

PRESENT TRENDS AND PRACTICES IN A SENIOR
HIGH SCHOOL LITERATURE PROGRAM

by

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INTRODUCTION

As men do research and find out more about their particular fields of endeavor, trends evolve. Education is one of the fields in which a great deal of research has been done and presently is being done. Trends and practices in the English language arts program, as an integral part of American education and of each senior high school curriculum, also have been changing.

The different fields of emphasis in the senior high English program, such as writing, speaking, listening, reading, spelling, and grammar, have undergone great changes recently with regard to trends and practices. Arno Jewett¹ found some of these to be developmental reading instruction, literature about people in other parts of the world, pupil guidance through speaking and writing, improved listening skills, study of television and other mass media, teaching critical thinking, and instruction in elementary semantics. To these he added seven more:

- (1) an increased use of the unit method of instruction, especially of the resource unit;
- (2) a nationwide movement to teach reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills together whenever they are interrelated in a learning situation;

¹ Arno Jewett, English Language Arts in American High Schools, U. S. Office of Education, Bulletin Number 13 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1958), pp. 90-95.

- (3) an extensive use of the thematic or idea-centered unit, especially in the junior high school;
- (4) a renewed interest in adapting the instructional program to meet the needs and promote the abilities of rapid- and slow-learning pupils;
- (5) an effort to determine adequate scope and sequence for the language arts program, especially in grammar, usage, mechanics, and reading;
- (6) a general concern for improving articulation between all divisions of the school system from kindergarten through college;
- (7) a concerted effort to teach youth an appreciation of the privileges and obligations of living in a free, democratic society and to instill in youth the moral values and ethics which help to unify free peoples.¹

In an issue of the English Journal that predates the government publication, Jewett offered three other trends for consideration.

There is an interest in determining which titles in our heritage of literature should be taught to all pupils from grades seven to twelve. The concern here is to teach literature which ought to be a part of everyone's experience: that is, literature which is often used or referred to on television, in movies, and in other mass media; literature which will serve as a unifying, binding force in our democratic society.

Pupils are being encouraged by teachers and parents to develop their own home libraries composed of inexpensive paperback books and hardcover books of literary quality.

English teachers are paying more attention to the potentials of superior students in the field of language arts. Learning experiences are provided through enrichment activities, ability groups, and accelerated

¹ Ibid., pp. 95-96.

classes. In the large city and suburban high schools, there is a¹ trend back to "homogeneous" classes. . . .

Since these changes cannot come to pass by themselves, he attributed the reasons for the majority of these changes to several causes.

Almost all of them have come about as the result of changes in our national and international scene, the results of carefully conducted research, and the leadership of professionally oriented individuals, local and state groups, and national organizations.²

Lou LaBrant suggested more possible causes for change.

According to Miss LaBrant, there have been changes in:

1. The national use of English. One of our major needs at one time was to mold the people into a unified whole because of diversified backgrounds and experience. Now social scientists would have people be individuals rather than have them conform.
2. Our world orientation. This orientation involves both language and literature in a world of wider reading, constant travel, and constant translation. Now we need to understand the limitations of translation and the importance of context and cultural influence on meanings.
3. The demand for the interpretation of specialized knowledge. With this increased demand on the expert also comes a need for reading and listening to be more careful and precise than ever before.
4. The nature of education. The ordinary man's opportunity is no longer so limited; and formal education is thought to deal with

¹ Arno Jewett, "National Trends in Teaching High School English," English Journal, XLVI (September, 1957), 328.

² Jewett, op. cit., 96.

the beginning rather than the terminal years of education.

5. The abundance of print. Today the classics of world literature may be procured at only a few cents a copy. With this abundance comes the danger that children who live in a world where print is carelessly discarded may have to learn to revere printed material.

6. The media of verbal communication. Practically everyone has access to radio, television, movies, and recordings or to at least one of these media. All the experience a high school student brings to class may not have been of the highest calibre, but he has had some experience.

7. Our knowledge of English. Instead of classification and definition, the new English examines the structure of the language and sees the relation of the parts to the whole.

8. The temper of the times. Although the English program originated in a relatively secure period, today questions arise that are perhaps deeper and more revolutionary than any since Galileo's time. Young people who feel unrest because of these problems need to read what the best minds have to say about man and his universe.

9. The demand for "better English." The public expects this demand to be fulfilled overnight, which is, of course, impossible. If it is to be fulfilled at all, it will be effected by the use of more books, smaller classes and newer approaches, not by doing more strenuously what used to be done.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of the study was to conduct a review of the literature pertaining to the current literature programs at the senior high school level. The intention was to

¹Lou LaBrant, "As of Now," English Journal, XLVIII (September, 1959), 296-300.

discover the present trends and practices of the existing literature programs throughout the United States. Particular emphasis was placed on changes in the high school English programs, trends in attitudes, methods and goals of high school literature programs, and poetry. This report may prove to be valuable to senior high school literature teachers by providing knowledge and goals which may lead to the improvement of existing programs.

