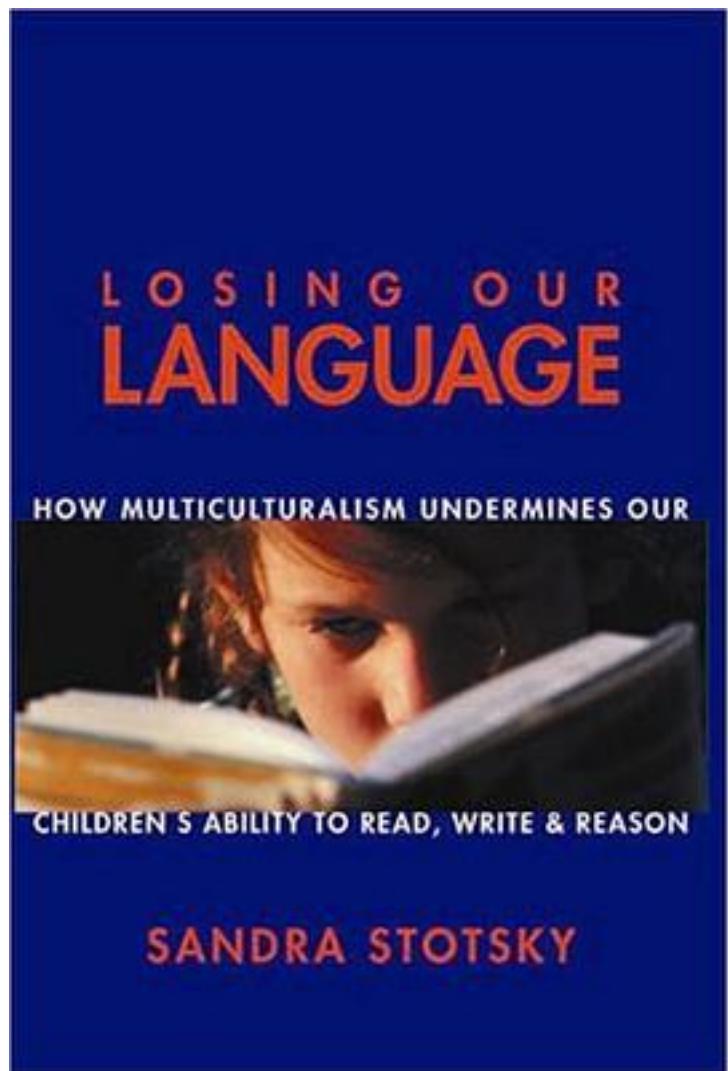


Losing Our Language



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著者:Stotsky, Sandra

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Why do American students' reading and writing test scores continue to decline? Why does the achievement gap continue to grow between minority and other students? Poor teacher training, large class size, small budgets and other such answers have been proposed for these vexing questions. But Sandra Stotsky argues that it is the incorporation of a multicultural agenda into basal readers, the primary tool for teaching reading in elementary schools, that has stunted our children's ability to read. In "Losing Our Language," Stotsky shows how basal readers have been systematically "dumbed down" in an effort to raise minority students' "self esteem." While elementary readers of the past featured excerpts from classic stories such as "Arabian Nights" and "Robinson Crusoe," with a complex vocabulary and sentence structure able to challenge the imagination and build reading skills, today's basal readers present students with politically and ethnically correct stories whose language is virtually foreign and unable to engage students. Drawing words from Swahili, Spanglish and other trendy dialects to teach students with a shrinking English vocabulary is a symptom of this intellectual and cultural disorder. Sandra Stotsky reminds us that how successfully we teach reading is no mere academic matter. Literacy--cultural and verbal--gives all students, but particularly those from poor or minority backgrounds, personal independence and achievement and the ability to participate fully in our civic life.

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