

FEAR: A UNIT OF STUDY FOR NINTH GRADE LANGUAGE ARTS

by

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B.A., Kansas State University, 1968

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

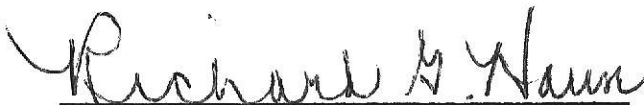
MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1975

Approved by:


Major Professor

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Part 1

INTRODUCTION

"What is most surprising of all is how much fear there is in school. Why is so little said about it?"

—John Holt, How Children Learn

In 1970 I chose to do a unit on the horror story because of the high interest potential it had. I was not disappointed: The students were interested. The realization of why the interest was so great is what led to the development of this unit.

Several of the discussions which went with the study of horror stories were successful in ways that only television teachers seem to be successful: The students were responsive, excited, and enthusiastic. Many of the students who did not normally participate were contributing. When the bell terminated the class discussion, many of the students continued with what they were talking about as they left the room. The next day the class was eager to continue the topic of the previous day.

My first reaction was self-flattery. I thought I had discovered some magical quality within myself which enabled me to conduct stimulating discussions. However, when the magic failed to emerge during other kinds of discussions I looked beyond myself to discover the reasons for the success.

It was during the second semester of the same school year that a repetition of the successful discussions on the horror story led to the realization that the topic under discussion must hold the key. What exactly had led to the excited exchange of ideas?

The students seemed to enjoy discussing the "blood and guts" issues. Though some of the students would manifest a distaste for this kind of topic, often these were the very students who shared the goriest tales. But it was not just a fascination with goriness which stimulated and sustained the discussion. It went beyond that. It involved fear: the obvious fears, the hidden fears, the fears long unspoken. I had given my students a chance to experience a mild catharsis by allowing them to share fears and fearful experiences.

As teachers we often ignore fears that students have, though as students we probably experienced many of the same fears. We give difficult examinations with staggering consequences. We expect students to perform in front of their peers without discussing with them why that can be such a traumatic experience. We use fear of grades, fear of parents, fear of humiliation to control classes, yet we do not like to live in fear ourselves.

Since fear is an important part of the innermost world of students, why not give them a chance to learn more about their fears or at least the opportunity to vent them? It was from this realization that a unit grew and changed. It is still changing as I learn more from my students about

the place fear has in their lives and what the school can do to help them cope with a complicated and often confusing emotion.

It is a good unit. It is an important unit. For these reasons I want to share it with others who might be able to profit from some of my ideas, experiments, theories and failures.

RECOMMENDED READING

Beck, Robert E. "A Case for Supernatural Literature and Communication," English Journal, Vol. 62: No. 5 (May, 1972), 673-76.

Reasons why supernatural literature should be studied. Contains a list of supernatural works to help the teacher select reading materials for students.

Evans, Verda. "The Mystery as Mind-Stretcher," English Journal, Vol. 61: No. 4 (April, 1972), 495-503.

An article recommending the use of the mystery story and novel in the English classroom. Contains a helpful categorization of the kinds of mysteries.

Part 2

THE UNIT: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

"Fear" is used as a unifying theme to develop selected language arts skills in the general areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Emphasis is placed on helping the student understand and accept his/her own fears. The climax and focal point of the unit is the writing of an original short story dealing with some aspect of fear.

The unit, as presented here, is not offered as a recipe but more as a menu. Most items are offered as possibilities, not requirements. Neither a time schedule nor a sequential order of activities is given because of the great variation in teachers, students, facilities, school systems, and educational needs.

Organization of the materials is by general skill areas. This may not seem to be the most logical way to present a unit which attempts to unify instead of segregate skills. However, it proved to be the easiest and most efficient manner of organizing ideas for quick reference and use.

TIME

The unit is designed for a nine week course of study (45 class hours), though it could easily be used as a basis of study for a semester (90 class hours) or as few as three weeks (15 class hours). Three and eighteen weeks respectively are recommended as minimum and maximum time periods.

