

February 2026



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The Rondout Reader



General Equivalency Diploma

GAMING THE TEST

GED DIPLOMA CERTIFICATE



State Of {Your State}

General Equivalency Diploma

This Certificate is Proudly Presented To

Recipient Name

after successfully passing the general education development test, they have shown that they possess the knowledge equivalent to a high school education. as a result, they are granted the [your state here] high school equivalency diploma by the state board of education.

Awarded in City, State on the 5th of May, 2025 by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction State Department of Education

Samantha Nguyen

State Superintendent of Public Instruction



Michael Rodriguez

Deputy State Superintendent





THE TEN

A Class by Themselves

*"We choose to do these things, not because they are easy,
but because they are hard!"*

President John Kennedy

If 'The Ten' had been about sex or drugs or cheating or bullying or nutrition or yet another case of educator misconduct or incompetence, there would have been past lessons and consequences to fall back on. Or a racial or religious or gender or ethnic or gay or disability or parenting or budget issue, as messy and as embarrassing as they can get, each can be turned into a 'teachable moment'.

Not The Ten. A new national Motor Vehicle program had popped the first one, then another and another. Each driver's license had been painstakingly forged. Ten fakes from ten different states for ten eighth-graders, thirteen-year olds.

What had driven children to commit federal crimes? Were The Ten fronting for their parents, exploited minors to escape adult punishment? Linked to a gang or a terrorist cell? Was National Security at stake? Or was it just about the money? How much for a beautifully-crafted Class D license?

At the start of the Fourth of July Weekend, New York sent in the State Police. California, Virginia, South Dakota, Rhode Island, Florida, Texas, Kansas, and Alabama used local cops. New Jersey called in SWAT.

In a corner house in a middle-class neighborhood in Teaneck, Ronald, age 13, big and fast enough to play high school football, but too gentle to want to, was sprinkling sugar on his cereal. Mom had just opened her strawberry yogurt. Dad's 'over easy' eggs were almost done when the SWAT team charged in, shields high and guns drawn. In seconds, the terrified family was on the floor.

"This has to be mistake," cried Mom.

A search warrant gave SWAT access to Ronald's computer. Photo-Shop files plus a 'business card laminator' kit made for an open-and-shut case.

"Yes," admitted the boy. "I made a phony driver's license."

"How many total?" asked SWAT.

"Ten, only ten. But none of us ever drove."

"How many you sell?"

"None. Not for money."

"Then what?"

"IDs...to crash the test."

"Test?" gritted SWAT. "What test?"

"Top drawer, state envelope," said Ronald.

The officer put on lab gloves before handling the evidence: Ronald's certified New Jersey **'General Equivalency Diploma.'**

In November 1942, the US Armed Forces Institute asked the American Council on Education (ACE) to develop a battery of tests to measure high school-level academic skills. General Educational Development tests gave military personnel and veterans who had enrolled in the military before completing high school a way to demonstrate their knowledge.

ACE revised the GED Tests for a third time in 1988. The most noticeable change was the addition of a writing sample, or essay. The new tests placed more emphasis on socially relevant topics and problem-solving skills.

To take the GED tests one must be 18 or within 60 days of your 18th birthday. In some states, under special circumstances, at 17.

Around the dining room table of a big house in a Long Island gated community, the State Police sat down Charlie, average height and weight for a 13-year old, but an exceptional 'fanboy' who *read* more science fiction and fantasy than he watched or played.

"You mean this isn't about driving or buying cigarettes or alcohol?" said the NY Police captain. "But to take the GED?"

"To get a high school diploma!" Charlie beamed. "But not in the beginning..."

"We met in a chat room about a year and a half ago. And one by one, the other kids dropped out. Always talking about music and movies, sports, fashions, sex and drugs. We were..."

"More serious?" finished the Police.

"We understood that we're living in a Brave New World. I mean, at the computer or on our iPhones, everything was at the tips of our fingers, the universe before our eyes."

"So you became 'cyber-forgers'?"

