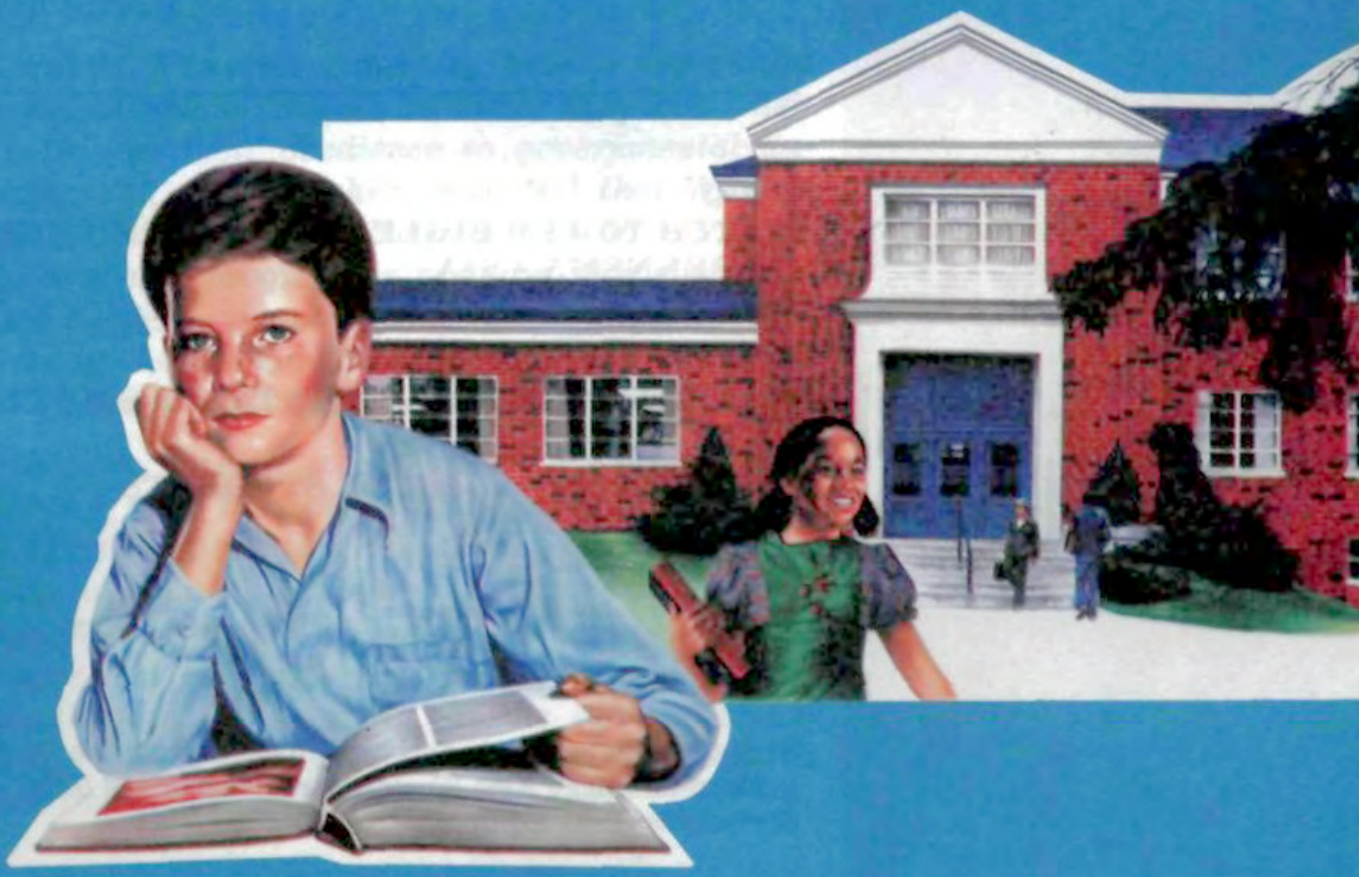
School and Jehovah's Witnesses



CONTENTS

Subject	*Page*
The Reason for This Brochure	**3**
Our Purpose in Life	**4**
Our View of the Future	**6**
The Moral Principles We Follow	**8**
Flag Salute, Anthems and Voting	**12**
Holidays and Celebrations	**17**
Extracurricular Activities	**22**
Class Instruction	**26**
Cooperation With the School System	**30**

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THE REASON FOR THIS BROCHURE

This brochure is published to promote understanding and cooperation between Jehovah's Witnesses and school authorities. It is our desire to cooperate with all who are working for the success of basic educational programs offered in school.

Parents who are Jehovah's Witnesses want to contribute to a favorable environment for the learning process. They want their young ones to receive the greatest benefit possible from their schooling. And they want teachers and other school authorities to know that they will do all that they reasonably can to help achieve this.

Jehovah's Witnesses generally have a reputation for excellent moral conduct wherever they live. They are noted for their obedience to governmental authorities. Yet, some teachers may feel that Witness youths are uncooperative because they do not share in every school program or function. However, this refusal to share is not because the youths are rebellious or antisocial. Their actions are based on religious and moral convictions.

In this brochure we would like to acquaint school authorities with the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses that affect participation in school activities. Additionally, we want to explain why, as a result of such beliefs, Witness youths do not share in certain school functions and programs that are common in many places throughout the world. At the same time we want to make it clear that it is not our intention to impose our views on others.

OUR PURPOSE IN LIFE

At the outset, a brief description of Jehovah's Witnesses and our purpose in life will be helpful. We are an international body of Christians who can be found in more than 200 lands throughout the world. Our way of worshiping God involves our entire outlook and manner of life.

Since we are convinced that God is a real being, we consider it vital to maintain a close, personal relationship with him as our Father. (Matthew 6:9) Among other things, this involves knowing him by his name. At Psalm 83:18 the Bible says: "That people may know that you, *whose name is Jehovah*, you alone are the Most High over all the earth."