THE SCHOOL

The school at which the unit was used is a junior high consisting of 1400 plus students in grades 7,8, and 9 in a university/military/farming community of approximately 35,000. The town has only one junior high and one high school.

The building was constructed in the early 1900's for use as a high school. A few years later an adjoining junior high was added with a connecting structure between the two schools being an auditorium to be shared by them.

Since construction, many changes have been made to the original structure: A new gymnasium and cafeteria were added, with the old gym and dressing areas being converted to classrooms and the cafeteria to a library. Probably the greatest disadvantage the necessary conversions have caused is the poor flow of student traffic. Because the building was in essence two separate schools, the provisions made for going from one building to the other are grossly inadequate for students changing classes. The cafeteria and gymnasium are separate buildings with the latter located across a city

street. The students are therefore forced to leave the main building several times a day to go outside for brief periods of time to get from one class to another. During nice weather this presents little problem. Inclement weather, however, poses a health hazard for the students.

The school is old and overcrowded. The age merely detracts from the aesthetics; the overcrowding detracts from quality education. Who knows what kind of psychological effect the crowded conditions may have on students and faculty.

For my purposes the main deficiencies of the school are insufficient large group areas, no place designed for small group work or independent study, inadequate storage, difficulty in transporting audio-visual equipment from the library to the area of usage, and distractions from the busy streets surrounding the school.

On the plus side, the administration is generally supportive of innovations by teachers; the library is well supplied with helpful teaching aids and the librarians try to purchase materials which supplement the units and activities of the teachers; and though the audio-visual equipment is often of insufficient quantity for the number of users, there is a variety from which to choose.

THE STUDENTS

The unit was developed for an used with ninth grade English classes of heterogeneous academic, intellectual, and socio-economic grouping. The majority of the students are middle class Caucasian. Since the course is required, the classes contain a typical cross section of the student body.

THE SCHEDULE

The junior high is in session from 8:30 to 3:20. The school day is divided into seven, fifty-minute periods with a twenty-five minute lunch break and five minute passing periods.

The ninth grade language arts program consists of a required one semester of English and one of speech. One semester electives are offered in literature, journalism, forensics, and debate.

This kind of program presents difficulties in unifying skills, but it does not make it impossible. I incorporate skills from the various domains, but I try and approach them differently than they are approached in the regular course. Since speech is required of all students, the activities I use in this area are very informal and not as numerous as they might be if speech were not an independent, required course.

Another problem is lack of time. English is such an all encompassing discipline. One semester is such a short time. However, when time is at a premium it is easier not

to waste it. Ideally this leads to better organization and the elimination of "fillers."

A rather unusual problem is created by the schedule because of alternate day classes of which ninth grade English has two. These two classes alternate the days they meet. So instead of meeting once a day for a semester, they meet every other day for two semesters. This means that they are never at the same place in the curriculum as the regular classes, and that a unit which normally lasts for six weeks takes twelve weeks to cover.

It has been my experience that alternate day classes need to spend more time to master a specific skill than the regular classes. Evidently the longer time intervals between classes allows too much loss of learning before the proficiency of the skill is attained to such a level that only minimal loss is experienced.

There is also the problem of using films which have to be ordered. If a particular film were to be shown to all English students it would have to be in the possession of the teacher for four different days of the school year. Only two of these days could be consecutive. This makes the rental and shipping costs of the film prohibitive. For this reason I do not use films in my program though I believe there are many excellent ones available which would enhance my teaching. For the present, at least, I prefer to use the limited monies available for other educational materials.

Part 3

PHILOSOPHY OF UNIT

Educational programs should be continually adjusted to meet current needs of the students and the community.

Education should encourage students to arrive at conclusions on their own. It is good to give some basic facts because we live in an age of such vastness of knowledge. To require that students seek out all facts on their own is unfair and inefficient. However, to require that students never have to search for information and draw conclusions from their findings is equally unfair.

Formal education should be concerned with more than the teaching of the traditional academic curricula. There should be a concern with helping students develop a positive self image, a healthy mental attitude, and a greater acceptance of others.

