec secondary schooling ends at grade eleven, and those seeking a university education must first go to regional colleges called *Collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel*, or CEGEPs, which offer both university preparatory courses and complete three-year technical courses in such fields as business administration, auto mechanics and secretarial sciences.

Canada's provincial governments run the schools. Local school boards (*commissions scolaires* in Quebec) build buildings, hire teachers and prepare budgets. The provincial ministers of education select curricula and textbooks, but local boards have been assuming greater responsibilities in these areas. Nearly 97 per cent of the money spent by public school boards comes from local or provincial taxation.