



Teacher and Students Request McGraw-Hill Change Its Textbook

By Educator Barnes – November 30, 2019

Fourth-grade teacher, Laura Wooley, was preparing her students for an upcoming social studies test using a McGraw-Hill textbook. During the course of prepping for the test, her students found an issue with the content in the book. On page 148 of the United States Research Companion, it states, "As more farmers grew tobacco, they needed more enslaved

Africans to do the work.” Ms. Wooley and her students took issue with one word in this sentence, “needed.” Instead of being angry and moving forward with the review, they decided to take action. They wrote letters explaining why the word was problematic and should be changed.

Below are some excerpts from the letters shared with the McGraw-Hill company.

When the wealthy people bought enslaved Africans, they didn't really need it. They wanted it. You see, the white people could've done all the work themselves, but they wanted slaves to do it. You should replace needed with wanted. It's more realistic. And when the 3rd graders come to 4th grade and see THAT, they are gonna think it's totally fine to enslave people because they NEED it. – Caroline

Our class doesn't think this is right. We think needed should be changed to wanted for these reasons. (I'm sorry if I say things that are rude, disrespectful, or judgemental). 1. No one needs slaves in this world. 2. Plantation owners could have done the work themselves instead of sitting on their lazy butts. 3. If they need slaves, I need a pet panda. – Laurel

I feel that needed is a strong word. Farmers didn't need enslaved Africans, they wanted them to do the work. If you don't change this, little girls and boys will think that slavery is right. Please address this and change this. – Delany

It said they needed slavery, but you should of wrote wanted because if they needed them they would probably paid them but they wanted them and did not care about them. That is why you should change needed to wanted. – Vivi

In addition to sending McGraw-Hill the letter, Ms. Wooley also shared the letter on Twitter, and McGraw-Hill responded:

We appreciate your and their concern for the success of all learners. Happy Thanksgiving from McGraw-Hill. Thanks for sharing these with us. Please in-turn thank your students for writing these letters. Their letters are powerful and have been forwarded to our Academic Design team for our next update.

Ms. Wooley students learned more than facts for the upcoming social studies test, they also learned how to speak up and use their voices to advocate for change.