As Christians, we also try to fashion our lives around the example of God's Son, Jesus Christ. That he was an outstandingly well-educated man is evident from the wisdom of his teachings. But Jesus used his knowledge for the benefit of others and not to gain a secure financial position or great prominence. The biggest thing in his life was his service to God. "My food," Jesus said, "is for me to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work."—John 4:34.

We feel the same way. To this end, Witnesses worldwide value a good education. We encourage our youths to expand their horizons—to get knowledge and understanding of their environment and what life is all about. To this end they read, and often use in their schoolwork, our journal *Awake!* that covers practically all fields of human knowledge. Some educators also use this magazine in preparing their school courses.

The educational training our children receive has helped many of them to develop their creative potential. The *Journal of Personality* observed this in its report on an Australian study about the "creativity" of 12-year-olds. The researchers said: "In particular,

Witnesses worldwide value a good education

a disproportionately large number of highly creative children were Jehovah's Witnesses." This can be attributed to the fact that the religion of the Witnesses encourages them to use their thinking ability.

Even though Witness youths are interested in a good education, they do not pursue schooling with the intention of obtaining prestige or prominence. Their main goal in life is to serve effectively as ministers of God, and they appreciate schooling as an aid to that end. So they generally choose courses that are useful for supporting themselves in the modern world. Thus, many may take vocational courses or attend a vocational school. When they leave school they desire to obtain work that will allow them to concentrate on their principal vocation, the Christian ministry.

View of the Bible

As you can appreciate from the foregoing, Jehovah's Witnesses take the Bible as a daily guide more seriously than many do. They really believe that "all Scripture is inspired of God."—2 Timothy 3:16.

In keeping with those words, we believe that everything recorded in the Bible is accurate and should guide a Christian in life. As a result, a Witness youth's view of certain school activities may be quite different from that of a student who may not take Bible teachings so seriously. This brochure will consider school activities that are involved and endeavor to help you understand why Jehovah's Witnesses take the position they do regarding such activities.

Since, as you may know, the Bible is outstandingly a book of prophecy, we would like you to consider the effect that faith in its prophecies has upon the Witnesses' attitude toward school.

Used as a daily guide

"The world is passing away . . . but he that does the will of God remains forever."
—1 John 2:17

OUR VIEW OF THE FUTURE

A Bible prophecy that profoundly affects our outlook on life is that found at Revelation 21:3 and 4. It reads: "God himself will be with [mankind]. And he will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away."

Repeatedly the Bible describes a better world of God's creation. "There are new heavens and a new earth that we are awaiting according to [God's] promise, and in these righteousness is to dwell."—2 Peter 3:13; Psalm 37:9-11, 29; Isaiah 11:6-9; 35:5, 6.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe the fulfillment of this promise to be the only solution to mankind's problems, as Jesus indicated when he taught his disciples to pray: "Let your kingdom come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth." (Matthew 6:10) In our belief, God's Kingdom is a real government. (Isaiah 9:6, 7) It is the only government that can eliminate from the earth all the conditions that produce human distress and bring lasting peace.

What the coming of God's Kingdom will mean for all present-day governments is stated in another Bible prophecy: "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be brought to ruin. And the kingdom itself . . . *will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms,* and it itself will stand to times indefinite." —Daniel 2:44.

Since we are convinced that this change is quite near, our young people believe it is realistic to prepare for a lifelong career that is in harmony with our belief in the reality of God's Kingdom. Our principal aim is to tell people about the bright future ahead. We really do look forward to the passing of present sorrows and troubles and to surviving to enjoy the blessings God has in store for those who serve Him. God's sure

promise is: "The world is passing away and so is its desire, but he that does the will of God remains forever."—1 John 2:17.

Separate From the World

As one might expect, this view of the future also had a significant effect on the first Christians. It caused them to be a distinctive people, separate from the world. As historian E. G. Hardy noted in his book *Christianity and the Roman Government:* "The Christians were strangers and pilgrims in the world around them; their citizenship was in heaven; the kingdom to which they looked was not of this world. The consequent want of interest in public affairs came thus from the outset to be a noticeable feature in Christianity."

Jesus made it clear that their separateness would be an outstanding characteristic of his disciples. "They are no part of the world," he said. (John 17:16; 15: 19) In keeping with this principle, Jehovah's Witnesses try to be "no part of the world." That does not mean, of course, that we advocate becoming hermits, shutting ourselves off from the world. We are sincerely interested in the welfare of others in the community and in the schools. Our young ones want to contribute to class activities in a helpful way.

At the same time, however, we believe the Bible makes it clear that "the whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one." (1 John 5:19; John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4) As a result, we are concerned about the adverse effect that the world's influence can have on our children. Often the world glamorizes life-styles that we believe to be unwholesome. And the schools are affected. So, to the extent possible, Jehovah's Witnesses want their children to avoid such harmful influences.

Witness children want to contribute what they can to class activities

THE MORAL PRINCIPLES WE FOLLOW

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the dramatic change in views on morality has had a bad influence on young people. As you are aware, a so-called new morality has taken hold since the 1960's. England's Bishop of Woolwich, one of its early proponents, claimed: "Nothing can of itself always be labelled as 'wrong.' " We do not agree with that, but we want to make it clear that we do not choose to argue with those who do. We simply want to explain what moral principles we follow and why we do so.

Joseph Fletcher, a prominent professor of theology in the United States, said of the new morality: "There is nothing against extra-marital sex as such, in this ethic, and in *some* cases it is good." And Frederic C. Wood, an assistant professor of religion in the United States, explained to students: "There are no laws attached to sex. I repeat: *absolutely no laws.* There is nothing which you ought to do, or ought not to do." —*Theology Today,* October 1965, page 396.