"Nothing like that," said Charlie. "Kids came and went from our chats. We felt we had something, but not a gang or a club or a team. We were The Ten. Together online, we found ourselves in a kind of a 'zone'."

"Huh?"

"Special kids in a special place. And we wanted to do something special together. My idea was to write a novel, 'Life Among the Eloi'."

"Eloi?"

"You know, the beautiful, apathetic children in HG Wells', 'Time Machine'. 'Cause that's how we felt sometimes. Stuck in a system we couldn't get out of. But writing about it wasn't enough. Not for The Ten. We felt confident, ambitious, eager 'to boldly go where no middle-schoolers had gone before!'"

Each time the GED Test is administered, an approved and trained examiner must be present, ensuring that GED policies and procedures are followed. For every 20 individuals taking the exam, at least one examiner and one proctor should be present.

The tests are used in all fifty states, U.S. territories, and in many Canadian provinces. Nearly 800,000 adults take the tests annually. Over the years, the GED Tests have provided professional and academic opportunities for millions of adults who, for many reasons, were unable to complete their formal high school studies.

GED credentials allow students the opportunity to enroll in the college or university program of their choice.

In a two-bedroom Colonial outside Huntsville, Alabama...

At 13, Patty was a big basketball fan though she'd never be able to play very well.

"I'm not pretty, I know that," said Patty, sitting with her parents and the local cops. "And I'll probably be overweight all my life, but as a member of The Ten, I felt cool because it wasn't about how hot you were or how athletic, not your top game scores or how much money your parents had, but that we were smart...and trapped in the education 'conveyor belt' just like all the other middle-schoolers."

"That's when The Ten took a turn?" asked the cop, taking notes.

"I wanted to start a blog about being in middle school and how we could make it better, but not by ranting and complaining. We wanted to *do* something! And if we were going to change the world, we first had to change ourselves."

"Where'd the GED idea come from?" pressed the cop.

"Kevin Garnett," said Patty, proudly showing her State of Alabama **'General Equivalency Diploma.'** "Then Kobe Bryant and LeBron James."

"I don't get it," said the cop.

"After they proved they could play at a higher level," said Patty. "They didn't *need* college, so they *skipped* college. By passing the GED, The Ten could skip *high school!*"

The GED Tests do not take the place of a regular high school education and are not a means to an education, but are designed to appraise the educational development of applicants who have not completed their formal high school education.

The equivalent of a high school degree, many call the GED a "Good Enough Degree", ranking its credibility often below that of a high school education. Although both are sufficient for most entry level positions, many higher-paying jobs will show preference for a high school degree rather than a GED.

Living in downtown Providence, Theodore 'Teddy', small, wiry, with sharp, dark eyes, might have been a diehard *Harry Potter* fan or a loyal '*Trekker*' or even a *Dr. WHO* fanatic, but when he was six, Teddy discovered the Second World War and had been watching and playing and most of all, *reading* about it ever since.

"What made you think you could pull this off?" asked the Rhode Island cop.

"Hubert Zemke," said Teddy.

"Who?"

"A fighter pilot in World War Two," said Teddy, 'flying' with his hands. "The mission of the fighters, the 'little friends', was to protect the 'big friends,' the bombers. The fighters would stick close to the bombers and shield them from the enemy's fighters who'd come up to shoot them down."

"And...?" said the cop.

"It wasn't working," said Teddy. "Not for the Germans against the British, and not for us against the Germans. So Zemke 'pushed the envelope'. Instead of 'escorting' the bombers, he and his squadron would fly in *ahead* and *jump* the Nazis when they least expected it. Zemke redefined the mission: shoot down the enemy fighters before they ever get a chance to attack. That'll protect the 'big friends'."

"And...?" asked the cop.

"As middle-school students, our mission was to learn enough to go to high school for four years to learn enough to go to college. That's the way it's always been. But The Ten had a better idea--'jump the curriculum' in a surprise attack!"

"Even if it meant breaking the law?" said the cop.

