



Hothouse Kids: The Dilemma of the Gifted Child

By Alissa Quart

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Hothouse Kids: The Dilemma of the Gifted Child By Alissa Quart

Critically acclaimed author Alissa Quart breaks the news about an issue that will be of urgent concern to parents and educators as well as adult readers with "gifted" pasts: the dilemma of the gifted child. While studies show that children who are superior learners do benefit from enriched early education, the intensely competitive lives of America's gifted and talented kids do have risks. The pressure can have long-term effects in adult life, from debilitating perfectionism to performance anxiety and lifelong feelings of failure.

Quart traveled the country to research the many ways in which the current craze to "produce" gifted kids and prodigies has gone too far. Exploring the overhyped world of baby edutainment and "better baby" early education programs, she takes a hard look at the claims about educational toys and baby sign language. Taking readers inside the ever-more elite world of IQ testing, she reveals the proliferation of new categories of giftedness, including "terrifyingly" and "severely" gifted and examines the true value of such testing. Profiling the explosion of kid competitions—from Scrabble(tm) and chess to child preaching—she uncovers the dangers of such heated pressure to excel so early in life and exposes the prodigy hunters who search science and math fairs for teens to hire for Wall Street investment firms. Critiquing the professionalization of play, she visits with kids who've been identified as prodigies—from a four-year-old painter whose works sell for \$300,000, to an eight-year-old professional skateboarder who is backed by nine corporate sponsors. Surveying expert assessments of the necessary role of unstructured play in child development, she warns about the disappearance of recess and the pitfalls of children's overstuffed schedules today. She also profiles the growing divide in opportunities for wealthy kids versus those from middle and lower income families who are losing out as gifted programs at public schools are gutted in the wake of the No Child Left Behind Act.

How should parents and educators draw the line? How much enrichment is too much, and how much is too little? What are we doing to our gifted kids? Alissa Quart's penetrating in-depth examination provides a much-needed wake-up call that will spark a national debate about this urgent issue.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Quart's follow-up to *Branded* shifts her focus from rapacious companies to parents, whose obsession with "creating" or "nurturing" giftedness, she argues, has led to a full-blown transformation of middle-class childhood into aggressive skill-set pageantry. While Quart wonderfully details the daily grinds of genuine prodigies (in everything from violin to preaching to entrepreneurship), the real force of the book is in showing how gifted childhood—relentlessly tested, totally overscheduled and joylessly competitive—is being created by striving parents of all stripes; such "enrichment" not only doesn't necessarily work, it can be harmful. A chapter titled "The Icarus Effect" presents child-prodigies as worn, depressed adults; "Extreme Parenting" and "Child Play or Child Labor?" show the bizarre (and often profit-based) forms prodigy-mongering is taking: "Phoenix has started her own knitwear business," one parent crows, "and though she is only 12, she can do it." Probing interviews (the kids are brilliant, robotic, frenetic, forlorn and every shade in between) are matched with educational and psychological data, with beautiful cultural riffs (particularly linking mathletes and Wall Street) and deep engagement: a former gifted kid herself, Quart interviews, interprets and assesses with a sympathy for her subjects and their caregivers that is emotionally profound. She turns in a remarkably evenhanded analysis and argues for "multiple intelligences" and enrichment for "strong learners" in public schools. Quart's second book is first-class literary journalism. (*Aug.*)
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From [Booklist](#)

Parental obsession with identifying and nurturing the slightest giftedness in children has produced a "prodigy industry" that is robbing children of simple childhood experiences, according to Quart, a former child prodigy who traveled the country to research the frenzied trend to identify and market products, services, and activities for gifted children. She examined research and talked to parents, educators, and child psychologists as well as current and former child prodigies for a portrait of what she calls the Icarus Effect. Quart includes her own story, describing herself as insufferable, an early reader who skipped a grade and wrote her first novel at seven. She visits an amazing range of competitions for gifted children, including spelling bees, Scrabble contests, and poetry slams, all part of enormous pressures placed on gifted children that sometimes result in resentment and rebellion as the gifted look back on stunted childhoods, haunted by not living up to their promise, being "a cross between a has-been and a never-was." A fascinating cautionary tale for overzealous parents of gifted children. *Vanessa Bush*
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Review

Quart's message, thoughtful, often eloquent, and bracingly frank, injects common sense into the overwrought rhetoric of parenting. -- *Newsday*, August 20, 2006

Utterly fascinating-Quart's...insightful analysis range from teen preacher competitions to the link between mathletes and Wall Street recruits. A. -- *Entertainment Weekly*, August 11, 2006

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Joseph Braddock:

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Catherine Scott:

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Carrie Wilson:

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