Provisions should be made within the system for individual differences in the interests, capacities, and achievements of students.

Education should offer practical areas of learning which have direct applicability for students in nonschool areas of endeavor. At the same time, schools should not become so concerned that all knowledge imparted have a direct and immediate purpose. Schools are an excellent

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place in which to expose students to many areas of culture that may not be necessary or essential, but may add some form of beauty and/or entertainment to their lives. As one educator put it, children should be required to occasionally "taste the spinach." Many things in life cannot be judged until they have been tried. If they like it, something new can be added to their lives; if not, they have not been harmed by the experience.

A unified approach to the teaching of language arts skills better helps the student see the interrelatedness of these skills. All too often a student will study and gain a certain degree of proficiency with a specific bit of knowledge as long as the knowledge is used and used within a limited context, but as soon as the skill is needed beyond the given exercises or examinations, transfer does not occur. Through a unification of skills study, it is easier for the teacher to teach for transfer of learning by showing the various ways a skill might have.

Schools should have programs designed to foster imagination, creativity, and originality.

Students should be allowed and encouraged to express their own opinions. This should be done, however, in such a way that the feelings and rights of others are taken into consideration.

The teacher should make every reasonable effort to make learning an enjoyable experience, but all learning is not fun all of the time. If too much emphasis is placed on

entertainment education, it is easy to leave out many areas which might not be as pleasurable to study yet are important for the student.

Fear is a normal and universal emotion. It is not shameful to experience fear nor is it a disgrace to let others know when one is afraid. It is healthy and desirable to openly discuss fears, and by doing so, to perhaps aid in coping with them.

Language can be used as an effective outlet for emotions. Good skills and a rich vocabulary enable the individual to better use language in this positive way while poor language skills lead to frustration in communicating.

The main objective of the language arts department of the school system is to help students communicate better. Communication can never be one hundred percent, but improvement by each student is possible.

Reading can almost be relegated to the position of "survival skill" in our society. The individual who is deficient in reading ability is operating under a marked handicap. Therefore, great emphasis should be placed on reading. Stimulating materials should be sought. Books and magazines should be made available that are on appropriate reading and interest levels for the students. The student should be encouraged or required to occasionally read challenging materials above his/her individual reading level. For the severely disadvantaged reader, special services should be made available to improve the student's

skill as much as possible.

While writing may not be as important a skill in our society, it is the language arts skill the secondary English teacher is expected to develop above all others. If a student doesn't learn to read, blame is placed on the elementary teacher. If the student doesn't learn to listen, the school system is not blamed at all. If the student is maladjusted socially and psychologically, the parents receive the blame. But let a student graduate from high school with poor writing skills, the secondary English teachers are the first to receive the pointed finger. Therefore, this highly complex discipline should receive special attention in the English curriculum.

The best way for students to learn to write is by writing.

Grammar is an educational skill left almost entirely to the English teacher to develop and polish. Grammar should never be studied as an end within itself in the regular English classroom. In an elective English course, grammar for the sake of grammar is fine, but never for the mainstream course. Grammar which has an applicable function is the grammar which will best be meaningful for the student.

The school should be responsible for teaching every student a standard language but never should a student's personal speech be condemned. To condemn a person's language is to condemn that person.

Listening is a skill which can be improved with a purposeful program. It is an important skill because so much of a person's time is spend in this activity. It should be presented as an active skill which requires critical analysis of the received materials.

A philosophy of education should be a dynamic process, not a static condition.

Part 4

UNIT OBJECTIVES

Before a program can be initiated it is imperative that goals be set. Without goals, there is no direction, no criteria for evaluation; in essence, there is no program.

Goals should be an outgrowth of a philosophy and should reflect and strive to achieve the philosophy.

The debate as to whether or not objectives must be stated in terms of student behavior with the terminal performance level indicated will probably continue to be an educational battleground for eternity.

Whenever possible, objectives should be stated behaviorally with as many specifics as possible. However, to imply that all educational objectives should be stated in this manner is to oversimplify the problem.

