

# Video Librarian

write a hit song for his favorite pop idol Russ Calvin, whose star is somewhat on the wane. This short won a school award and garnered a student Oscar nomination, which was probably well-deserved for great execution of standard student-film dazzle (long tracking shots, impressive moody lighting, quick edit montage, etc.). However, it suffers from being extremely dated (big hair '80s) and sporting a tortured plot with little character development. Even the primary message about self-confidence is somewhat buried under the filmmakers' apparent excitement about getting to fire a real gun to "a rousing rock score." **Not recommended.** Aud: J, H, P. (E. Gieschen)

## EDUCATION

### The Educational Rap Lecture ★★1/2

(1997) 60 min. \$24.95. Grand Hank Productions. PPR. Color cover.

Grand Hank, an African-American chemist and rapper, stresses the importance of education to children and their parents. The message is positive and (no pun intended) upbeat, pointing out that being educated is the best way for African-Americans to assert their power in American society. The video features several raps, some spoken as script, some performed with taped beat to an audience. In one, Hank invites elementary school children to come out of the audience to identify African-American scientists. He also includes a review of the eight parts of speech—an important topic—but simply identifying "subject," "verb," and "predicate" as terms cannot substitute for actually teaching students grammar. The video has some amateurish aspects: the entire first rap is taped from just a few rows short of the stage, so the people constantly moving around back and forth in front of the stage and aisle all but obliterate Hank. In addition, the sound quality isn't the highest, and tighter editing of the performance segments would have been welcome. An optional purchase for elementary and middle schools. Also available: *The Science of Grand Hank* (video, \$24.95) and *The Education of a Nation* (2 videocassettes, \$9.95). Aud: I, J, P. (R. Reagan)

### Empower Mind for Teens ★★

(1998) 3 videocassettes, 27-50 min. each. \$89.95 (includes 5 audiocassettes and a book). EmpowerMind. PPR. Color cover.

People who fret about the supposed failures of American education should see how frightening are some of the proposed alternatives. If Kimberly Kassner, the host of the dreadful *Empower Mind for Teens*, has teaching credentials, they are not mentioned here or in the publicity materials. Instead of a professional approach based on classic study

skills, she fizzes over with attempts to be entertaining, shrieking at her audience of teens, in the first video of the two-part *Power Tools for School*, to get them to join in several choruses of "When I ACT enthusiastic, I FEEL enthusiastic!" After spouting an homily about "association [being] the basis of all learning," which she has the students repeat (even though they don't appear to understand what she means), she barks: "Got it? Say yes!" This is a rather ironic order, since she disses teachers who believe students when they say they understand. After a cursory look at self-esteem and how students have been traumatized by teachers, Kassner then begins a belabored lesson on how to remember people's names. If the *Power Tools for School* tapes look and feel like a sales training seminar, the third video in the set, *How to Do Twice the Homework in Half the Time*, seems like a subversion of education itself. "Reading takes the most time and is the most grueling" part of school," Kimberly Kassner states, and then presents her own four-step plan for skimming through a textbook. If you want to blow off studying, she recommends just reading captions, graphs and summaries and not wasting one's valuable teenage time on all the text stuff (the fourth and optional step in her plan). She promises good grades will follow because the information "will be in your subconscious." She tells the inspiring story of a girl who with a book report due, read "the book cover? On each side? And little bit of the story? And then she put together a paper and still got a B+ on it!" If you want to hear, like, a middle-aged Valley Girl give all her tips on how to cheat your way through school without really learning, this is the ticket. Parents who are desperate to get their kids to improve their grades may shell out for this tape (advertised via television infomercial), but schools and public libraries absolutely should not waste the money. Aud: J, H, P. (R. Reagan)

### How to Help Your Child Succeed in School ★★★

(1997) 56 min. \$46. Educational Resource Specialists. PPR. Color cover. ISBN: 0-9654146-0-4.

While this video is geared for parents of children with Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD), it's full of helpful suggestions for any parent trying to get a child to do homework. While many suggestions seem obvious (have a quiet place for the child to study; be available to help but don't do the work for her; ask to see the homework assignments each and every day), there are many parents who don't think to ask or who don't know that they are supposed to give this kind of guidance. There are many videotapes on the subject already available, but this one would also be a worthy addition to a public library collection, as it is hosted by

Sandra Rief, a nationally-known educator on ADHD. A nice bonus is the use of multi-ethnic families who illustrate Rief's points. Recommended for public libraries and agencies which offer parenting classes. Aud: H, C, P. (R. Reagan)

### Raising Self-Esteem For African-American Students ★★1/2

(1998) 21 min. \$59.95 (teacher's guide included). TMW Media Group. PPR.

Knowing about your cultural heritage and history, especially in a personal context, can help young people answer the question "who am I?" and thus raise their self-image. The purpose of this video is to provide such an introduction to African-American students of their unique heritage. Topics covered include: a brief history of civilization in the Nile Delta, societal contributions, and practical suggestions on taking pride in one's roots. Although the program intends to be basic, at times it is too general in its claims, and ends up only scratching the surface of African history. In addition, no mention of African-American history, especially contemporary figures, is made, and many times the terms African and African-American are used interchangeably, which is both inaccurate and confusing. Too, while the narration is good, and the host articulate, repeated use of the same shots and odd angles sometimes detract. Overall, a less than optimum purchase. Optional. Aud: I, J, H. (E. Gieschen)

### Successful Classrooms: Effective Teaching Strategies for Raising Achievement in Reading and Writing ★★1/2

(1999) 59 min. \$74. Educational Resource Specialists. PPR. Color cover. ISBN: 0-9654146-1-2.

The good news is that math scores are going up; unfortunately, reading scores are stable or dropping in many places. One way to combat this slippage is to follow the methods used in the Naranca Elementary School (El Cajon, CA), which made reading and writing top academic priorities. Of its 800+ student body, the school has 350 students speaking fourteen languages other than English, but now all students focus on English language arts for an impressive period of classroom time. By spending an unprecedented two and a half hours a day on language arts, the school has gone from the worst-performing school in the district to being named a Title I Achieving School. Using a combination of phonics and whole language approaches, students spend more time learning to read, spell, write their own stories, and read for pleasure each and every day. Disappointingly, however, while the importance of having classrooms well-stocked with books is mentioned, the role of the school library within this language arts-intensive program is not. Still, this is good food for thought, and schools and school