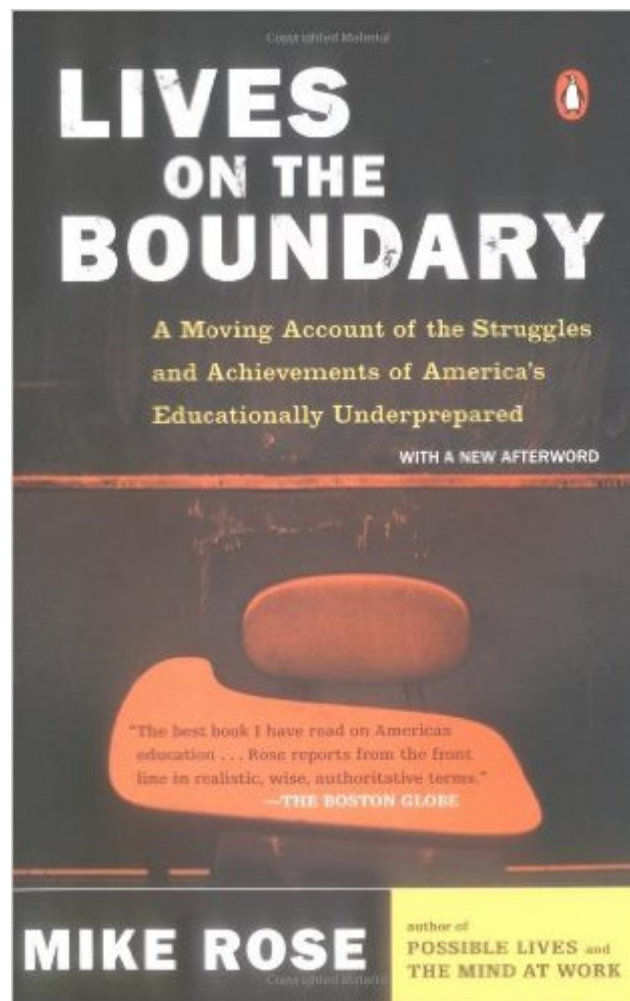


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# Lives On The Boundary: A Moving Account Of The Struggles And Achievements Of America's Educationally Un Derprepared



## Synopsis

Remedial, illiterate, intellectually deficient—these are the stigmas that define America's educationally underprepared. Having grown up poor and been labeled this way, nationally acclaimed educator and author Mike Rose takes us into classrooms and communities to reveal what really lies behind the labels and test scores. With rich detail, Rose demonstrates innovative methods to initiate "problem" students into the world of language, literature, and written expression. This book challenges educators, policymakers, and parents to re-examine their assumptions about the capacities of a wide range of students. Already a classic, *Lives on the Boundary* offers a truly democratic vision, one that should be heeded by anyone concerned with America's future.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The hero in this success story is Mike Rose: author, educator, teacher of writing, and a disadvantaged student from the Los Angeles ghetto. Mike barely made it, but a young, new English teacher intervened in his high school, equipping Mike with the intellectual tools that enabled him to enter and succeed in college his "pivotal...freshman year" (165). Mike Rose's career has largely consisted of culling and applying the social and intellectual tools, the habits of mind that empower underprepared students on the margins of society, helping them transition into college. He knows the psychology of disenfranchisement, and also the defunct English curriculum that plagues many schools. But like many Americans, our hero believes in education, and at the center of education, according to Rose, are community, language and strategies of thinking. "This is a hopeful book

about those who fail" (xi), Rose begins, and the hope he communicates lies in his ability to teach teachers to empower their students with academic literacy. His book models his teaching, and so a reasonable review will evaluate how well Mike Rose's book fulfills his didactic design and practical hope. I evaluate *Lives on the Boundary*, therefore, according to how well it engages his audience, the usefulness of its educational doctrines, and how well it inspires hope, confidence and a passion for teaching. From the outset, I cannot hold back how well I think Mike Rose accomplishes his task. I highly recommend his book to new composition teachers with the hope that we may reach our students and not fail them. Does Rose engage his audience, an audience of educators and writing teachers? His book reads quickly and fluidly, and this is a strategic and effective part of Rose's educational engagement.

What is literacy? It seems such a simple word, yet the view from the classroom is much different than from the person on the street. Mike Rose challenges our assumptions of reading and writing, of how a student is educationally introduced to both concepts, and how so many are being lost by the wayside of this much older "information highway." The book is mostly autobiography as Rose describes how he was accidentally put into a remedial class due to a clerical error (shades of Brazil, anyone). The mistake went undetected for over a year, partly due to his parents' unfamiliarity with the school system and Rose's own attitude. He was lucky, though, when a teacher noticed a discrepancy between his standardized test scores and those of his incorrect file, and he was moved to the regular classroom. This early experience haunted him throughout his school career, however, and his struggle to enter into the "main-stream" of education becomes a mirror by which he views the process of becoming literate. His experience coupled with his volunteer work with underprepared children, veterans, and college students gives him fresh insight into the question that started this: what is literacy? Rose's experience is that no one sentence is sufficient to capture the idea, and that literacy is many things to many people. Well, duh, you say, but stop and think about the "back to basics" arguments you hear from education reformers. What do they say about the process by which students learn to read and write? "All they need is work on the fundamentals," is a common theme. But Rose's challenge is that this is too simplistic.

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