PROCEDURES USED IN THE STUDY

To begin this study, an investigation of the literature in the Kansas State University Library was conducted. The investigation produced a quantity of material relating to the goals and trends of the high school literature program, and to poetry; however, materials pertaining to other specific categories were limited.

Because current trends and practices were being studied, periodicals, journals, and recent publications were relied on. In conducting this review it was discovered that many of the articles found in the various journals and periodicals contained similar ideas. For this reason, the sources which seemed to be the most complete were relied on most heavily.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Changes in Views Toward Senior High Literature Programs

There have been many changes in the world that have had an influence on the usage of English and therefore on the teaching of it. These changes have also produced differences in attitudes toward senior high school literature classes, the methods used in these classes, and the trends that are characteristic of the classes on the whole. Changes for the improvement of existing literature programs have long been the aims of literature teachers. As early as 1917, the U. S. Bureau of Education published a report of the first committee to make an organized attempt at formulating the objectives of literature teaching, a committee of the National Council of the Teachers of English. The committee said that literature which appealed to students should be used, literature students do not find appealing should not be used no matter how old it is, individual differences should be recognized and dealt with in the best possible way, and the standards of taste should be raised.¹ The basic goals for literature teaching have not changed over

¹Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools, U. S. Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1917, 26-35, cited by Anthony L. Tovatt, "Two Basic Convictions about Teaching Literature," English Journal, XLIX (November, 1960), 532.

the years, but different facets of them have been enlarged upon and emphasized in varying degrees.

Dora V. Smith's report, as part of the National Survey of Secondary Education in the 1930's, revealed that the two major professed aims of instruction in literature were the development of the breadth of understanding and interests through vicarious experience in reading, and the development of both the desire and the standards of evaluation to continue reading under one's own direction, actually there existed in many schools intensive study required of all students of a few set classics roughly identical with the college entrance list of the 1890's.

Nevertheless, the national study of Arno Jewett provided evidence that there had been important changes in the last twenty five years. To briefly reiterate what was noted in the introduction, he found greater use of the theme-centered unit, more emphasis on world literature study, an increased interest in adapting programs to meet individual needs and a more concentrated effort to inculcate moral and ethical values in our youth.²

One of the major changes in the world affecting the study of literature is that today the formal education of the individual is considered to be the beginning of his education, not the end of it. Anthony Tovatt said that ". . .the true test of what is done with literature in the

¹Tovatt, op. cit.

²Ibid.

classroom is what the students read after they leave school. . . ,¹ not how well they can " . . . affix the right tags to the right selection. . . ."² In something of an extension of Tovatt's statement, Robert Heilman stated that

If literature is. . . a maturer of humanity, that value is the sum of a continuous experiencing of books. The more that experiencing goes on, the more it should contribute to the flexible but penetrating awareness of the human situation, sometimes gay, sometimes grave, that we call wisdom.³

Following Course Outlines

Tovatt said that he had two basic convictions about teaching literature. The first is that

". . . the person who accepts the responsibility for teaching literature must have the conviction that an existing literature program is not inviolate and that with the teacher rests the final responsibility for making choices that are governed by his best assessment of what a class particularly needs."⁴

Mark Neville traced the history of the tendency to follow book lists blindly; one feels the principles also apply to the following of course outlines. He said that years ago, when the books to be read were the British and American "classics", a tentative program had no place because the

¹Ibid., 529.

²Ibid., 534.

³Robert B. Heilman, "Literature and Growing Up," English Journal, XLV (September, 1956), 309.

⁴Tovatt, op. cit., 530.

course of study was prescribed by the colleges and the teachers followed the prescription. He said that educators came to the realization that pupils are individuals; and individuals have different needs, characteristics, and interests. Therefore books are now examined more in their entirety, after which specific books are recommended for specific pupils.¹ According to Neville,

The careful study of a limited number of "good books" is still an important literature experience for pupils but the entire literature program must not be confined to the intensive type of reading.²

We should seek a balance between the old and the new ways of doing things.

Lou LaBrant also had something to say on the matter of following lists unquestioningly that might be applicable to the blind following of course outlines. She suggested these possible causes for the adherence to the lists:

1. . . .it is easier to follow the prepared list than to think.
2. . . .the list avoids taking responsibility.
3. . . .the list is impersonal.
4. . . .lists can be used as controls over thinking and critical teaching and hence can obviate the necessity for taking a stand.³

¹Mark Neville, "The Function of Book Lists in a Literature Program," English Journal, XXXVII (March, 1948), 142.

²Ibid., 143.

³Lou LaBrant, "A Little List," English Journal, XXXVIII (January, 1949), 38-39.

