Talking About Schoolwork

I didn't like being trapped in a school, but I hated the schoolwork. Even though I loved—and love—to read, the **required** reading was never interesting. And after every book, a book **report** was **due**! Nothing ruins a book like writing about it.

In every **subject**, there was too much **homework**. Didn't the teachers know that seven hours of school was enough? Why did I have to do more work at home? And even when there wasn't homework, I had to **study**, because we took a **test** in one subject or another every week.

Do you know what I hated most, though? Every time someone complained about how much work we had to do, a teacher would say "right now, school is your job." I didn't see the teachers doing their job for free, so who was going to pay *the students*?

When you were in school, was there a subject you hated? Was there a subject you loved? Which subject helped you most with your job now? Is there a subject you wish you'd worked at harder? (I wish I learned more when I was in math.) Do you think that homework helped you learn? What books would you make required reading for kids today?

Vocabulary

Required: In Germany, the law says that you have to have a first aid kit in your car. It's <u>required</u>. In most countries, you can't drive without wearing your seatbelt. They're <u>required</u>, too. The word <u>required</u> refers to something that you have to have, or have to do.

<u>Required</u> reading refers to the books that teachers sent home with us, and said we *had* to read them. More than books were <u>required</u> in school. Some **subjects** in school were <u>required</u>, and others were optional, meaning that you could choose if you wanted to take them or not. And Spanish and French weren't <u>required</u> subjects in my school, but two years of one language *was* <u>required</u>.

Report: After every book we read as **required** reading, we had to write two or three pages about the story of the book. I used to hate writing these book <u>reports</u>.

A <u>report</u> means any description of what happened, normally one that's written on paper. After a car accident, the police might ask the drivers involved to make written <u>reports</u> of what happened. And today's newspaper is full of <u>reports</u> of what happened yesterday!

Due: Imagine a teacher told you that the book "Moby Dick" was **required** reading, and to write a **report** on the book when we were finished. Will you be able to read the book and write the report

before tomorrow? Of course not, he has to give you more time than that. Maybe the teacher says you have to finish the report in two weeks. The the report is <u>due</u> in two weeks.

   <u>Due</u> means when something has to be done. Homework normally has a '<u>due</u> date' (even if it's the next day). But there's something else that can be <u>due</u>: If my wife is pregnant, and we expect the baby to come in August, then the baby is <u>due</u> in August.

Subject: We learned a lot in school. We learned math (in the U.K, they say "maths"), and English, and biology and. . . and . . and. . . each different thing we learned is a <u>subject</u>. For each <u>subject</u>, we had to go to a different **classroom**. In school, music was my favorite <u>subject</u>. And I think that gym (where we had to do sports) was the <u>subject</u> I hated most. Math was the <u>subject</u> I got the worst **grades** in.

Homework: We did a lot of work in school. (At least, I thought so!) But, after school, we had to take our books home and do more work there, too! This <u>homework</u> was normally collected the next day by the teacher and given a **grade**. Don't confuse <u>homework</u> with housework. <u>Homework</u> is normally given by a teacher, and you can stop when you finish school. 'Housework' is the cleaning and cooking that never ends in a house or apartment. (My mother says that I did more <u>homework</u> than housework as a child, and she's right.)

Study: Can you learn English just by sitting in a classroom? Maybe, but I know I can't learn French that way. I go to class, but I also have to spend a lot of time at home, working with flash cards and doing exercises. I have to <u>study</u> French at home.

   <u>Study</u> refers to the time you spend learning outside the classroom. You might hear things like: "I can't come to the movie tonight, I have to <u>study</u> for a test tomorrow." "Toby, your grades are terrible, you'll have to <u>study</u> more." We also use the word <u>study</u> to talk about the main thing we learn in a university. "I <u>studied</u> German," means that, while I learned a lot of things in the university, I was mainly there to learn German. When I came to Germany, I was surprised that there were people who <u>studied</u> American the way I'd <u>studied</u> German.

Test: I think it would be nice if a teacher taught French—maybe some new vocabulary—and then said "Okay, Toby, do you understand?" I'd say yes, the teacher would smile, give me a good grade, and then move on to the next subject. But that's not the way it works. The teachers always want proof that I understand what they teach me. So they ask a lot of questions and, after counting how many I get right, they give me a grade. They <u>test</u> me.

   <u>Test</u> can be a verb, meaning something like "to measure the quality of." You can <u>test</u> the

drinking water, or <u>test</u> drive a new car. But, in school, a <u>test</u> is normally on paper, with a lot of questions, and too much stress. I used to hate math <u>tests</u>. Now, I'm a teacher, and I don't like giving <u>tests</u>. Students who do well in class get nervous on a <u>test</u> and then they get bad grades.