Though such views on morality may be popular, Jehovah's Witnesses consider them contrary to the Bible and hence improper. Our Bible-based position is reflected in our 1976 book *Your Youth—Getting the Best out of It,* which considers how moral principles affect conduct. Interestingly, after having it reviewed by 100 students 12 to 19 years of age, a researcher wrote in criticism: "Moral standards like the ones expressed in your book might have worked at one time, but I doubt they would work now. This generation is more enlightened than any before."

However, it does not seem to us that adopting the new moral standards has made young people "more enlightened." In a recent study of more than 160,000 young people 13 to 15 years of age, 41 percent of the boys and 21 percent of the girls had engaged in sexual

A book that considers how moral principles affect conduct. Witness parents use it to instruct their children

intercourse. And of those 16 to 18 years of age, nearly three quarters of the boys and half the girls had done so. But what have been the consequences?

An epidemic of adolescent pregnancies. About one in ten teenage girls in the United States gets pregnant each year—some 1,250,000 annually. Of these, close to 600,000 have their babies—the rest have abortions. Also, millions of young people each year contract a venereal disease, including the feared herpes. Consequently, we believe there is good reason not to view these social conditions as the product of 'enlightenment.'

Sound Moral Principles

There is much confusion regarding what moral principles to teach young people. Teachers frequently lament the lack of clear conviction about this. We realize that some teachers wish that they had more freedom to teach their students the sound moral principles found in the Bible. As Jehovah's Witnesses, we sincerely believe that the Bible's teaching regarding morality has a truly wholesome effect.

Witness parents begin early to teach the Bible's moral principles to their young ones, often using as a teaching aid *Your Youth—Getting the Best out of It*. If you wish, one of your Witness students will be happy to provide you with a copy. It will acquaint you with the moral principles we follow, giving more details regarding our views on the following matters.

Premarital Sex: We believe that, without exception, premarital sexual intercourse, which is fornication, is wrong; it is immoral. The Bible commands: "Flee from fornication." (1 Corinthians 6:18) "Abstain from fornication." (1 Thessalonians 4:3) It is our view

Along with the new morality came an increase of social problems

Witness parents begin early to teach the Bible's moral principles to their young

that premarital sex is a serious offense against God. "God will judge fornicators and adulterers," the Scriptures say.—Hebrews 13:4; Revelation 21:8.

Homosexuality: We also believe that homosexuality is morally wrong. Note what the Bible says about both women and men homosexuals: "God gave them up to disgraceful sexual appetites, for both their females changed the natural use of themselves into one contrary to nature; and likewise even the males left the natural use of the female and became violently inflamed in their lust toward one another, males with males, working what is obscene."—Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

Alcoholic Beverages: Alcoholic beverages are foods and, in their place, can be beneficial. (Psalm 104:14, 15; 1 Timothy 5:23) Yet they can be, and often are, abused. We believe, as the Bible emphasizes, that overindulgence in them is a serious moral wrong. (Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10) We also respect the wisdom of authorities that make laws to restrict the use of alcoholic beverages by young persons, and we cooperate with these laws.

Drugs: We do not use addictive and habit-forming drugs for pleasure, such as marijuana, heroin, cocaine, LSD, betel nut and tobacco, to name just a few. Jehovah's Witnesses believe it is wrong, for mere selfish gratification, to damage their body with substances that cause addiction or alter the mind, since the Bible urges: "Let us cleanse ourselves of every defilement of flesh."—2 Corinthians 7:1.

Obscene Language: We consider the use of obscenities improper; they are not in keeping with the Bible command: "Let fornication and uncleanness of every sort or greediness *not even be mentioned among you, . . . nor foolish talking nor obscene jesting,* things which are not becoming."—Ephesians 5:3, 4.

Respect for Authority: In keeping with Bible principles, we expect our young people to be respectful of all duly constituted authority, including schoolteach-

ers. (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17) Jehovah God, for whom our young ones are taught deep reverence, says that we should be honest and truthful and should care for others.—Hebrews 13:18; Colossians 3:9; Ephesians 4:25; Matthew 7:12.

Value of Bible Principles

We have found that following the Bible's moral principles has greatly improved the lives of our people. Though we have our share of problems and our children are certainly not perfect, yet for the most part we have been freed from such vices as stealing, lying, cheating and the hurting of others. To the extent that we and our children obey God's laws, to that extent we are not troubled by the epidemics of venereal disease, unwed mothers, illegitimate children and abortions, nor by heartbreak and plagued consciences. We believe that the early American president John Adams was right when he called the Bible "the best book in the world." We also believe President Abraham Lincoln was correct in saying that by accepting the Bible "you will live and die a happier and better man."

Yet, as you are aware, there is a lot of peer pressure on children to do what the Bible counsels against, namely, 'to run in a course to a low sink of debauchery.' And when some do not, others "are puzzled and go on speaking abusively of [them]." (1 Peter 4:4) Our young ones are at times ridiculed and even laughed at because they do not engage in such activity as premarital sex or the like. So we appreciate it when teachers support our children's efforts to adhere to Bible principles, thus giving encouragement to our young ones who are trying to live by these principles.

You will find that our young people do not feel deprived because of the Bible's moral restrictions. On the contrary, one Witness youth, in comparing his life with that of his schoolmates, said: "The only thing I've missed out on is a lot of trouble." As we view it, the requirements of Almighty God are for our protection, and we only benefit by heeding them.—Psalm 19:7-11.

'By accepting the Bible you will live and die a better man.'—Abraham Lincoln

"They are no part of the world, just as I am no part of the world."
—John 17:16

FLAG SALUTE, ANTHEMS AND VOTING

Perhaps one of the most sensitive areas of our children's interaction with the schools involves patriotic observances. We realize that deep feelings may be involved, and we appreciate very much those teachers who handle the various situations with sensitivity and understanding. An explanation of why Jehovah's Witnesses do not participate in patriotic observances may be helpful.