"The GED Test was *the* law," said Teddy. "The national standard. It gave us what we needed most--a goal that told us what we had to become, not a 'gang' or a 'group', but a *class*. If we could learn to fly at that altitude, like Zemke, we could redefine our own mission!"

"But..."

"What?" said the cop.

"Man, that first time we looked at the GED," said Teddy. "We didn't think we'd ever leave the runway."

The passing score of the 2012 GED test is determined by the scores of students who are seniors in 2011. These scores and ranks are used as the performance standard for GED candidates. In order to pass the GED, candidates taking the GED must score at least as high as the top 60 percent of graduating high school seniors.

The GED includes Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, Reading, and Mathematics. GED candidates must also pass the essay portion of the test.

In Kendal, a suburb of Miami, the Florida cops knew that 13-year old Jose's driver's license was bogus; first they checked his parents' papers.

"To start out, we took a sample online test," said Jose, nervous in front of the police. "And we got crushed! The GED is no trivia test, no memorization drill. Up front, we knew we were a long way from the finish line."

"What'd you do about it?" asked the cop.

"Everything we needed was free on the web," said Jose. "But there was no 'secret' to the GED, no 'magic bullet'. This was going to be hard work."

"Was everybody in it from the beginning? Or did you have to coerce some of the others?"

"No way," said Jose. "The Ten were in this together. We looked at it longterm-- a year, maybe thirteen months. We had to learn *how* to learn."

"Wasn't that what you were in middle school for?" said the cop.

"To conform, to obey, to behave, to fit in...We wanted to do high school work to prove we could do college work!" insisted Jose. "We had to play catch-up, or else we'd be waiting four years while the Board of Education caught up with us."

"A year to do four years' work?"

"We didn't see it like that. We were on a secret quest, an adventure. 'An inch up every day' became our motto. If the GED wasn't the highest of mountains, The Ten wouldn't have wanted to climb it."

The Language Arts Reading test consists of 40 multiple-choice questions with a 65 minute time limit. The test has seven passages taken from various literary texts. The seven areas include fiction before 1920, fiction from 1920 to 1960, fiction after 1960, poetry, drama, nonfiction prose, and workplace or community documents. The test creators pay a great deal of attention to the diversity of GED candidates when selecting passages for this part of the test.

The test requires the candidate to utilize a variety of thinking skills: comprehension (20%), application (15%), analysis (30%), and synthesis (35%).

On the eighth floor of a housing development in Los Angeles, Stefanie, the oldest of three children, was drawing on a sketch pad as she talked to the cops.

"We split up the GED and concentrated on our favorite subjects---math, science, literature, cut it up and went after it piece by piece. 'Attack the GED', 'Beat the GED,' 'Kill the GED', we were like the kids in 'Lord of the Flies'."

"I saw the American remake," said the cop.

"Big mistake," said Stefanie, penciling away. "Took us a couple of months to understand that we had to look at the *whole* test. The GED is all about *reading*, and every one of us was a reader."

"So you read a lot," said the cop.

"We always had. That was huge!" she said, squinting at the cop's face. "Still felt the joy of reading, but not just vocabulary or dictionary meanings, or what the passages

meant, but what the writer was *saying*, let the words come off the page and talk to us, making us *infer*. Reading became a kind of 'silent listening', but we were struggling."

"Couldn't you get a teacher to help? Adult supervision, qualified leadership?"

Stefanie handed the cop his portrait in pencil.

"Then we wouldn't have been The Ten," she said proudly. "We had unity, we had purpose. We didn't need or want anybody to 'teach us the test'; the GED taught us!"

The Social Studies test is a 50 question multiple-choice test based on text or a combination of graphs and text, including voting information, historic documents, and sections of the U.S. Constitution. Approximately 60% of the questions refer to graphs or a combination of graphs and text. The other 40% exclusively to text. U.S. History (25%), World History (15%), Government and Civics (25%), Economics (20%), and Geography (15%).

