



Caught in the Middle: Nonstandard Kids and a Killing Curriculum

Susan Ohanian

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As one of the country's most outspoken critics of standards and testing, and a former inner-city teacher, Susan Ohanian is no stranger to the "f" word: failure. She often referred to it in her best-seller, *One Size Fits Few*, to point out "the folly of educational standards." And now, in her follow-up book, *Caught in the Middle*, it's the fulcrum upon which she dares to reveal what schools are really like when nonstandard kids and a standardized curriculum collide in the classroom.

Offering both a warning and a clarion to teachers everywhere—Susan tells an insider's story of living day in and day out with students who are not likely to succeed in a world with only one definition of success. In the first of a series of heart-wrenching and heroic portraits, you'll meet twelve-year-old Sylvia ("Nobody messes with Sylvia"), who is failing all her courses but, somehow, teams up with the author in a bizarre mutual-aid arrangement. Next, one by one, you'll get to know Anita (sweet, compliant, and then pregnant) . . . Jimmy (who discovers fairy tales ten years after all his peers did) . . . Tiffany (unkempt, unwashed, whiny, and then suddenly transformed into the proud owner of words when introduced to a thesaurus) . . . Jean (teller of tall tales, including a whopper Susan fell for) . . . Clarice (the most polite kid in school, but with a locker bursting with stolen goods) . . . and Arnold ("certifiably crazy," but who is always promoted because nobody wanted him to stay another year).

Although admitting to failure, *Caught in the Middle* is not a downer. Hope shines through, and it comes, not from political initiatives or even from wonderful programs, but from individual interactions between teacher and students; it comes from matters of the heart.

Visit www.susanohanian.org

Visit Susan Ohanian online for a wealth of information on education issues and to learn more about her. You'll find commentary, cartoons, letters, resources, quotes and a word of the day offering children a provocative way to increase their vocabulary.

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