



This April 1st, Is Truth Stranger Than Fiction?



This April 1st, we want to begin with an acknowledgement that April Fools' Day stories have become redundant, even obsolete. Some of our past stories which were meant to be so absurd that they couldn't be reasonably believed turned out to be prophetic. In 2021, for instance, our April Fools' story told readers of a "[turducken voucher](#)" bill in Florida:

A traditional roast turducken is a chicken stuffed in a duck and then stuffed in a turkey. For Florida's legislative chefs, the chicken is a traditional voucher, the duck is a neovoucher (which is funded through tax-credited donations), and the turkey is an education-saving-account (ESA) voucher. The legislators then pushed previous limits by squeezing their whole bundle of Turducken fowl goodness into a wild goose: a charter school.

Just a few years later, we see versions of this turducken hitting dinner tables in states throughout the nation. Oklahoma has authorized a charter school that looks a lot like a voucher scheme, with the charter run by a church providing religious instruction and proselytizing, and even allowed to practice faith-based discrimination against members of the LGBTQ+ community (currently being [challenged](#) in court). Missouri is among the states that have adopted a [voucher program stuffed with a neovoucher funding mechanism](#) for an ESA program. And of course Florida's always-creative legislators continue to [push the voucher envelope](#), although ironically by consolidating programs as they've expanded (so at

least we got that part wrong).

Faced with reality's stubborn impudence, we offer this year's April 1st newsletter as a challenge to our readers to distinguish counterfeit parodies from actual news stories from the past year (answers are provided below). We'll take you to three states: Missouri, Texas, and (of course) Florida.

Missouri

Option #1: A bill introduced in January in Missouri would require an annual human growth and development unit, beginning in the third grade, that includes a high-definition video, which must be at least three minutes long, of fetal development. Schools must also show these students a specific video called "Meet Baby Olivia," showing an animated fetus that develops over the course of (another) three minutes. Olivia is a "new human being" who came "into existence at fertilization." The video helps its audience develop an affinity and attachment to Olivia, who is shown wearing a cross necklace as a fetus, by telling her in-utero story.

Option #2: A bill introduced a month ago in Missouri would jail teachers for using trans students' preferred pronouns. Any person acting in an official capacity in a school, who uses trans students' chosen names or pronouns, would be considered to be "contributing to social transition" and subject to a maximum of four years in prison. That educator would then have to register as a sex offender.

Texas

Option #1: A new law in Texas allows school districts to replace school counselors with unlicensed chaplains. These religious chaplains could, according to the law's supporters, help prevent shootings by returning God to schools. The chaplains can volunteer, or schools can choose to use funding that would otherwise go to school safety to pay the chaplains for work in mental health roles. Legislators rejected an amendment to the bill that would have barred proselytizing or attempts to convert students.

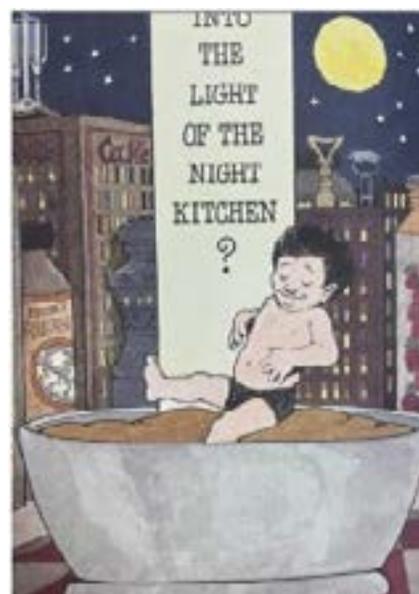
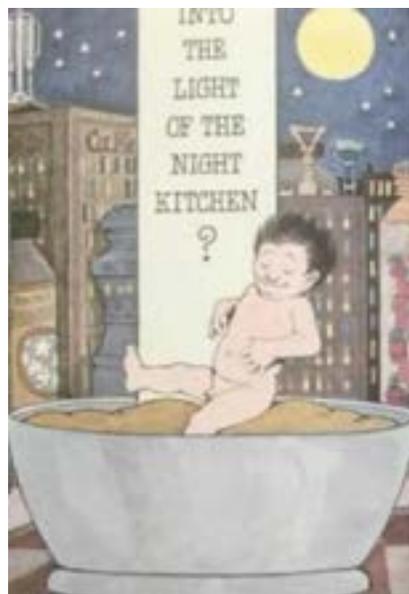
Option #2: Mike Miles, the state-appointed superintendent of the Houston Independent School District, announced that he would be "repurposing" the libraries of "priority" schools into "team centers," where misbehaving students would watch "virtual" lessons and would earn \$3/hr helping to make license plates for the state. The money earned by the students would be split 50-50 with the local school districts to help compensate for their behavior.

Florida

Option #1: Most readers also already know that this has been an interesting year for Moms for Liberty in Florida. In particular, co-founder Bridget Ziegler went from promoting *Don't Say Gay* legislation to having a three-way sexual encounter with a woman plus Ziegler's husband, who was then Florida's GOP chairman. But how many remember that the Hillsborough County school district switched to using only excerpts from Shakespeare's plays to

avoid “raunchiness” that they feared would violate one of Florida’s state-of-the-art censorship laws? Or the complaints by a Moms-follower against Amanda Gorman’s poem *The Hill We Climb* (which was recited by Gorman at the 2021 Biden inauguration), which resulted in a Miami K-8 school restricting the poem to the middle-school section of the library?

Option #2: Most readers will remember last year’s (true) news story about the governing board of a “classical” charter school in Florida asking the principal to resign after horrified parents learned that a photo of Michelangelo’s statue *David* was included in a lesson on Renaissance art. Readers might also remember the state’s adoption of middle-school history guidelines that included the job-training benefits of slavery (teaching that Black people benefited from slavery because it taught them useful skills). But readers may have missed the story from a couple months ago of the chair of a Moms for Liberty chapter who complained, citing the state’s new Don’t Say Gay law, that an elementary school library in Indian River County, Florida possessed illustrated children’s books showing nudity in drawings. For instance, Maurice Sendak’s book *In The Night Kitchen* included drawings she called “pornographic.” The Moms for Liberty chair agreed to a compromise, whereby the district drew clothing over the naughty bits in the offending illustrations. For instance, here is a before-and-after from the Sendak book:



And here’s your answer sheet:

Missouri

The false story is Option #1. The [Baby Olivia video](#) does not, in fact, show the fetus wearing a crucifix. But otherwise, the story of this [bill](#) is true. In fact, similar *Baby Olivia* bills have been introduced [throughout the U.S.](#)

The bill targeting educators who fail to dead-name trans students can be found [here](#). CNN recently ran a story about the bill [here](#).

Texas

The false story is #2. The license-plate part is not true. For now. To learn more about the actual story, see the coverage in [Education Week](#), the [Hechinger Report](#), and the [Guardian](#).

The chaplain legislation, Senate Bill 763, is [here](#). To learn more, see the coverage from the [Texas Tribune](#).

Florida

Sorry, but they're both completely true. We couldn't come up with any stories to top Florida's reality.

To learn more about the district protecting students from the lewdness of Shakespeare's plays please [see this article](#) from the *Guardian*. To learn more about the school protecting elementary school students from Amanda Gorman's poetry, [see this article](#) from the *Miami Herald*.

The drawing-clothes-on-illustrations story was broken by *Popular Information*. Read the story [here](#). (As a bonus, here's the NBC News coverage of the [slavery-as-job-training](#) story.)

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