

Book reviews

'Teacher said WHAT?!' a hard one to put down

If you are trying to get a handle on all the fuss about the national debt, but really don't have a firm grasp on the economics or politics involved, consider picking up a copy of "Your Teacher Said WHAT?!: Defending Our Kids from the Liberal Assault on Capitalism," the new book by father/daughter team Joe and Blake Kernens.

The book had its genesis in a series of discussions Joe had with his 10-year-old regarding what she was learning in school — a seemingly innocuous conversation many parents have with their kids on a fairly regular basis. "Writing this book was an incredible learning experience," Blake explains. "I discussed many topics with my dad that most fifth graders don't even know about but probably should."

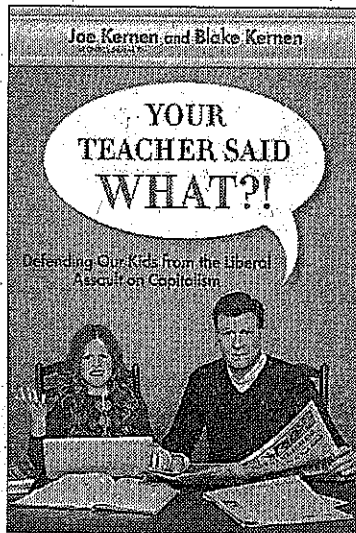
"We had fun," Joe adds.

Joe Kernens, the co-anchor of "Squawk Box," has been at CNBC since it merged with Financial News Network in 1991. Trained at Merrill Lynch, he was a vice president at both EF Hutton and Smith Barney. He has an undergraduate degree in biology from the University of Colorado and a master's degree in cancer research from M.I.T.

Daughter Blake is a fifth-grade student; she lives with her dad, mother, Penelope, and younger brother, Scott, in New Jersey.

"This whole thing began with one nervous father: nervous about the widespread acceptance of Progressive ideas and especially the uncritical way they were being presented to my children," Joe Kernens explains. "Blake didn't always agree with Penelope and me. One thing I learned is that the most powerful way in which 9- or 10-year-olds resemble grown-up Progressives is in their love of regulating things."

Obviously, Joe was the senior author for this effort. It is written primarily from his perspective and in his unmistakable literary style. At the same time, Blake's contributions are evident throughout the text and serve to enhance its overall aesthetic. Excerpts from conversations between Joe and Blake saturate the book and constitute one of its most endearing features. Moreover, the authors use delightful illustrations and language to purposefully



"Your Teacher Said WHAT?!: Defending Our Kids from the Liberal Assault on Capitalism" by Joe Kernens and Blake Kernens. New York: Sentinel Books (The Penguin Group), 2011. 236 pages, \$25.95.

enhance the experience of reading the book.

If you have seen Joe Kernens on TV, you know he is an avowed capitalist; a staunch believer in free markets. Referring to the way he and Penelope see the world, he writes: "We believe that free-market capitalism is not only the most powerful engine for human prosperity ever, but also history's strongest force for freedom and human advancement."

"The only difference between defending economic freedom and defending religious freedom is that while the mainstream culture offers no real opposition to the many ways in which Americans worship," the author continues, "there is a powerful current of antagonism toward the ways in which they do business."

The book consists of 10 relatively easy to digest chapters organized in a kind of chronological order — each chapter begins with a particular month and year. My favorites are Chapter 2, "February 2009: The ABCs of the Free Market," which explains the fundamentals of economics, and Chapter 4, "October 2009: Who Made My Shoelaces?" which traces the origins of an everyday product from cotton field to store shelf.

"The ABCs of the Free Market" reads like a glossary — it

begins with "Advertising" and ends with "Supply and demand." Terms and concepts are explained in alphabetical order and include entertaining anecdotes that help to explain concepts to younger readers. The Kernens are resolutely unapologetic for the conservative bias that permeates this "dictionary."

Consider the definition of "Stimulus, fiscal": Noun. An increase in government spending or decrease in taxes taken to limit the damage of an economic recession. Of all the things that define economic Progressivism, maybe the most dangerous is its belief in the ability of government to do things more effectively than the marketplace.

"Who Made My Shoelaces?" is a fascinating story about how an ordinary item makes its way into the hands of consumers. Even with a conspicuous partiality clearly on display, the explanation of everything that comes into play in making and selling shoelaces is enlightening and highlights the fact that we do indeed live in a global community.

"You can't buy Scott's shoelaces for a couple of bucks because of central planning or taxation or regulation," the authors state. "They exist, like every other thing we buy, because millions of people — farmers, engineers, truckers, miners, and everyone else — are free to communicate their wants and needs to one another and to respond to them in the most efficient and inventive ways they can devise."

The reality is that the book is probably above the heads of most fifth-graders (and perhaps a few graduate students). A substantial portion of the content is simply beyond the grasp of anyone with only a rudimentary understanding of core economic and political ideologies. Still, it is a very good read. It's one of those books that is hard to put down. A couple of nights I stayed up way too late because it was difficult to find a good "stopping place."

So be forewarned. Once you begin reading "Your Teacher Said WHAT?!" you might find yourself suffering the same fate.

— Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.