The questions also target specific thinking skills. 20% comprehension skills, 20% application skills, 40% analysis skills, and 20% evaluation skills.

Candidates are given a combination of reading passages, forms, quotations, graphs, charts, maps, and cartoons, and must be prepared to summarize main ideas, restate information, and identify implications after reviewing the given material.

Billy lived with his single Mom in a small apartment in Roanoke, Virginia. He never knew his Dad or had talked with the police before.

Shy and withdrawn, Billy's escape was the opportunity, thousands of years later, to learn about the rise and fall of empires.

"History is why we are who we are," said Billy. "How we changed as things happened. Wars, discoveries, disasters, revolutions...What we had to understand was not an archive of names and dates, we could Google all of a creation in a heartbeat. What did it *mean* to us today and tomorrow?"

"Your best subject," said the cop. "Everyone had one?"

"That's middle-school thinking. Not 'subjects', but pieces of the pizza the world is. We had to digest the entire pie."

"Which one of you pushed the others to break the law?" the cop asked. "Who's the ring leader?"

"Nice try," said Billy. "The Ten crossed the Rubicon together. In a class by ourselves, there was no going back."

"Did any of The Ten ever fail to keep up with the work? Did any fall dangerously behind?"

"Everybody had problems, weaknesses. We didn't hide things from each other. We'd get frustrated. Why couldn't we get this or that? Why couldn't we be smart enough, fast enough?"

"What disciple would be executed on those who failed?" asked the cop. "The Ten had become a cult. What was done to keep the class in line?"

"Officer," said Billy respectfully. "We were being served up a 'State-delivered education' and decided to go out for our own. Not part of a 'collective', but growing 'private plots', not for the school or the State, but for ourselves."

"Regular education wasn't good enough for you?" said the cop. "You thought you were better than everybody else."

"We weren't interested in being 'good,' but in bettering who we were. Not competing or trying to show up anybody. The Ten was a class, but not in school. Other kids called us 'nerds' and 'geeks' and worse. For us, learning to learn wasn't a hassle or a chore; but an *odyssey*. As The Ten, we were heroes in the same boat, rowing hard towards our destiny. 'eighth-grade *Argonauts*', The GED was our 'Golden Fleece!'"

The GED Science Test emphasizes the physical sciences (physics and chemistry) and expands the area of Earth science to include space science. Test questions measure understanding and interpreting concepts of life, Earth, and space sciences; physics; and chemistry, and applying them to visual and written text from academic and workplace contexts. The questions reflect the many roles of individuals: worker, family member, consumer, and citizen.

The GED focuses on the comprehensive, integrated skills typical of what the candidate must know, understand, and be able to perform in order to be scientifically literate.

In a small town in South Dakota, the household was faced with an additional awkward situation: 17-year old Joseph was supposed to be the first son to graduate from high school, not Philip, age 13.

"How does it feel, beating out your older brother?" asked the cop. "Leaving all those high school students in the dust, making'em look like fools?"

"Not Joe or any other high school student," said Phil. "The Ten wanted to leave behind who everybody thought we were--a bunch of goofy, immature middle school kids."

"What you've done is forgery and fraud," said the cop. "Is that 'grown up' to you?"

"You think this was easy? The first couple of months, we were putting thirty-five hours a week in 'chalkboard school', and eight to ten hours in our 'digital classroom.' Joe's on the high school basketball team. Joe has friends to play with. Joe has a girlfriend. I had The Ten."

"No more pencils, no more books, no more teachers' dirty looks'," said the cop. "A stealth high school,"

"It's all online," said Phil. "Everything but the will, the *spirit* of learning. Science is the way the universe works, the 'scientific method'. Month after month we kept climbing and falling, but The Ten got up as one."

"Which kid was Number One?"

"None of that. We were all 'One of The Ten'. Back and forth, push, push! 'Observe, analyze, apply'. With every question, we felt like detectives challenged by a mystery: What do we have to show we know?"

"What was the hardest part?"

