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EDITORIAL

Death of poetry? 'Tis not by the Common Core

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THE LIBERTARIAN PIONEER INSTITUTE is taking its campaign against federal curriculum guidelines in a new direction, releasing a report claiming that the new Common Core will undermine the teaching of poetry. It's certainly worth worrying about how art and literature will fare in an educational climate that's increasingly concerned with so-called STEM subjects — science, math, engineering. But declaring that “it is not clear that the literary genre called poetry has a future” in the Common Core pushes the argument too far. This isn't the heavy hand of government snatching up Emily Dickinson texts; it's a valid attempt to beef up the teaching of core subjects, including English, while leaving districts free to offer as much literature as they'd like.

The Pioneer Institute's report suggests the Common Core's emphasis on preparing students for the workplace, by stressing the importance of reading and understanding nonfiction, is an attempt to muscle poetry out of the curriculum. The report cites as evidence the paucity of teaching recommendations for poetry in the Common Core.

But the Common Core doesn't set curriculums, and there is nothing stopping districts from building their own programming on top of the federal standards. In fact, Massachusetts did just that by adding the writing of poetry into the state curriculum and by folding in the list of recommended poets the Commonwealth created back in 2004. Ensuring that poetry gets taught in public schools is the responsibility of local school districts, just as it was before the Common Core.

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