Although these are plausible reasons for relying too heavily on the lists, she also submitted some questions that might be asked where lists and course outlines are used.

1. Are teachers free to add to the lists, either through recommendations to pupils or through library acquisitions?
2. Are the teachers always aware of this freedom?
3. Are teachers constantly suggesting additions and modifications to the lists?
4. Are teachers aware that the reading experience includes the purpose of the reader?
5. Are teachers aware of the dates when the lists were made, the persons who made the selection, and the limitations of that situation?
6. Are those who provide the lists aware and making use of new aims, new problems, and new attitudes on the part of students?
7. Are the ultimate consumers--the children--aware that the lists offered them are fallible, incomplete, suggestive, but not authoritative?

Because the trend toward the increased responsibility of the individual teacher is a relatively new trend in practice, the old method of adhering closely to course and program outlines still may have followers who say that their method is more conclusive. However,

While there are those who would say then that the teaching of literature was more intensive and more thorough in times past, they overlook the fact that the program was much too narrow not only in scope and design but also in aim. Based on the European tradition that by surrounding the student

¹Ibid., 39-40.

with only the best literature and subjecting him to a rigorous and careful study of it would not only kindle a love for such reading but would also establish taste and increase his interest to go on reading only the best has not been borne out in reality, either then or now.¹

Reading Habits of the Population

According to an interesting comment on mass literacy by James Squire, "Controlled research has demonstrated repeatedly that not more than one fourth of the population reads as much as a book a month. . . .",² in spite of the fact that good literature has become more available because of changes in book publication and distribution (which one may infer to be the paperback trend); and in spite of the fact that book sales and library circulation of good literature are increasing. He said that the reading habits of young people are improving, even if it is a small segment of the entire population which reads. Squire also stated that more adults possess the ability to read than are using that skill; he suggested that they may lack motivation to read because they are not sure how to respond to literature.³ Squire said that he felt that the young people in our schools today will read after they graduate only if they are taught

¹ Tovatt, op. cit., 530.

² James R. Squire, "Literacy and Literature," English Journal, XLIX (March, 1960), 155.

³ Ibid., 159-160.

competence in advanced reading skill, competence in special skills of literary analysis, some sense of literary tradition, favorable habits in approaching literary interpretation, and perhaps most important, a motivation for the continued reading of literature.¹

Student Involvement

To return to Tovatt's convictions about literature teaching, he said that in the second place, "Literature must always be meaningful to the student in the present if it is to be meaningful in the future."² According to Tovatt, if the work has no effect on a student, he will repeat what he has learned from a source other than himself, he will learn the prescribed way to see the selection, or he considers the whole affair a lost cause.³ This matter of involvement was also taken up by Louise Rosenblatt, who apparently felt much the same as Tovatt.

A story or poem or play is merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. When these symbols lead us to live through some moment of feeling, to enter into some human personality or to participate imaginatively in some situation or event, we have evoked a work of literary art. . . .

When we teach literature, we are therefore concerned with the particular and personal

¹Ibid., 160.

²Tovatt, op. cit., 533.

³Ibid., 534.

way in which students learn to infuse meaning into the pattern of the printed symbols. We are not dealing with books as separate and fixed and neatly-outlined and summed-up entities. We are dealing with each student's awareness, no matter how dim or confused, of a certain part of the ongoing sequence of his life, as he seeks to marshal his resources and organize them under the stimulus of the printed page.¹

As for the results of dealing with students' awareness instead of books as entities, G. Robert Carlsen suggested some satisfying literary experiences that a high school student might have:

He should see himself, his problems, his feelings in the literature he reads; experience the writer's feelings for the inherent dignity of human beings; participate in the driving force that makes man endure as he strives for the unknown or the unknowable; become aware of the goodness and beauty of the daily round of living; and speculate through literature about the impact of human being upon human being in the patterns of living.²

Teaching Methods

The thematic unit. One method currently advocated by a large number of authors is the thematic unit.³ Although

¹Louise M. Rosenblatt, "The Acid Test for Literature Teaching," English Journal, XLV (February, 1956), 66-67.

²G. Robert Carlsen, "The Focus of Literature," Midwest English Review, (Winter-Spring, 1959-1960), cited by Tovatt, op. cit., 535.

³For additional readings on the thematic unit, vide Appendix.

it is not used exclusively, it is being used more; and it is often used with topical units.

The term "thematic unit" may refer to three plans that differ slightly in spite of their close relationships.¹ A thematic unit may be a study of a series of selections dealing with a single topic. This form of organization is by no means new; anthologies at the junior high school level have used this organization for quite a few years, but the emphasis in the thematic unit is on the individual selection rather than on the topic. A thematic unit may also be the tracing of a theme through a series of selections. The third concept of a thematic unit does not only concern literature; it is the study of all the language arts through a single theme. This is the view of the Commission on the English Curriculum of the National Council of the Teachers of English. They defined a unit as meaning

. . .that varied activities in the language arts are developed around a central theme or purpose, clear and significant to the student. It must be sufficiently broad to involve in some measure all four of the language arts and to permit each individual to work in cooperation with his class and to pursue certain special interests in a wide range of material and experiences suited to his ability.²

¹Dwight Burton, Literature Study in the High Schools (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1959), 227-229.