In an attempt to be specific, behavioral objectives dealing with competency levels draw arbitrary competency standards. What skills are satisfactorily mastered at 95% correct answers on ten items and what competencies might be better stated as 80% correct answers on 1000 items? Where should the lines be drawn? Who should decide?

When behavioral objectives become the educational obsession of teachers, too many other things may be lost because of the difficulty of stating them behaviorally.

There is always the problem of objectives that deal with feeling and thinking. How does a teacher see a student appreciating a short story? The student may or may not verbalize how much he/she appreciated it. The teacher can always ask directly, "Did you appreciate this story?" The reply to which may be an accurate response of the student's feelings or it may be an expression of what the student thinks the teacher wants to hear.

What criteria can be set up to truly determine whether or not the student appreciates or understands or engages in critical thinking or likes something? Can educators mass evaluate these areas? If not, should they or should they not show up in the course or unit objectives?

Time is also a factor to take into consideration in goal setting. Should objectives be restricted to those which can be obtained within x-number of days, weeks, or months? Is it feasible to list as course goals those which may not be realized for years?

On these questions I tend to take a wavery middle-of-the-road stand since the arguments on both sides are mostly subjective. Until empirical proof is presented which unquestionable supports either the behavioral objectivist who wants a strict delineation of all goals or the you-can't-measure-the-more-important-aspects-of-learning advocates, I will continue to be momentarily swayed by whichever side is stating its case before returning to the middle.

Practically speaking, objectives should be written in terms which the instructor can utilize whether or not the wording would please Mager. For if goals are of no applicable benefit to the teacher and are not used by her, no matter how beautifully and carefully they may have been worded, they are useless.

I have tried to make objectives that reflect my philosophy and to be only as specific as I find personally useful to be. I do, however, try to be able to evaluate in some way whether my goals have made positive, negative, or neutral progress.

OVERVIEW

The main objective of the unit is that the student will be able to communicate more effectively. This very general objective would include improvement of the student's communication skills in the areas of listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Particular emphasis is placed on creative writing. Another very important area of the unit deals with helping students express internal feelings, especially those dealing with fear.

BUILDING SELF ACCEPTANCE

The student will realize that having fears is normal and nothing to be ashamed of, thereby better accepting him-/herself.

The student will be able to express his/her fears.

The student will have confidence in his/her ability to succeed in English.

The student will consider him-/herself to be a person worthy of respect.

Through discussion, fantasy, and literature, the student will realize that fears can be eradicated, controlled and/or lived with.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The student will be able to identify and work with a group of peers for the accomplishment of a common goal.

The student will show respect for the person and property of others.

The student will show respect for the feelings and opinions of others.

Through a sharing of fears, the student will accept the fears of others without passing judgment.

LISTENING

The student will listen with interest while the teacher or his/her fellow classmates talk.

The student will be able to sort out specific sounds, analyze, and be able to describe them.

The student will be able to listen to a short story read orally and be able to follow and understand the plot.

The student will be able to detect the various pronunciations which make dialects differ from one another.

The student will be able to listen critically for errors that detract from good communication.

The student will be able to follow verbal instructions.

SPEAKING

The student will be able to express him-/herself verbally to a small group of peers.

The student will be able to express him-/herself verbally to a classroom of peers.

The student will be able to give a short prepared oral presentation to the class.

The student will be able to read short unprepared passages before a class.

The student will be able to read well with expression a prepared reading.

READING

The student will improve his/her reading comprehension during the course of the unit.

The student will enjoy reading.

The student will recognize the need for various reading speeds and be able to employ them at the appropriate times.

The student will be able to analyze various techniques used by writers to create special effects, i.e., plot, conflict, characterization, setting, etc.

The student will be able to follow written instructions.

The student will be able to outline the plot of selected short stories.

WRITING

General

The student will improve his/her ability to express him-/herself effectively through writing.

The student will recognize the importance of accurate writing.

The student will appreciate the skill involved in creative writing.

The student will be able to write legibly.

Vocabulary

The student will recognize the importance of a large and varied vocabulary.

The student will increase the size of his/her vocabulary.

The student will be able to use a dictionary to learn the meaning, pronunciation, and correct usage of unknown words.

