

# PROFESSOR'S NOTES

teachers only



## The Little Professor & His Friends™

### The Little Professor & His Friends sparks student interest

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#### The Little Professor™ develops visual literacy

A barrage of competing images vie for the attention of adolescents. In our increasingly visual world, dominated by images on television, film, the World Wide Web, and in print media, we have a responsibility to help students become visually literate with adequate critical thinking skills to process the constant flow of information.

"Visual literacy is the ability to find meaning in imagery. It involves a set of skills ranging from simple identification—naming what one sees—to complex interpretation.... Many aspects of cognition are called upon, such as personal association, questioning, speculating, analyzing, fact-finding, and categorizing" (Yenawine, 1997, p 845). Tools like The Little Professor help adolescents develop the skills necessary for confronting pervasive images as active rather than passive consumers.

In our classrooms where government mandates and adolescent apathy seem to take on enormous significance, we are constantly looking for ways to re-ignite student enthusiasm and to invite them to participate in their own learning.

Unfortunately, once a behavior, like apathy toward school activities, is linked with motivation provided by peer groups and with unconscious identification of traditional gender roles, it is particularly resistant to change. Peer groups often reinforce stereotypes of "active" boys and "passive" girls. Bourdieu explains this ingrained behavior as "habitus"—individual differences collapsed into an older set of traditional practices (Bourdieu, 1990, p 54).

"The 'habitus' legitimates the activities of boys and girls who have conventional interests, while those who behave differently may be marked as deviant and in later stages of their development attract the label 'tomboy' for an active girl, or 'sissy' for a more passive and gentle boy" (Millard, 1997,

p 44). This gender dynamic is further complicated by notions of race, often offering conflicting messages about desirable conduct in school. Many of these gendered and racialized behaviors work to the detriment of the learning environment.

Developed by two  
middle school teachers,  
Gary Smith and Steve A.  
Prince, *The Little  
Professor™* understands  
the challenges of  
teaching young people  
amidst today's  
distractions.

The Little Professor™ is an  
action packed series  
designed to supplement  
traditional classroom  
curricula.



MIDDLE  
SECONDARY

Studies have shown that pre-teens and teenagers prefer to read magazines, manuals, graphic novels, and comic books rather than the fiction and non-fiction linear narratives favored by traditional curricula (Alverman, 2007). When these materials are allowed in the classroom they are generally used to fill empty time rather than used as a central part of the lesson. So even when young people volunteer to read, for example, their choice of reading material may still be out of sync with the academic setting. Many teachers discourage certain kinds of reading material as inappropriate or irrelevant to the immediate needs of the classroom. As a result of this disparity, young people—particularly boys—begin to feel at odds with school.

By beginning with a text that reinforces adolescent identity and affirms their self-image then moving into academic inquiry, The Little Professor makes research appear more relevant to everyday life. Studies have shown that "adolescents need a reason to participate in their own learning. They crave affective as well as cognitive experiences. And they are ready, willing, and very able to be moved and to act if given a compelling reason to do so" (Long, 2008, p 507). The Little Professor heartens students and validates their interests because it is a comic book.



With *The Little Professor™* students participate actively in their learning. The colorful cast of characters is both fresh and classic and speak to young people in a voice they understand. By bringing comic books into the classroom, *The Little Professor™* sparks student interest and engages them in challenging activities and projects.



## Students participate actively in learning

*The Little Professor™* is accompanied by a curriculum that invites students to explore and to take risks. While teachers may want to develop their own assignments, *The Little Professor* offers support for its use in the classroom. Most textbooks present the content in one place, followed by questions with a set of prescribed answers. All of the answers are readily available to students. In this way, students do not run the risk of being unable to locate the information necessary to meet the assignment.

Unlike traditional textbooks that regulate the learning process, *The Little Professor™* is not meant to be a one-stop shopping experience. The activities offered by *The Little Professor™* encourage students to explore with minimal intervention from teachers, allowing students a sense of independence and a greater sense of responsibility in the learning process.

Many of the activities are open-ended and facilitate genuine discovery for students and their teachers. Supplemental materials include on-line activities, three lesson plans, ready to use assignment sheets with accompanying rubrics, links to electronic resources, a bibliography, guidelines for oral history research, and sample student work.

### Works Cited

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