²Commission on the English Curriculum of the National Council of Teachers of English, The English Language Arts in the Secondary School (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1956), 69-70, cited by Burton, ibid., 228-229.

Thematic units usually have three features in common.

1. A unit is initiated by some literary selections read in common by the entire class.
2. The unit then develops into a phase of literary and language activity which is varied for individuals or for small groups of pupils.
3. The unit is concluded with class activities for the entire group. These final activities bring the various features of the unit to a satisfactory culmination, provide for a sharing of individual reading, and conclude with an evaluation in terms of the goals set up when the unit was initiated.¹

Walter Loban stated that a compromise is preferred "between common assignments for all and complete individualization of assignments."² The idea of compromise is extended even further when the classics new and old are considered.

. . .The older classics are lifted from their pedestals and valued rather as contributors to the best values of our literary heritage and indirectly to the problems of adolescents. . . .

Neither the old nor the modern classics can be neatly fitted into the thematic and topical units with which teachers of literature have experimented. These longer works are too multivalued; their themes are too complex for them to be easily encompassed within the folds of a single thematic unit.³

An example of a collection of thematic reading units has

¹Walter Loban, "Teaching Literature: A Multiple Approach," English Journal, XLV (February, 1956), 76.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

been written by William Fidone,¹ who incorporated both the classics of the past and those of the present.

The thematic unit has both advantages and disadvantages. The following are some of the advantages of the theme-centered approach:

1. It facilitates the integration of literature with all other aspects of the language arts program and with other areas in the curriculum.
2. It permits adaptation of the literature program, within the same theme center, to individuals and classes of widely differing abilities and tastes.
3. It establishes a meaningful relationship between the intensive study of literature in class and extensive outside reading by individuals.
4. It encourages breadth of literary experience rather than concentration upon two or three texts for all.
5. Above all, it stresses the human values of literature and the selection of literature for its meaning in the lives of the students.²

In Literature Study in the High Schools, Dwight Burton said that the thematic unit has great advantages in that a literature teacher using a thematic unit can start with a topic of interest to high school students and can adjust the level of a theme or problem to the various intellectual

¹William Fidone, "The Theme's the Thing," English Journal, XLVIII (December, 1959), 518-523, 533.

²Board of Education of the City of New York, "Reading and Literature," English-Speech Language Arts for Senior High Schools, cited by M. Jerry Weiss, An English Teacher's Reader (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1962), 405.

levels of the individuals in the class.¹

To balance the picture, the possible disadvantages should be reviewed. Burton² stated that careful selection of a theme is essential; the theme need not agree completely with the interests of the students, but it should be somewhat interesting to them and it should definitely be within their understanding. Another problem could arise when selections are sought to carry out the theme. The selection should be relevant to the theme and appropriate for the students as well as for the best literature goals. The third danger is that the theme must be kept in sight and the teacher must strive to keep a particular direction in mind; a discussion without direction, however interesting, does not aid the purpose of the thematic unit.

When working from a theme-centered approach, one should also guard against

. . . establishing far fetched and artificial relationships to force a book into a theme; narrowing the scope of literary experience to the didactic; over-emphasizing the guidance or social studies aspects of literature. Where the theme is broad enough and oriented to something basic, as for instance, the developing adolescent, and where the consecutive themes are expanding in nature, these dangers are somewhat minimized. The theme-center should never be narrowly interpreted as a didactic strait-jacket; there is room in a

¹Burton, op. cit., 229.

²Ibid., 230-231.

theme-centered program for units of study only tangentially related to or even outside the theme, if they meet the needs of particular groups or individuals. There is room in the theme-centered program for the unit in the appreciation of literature for sheer delight; and teachers who wish to integrate their teaching in this way are encouraged to do so. The needs for aesthetic experience and for pleasure¹ in reading are as real as any other needs.

To continue with some of the disadvantages of the thematic unit, George Robert Carlsen said that regardless of the many things in its favor,

. . . frequently the English teacher feels that the student is missing something of the personal importance and value of literature. . . . In most courses developed thematically, either as a separate class in English or as a part of a core course in general education, literature has become subservient to the social studies; many of the values of literature, that should give it an equal if not a superior place, are lost sight of.²

The world literature course. Another method that is receiving English educators' attention is a greater emphasis on world literature. According to Carlsen, interest in world literature courses first began to supplant the English literature courses at the senior high school level in the late 1930's. The attempts at using world literature were not too successful, he said, because translated material is

¹Board of Education of the City of New York, op. cit.

