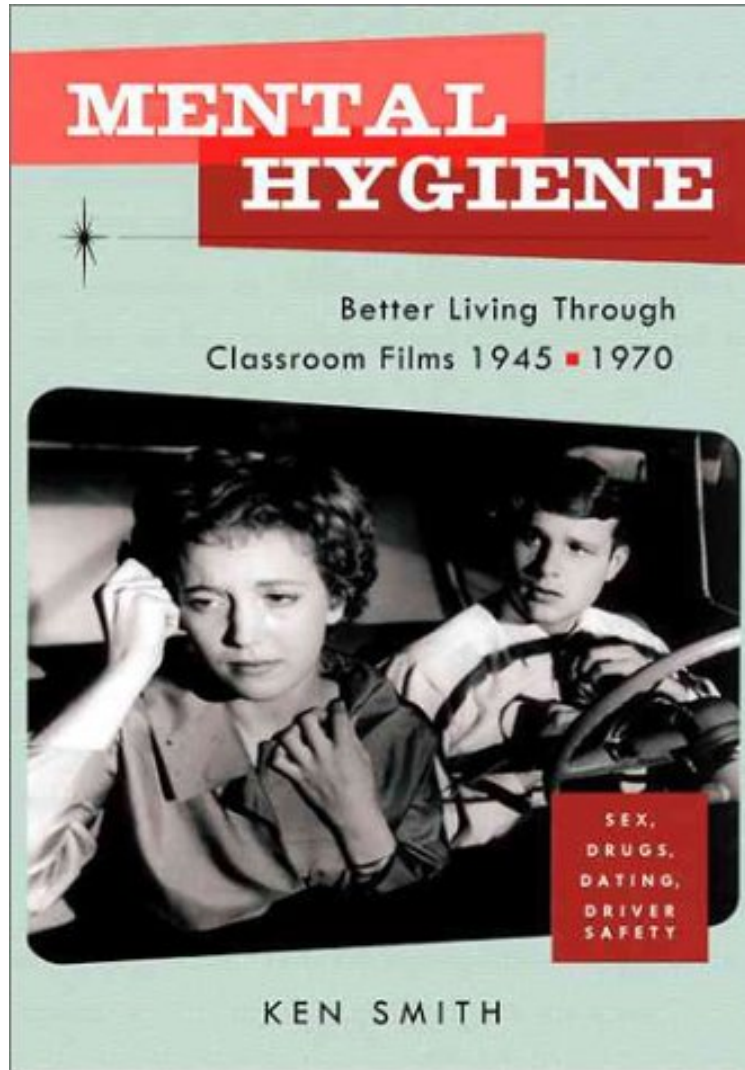


## Mental Hygiene: Better Living Through Classroom Films 1945-1970

Ken Smith

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**Ken Smith : Mental Hygiene: Better Living Through Classroom Films 1945-1970** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mental Hygiene: Better Living Through Classroom Films 1945-1970:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. HilariousBy Molly McGeeThe best way to use this book is to turn to the actual descriptions of the films in the second half of the book. Once you're finished either laughing or being horrified, go back to the beginning and read the history of the various low- budget production companies involved. Subjects vary widely and include personal hygiene, dating, atomic bombs, and drug abuse. My favorite are the dating films. Boys wearing patent leather shoes, suits and neckties, looking like tiny Baptist ministers ask out girls

wearing saddle shoes, long wool skirts, and fuzzy sweaters over white cotton shirts. Both go somewhere very public and follow many, many rules of etiquette, after which the boy drops the girl off at her front porch and...shakes her hand! They're so stiff and awkward, and hilarious. The most disturbing one is about the duck-and-cover drills. My dad saw this film in school. You'd have to believe the filmmakers were either totally naive or just distributing government propaganda here. Is there any way the makers of this film really believed that putting a newspaper over your head or ducking under a blanket would really help if an atomic bomb went off in the vicinity? It seems likely the public believed it, which makes this gem all the more surreal- at once hilarious and terrifying. Note that there are only small black-and-white pictures and lots of text, though the text does a really good job at describing the films. To get the full effect, I recommend the "shorts" dvds that are produced by MST3K or RiffTrax. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A most unusual, yet fascinating, film history book! By Chuck Donegan Ken Smith has offered a fine chronicle on the history of a unique-for-its-time learning device: the educational film. Once regarded w/suspicion by conservative school authorities, the post-WWII years changed all that and showed just what an effective tool it really was, leading to a boom in this one-of-a-kind "genre" that lasted about 25 years, and Smith has really done his homework here, viewing countless films and offering some fascinating information. Highlights include:- The rise and fall of the 2 biggest educational film studios, Coronet and Centron- A bio of the largest independent educational producer, Sid Davis- Mini-summaries of more than 150 films One highlight comes in the opening "primer", when Smith laments that "neither the public archives nor the private footage libraries seem inclined to release these films for viewing, but perhaps this will change" (remember, this book was written in 1999). And change it has, thanks to video sharing sites like YouTube, Google Video, the Internet Archive, etc...they've given new life to these films and provided them w/a whole new audience! 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The Horrors of the Fifties By Andrew Sherwood Since I'd seen several of the Centron educational films on YouTube, I wanted to find out more about them. Thanks to Google I discovered the book, "Mental Hygiene", which I ordered immediately. I'm very pleased with it and plan to use it in my research for a history of the Centron films I'm writing in French, having already written about the history of highway safety films as seen in "Hell's Highway" (about which there's also a chapter in "Mental Hygiene"). I live in Paris, writing for a French audience to whom such films are not only unknown but also extremely exotic, yet it was a French friend who first showed me the Centron films, but then, he, an even greater movie buff than I, spends whole nights on YouTube! Andrew Sherwood