Historical evidence indicates that the first Christians did not involve themselves in political affairs. As Jesus said of them: "They are no part of the world, just as I am no part of the world." (John 17:16) Rather, they shared a common allegiance to a heavenly government, God's Kingdom. New York educators Eugene A. Colligan and Maxwell F. Littwin said regarding them in the book *From the Old World to the New:* "They preferred the Kingdom of God to any kingdom that they might serve on earth."

In this respect early Christians followed closely the example set by Jesus Christ, and Jehovah's Witnesses today try to live up to that standard. (John 6:15; 18:36) Note how textbooks comment on the neutral position Christ's early followers took toward political affairs:

"Early Christianity was little understood and was regarded with little favor by those who ruled the pagan world. . . . Christians refused to share certain duties of Roman citizens. . . . They would not hold political office." —*On the Road to Civilization, A World History* (1937), by Albert K. Heckel and James G. Sigman, pages 237, 238.

"The Roman government called the Christians enemies of the state. They would not serve in the Roman army. They refused to salute the emperor's statue, which meant the same to Roman society that a nation's flag does to citizens today. They were loyal only to their religion." —*Man—His World and Cultures* (1974), by Edith McCall, Evalyn Rapparlie and Jack Spatafora, pages 67, 68.

As you may appreciate, following a similar course of neutrality today affects our young people's participation in a number of school exercises and activities. What conscientious position on these matters have Jehovah's Witnesses taken earth wide?

The Flag Salute

Even though we do not salute the flag of *any* nation, this certainly is not meant to indicate disrespect. We *do* respect the flag of whatever country we live in, and we show this respect by obedience to the country's laws. We never engage in antigovernment activity of any kind. In fact, we believe that present human governments constitute an "arrangement of God" that he has temporarily permitted to exist. So we consider ourselves under divine command to pay taxes, tribute and honor to such "superior authorities."—Romans 13:1-7.

'But why, then,' you may ask, 'do you not honor the flag by saluting it?' It is because we view the flag salute as an act of worship. Although we do not discourage others from saluting the flag, we cannot conscientiously give what we view as worship to anyone or anything except our God, Jehovah. (Matthew 4: 10) Of course, many people do not consider the flag *sacred or that saluting it is an act of worship. How*ever, consider what secular authorities say about this:

"The flag, like the cross, is sacred. . . . The rules and regulations relative to human attitude toward national standards use strong, expressive words, as, 'Service to the Flag,' . . . 'Reverence for the Flag,' 'Devotion to the Flag.'"—*The Encyclopedia Americana* (1942), Volume 11, page 316.

"Nationalism's chief symbol of faith and central object of worship is the flag, and curious liturgical forms have

Jehovah's Witnesses view the flag salute as an act of worship

been devised for 'saluting' the flag, for 'dipping' the flag, for 'lowering' the flag, and for 'hoisting' the flag. Men bare their heads when the flag passes by; and in praise of the flag poets write odes and children sing hymns."—*What Americans Believe and How They Worship* (1952), by J. Paul Williams, pages 359, 360.

You may feel that the above are extreme views. However, it is interesting that in the colonial days of America the Puritans objected to the British flag because of its red cross of "Saint" George. According to *The Encyclopædia Britannica* (1910-1911), they did this, "not from any disloyalty to the mother country, but from a conscientious objection to what they deemed an idolatrous symbol."

One of the Ten Commandments forbids making an object to worship with "a form like anything that is in the heavens above or that is on the earth underneath." (Exodus 20:4, 5) As Christians, we also feel bound by the Bible's command to 'guard ourselves from idols.' —1 John 5:21.

We appreciate it when teachers are understanding regarding our beliefs and help our children to abide by them. Others have expressed an understanding of the position we have taken that the flag salute is related to worship, as the following comments show:

"Christians refused to . . . sacrifice to the [Roman] emperor's genius—roughly equivalent today to refusing to salute the flag or repeat the oath of allegiance."—*Those About to Die* (1958), by Daniel P. Mannix, page 135.

"The key assumption is that saluting a flag constitutes an act of religious devotion. . . . This view, while odd, is not entirely without biblical support. . . . If saluting is a religious act, then it is forbidden by God's law *however worthy the object of respect.* In other words, refusal to salute need imply no disrespect for flag or country."—*Render Unto Caesar, The Flag-Salute Controversy* (1962), David R. Manwaring, assistant professor of political science, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, page 32.

"Christians refused to . . . sacrifice to the [Roman] emperor's genius —roughly equivalent today to refusing to salute the flag"

We would like to emphasize that we intend no disrespect for any government or its rulers by our refusal to salute the flag. It is just that we will not, in an act of worship, bow down to or salute an image repre-

senting the State, like the one Nebuchadnezzar raised up in the plain of Dura, or like the modern flags of the nations. (Daniel 3:1-30) Significantly, the Supreme Court of the United States, in a historic reversal of a previous decision, stated:

> "We think the action of the local authorities in compelling the flag salute and pledge transcends constitutional limitations on their power and invades the sphere of intellect and spirit which it is the purpose of the First Amendment to our Constitution to reserve from all official control."—*West Virginia State Board of Education* v. *Barnette* (1943).

So then, while others salute and pledge allegiance, our children stand quietly during the flag salute ceremony. But if, for some reason, the flag ceremony is conducted in such a way that simply standing gives evidence of one's participation in the ceremony, our young ones remain seated. In addition, our youths do not march in patriotic parades, which would show their support of the thing honored by the parade. We remain neutral.

National Anthems and School Songs

A national anthem often is, in effect, a hymn or a prayer set to music. *The Encyclopedia Americana* (1956) says: "Love of fatherland and pride in one's country are the keynotes of most national anthems, and in many, religious feeling is blended with patriotic sentiment." Actually, patriotic songs express the same fundamental ideas that are embodied in the pledge of allegiance to the flag. And since there is no Scriptural basis for the nationalistic pride that has so divided our world, we do not join in singing songs that extol any earthly nation.—Acts 17:26; John 17:15, 16.

