

OPINION

YOUR SUBMISSIONS

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I Was Just Thinking

By Catherine Ruby

What kind of a citizen are you?

Looking at that question, I sense a tone of antagonism. Not that that was my intention. At least, not consciously. But recently my radio station shared survey data on how many Americans couldn't pass the U.S. Citizenship test, and it was a little disconcerting.

We're not talking about immigrants here — according to the official website, about 96% of them pass on their first or second try.

But us? About 36% pass with a score of 60% or higher (that jumps to 75% for those of us over 65).

Well of course I decided to try the test. I checked out the library's "Becoming a U.S. Citizen" manual and took the test. 100 questions in six categories: three on government, two on American History, and one covering "Recent History, geography, symbols, and holidays."

My score, I'm sorry to say, was 84%.

I missed questions like "How many members are in the House of Representatives?" and "Why was Martin Luther King important?"

But wait a minute there — I said because he led the Civil Rights Movement. They wanted "fought for Civil rights" or "worked for equality for all Americans."

Splitting hairs? My interviewer may have accepted my answer, but maybe not. One young woman taking the test gave a lengthy answer to that question and they counted it wrong.

Because you see, the test is not multiple choice (one website said it was). An interviewer asks the questions and you respond.

You don't take the full test, though. Imagine how long that would take!

Twenty question are chosen — I assume randomly, and hopefully, to make it fair — before you walk into the room.

Given my score, if the questions came from the 84 that I got right, I would ace the test. However, if my 20 included 13 of the ones I got wrong, I would have failed.

I think the questions are interesting. Some are trivial, like "Where is the Statue of Liberty located?" Some should be obvious, like "Who is the President of the United States?" or "What are the three branches of the Federal Government?"

Well, according to that radio data, 1/3 of our young people don't know (I could not find the source).

Just as I thought my research was done, I found that the test has been updated from

my 2025 manual. It now has 128 questions.

I dutifully found it on-line. Some questions were deleted, some were reworded, and of course, new ones were added. Like "Why is the Electoral College important?" or "Why is it important to pay Federal taxes?" or "Why is the President limited to two terms?"

I sort of wondered if some of these added questions reflect our current political environment. But I won't get into that.

Suffice it to say that my 84% may be in jeopardy . . .

In a way, in its entirety — 128 questions and answers (in the manual) — the citizenship test is sort of like a crash course on American government and history. "Citizenship for Dummies."

For those of us who are citizens, who came through the American educational system, it basically tests what we remember.

Almost 2/3 of us evidently don't remember enough to pass the test, as compared to over 95% of immigrants passing it.

What does that say about us?

On the one hand, we look pretty dismal. But let's level the playing field.

Immigrants seeking citizenship are studying the material. Like me, they have the book, or they access the test online. Questions and answers. Sort of like when your teacher said, "This is a list of 100 questions to study for the Final Exam. I will pull 20 from the list."

But these surveys just test what we remember. It's really not a fair comparison. Granted, our recent graduates should know how many branches are in the Federal Government, and hopefully the responsibilities of each branch.