²George Robert Carlsen, "The Dimensions of Literature," English Journal, XLI (April, 1952), 180-181.

often beyond the intellectual maturity of high school seniors. Even the English literature course did not reach the majority of the students. The organization of a world literature course offered a stumbling block, too, in that organization either by geographic areas or by types of literature imposes severe limitations.

If it is organized by country, there is a tendency to emphasize differences and uniqueness among various cultures rather than similarities. If it is organized by literary types, there is too great a stress on literary form and not enough on human experience. Poetry, in particular, does not translate in such a way that it can be studied as a form with any great profit.¹

J. N. Hook also is aware of the difficulty in arriving at a pattern for organizing the world literature course. He stated that the core curriculum is the somewhat unsatisfactory point of departure in junior high schools.

The tenth-grade course, though, is the real no man's land in literature. Although Julius Caesar is fairly standard equipment, nothing else is. In some schools world literature is prescribed for the tenth grade, but others concentrate on teaching knowledge of literary types, and many continue with theme-centered units. Grade eleven, in contrast, is now almost always American literature, often taught chronologically but sometimes beginning with modern and then moving back to earlier periods. Twelfth-

¹G. Robert Carlsen, "How Can the Language Arts Promote International Understanding?", NASSP Bulletin (December, 1956), Chapter 2, as found in M. Jerry Weiss, op. cit., 429-430.

grade literature, which is not a universal requirement, is usually British, although world literature occasionally supplements or replaces it. The British literature is most often taught chronologically.¹

Carlsen reported educators' opinions pertaining to the best organization for world literature.

The feeling of many educators has been that the most successful pattern of organization would be one by themes in which a single theme would show the basic universality of man dealing with similar problems in similar ways the world over. A group of selections dealing with home and family life could bring together literature showing family relations in many parts of the world. As the student moved from selection to selection, he would gain an awareness of the persistence of basic problems, and the persistence of similar kinds of men in meeting this aspect of their lives.²

Two of the methods advocated within the last ten years, then, are the thematic unit and the world literature course. Both have their limitations and their advantages; from all indications of available research, they are being used more and more in senior high school literature classes.

Objectives of a High School Literature Program

The methods and the objectives of a high school literature program are quite closely aligned. They are so

¹ J. N. Hook, "Trends in the Teaching of English," Wisconsin English Journal, (October, 1959), as found in M. Jerry Weiss, op. cit., 28.

² Carlsen, op. cit., 430.

near each other at times that it becomes extremely difficult to distinguish one from the other. Since methods and objectives differ, although sometimes only minutely from teacher to teacher, many people have quite similar ideas; they express themselves in varied ways and with varied emphases. For this reason, the examples of objectives quoted here are not the only existing examples but ones felt to be the most representative of those at hand.

Objectives of a literature course were not always debatable. There was a time when the objectives were clear: all young people were exposed to the very best of the English language. The range, in most cases, was not wide; the study, in most cases, was intensive. The problem was, as Dora Smith discovered, that very few people's opinions concurred exactly on what composed the best of the English language. Since this method did not apparently enjoy a great deal of success, the pendulum swung the other way and teachers tried to bring their students in contact with a greater body of literature and to allow them to have some degree of freedom in selecting what they were to read. The students did read more than before and they seemed to enjoy imaginative literature, but they apparently lacked direction and read the same kinds of books again and again. More recently, American educators seem to have become aware of the people's need for social understandings. Therefore

courses of study and book lists have developed around such units as home and family life, war, and poverty. The pendulum seems to have arrived at something of a happy medium; at best, the objectives are apparent but not obtrusive.

In proposing a course of study, there are many things to consider. Lou LaBrant suggested some imperatives for an English program which, because of their general nature, one feels could apply equally well to a literature program. To cope with individual differences of students, she says the program should be flexible. To give each student meaningfully varied experience, she says that the program should include both overview and depth, that it should give the opportunity for testing out the unknown and that the accent should be on processes rather than on the accumulation of specific information. To challenge the student, the program should be demanding; and to instill ethical and moral values, the program should be honest and should develop honesty. Her final principle touched all the others:

. . .we need honesty in viewing our world, honesty in respecting our students, honesty in being broad readers ourselves, honesty in admitting the limitations of what we suggest. We need to display by our very living that we believe. . .in literature as a record of life.¹

¹ Lou LaBrant, "As of Now," English Journal, XLVIII (September, 1959), 302-303.

Many groups have ideas about what a literature program should include, from skills to basic understandings. The New York City Board of Education felt that the following should be some of the major objectives:

Development of each student's reading skills to give him the greatest security in the widest range of worth-while reading activities.

Enjoyment of reading, strengthening the habit of reading good books, magazines, and newspapers.