When national anthems are played, usually all that a person has to do to show that he shares the sentiments of the song is to stand up. In such cases, Witness youths remain seated. However, if our youths are already standing when the national anthem is played,

As faithful Hebrew youths refused to worship an image of the State, so Jehovah's Witnesses do not salute the flag

they would not have to take the special action of sitting down; it is not as though they had specifically stood up for the anthem. On the other hand, if a group are expected to stand *and* sing, then our young people may rise and stand out of respect. But they would show that they do not share the sentiments of the song by refraining from singing.

Do school songs come into the same category as national anthems? Yes, they are viewed the same way by those in the school as national anthems are by the nations. They are often sung with religious fervor and with cheers. Our youths do not share the sentiments of such songs.

Elective Offices and Positions

In many schools, students are voted into an office or a position, such as class president. Some schools have small-scale political campaigns, including campaign buttons and posters advertising candidates. The purpose is to familiarize young people with the machinery of politics. However, Witness youths do not mix in school politics, either by accepting an elective office or by voting others into office. So if either nominated for or elected to an office, they tactfully decline. In this way they follow the example of Jesus who withdrew when the people wanted to make him king.—John 6:15.

However, we consider an appointment by the teacher as something different. So if Witness youths are appointed to help in traffic direction or some other such activity, they are encouraged to cooperate to the extent possible.

Of course, our young ones realize that not all voting is political. Sometimes students are called on by the teacher to give their opinions. There may be no violation of Bible principles to express one's preference for certain activities or to provide one's appraisal of a talk or composition. When persons express opinions by a show of hands as to the quality of something, this is not the same as electing another politically to an office.

Witness youths do not mix in school politics

HOLIDAYS AND CELEBRATIONS

The fact that Jehovah's Witnesses do not participate in most holiday observances and other celebrations can be somewhat perplexing to a teacher. We hope the following helps you to understand why we take the matter so seriously.

Perhaps to a greater extent than you may have realized, many holidays and the customs associated with them have a non-Christian religious background. It is this that makes them objectionable to Jehovah's Witnesses. We try to follow the principle stated by the Christian apostle Paul:

"What fellowship do righteousness and lawlessness have? Or what sharing does light have with darkness? Further, what harmony is there between Christ and Belial [a false god]? Or what portion does a faithful person have with an unbeliever? . . . 'Therefore get out from among them, and separate yourselves,' says Jehovah."—2 Corinthians 6:14-17.

So if a holiday or a celebration is in some way linked to other gods or goddesses, or if observing it is contrary to our understanding of Biblical principles, we do not take part.

Birthdays: Enjoying a feast or a party and generous giving to loved ones are certainly not wrong. (Luke 15:22-25; Acts 20:35) Jehovah's Witnesses enjoy giving gifts and having good times together throughout the year. However, the only two birthday celebrations mentioned in the Bible involved people who were not true believers. They were a Pharaoh of Egypt and the Roman ruler Herod Antipas, each of whose birthday celebrations had deadly results. (Genesis 40:18-22; Mark 6:21-28) So it is not surprising to see these historical references to the attitude of early Christians toward birthday celebrations:

Early Christians did not celebrate their birthdays

"The notion of a *birthday festival* was far from the ideas of the Christians of this period in general."—*The History of the Christian Religion and Church, During the Three First Centuries* (New York, 1848), by Augustus Neander (translated by Henry John Rose), page 190.

"Of all the holy people in the Scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great banquet on his birthday. It is only sinners (like Pharaoh and Herod) who make great rejoicings over the day on which they were born into this world below."—*The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1911), Volume X, page 709 (quoting Origen Adamantius of the third century).

Additionally, birthday celebrations tend to give excessive importance to an individual, no doubt one reason why early Christians shunned them. (Ecclesiastes 7:1) So you will find that Jehovah's Witnesses do not share in birthday festivities (the parties, singing, gift giving, and so forth).

Christmas: As you are probably aware, December 25 was not the birthday of Jesus Christ. You may feel that this does not matter—that the event is the important thing. But the way the Christmas holiday developed shows that there is more to it than that. The following encyclopedias explain:

"The observance of Christmas is not of divine appointment, nor is it of N[ew] T[estament] origin. The day of Christ's birth cannot be ascertained from the N[ew] T[estament], or, indeed, from any other source. The fathers of the first three centuries do not speak of any special observance of the nativity."—*Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1981 reprint), by John McClintock and James Strong, Volume II, page 276.

"Most of the Christmas customs now prevailing in Europe, or recorded from former times, are not genuine Christian customs, but heathen customs which have been absorbed or tolerated by the Church. . . . The Saturnalia in Rome provided the model for most of the *merry* customs of the Christmas time."—*Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh, 1911), edited by James Hastings, Volume III, pages 608, 609.

It is commonly known that Christmas was not originally a celebration of Christ's birth. *U.S. Catholic* of

December 1981, page 32, notes: "It is impossible to separate Christmas from its pagan origins." The magazine explains:

> "The Romans' favorite festival was Saturnalia, which began on December 17 and ended with the 'birthday of the unconquered sun' (*Natalis solis invicti*) on December 25. Somewhere in the second quarter of the fourth century, savvy officials of the church of Rome decided December 25 would make a dandy day to celebrate the birthday of the 'sun of righteousness.' Christmas was born."

When learning these facts about Christmas, how have some been affected? *The World Book Encyclopedia* (1982) observes under "Christmas": "During the 1600's . . . Christmas was outlawed in England and in parts of the English colonies in America." Since people in the past refused to celebrate Christmas because of its pagan origins, it should be understandable why Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate it today. We take no part in Christmas parties, plays, singing, exchanging of gifts, or in any other such activity that is associated with Christmas.

