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Grade 3 testing advances reform policies

There are several pivotal years in the educational development of a child; somewhat more important than the others. Grades 3, 7 and 11 are the considered by many to be the hardest years in school.

Grade 7 is tough because this is when decisions regarding high school are made and is a considerable step into a more mature environment. Grade 11 is simply a quantum leap in academic difficulty over Grade 10. And Grade 3 is likely the most important of all. It is the year when children are first streamed, first evaluated and first seriously tested.

By Grade 3 students must be competent readers, writers and have strong math skills to succeed.

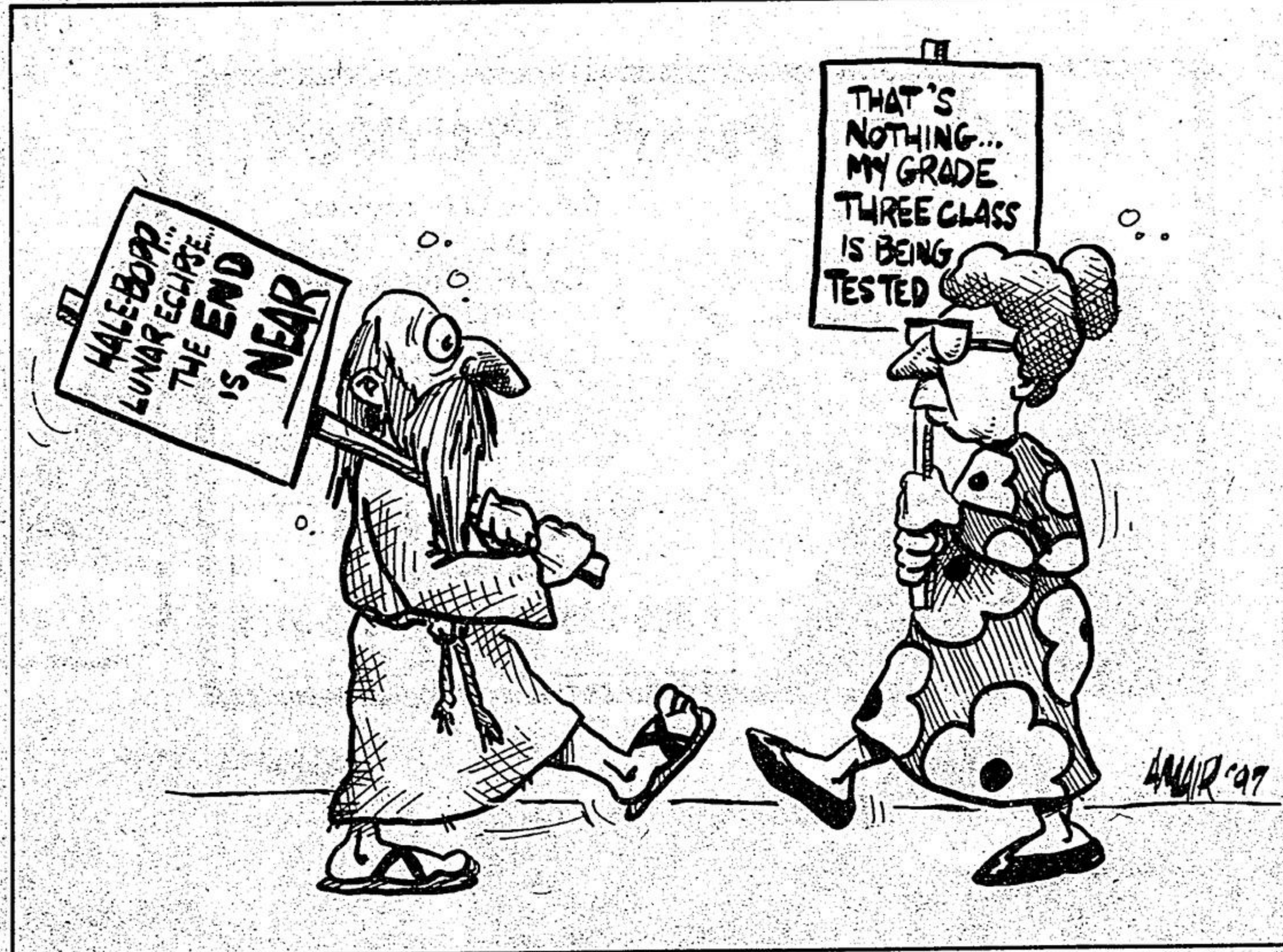
The province is about to find out just how effective teachers have been in this crucial year of development. It should be noted that the Grade 3 testing (which may begin any day, by the way) is designed to scare people. The home test given this week is to re-emphasize what parents should be doing with their youngsters' minds by this age.

The student tests are murderously difficult - and this too, if for a reason. The government wants there to be a reasonable failure rate in order to have ammunition to enact further reforms.

The tests will prove there is a need for change, and it is the teachers in the classroom who will be to blame. From the early indications, the

testing of the province's Grade 3 children will lead to wholesale changes in the way our children are taught. The bottom line is: The gov-

ernment appears to be rushing through these tests to push through more reforms. And it will likely be another case of too much, too fast.



GTA in brief: Here today, 'mega' tomorrow

Here's what my crystal ball says today:

There will always be an England. But, don't count on Whitchurch-Stouffville or Uxbridge being around forever.

In about 10 days, the provincial government will give birth to a megacity. With the stroke of a pen, Bill 103 will be passed by the Tory majority government. It means we'll say "bye bye" to the municipalities of Toronto, Scarborough, Etobicoke, York, North York and East York and "hello" to Toronto, The Big on Jan. 1.