Between 1945 and 1970, millions of public school students were subjected to hundreds of films designed to keep them on the straight and narrow. These cultural gems "enlightened" the nation's youth about proper dating, good table manners, the evils of dope, and what happens to teens who drive too fast on prom night. Author Ken Smith embarked on an exhaustive nine-year search for these obscure educational films. The result is this fascinating stroll down memory lane. Smith has gathered titles such as Worth Waiting For, Posture Pals, Last Date, Highways of Agony, and Soapy the Germ Fighter. Included are interviews with writers and directors, detailed descriptions of these unintentionally hilarious films, and commentary on the social engineering behind them.

.com In Mental Hygiene, Ken Smith takes a look at the endearingly gooney safety and "social guidance" films produced for classroom use between World War II and the early 1970s. Everything from dating to drugs to auto safety is covered in this lovingly compiled book. Smith even takes the time to discuss the stylistic differences of the various studios and analyze the peculiar obsessions of their auteurs. Though its subjects are bizarre ("Healthy Feet"), corny ("Teen Togs"), and often ineptly made ("Red Nightmare"), Mental Hygiene is no mere excuse to mock these films. Smith is careful to note bursts of good (or at least interesting) filmmaking and makes a convincing case that in their day these classroom movies were considered the new wave of liberal education. The films, catalogued at the end of the book, teeter between unintentionally hilarious ("More Dates for Kay") and just flat-out disturbing ("Boys Beware"). Most take the stance that teens who drive too fast or don't mind their manners deserve their horrific fates. For example, the auto safety films tend toward subtly titled epics like "Mechanized Death" and "Wheels of Tragedy," while the "image building" shorts mercilessly taunt their misfit protagonists. ("It's a little late for tears, isn't it, Barbara?") A thoroughly enjoyable read, Mental Hygiene is both funny and informative, but not so informative that it will put you to sleep in class. --Ali Davis From Booklist Among the most pervasive and pernicious forms of 1950s cultural indoctrination was the mental hygiene film, extolling proper behavior to captive audiences of schoolchildren. Blatantly and crudely designed, the genre's products instilled proper dating practices and showed the consequences of failing to avoid drugs and of car wrecks. No social problem was too big for them, not even juvenile delinquency and the atom bomb. Mostly, as Smith shows, they aimed to maintain conformity. Evolved from World War II training films, they flourished from 1945 to the early 1960s, when the growing sophistication of their target audience rendered them ineffective. Smith synthesizes well more than a hundred leading examples, from Act Your Age (1949), which offered tips on emotional development, to the seminal Youth in Crisis (1944), which exposed "the grim story of what the war is doing to America's youth!" Most mental hygiene films have vanished, discarded when their message grew dated, but they live again through Smith's diligent research and witty write-ups, more fun to read than watching them ever was.

Gordon Flagg Social guidance films, the postwar spawn of progressive educators and Grade D auteurs, taught kids how to be popular and to say no, to think fast and to drive slowly. These beguiling curios have been fodder for documentaries ("The Atomic Cafe"), for compilation reels ("Sex Hygiene Scare Films"), and for the canny gibe artists of Mystery Science Theater 3000. Now they've been rescued and reappraised by cultural critic Ken Smith in a droll, provocative study, *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films 1945-1970* (Blast Books). There's nothing wrong with telling a kid to hang up his clothes or help with the dishes. But maybe the instructo-entertainment complex is better at teaching a child bad things (because they look cool) than good things (because they look drippy). After two decades of social indoctrination by classroom movies, kids were dressing more sloppily and taking more drugs. Instead of running for Student Council, they were protesting the Vietnam War. Some children may never have considered slouching until Posture Pals told them not to. Did the mental hygiene cinema of the 1950s create the hippies and druggies of the 1960s? Well, did it class? Let's discuss. -- Richard Corliss, *Time Magazine*, February 7, 2000