Development of good standards and good judgment in the evaluation of reading materials.

A knowledge of literature which will lead to wholesome attitudes toward people and more effective daily living, as a result to the deeper insights revealed in books.

Appreciation of aesthetic qualities in literature.

Philip Marsh suggested that the aims of the senior high school literature program should include "ideas, characters, application of ideas, history or knowledge, literary qualities, art in isolation; authors' lives, and social assets of literary knowledge,"² in that order of importance.

To turn from the program itself to what should be done to aid the student, Dwight Burton³ stated that there

¹Board of Education of the City of New York, op. cit., as found in M. Jerry Weiss, op. cit., 403

²Philip M. Marsh, How to Teach English (New York: Bookman Associates, 1956), 87.

³Dwight L. Burton, "Teaching Literature to Our Youth Today," English Journal, XLIV (May, 1955), 274-279.

are touchstones of the maturing mind that literature can help the individual student to approach. Burton said that the student should be aware of the complexity of human character and that being able to follow the development of a character in a selection might aid the student. He said that the student should understand what is real in human experience and should be able to tell when the assumptions underlying the experience are true, false, or oversimplified; this facet of student understanding might be developed by acquiring the skills of handling many kinds of plot structure and of judging the point of view, among other skills. The third touchstone is a concern with a set of values to regulate the life of the student; Burton stated that being able to recognize the theme of a selection and relate details to it is an essential part of maturing with the help of literature.

Edwin Cady¹ related the skills and understandings a student can acquire from literature to experience. He said that from literature a student can gain the ability to distinguish between events, which may be said to happen objectively to us, and experiences, which may be said to happen subjectively to us. He stated that there is a definite correlation between the preparation the mind has

¹Edwin Cady, "The Role of Literature for Young People Today," English Journal, XLIV (May, 1955), 268-273.

for experience and the experience that it actually creates. According to Cady, literature should also be important in a student's life because imagination determines the overall satisfaction an individual derives from an experience and because experience is the thing of the greatest importance in the life of an individual. Cady seemed to hope, then, that at best the well-organized and -carried out program of literature study would give the majority of senior high school students a stable and satisfying life, a keener awareness of the world, and the opportunity to create vivid and satisfactory experience. George Robert Carlsen concurred with Cady when he stated that

The primary focus in teaching literature should be always on the human experience being communicated to boys and girls and the significance of that experience for life and its values today.¹

Educators' statements of the objectives for senior high school literature programs can range from a series of short statements such as those of Philip Marsh to an extended statement such as that of Lou LaBrant. But underlying all the statements is the realization that each student is an individual and that the aim of the literature program is to help each student realize his own potential.

¹George Robert Carlsen, "The Dimensions of Literature," English Journal, XLI (April, 1952), 186.

Poetry

The goals and methods used in the teaching of poetry are different from those used in teaching other forms of literature. Children have a fondness for poetry because they love rhythmic and repetitive things; this is deeply rooted in them, because all about them Nature and the world are changing repetitively, rhythmically: in day and night, in the seasons, in rain on the roof, in a cricket's chirp. They love to chant songs, words, and phrases whether they understand what they are saying or not. When the great majority of these same rhythm lovers arrive in the literature classes of the senior high school, however, all vestiges of the love of poetry, repetition, rhyme, and rhythm seem to have been left behind and the announcement of an approaching poetry unit brings many groans.

Some students may have been exposed to poetry and its mechanics too early; others might have had an uninspired teacher, while still others might have come in contact with poetry too late. Ann Morrow said that

Boys and girls who find poetry colorless and drab have been perhaps introduced to it too early in written form and were confused by artificial phraseology and constructions which they do not meet in reading prose.¹

¹Ann Ess Morrow, "The Challenge of Poetry," English Journal, XLIV (January, 1957), 45.

In a review of the research done on literature in the secondary school, G. Robert Carlsen reported that

Stensland (1958) reviewed articles and professional materials, printed since 1950, on the teaching of poetry. The objectives of teaching poetry most often mentioned were to increase vicarious experience, to provide enjoyment, and to give moral training. In spite of these stated objectives, the methods most usually recommended were the study of historical and literary backgrounds, the study of versification, the discussion of the experience or theme of a poem, and the study of meaning through such processes as defining words, unraveling figures of speech, and explaining allusions. Stensland's review highlighted the incongruity between the objectives sought and the methods used.¹

With regard to the possibility of having a teacher who could not or did not inject into poetry what he might have, Ann Morrow pointed out that

It is not merely children who weave uncertainly through bothersome constructions, who rest at ends of lines with continuity disrupted, whose voices are far from reaching their musical potentialities; it is teachers as well. Certainly no great lines of poetry, when read in rasping or in nasal tones, or with an ineffectual mildness. . . can re-create the degree of inner happiness experienced by the author. Thus teachers with unpleasant voices and with poor reading ability have helped to place those sorry expressions on the faces of adolescents at the mention of poetry.²

¹G. R. Carlsen, "Literature in the Secondary School," Review of Educational Research, XXXI (April, 1961), 173.