Jehovah's Witnesses take the same position of total nonparticipation in other religious or semireligious holidays that occur during the school year. The reason is that these holidays, too, are connected with non-Christian worship; in fact, certain features of such worship often dominate the celebrations. Consider the following examples:

Easter: Although this holiday is supposed to commemorate Christ's resurrection, note what secular authorities say regarding it:

> "Easter. Originally the spring festival in honor of the Teutonic goddess of light and spring known in Anglo-Saxon as Eastre. As early as the 8th century the name was transferred by the Anglo-Saxons to the Christian festival designed to celebrate the resurrection of Christ." —*The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* (Philadelphia, 1944), by John D. Davis, page 145.

> "Everywhere they hunt the many-colored Easter eggs, brought by the Easter rabbit. This is not mere child's play, but the vestige of a fertility rite, the eggs and

"Christmas was outlawed in England and in parts of the English colonies in America"

"This is not mere child's play, but the vestige of a fertility rite, the eggs and the rabbit both symbolizing fertility"

the rabbit both symbolizing fertility."—Funk & Wagnalls *Standard Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend* (New York, 1949), Volume 1, page 335.

Halloween: Though celebrated as a Christian holiday, Halloween finds its origins in pre-Christian festivals that propagate false ideas about life after death. Interestingly, we read: "After the Reformation, Protestants rejected this feast along with other important ones such as Christmas and Easter. Nevertheless, Halloween folk customs of pagan origin flourished."—*Encyclopædia Britannica* (1959), Volume 11, page 107.

All Saints' Day: "There is little doubt that the Christian church sought to eliminate or supplant the Druid festival of the dead by introducing the alternative observance of All Saints' day on Nov. 1. This feast was established to honour all saints, known or unknown, but it failed to displace the pagan celebration of Samhain."—*Encyclopædia Britannica* (1959), Volume 11, page 107.

New Year's Day: "In ancient Rome, the first day of the year was given over to honoring Janus, the god of gates and doors and of beginnings and endings. . . . New Year's Day became a holy day in the Christian church in A.D. 487."—*The World Book Encyclopedia* (1982), Volume 14, page 237.

Valentine's Day: "Valentine's Day comes on the feast day of two different Christian martyrs named Valentine. But the customs connected with the day . . . probably come from an ancient Roman festival called *Lupercalia* which took place every February 15. The festival honored Juno, the Roman goddess of women and marriage, and Pan, the god of nature."—*The World Book Encyclopedia* (1973), Volume 20, page 204.

May Day: "May Day festivals probably stem from the rites practiced in honor of a Roman goddess, Maia, who was worshiped as the source of human and natural fertility. . . . [The] Maypole is believed by most scholars to be a survival of a phallic symbol formerly used in the spring rites for the goddess Maia."—*The New Funk & Wagnalls Encyclopedia* (1952), page 8294.

Mother's Day: "A festival derived from the custom of mother worship in ancient Greece. Formal mother worship, with ceremonies to Cybele, or Rhea, the Great Mother of the Gods, were performed on the Ides of March throughout Asia Minor."—*Encyclopædia Britannica* (1959), Volume 15, page 849.

These are just a sampling of holidays that are commonly observed, and in which schoolchildren often are expected to participate by sharing in certain activities. However, Jehovah's Witnesses for conscientious reasons do not take any part in these holiday activities—whether it be singing, playing music, acting in plays, marching in parades, drawing pictures, attending parties, eating and drinking, and so forth. Yet, at the same time, we do not object to others celebrating such holidays nor try to hinder them. We appreciate it very much when teachers kindly excuse our children from participation in all activities that in any way commemorate these holidays.

For conscientious reasons, Jehovah's Witnesses do not take part in holiday activities

National Holidays

Other holidays are somewhat different in nature. These are not so universally celebrated, but may be unique to a particular country. For example, there may be national days of thanksgiving. In some places there may also be a certain day set aside to memorialize a nation's war dead, or a day to remember the birth of a country or certain prominent presidents, rulers or national heroes.

Jehovah's Witnesses also respectfully refrain from participating in such national holidays. Though we respect the authorities in whatever country we may reside, for conscientious reasons we do not give them what we view as worshipful honors. We remain neutral toward all such celebrations. This is in keeping with Jesus' words regarding his followers: "They are no part of the world, just as I am no part of the world." —John 17:16.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that there should be more to life than simply study and work. Some exercise and recreation during school hours provide a needed break and refreshment. Yet you may have noticed that most Witness youths do not participate in extracurricular activities sponsored by the schools. A brief explanation can help you to understand our views on this matter.

Witness families already are pursuing a program of activities that centers around their worship. And parents are encouraged to include recreation in this family-oriented program. With parents arranging and overseeing the recreation and entertainment of their children, often participating right along with them, needed supervision is provided.

"Bad associations spoil useful habits." —1 Corinthians 15:33

At times a few Witness families may get together to enjoy various types of entertainment. They also travel several times each year to attend larger gatherings called circuit assemblies and district conventions. These trips sometimes provide opportunities to visit museums, historic sites and other places of cultural interest. At these gatherings young Witnesses meet and enjoy the companionship of many other youths from other parts of the country who share the same goal they have of serving their God, Jehovah.

We consider it vital that our youths enjoy this wholesome association, particularly in view of the deteriorating moral standards of human society today. Jehovah's Witnesses take seriously the Bible's warning: "Bad associations spoil useful habits." And, as noted before, we try to comply with Christ's statement to his followers: "You are no part of the world." (1 Corinthians 15:33; John 15:19) These principles shape the view of Witness families toward the school's extracurricular activities, including the following:

Sports: Bodily training, such as we get in sports, is good for us. But placing the matter in proper perspective, the Bible says: "Be training yourself with godly devotion as your aim. For bodily training is *beneficial for a little;* but godly devotion is beneficial for all things." (1 Timothy 4:7, 8) In keeping with this advice, Jehovah's Witnesses appreciate the value of physical education courses that are conducted during school hours.