"Not cheating," said Phil. "Six months in, we began taking sample GED tests, but since the answers were given at the website, we couldn't resist. So every week, one of us would dig deep into the net to find a 'virgin test' and cut-and-paste it for the others. No Googling!"

"Honesty is the best policy," chuckled the cop.

Phil let that slide. "Chalkboard school' stressed 'behavior' and 'attitude', and 'following the program'. The Ten 'programmed' curiosity and confidence. 'Think GED!' You either know it or you don't. We kept finding out. That was the reward, the fun part!"

Paraphrasing Yogi Berra: 'Ninety percent of the GED math test is half reading.'

The Mathematics test contains 50 questions total with 40 multiple-choice format questions and 10 grid format questions with a 90-minute time limit. At least half

reference accompanying graphics such as charts and tables. Number operations and number sense (20-30%), data analysis, statistics, and probability (20-30%), algebra, functions, and patterns (20-30%), and measurement and geometry (20-30%). Three types of questions: procedural, conceptual, and application.

The Mathematics test has two parts, each with 25 questions. During Part I of the test, students can use a calculator. Students will also be given a sheet of math formulas to use as a reference during the test. Students will have 45 minutes to complete Part I. After 45 minutes, Part I and all calculators will be collected by testing staff and Part II will be distributed. Students will have 45 minutes to complete Part II. Students who complete Part II in less than 45 minutes will have the option to return to Part I of the test. Any students returning to Part I will not have access to calculators during this time.

"Everyone of us feared the math test," said Thomas in Texas. With thick glasses, he'd been ridiculed since third grade. The Ten made him see the future. "People who'd failed the GED blamed it on the math, especially the problems. First, second and third time around, we flopped."

"How'd ya get over?" said the cop.

"Instead of 'doing' the math, we began *reading* it, as if it were its own language. 'Understand the question first', *then* go for the answer. Half the questions were 'gifts', obvious if you knew what you were doing. It wasn't ignorance that was screwing us up, but *carelessness*. Overconfidence with the 'easy' ones made us lazy. We had to drub that out of each other."

"High school algebra and geometry," asked the cop who had barely gotten by.

"The GED gave us the formulas, the *recipes* of mathematics," said Tom. "We had to learn how to 'cook the numbers'. There were no shortcuts, no tricks. Graphs, charts, problems...*read* the math!"

"That simple, eh?"

"Yeah," said Tom. "After beating our heads against a wall for nearly a year. But we still faced a hard obstacle: money. To take the test cost ninety-five dollars."

"Why didn't you ask Mom and Dad?"

"In this economy? Three fathers and two mothers had lost their jobs. Others were underemployed or working multiple jobs part-time. We mowed lawns, did yard work, sold our video games and 'Play Stations', our baseball gloves, even our bicycles. The Ten were 'all in!'"

"Give me a pile of just-completed GED tests, no answer key, and one minute apiece, and I can tell you who passed and failed and be right two-thirds of the time," said a long-time high school teacher. "Read the essay. That's where it shakes out."

A total of 120 minutes is allowed for both parts of the GED writing exam, with 75 minutes slotted for the 50 multiple-choice questions in part one and 45 minutes slotted for the essay. Passing the GED test requires that you get a minimum passing score on the essay.

GED essays are scored on a 4-point scale, and scored by two trained GED essay readers.

In an old house in a small Kansas town, short, thin Aquante looked ten years old to the cops.

"I wore a big set of falsies under my *Lakers* sweatshirt, Mom's favorite wig, and three-inch lifts in my sneakers," said Aquante. "Put on a gang 'tude, showed my license, paid in cash and I was good to go. Some of the boys had packs of cigarettes, stick-on mustaches. Every member of The Ten used make-up, for our license photos and then to take the test."

"Amateurs," said the cop. "If I'd've stopped you behind the wheel, you and your license were toast."

"We knew that. Same at a store or a movie theater. But to take a GED test? Who's gonna spend ninety-five bucks with a fake license? Nobody gave it a close look."

"They will...*now*," said the cop. "But didn't you know you were going to get caught?"

