

Death at an early age: the review

[Profession](#), [Teacher](#)



Death at an Early Age: The Review Brandon Kennedy I am reviewing Jonathan Kozol's auto-biography, Death at an Early Age. This piece of literature provides the reader with an in-depth, personable account of schools of the 1960's and the corruption that had flourished. Throughout this piece Kozol told of grim stories about public schools throughout Boston, Massachusetts; many of which would be incredibly disturbing. I believe Kozol's thesis was the following: although legal segregation had been abolished in 1954, (Brown v Board) socio-economic segregation was still in full effect over ten years later. Or in other words, even though segregation had come to an end, African Americans were still denied fundamental rights, including an education. It is obvious that Kozol is writing this because he was very much appalled by the public school system throughout Boston. Countless times throughout the text Kozol speaks of his disgust in the treatment of the blacks. Kozol is trying to show the reader not only how blacks were denied a basic education, but the prevalent racism that existed throughout the north. Perhaps Kozol was writing this for reform, perhaps he wrote it to enlighten others. This book could be geared towards any educated audience, and would be a great read for anyone going into the field of education. I personally found this to be a great read; Kozol was able to bring up many valid points, make the reader think, and keep the reader entertained. Although the book was disturbing in many aspects, I found as I went the pages become easier and easier to turn. Overall I found this to be both entertaining and educational. This piece began in the academic year of 1964, the same year as the Civil Rights bill was passed. Jon Kozol was a substitute teacher who had worked in Boston for nearly 5 years now. Kozol's

text moved in chronological order throughout the story. He recently had landed a full time substitute job at Roxbury Elementary. He goes on about the trials and tribulations of working within a “ segregated school. ” It was segregated by economic status essentially. Children that lived in the ghetto made up the majority of Boston’s public schools, nearly 60 percent of which were black. Kozol also tells the sickening stories of racism that occurred in the school he worked in. Male teachers often beat their students when they disobeyed, and the vast majority of the times the child was black. When I black child spoke out of turn or was “ disrupting the class” they were often sent to the cellar to receive whippings. These “ disciplinary actions” would almost always leave the child in tears and covered in welts for the next several days. One story I found to be incredibly sickening was that of Edward. Edward was one of Mr. Kozol’s fourth grade students. Edward was also severely mentally challenged. Yet teachers still felt the need to beat him, often times leaving him bruised. Edward would cry all throughout school nearly every day: in English because he could not read, in writing because he could not write, and in math because he could not add or subtract. This child was in fourth grade however it seemed his teachers had given up on him long before that. Many of the teachers at the school often referred to Edward as a “ lost cause. ” Kozol couldn’t help but wonder that if Edward had been white, how his treatment would differ. After some time Kozol had become disgusted with himself. He had become disgusted in himself mainly for one reason, he never spoke up. He’d let his fellow staff to discriminate and beat the children all the while he would just stand by. He described it as feeling trapped; he also feared termination of his job. Throughout the year Kozol

was replaced and sent off to different schools in the area. However it was the same old song and dance. By the end of the year not much had changed. Although Kozol spoke much of the infringements of these students' right to learn, the end gave a glimmer of hope. As he entered the new school year Mrs. Hicks was voted top position in the school committee, as racist as she was. He then goes onto describe the growing black nationalism and a positive future. Throughout *Death at an Early Age* the reader can begin to notice several reoccurring themes. These include racism, incorrect stereotyping, and a child's innocence. Racism is undoubtedly the most noticeable theme in this book. Nearly every page has some sort of an example of it, whether it is a teacher, a student, or even Kozol himself. This entire book is wrapped around racism and how it effects the education of black children. Incorrect stereotyping is also a very dominant theme in *Death at an Early Age*. Time and time again the teachers refer to the children as lazy, unmotivated, and even " wild animals. " Often times the teachers would refer to their schools as " zoos. " Many teachers believed the students simply refused to learn, that they were too lazy, and did not care for it. However this was completely false; on a weekly basis Mr. Kozol was approached by students seeking extra help that were too embarrassed to go to anyone else. And lastly would be a child's innocence. He often ranted about how the children simply did not deserve what was served on their plate. These children often came from broken homes and were just trying to get along. However when they came to school many of them received cruel punishments including beatings and whippings. The children were coming to school simply to learn, not to be held down. I found this book to be incredibly

helpful towards my research topic. My topic has to do with socio-economic segregation specifically in Boston, Massachusetts. This was a very good source. It was not very biased, although he seemed to give more of a liberal approach. I only wish this book covered more of a timeline rather than school year.