At the same time, however, Witness parents feel that schools often overemphasize sports. Therefore in training their children, they try to moderate the emphasis on athletic achievement. They hope their young ones will want to pursue careers, not as athletes, but as ministers of God. So Witness parents encourage their children to use after-school hours principally to pursue spiritual interests, rather than to excel in some sport.

Participation in organized sports, we believe, would expose Witness youths to unwholesome associations. We also feel that the competitive spirit in modern sports—'the winning isn't everything, it's the ONLY thing' ideology—has harmful effects. So if Witness youths feel the need for extra recreation, their parents encourage them to seek such recreation with fellow believers, yes, "along with those who call upon the Lord out of a clean heart."—2 Timothy 2:22.

Cheerleader and Homecoming Queen: At athletic events it is the responsibility of cheerleaders to orchestrate the crowd in frenzied cheering for a school. They also encourage the people into hero worship and lead them in standing for the school song. Jehovah's Witnesses consider it inappropriate to do this. Similarly, we feel that for a Witness youth to serve as a homecoming or beauty queen would be in violation of

Bible principles that show the impropriety of glorifying humans.—Romans 1:25; Acts 12:21-23.

School Dances: As with sports, dancing can also be a wholesome, healthful activity. It is evident that Jesus Christ approved of it, since he mentioned dancing as a part of a proper celebration in his illustration about the prodigal son. (Luke 15:25) However, you may have noted that Witness youths usually do not attend dances sponsored by the school, such as the junior and senior proms. Why?

This is principally because of the poor environment that often exists in connection with school dances. Commonly there is smoking, alcohol abuse, use of drugs, as well as scandalous sexual conduct. Thus a person who attends these dances almost unavoidably is thrown together with unwholesome associates. So, in keeping with the admonition to pursue activities "along with those who call upon the Lord out of a clean heart," it is the custom of Jehovah's Witnesses to stay clear of school dances.

Dating: In recent times dating has become a common form of recreation in many places. Even youngsters in their early and mid teens commonly date. They may be seen around school holding hands, kissing, or even doing things beyond that. Witness parents do not believe that it is proper for their children who are still too young to get married to isolate themselves with a member of the opposite sex and engage in conduct generally associated with dating.

School Clubs: Students with similar interests may want to share these interests as members of school clubs. Often, however, these clubs serve mainly for social activities. And it has been noted that sharing such activities with certain groups of students often leads to immoral conduct. In view of this possibility, we feel that careful consideration should be given before joining a school club.

Important questions that Witness youths and their parents would consider are these: Are the club's activities limited to school hours? Do they come under close

school supervision? Will belonging to the club require time after school that would be better spent in family or congregational activities? In the final analysis, it is the responsibility of Witness parents to decide what clubs or school organizations, if any, they will permit their children to join.

School Plays: Jehovah's Witnesses do not have any objection to acting in itself. Bible dramas are a featured part of our district convention programs. Yet Witness parents will consider a number of factors before deciding whether to permit their children to participate in a school play. For example, Is what is portrayed in the play in harmony with Bible principles? Witness youths would not participate in a play that condoned moral standards that the Bible condemns. Further, there is the time involved in practicing, and possible unwholesome associations. So in deciding whether Witness youths will participate in a play, their parents will consider these factors carefully.

Blood and Other Donations: From time to time students in many schools are asked to make donations to one cause or another. At times the request is for blood that is to be used in giving blood transfusions. However, it is our understanding of the Bible's command to "abstain . . . from blood" that it should not be eaten or used in any other way. Therefore, as a matter of conscience, we do not give or accept blood.—Genesis 9:4-6; Leviticus 17:10-14; Acts 15:19, 20, 28, 29.

For reasons discussed earlier in this brochure, if there is a request for money to further some political cause or in connection with some religious holiday or celebration, Jehovah's Witnesses would not contribute. Nor would we take part in lotteries, games of chance or any such gambling activities. However, there are other areas in which a personal decision on whether to contribute can be made according to the circumstances. For example, if there is a schoolmate who has been injured or who is sick and there is a collection to purchase some flowers or other gift, they are glad to have a share in such giving as they have the means to do so.—Acts 20:35.

CLASS INSTRUCTION

Another area in which the views of Jehovah's Witnesses may affect their schooling involves the curriculum. So, what is presented here is meant to promote understanding and cooperation between teachers and Witness parents, since we believe that it is particularly the parents who are responsible to choose what their children will be taught.

Religion and Prayer: Some schools include religious instruction in the classroom. At one time parents in the United States were required to say whether they wanted their children instructed in the Catholic, Protestant or Jewish religion. A child that was not signed up for religious instruction had to leave the classroom and carry on secular studies elsewhere. But then, in 1948, the Supreme Court of the country stated:

"The First Amendment rests upon the premise that both religion and government can best work to achieve their lofty aims if each is left free from the other within its respective sphere. . . . the First Amendment has erected a wall between Church and State which must be kept high and impregnable."—*McCollum* v. *Board of Education* (1948).

Later, on June 17, 1963, the U.S. Supreme Court also ruled against Bible reading and prayer in public schools. Justice Brennan explained in his opinion: "The spirit of our federal and state constitutions from the beginning . . . [has] been to leave religious instruction *to the discretion of parents.*"

Jehovah's Witnesses agree that it is the parents' responsibility to give their children religious instruction. Therefore, where religious instruction is given in class, Witness parents will request that their children be excused. If the religious course includes participating in a form of worship that we consider to be unbiblical,

Courts have ruled that religious instruction should be left to the discretion of parents

such as bowing before images, Witness parents do not approve of this under any circumstances.

On the other hand, if there is simply an objective classroom study of various religions or of the Bible, Jehovah's Witnesses have no objection. So if a school arranges talks by representatives of various religions, not to proselytize, but simply to inform the students about those religions, Witness students will respectfully listen. Similarly, when invited, Jehovah's Witnesses are pleased to give talks to school groups, explaining their religious beliefs.