"But who'd be first? The Board of Ed or Law Enforcement?" said Aquante, pulling out her Kansas certified '**General Equivalency Diploma.**' "You boys are two days late."

"But nobody was gettin' anything if our English sucked, if our writing sucked," said Aquante. "And goin' in, it did."

"No writing, no rings'," misquoted the cop.

Aquante smiled and misquoted back: "If you ain't readin', then you ain't writin'. The Ten were becoming critical, analytical readers. 'Think GED!'

"But getting the grammar and sentence structure down pat, we had focused on showing the system how much we had learned and used fancy vocabulary, tryin' to impress. Our early essays were cobbled crap! We took each other apart on them."

"Your own circle of critics?" said the cop.

"Had to! Not just to get better, but to find our individual essence, our confidence, our 'voice'. We were The Ten, and each of us was unique. Not writing to the test, but to the *reader* about how we saw the universe, Life and Death, War and Peace, Famous People, Parents and School. Having something to say from the heart...don't 'show'. *Tell* the reader!"

"Trust your feelings, Aquante," misquoted the cop.

The 13-year old misquoted back, "'Read page one and my age will be forgotten'. It wasn't the writing, but the *rewriting*. We developed a discipline. First, jot down our ideas on how and why we felt, understanding that we were laying down wet concrete, then go back to the beginning and smooth it out. Again and again and again, once a week for months. Not GED writing, but good reading!"

"So you lucked out and passed. Congrats," said the cop, turning harsh. "How many others, one, two?"

"You're still lookin' at me like I'm a typical 'teenie-bopper," said Aquante. "I'm one of The Ten. We took on the GED to go ten for ten and we did."

"An inch up every day!"

Forty percent of America's high school graduates cannot pass the GED Test. Thousands more, who enroll in higher education, must take remedial courses because they are not yet ready to do college-level work.

To fill the education vacuum, hundreds of online schools, offering high school and college certificates and diplomas, have opened up, charging high fees and delivering low results. Competing against games, Twitter, and the social networks, most online learning programs fail to hold students' interest.

American children continue to perform poorly on international education tests, falling behind most of Europe, China, Japan, and India.'

"I don't know what I wanna be, not yet" said Ronald. "But I want to be prepared to make that decision and have a lot of choices."

"Social work," said Patty. "Showing others, especially children, how to help themselves."

"An artist," said Stefanie. "To imagine the world with a fresh perspective."

"An environmentalist," said Phil. "Save the natural world from ourselves."

"A writer!" said Aquante. "I'm tellin' our story. We'll split the movie rights ten ways."

"A teacher," said Charlie. "But not like any I ever had."

"A pilot, of course," said Teddy.

"An archeologist," said Billy. "To make the old world young again for everybody."

"Pediatrician," said Tom. "Nobody over ten. Birth certificates will be verified."

"President of the United States!" said Jose. "As soon as I'm old enough."

Refusing to reward dishonesty under any circumstance, the American Council of Education (AMC) invalidated The Ten's GED diplomas. The children were welcome to take the GED again when they become eligible in four years.

In Juvenile Court their fraud and forgery charges got them two years probation and 100 hours of community service; The Ten spent half the summer picking up litter along the highways.

Their families were urged to sue, but litigation became moot; ignoring the AMC, the best universities in the country, from the Ivy League to the SEC, recruited The Ten as if they were 'First Team All-Americans'.

Instead the children chose local community colleges to continue living with their parents who had secured an agent; The Ten signed a four-year endorsement deal with a shoe manufacturer and an apparel company. The new Young American line: 'One of The Ten'.

Publishers will soon be bidding for Aquante's 'The Ten - *Scholars against The System*'. Hollywood quickly optioned the screen rights.

The American Council of Education, the GED Testing Committee and the FBI are taking firm actions that will prevent anything like this from ever happening again.

Somewhere in and across America, maybe a new Ten is getting together. Or perhaps two or three.

The kids will figure out a way; they have to.