²Morrow, op. cit., 45-46.

She went on to say that some teachers have surfeited their classes with poetry, believing mistakenly that the teacher's boundless enthusiasm was shared by the young charges.

Morrow also said that when children are small, they are more apt to respond emotionally to the swing of sound than they will be in later years; adolescence is a time of inhibition.

If this psychological readiness is ignored or is not put to worthy use, if children hear but little poetry, and the joy that lies in poetry is both diminished and delayed.¹

If the child represses the urge to sway, to clap his hands, or to tap his feet with the rhythm, Morrow said "that the child loses sensitivity to the imagery within the poem."²

She continued, saying

Often this same child hesitates to show how he feels toward poetry because the teacher he has had has been himself this way. Certainly it is clear that the child who is prepared through his own experiences for the vicarious enjoyment of those of other people often grown into a teenager with a real interest in poetry.³

Dwight Burton suggested, however, that the high school student's lessened enthusiasm for poetry might also come from two "traditions": the "academic" tradition and the "feminine" tradition. The academic tradition was already noted in reference to the findings of Stensland; Burton called it the tendency to emphasize the skills, to treat poetry as "a discipline, a rigorous vehicle for

¹Ibid., 45.

²Ibid., 46.

³Ibid.

developing the mind, sharpening the powers of abstraction, and enlarging the vocabulary."¹ He said that the feminine tradition "features the sighing, rhapsodic approach, the idea that poetry is a precious form of experience reserved for the esoteric few."² It is not amazing when normal high school boys rebel against this type of an approach. In fact, with the consideration of the approaches named here, the causes of the apathy and downright dislike of high school students for poetry cease to be such mysteries. In reply to a possible question about why poetry is even taught, Burton said that the functions of poetry are to communicate experience and to provide something esthetic in the life of the individual, whether it is John Donne or jukebox jingles.³

Although goals in poetry are difficult to verbalize and even harder to implement, as witness Carlsen's quotation on the findings of Stensland, Richard Corbin and Roger Hyndman formulated examples of goals which seem to be valid and practical. Corbin said that one should learn to enjoy poetry with his senses and to understand it with his mind; T. S. Eliot⁴ agreed with him on these points. But Corbin

¹Burton, op. cit., 185.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 184.

⁴T. S. Eliot, "On Teaching the Appreciation of Poetry," Teachers College Record, LXII (December, 1960), 215-221.

said the highest point in poetic experience is reached when enjoyment and understanding are one and the same thing:

. . .when the reading of a poem becomes, in whatever degree, an integrated experience of body, mind, and spirit, then one has come rather close to what I conceive "aesthetic experience" to be.¹

Hyndman took a different approach; these are his goals: he tries to teach the students

. . .that the stuff of poetry is the stuff of life, intensified and interpreted by the mind of the poet; that the suggestive quality of poetry is a deliberate device employed by the poet to engage the reader's imagination; and that the poet's selection of words and arrangement of details are aimed at producing a final mood or idea.²

The next consideration should be of the methods used to make the goals reality. Richard Decker telescoped a great deal of work when he suggested that planning for a poetry unit should include the following:

First is the process of selecting particular poems to fit the age and experience of the students. Then comes a careful study of the poems we intend to present, including a determination of the expected literary experience and the gathering of materials. Finally, we make a choice of the method of presentation. And always we ought to keep in mind that student activity as well as

¹Richard Corbin, "The Aesthetic Experiencing of a Poem," English Journal, XLIV (December, 1957), 569.

²Roger Hyndman, "The First Poem," English Journal, XLVI (March, 1957), 158.

teacher activity is a necessary part of experiencing appreciation.¹

As to the method of presenting poetry, a method that has a great deal of support today is that of hearing the poetry. Good poetry, like good prose, must be heard to be appreciated thoroughly. The reading might be done by the teacher or by a student who has had a chance to prepare; another excellent source of poetry to be heard is the growing library of recordings of poets reading their own poems. T. S. Eliot² was in favor of this, because he said it helps the teacher to concentrate on poetry, in addition to guiding the study of poets and their lives. Eliot also apparently believes that having a historical understanding of literature through a study of the classic examples of poetry is a prerequisite to understanding more recent poetry. To Eliot, enjoyment is the first goal whether the poetry is old or new, and student enjoyment of poetry comes when the enthusiasm of the teacher is infectious.

After hearing poetry, studying it, and developing certain skills long associated with it, some educators advocate having the students try to write some poetry of

¹Richard G. Decker, "Introducing Poems," English Journal, XLVI (March, 1957), 147.