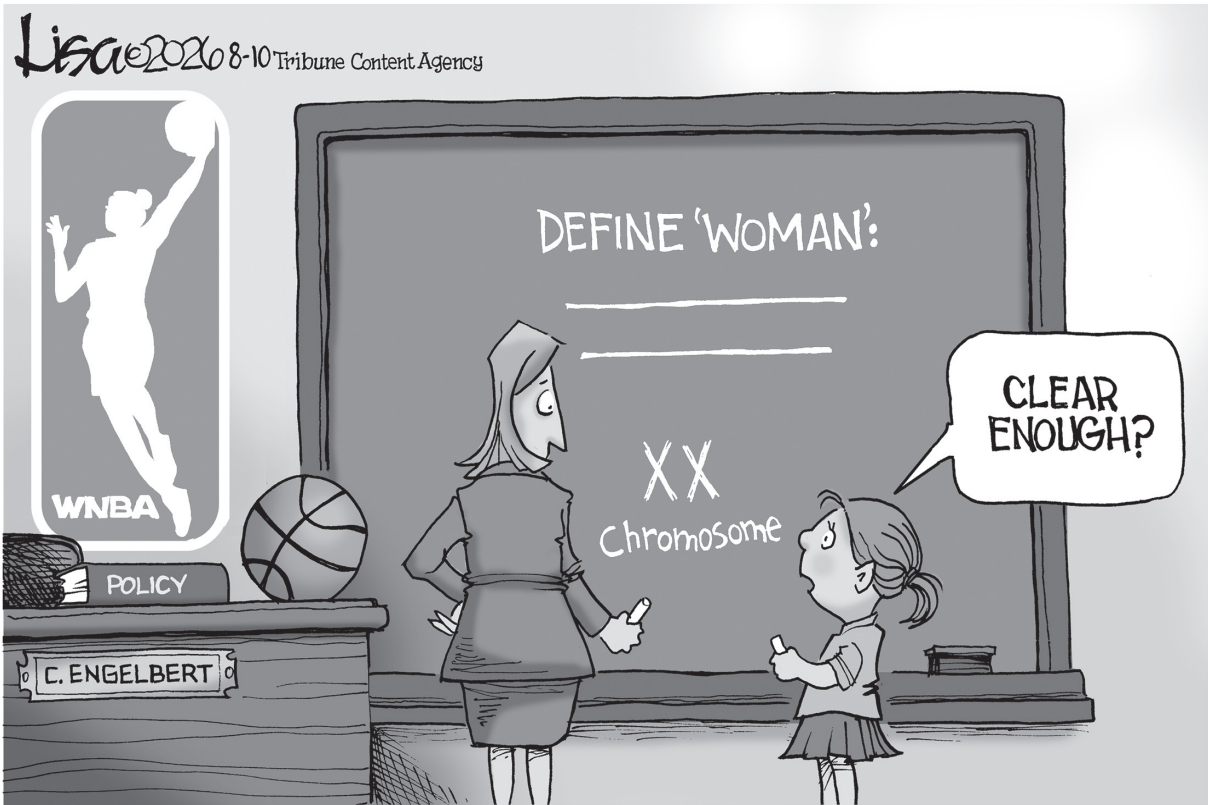
But when I look at the questions, many ask for information that I once knew and no longer remember (like stuff you learn for a test and then forget).

And some I would have to respond to with "Why is that important? Isn't there something more important I should know?"

I think it's always interesting to quiz myself on things I might know. The internet is full of them — history, movies, famous people.

You may like those quizzes, too. I think this is one quiz we should all challenge ourselves with, though. Just how much do you know about this country that you are a citizen of? Be ambitious — take the test on-line.

Hopefully you won't fall into that 36% category!



The journey begins

As this humid and rainy summer moves forward and the beginning of school lies just upon the horizon, the last day of July 2026 takes its place in time. Nathaniel Hawthorne once said, "Time flies over us, but leaves its shadow behind." I am a firm believer that shadow is the culmination of our life's stories. While time may be unstoppable, it cannot take those away, and in that, there is a type of undying education.

Stories have always been a strong tool for teaching, and this last week, my wife and I had the opportunity to watch a movie about one of history's most famous stories, The Odyssey. As an English teacher, every year for almost 20 years, I taught excerpts from the literary epic. The hero Odysseus and his exploits always made

for an interesting class.

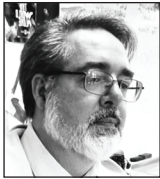
While seemingly obvious when teaching the work in class, the movie brought forth the perpetual theme of war. Indeed, the story comes about after one of the most iconic conflicts in literature, the Trojan War. Odysseus and his "tricks" were indisputably the hero of the war.

However, it is the theme of the Journey that always seems to take precedence in my mind, and it is never more apropos than at the beginning of the school year. Indeed, the journey implies a sense of newness, the unforeseen, and even unanticipated lessons. Although students are not entering a cave and facing a cyclops when they enter my classroom, they are undeniably facing challenges. While my cave simply harbors posters of Batman, some

disembodied computers, and a fish tank with a fish that did not die over the summer, there is still that place where stories are made.

Whereas we will never forget the day Johnny found the value for X, or when Sally used the correct "their" in a sentence, there are still other stories. We had an impromptu concert where the students once again amazed me with their casual talent. We had an artist in class who used my whiteboards as his canvas the whole year. His work was so good, I simply left it up. We had our many walks and talks that fought the monotony of the day; and many more moments that made up an unforgettable year.

And as our summer ends, and the rains eventually make way for the cold, there will be new stories. And while the call to arms may not be Odysseus, I can still hear the rallying cry, "Once more into the breach dear friends, once more!"



The Teacher's Desk

By Brian Theodore