In some schools the Lord's Prayer, or Our Father, is repeated on a regular basis. Although Jehovah's Witnesses accept that prayer, we do not join in its ritualistic repetition. This is because at the very time Jesus provided that model prayer he counseled against praying "the same things over and over again." (Matthew 6:7, 8) Another reason we do not participate is that we do not share in any interfaith religious services.

Sex Education: Health and hygiene have long been subjects taught in public schools. We appreciate that these courses have been very helpful in teaching the value of cleanliness, disease prevention, care of children, family responsibility, and so forth. But today many schools are also providing explicit education in sexual matters, including contraception, masturbation, homosexuality and abortion.

Sex education is generally provided without moral guidance. In fact, it is not infrequent that educators themselves will criticize the moral standards of the Bible. Therefore Witness parents are very concerned about what is taught in sex education classes.

One book used in some schools, entitled *Dreng og pige, mand og kvinde* (Boy and Girl, Man and Woman), says, "Each individual must have the right to satisfy

his sexual needs independent of age, sex and—as far as it does not invade the rights of others—of the method used." So, as to sex relations with animals, this book states: "In this country [Denmark], . . . it is *lawful* to satisfy sexual desires in this way." Yet God's Law to Israel said: "Anyone lying down with a beast is positively to be put to death."—Exodus 22:19.

As emphasized earlier, Jehovah's Witnesses try to follow the Bible's moral principles and to inculcate these into their children. Therefore they do not want their children to receive sex education from those who do not respect these principles. Thus if Witness parents feel their children are being indoctrinated with ideas, and/or visual matter, that blatantly undermine principles being taught at home, they may request that their young ones be released from sex education classes.

Science and Evolution: Jehovah's Witnesses are keenly interested in science. They have respect for the dedicated scientists who have added greatly to our understanding of the world around us. We encourage our young people to study the various branches of science, since this will help to increase their appreciation for the wisdom and power of our Creator.

We encourage our young people to study the various branches of science

But not all that is called science is necessarily fact. There are also theories, such as the theory of evolution, that are often passed off as scientific fact. Evolution asserts that the first living organism evolved from nonliving matter. Then, as that organism reproduced, its offspring changed and branched out to produce ultimately all the living things, including all people that have ever lived on the earth.

Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe this theory to be true. Nor do we go to the other extreme of believing that creation took seven literal days. We believe that the first man and woman were created by God, as were all other kinds of life. So if theories about the origins of living things are considered in class, we appreciate it when teachers respect the Bible-based beliefs of Witness youths. Actually, we feel these beliefs are in harmony with scientific facts, which Witness youths will be pleased to share with you.

Music and Art Instruction: Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe there is anything wrong with music or art instruction in itself. However, Witness youths do not participate in any kind of music and art instruction in connection with religious or patriotic holidays. When it comes to sharing in a school's music education program, there are factors that Witness youths and their parents will take into consideration.

For example, they will consider where and under what circumstances the instruction is received, as well as the nature of the music played. If the instruction involves serving in a band that may be expected to perform at affairs that have political or religious connections, one of Jehovah's Witnesses could not participate. Even during practice sessions, Witness students would not share in playing national anthems or songs connected with religious or national holidays. Another matter to be considered would be the amount of time involved, and whether there would be interference with Christian meetings and family activities.

Combat Instruction: In some schools military training is given students. Yet Jehovah's Witnesses want to be among those of whom the Bible says: "They will have to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning shears. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore." (Isaiah 2:4) Therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses ask to be excused from military training classes at school.

The Bible also says: "If possible, as far as it depends upon you, be peaceable with all men." (Romans 12:18) The application of these principles in our lives also affects our attitude toward other forms of combat. These include the martial arts, such as judo, karate and kendo, as well as boxing and wrestling. Although these activities may be labeled sports, we view participation in them as training for the purpose of fighting or hurting others. Therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses do not take part in such combat activities. Although Witness youths ask to be excused from participation in them, they gladly cooperate to the extent possible in other school-hour physical education programs.

Parents have the primary responsibility for teaching their young

COOPERATION WITH THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that a good education is one of the most important legacies that can be given to children. But who primarily is responsible for a child's education? Is it only the teachers in school?

Some people apparently think so. However, children are born to parents and are part of families. They are not products of the State or of any institutions of government. Hence, *parents* have the God-given responsibility to decide what their young will be taught.

Yet, at the same time, schoolteachers provide a very much appreciated, valuable service. And we realize that in these days of deteriorating discipline, their job is not an easy one. What can parents do to cooperate with them?

Cooperation of Parents

To begin with, it is important that parents become acquainted with their children's teachers—making arrangements to meet and talk with them. The meeting should certainly not be for the purpose of confrontation, but rather to see how both parents and teachers can cooperate to help in the child's development. Parents are happy to listen when the teacher talks as well as to communicate clearly what they want for their children.

In such a meeting the Witness father or mother should let the teacher know that the parents expect proper Christian conduct from their children, and that if the children misbehave, they want to be informed. The parents also should give assurance that they will support the teacher in whatever reasonable discipline is administered, even reinforcing it at home.

Other ways that parents can help: Make sure children get a good breakfast before they leave for school.

See that their homework is complete and that they have all their books with them. Always show respect for school regulations and expect the children to respect these as well. Get the children to talk at home about school activities and any problems they may encounter there.

In its publication *Helping Children Make Career Plans: Tips for Parents,* the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare tells parents how they might motivate their young ones to study: "Help your child understand how very important her or his school work will be in later job decisions. Show them how such subjects as reading, arithmetic, and communications are used in almost all occupations. In short, help them understand that there are more important reasons for going to school than simply going to school."

We sincerely hope that the information in this brochure will contribute toward pleasant cooperation between school authorities and families of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Witness parents are encouraged to get acquainted with their children's teachers