That said, let's look at us. Before we stare into the eyes of Whitchurch-Stouffville or Uxbridge, let's go back to the mid '80s when the Tories were enjoying about 40 years of non-stop rule.

Long before I felt my first menopause-related hot flash, I got hot under the collar about a new thing being called the 'greater Toronto area'.

This 'gTa' term started popping up. Soon it was being capitalized in print. Editors told reporters to upper case it to the Greater Toronto Area and to call it GTA on second mention. I didn't like it. But, what the heck. At the time, I didn't like most editors or many Tories. At the time, the law dictated that I couldn't murder editors; the political climate was such that I figured the blue-striped boys and girls would get the boot; the Liberals would run the show and we wouldn't hear another word about this GTA.



I was right about the change of command at Queen's Park and dead wrong about the GTA.

When the Grits finally took

over at Queen's Park, they embraced the GTA. In fact, when it came to the GTA and the Liberals, it was all hugs and kisses.

When the Liberals were shown the exit three years later, I figured the ruling New Democrats would be around for a while and, of course, they'd put the kibosh on all GTA thinking. I was dead wrong. Today, I see it this way:

Litle brothers can often be terrific role models

In 'The Xenophobe's Guide to the English,' Anthony Miall observes, 'Unlike their transatlantic cousins, the English have an inherent distrust of success and look upon money with disdain.'

It is certainly true that unabashed success in the land of my birth is regarded with deep suspicion, especially when it involves any form of self-promotion. I was reminded of this fact during discussions with my children about their future career options.

Using myself as a role model would clearly not do, so I gave deep thought to the example set by my younger brother, whose experiences in the working world remain unparalleled by anyone of my acquaintance.

Among the motley array of jobs he has held down are a short stint as a bank trainee ('You're a delightful chap, but I don't think you're quite what we're looking for'), nursing assistant in a hospital for the

mentally handicapped (a job he left hastily after an inmate lunged at him with a fork and clearly murderous intentions) and woodsman (he was a lumberjack, but he wasn't okay, so he left before they could cut him off in his prime).

He set a record for brevity at a cake factory - 45 minutes after he clocked on, he declared himself redundant because he couldn't keep up with the production line. Something horrible happened to a caseload of cakes as a result, but he's still in denial and refuses to discuss it.

From these heady heights he applied to, and was accepted by, the post office, starting off as a postman and rising up the hierarchy like greased lightning until he reached the postal counter, where he grudgingly sold stamps to the great unwashed.

He also played soccer for the spectacularly unsuccessful Southampton post office team

and was involved for a time in a postal chess league, until he discovered that the person he had been selected to play against had not replied to his challenge because he had been dead for several weeks.

My brother's forays into the world of commerce are mirrored by his skills in the home improvement department. Any shelf he puts up can be demolished simply by placing an object upon it - a framed photo or a small vase of flowers, for example.

Despite his slight shortcomings in matters practical, his gift for humorous repartee is second to none. Alas, it pays not at all, but it makes him a won-

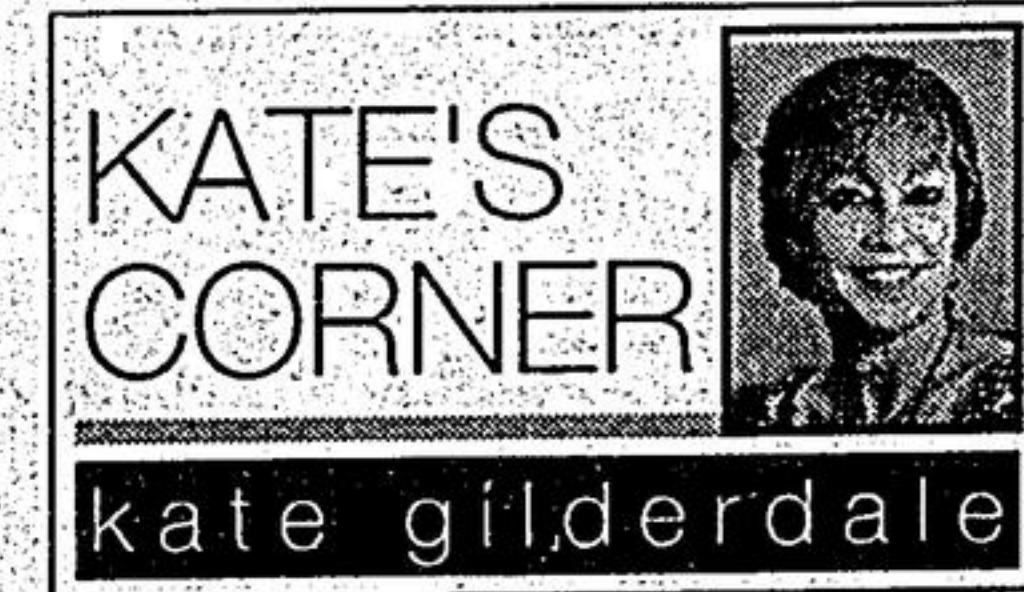
derful companion and a joy to the family whenever we amble across the pond for a visit.

If we weren't such a non-competitive lot, I would be jealous of his effortless wit - what takes me a day to write comes to him spontaneously and with no apparent effort. As it is, I wish I could see and hear more of him, if only to indulge in a spot of plagiarism to enhance my own writings.

This would bother him not at all, but even if it did he couldn't afford a lawyer and, being one in a long line of procrastinators, he would find it hard to bestir himself long enough to take action.

As a long-standing employee of the post office, he has never been known to heed his employer's exhortations to post early for Christmas, and his tardiness always results in a nice surprise among the bills when January rolls around.

He may not be Bill Gates, but I'm glad he's my brother.



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