²Eliot, op. cit.

their own as the culmination of the poetry unit; Edgar Logan¹ was one of these, and Edwin Sauer was another:

The verse produced by such efforts is generally not very respectable (the student verse submitted in national writing contests is always inferior to the essays and the stories), but once in a while a gem appears.²

This experience may make them more appreciative of the difficulty of trying to communicate a mood or an experience within the limits of a given form or rhyme scheme.

The goals of poetry teaching, like those of literature teaching in general, are to develop enjoyment and understanding. The achievement of these goals can be obtained by having the students hear poetry as well as read it silently, and by having them write poetry, too. Only time will tell whether the newer methods are more successful than the traditional ones.

SUMMARY

There have been many changes in the field of senior high school literature teaching in the last few years.

¹Edgar Logan, "Teaching Poetry: Tears or Triumph?", Clearing House, XXXIV (January, 1960), 266-269.

²Edwin H. Sauer, English in the Secondary School (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), 151.

Changes for the improvement of existing programs have long been the earnest concern of literature teachers. Many changes in attitude have come about; one of these is the tendency to use literature that is appealing to students. Another is the belief that the formal education a man receives is only the beginning of his education, instead of the end of it. In the high school literature program, this may be seen in that one of the emphases is on the importance of the students' continued reading after they leave school.

Another change is the belief that the individual teacher can best judge the needs of his class and can best select material to fulfill those needs; this change opens the field of individual differences. The teacher today does not require that his students study the classics exclusively and intensively; neither does he permit the students to read only on their own level. Instead, a combination of methods is used in whatever proportions will best cope with the needs of the individuals in the class.

The reading habits of the population also are changing. Although less than one-fourth of the population reads a book a month, book sales and library circulation have increased. The reading habits of young people are improving; more adults possess the skill to read than are actually reading and some educators feel that it is lack of motivation that is at fault in the reading habits of adults.

Ideally, young people are being taught more skills which will motivate them to read after they graduate. One way educators seem to feel that this will be accomplished is by student involvement. The apparent reasoning is that if people are interested in something and if they understand it, they will read about it. Literature teachers are concerned with how to get them to read with interest and with understanding.

With these changes in views toward the senior high school literature program, teaching methods have also been changed to some degree. The thematic unit, in which varied activities follow a theme that is of interest to the student, is one. The world literature course, difficult though it may be to organize, is another. Educators apparently feel that world literature would be best organized if it were organized around themes showing the basic similarities among men the world over, and the similar ways in which they meet universal problems.

The methods and goals of literature teaching are interdependent. Previously, their relationship was not recognized by teachers; but now they seem to try to achieve a closer relationship. The basic goals seem to be to instill interest, understanding, and appreciation; and to teach the skills associated with literature while providing vicarious experience.

The teaching of poetry has many undesirable features; some children may have been exposed to poetry too early or too late; others might have had uninspired teachers. Literature teachers are seeking to overcome these handicaps by means of reading aloud in addition to the usual silent reading and by means of having their students write poetry as well as having them do the regular exercises connected with the concept of poetry as a discipline. Enjoyment first and then understanding are the goals of poetry teaching.

In summary, the emphases in senior high school literature programs are those which will help the students to develop skills that will serve them in everyday life; that will develop appreciation, enjoyment and understanding of literature and that will motivate them to read after graduation.

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APPENDIX

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PRESENT TRENDS AND PRACTICES IN A SENIOR
HIGH SCHOOL LITERATURE PROGRAM

by

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The different fields of emphasis in the English program of the senior high school have undergone great changes recently with regard to trends and practices. The changes, both major and minor, have served to make the field more dynamic.

The purpose of this report was to conduct a review of the available literature pertaining to literature programs at the senior high school level. The intention was to discover the present trends and practices of the existing literature programs throughout the United States, so an investigation of the literature in the Kansas State University Library was conducted. The investigation produced a quantity of material relating to the goals and trends of the high school literature program, and to poetry; however, materials relating to other specific categories were limited.

Senior high school literature teachers have long been concerned with improving existing literature programs. One change is to use selections in which students are interested. Another change, where one can see the importance of the students' continued reading after graduation, is the concept of a man's formal education being the beginning of his education rather than the culmination. A change which opens the whole field of individual differences is the belief that an individual teacher can best decide the needs of a particular class and can cope with the needs accordingly.

The reading habits of the public are also changing: not as many adults who can read are reading, but younger people are reading more after graduation. One opinion is that more emphasis is now put on student involvement which apparently leads to reading motivation.

With these changes, new methods are also being used. The use of the thematic unit is one; the world literature course is another. The field of poetry teaching is also changing. The emphasis now is on enjoyment, understanding, and appreciation, in that order.

In summary, emphasis in the senior high school literature program falls on teaching the skills that will serve the students best after graduation. Educators now feel that these are the skills which lead to enjoyment, understanding, appreciation, and continued reading.