The student will be able to use a thesaurus.

Spelling

The student will recognize the importance of proper spelling.

The student will be able to use a dictionary to find the correct spelling of a word.

Sentences

The student will be able to construct a logical, coherent sentence.

The student will be able to use a variety of sentence lengths and patterns.

The student will be able to recognize a sentence fragment.

The student will recognize the difference between a correctly used sentence fragment and an incorrectly used one.

The student will recognize and avoid the use of run on sentences.

Grammar Usage

(The following objectives deal with specific skills which may vary from year to year with regards to the selection. The specific skills are chosen in two ways: one, by a grammar committee which assigns various grammar concepts to various grade levels to insure better articulation and coverage; two, through the administering of a composition at the beginning of the term to determine the areas of weakness and strength. More will be said about this later.)

The student will be able to recognize the difference between singular and plural nouns and the form of the verbs which are used with these forms.

The student will be able to correctly select verbs which agree in number with their subjects.

The student will be able to correctly select the form of the pronoun which agrees in number and person with its antecedent.

The student will be able to recognize the difference between correct and incorrect tense changes.

The student will be able to correctly use the subjunctive were in contrary-to-fact statements (after if or as though) and in statements expressing a wish.

The student will be able to distinguish between adverbs and adjectives.

The student will be able to correctly determine whether the word to be modified takes an adjective or an adverb.

The student will be able to correctly use well and good.

The student will be able to distinguish between the comparative and the superlative.

The student will correctly use the comparative when comparing two things and the superlative when comparing more than two.

The student will be able to use the word other or else when comparing one thing with a group of which it is a part.

The student will avoid the indefinite use of the pronouns it, they and you.

The student will be able to separate items and phrases in a series with a comma.

The student will be able to separate independent clauses with a comma.

The student will be able to set off nonessential material with commas.

The student will be able to use a comma after introductory elements.

The student will be able to correctly divide a word at the end of a line.

The student will be able to correctly punctuate dialogue.

Paragraphs

The student will be able to recognize and use a topic sentence.

The student will be able to develop a coherent, well organized paragraph.

The student will be able to divide larger works into paragraphs.

The student will be able to write realistic dialogue.

The student will be able to represent in writing various dialects.

Creative Writing

The student will be able to construct an original plot outline.

The student will be able develop a setting that is appropriate for the mood he/she is trying to create.

The student will be able to create realistic characters who appropriately carry the plot of a story.

The student will be able to construct a short story dealing with some aspect of fear.

RECOMMENDED READING

Airasian, Peter W. "Behavioral Objectives and the Teaching of English," English Journal, Vol. 60: No. 4 (April, 1971), 495-99.

A pro-behavioral objective response to Hans Guth's article "The Monkey on the Bicycle: Behavioral Objectives and the Teaching of English" (see annotation below). Airasian uses a broader definition of "measurement" than Guth.

Cohen, Arthur M. "Objectives, Accountability, and Other Unpleasantries," English Journal, Vol. 61: No. 4 (April, 1972), 565-70.

A strong case for the importance of having objectives and the need for accountability of the attainment of these objectives.

Dieter, Lynn. "Behavioral Objectives in the English Classroom: A Model," English Journal, Vol. 59: No. 9 (December, 1970), 1259-62, 1271.

A useful guide for organizing a literature unit from objectives to actual application. Author uses the novel Shane to illustrate.

Guth, Hans P. "The Monkey on the Bicycle: Behavioral Objectives and the Teaching of English," English Journal, Vol. 59: No. 6 (September, 1970), 785-92.

An attack on the movement toward the use of behavioral objectives in the English class.

Kirkton, Carole M. "A Reference Shelf for Curriculum Planning Part III: Behavioral Objectives," English Journal, Vol. 60: No. 1 (January, 1971), 142-45.

A presentation with comments of some of the arguments of both sides of the behavioral objective issue.

Lazarus, Arnold. "Performance Objectives in Responding to Literature," English Journal, Vol. 61: No. 1 (January, 1972), 52-8.

A guide for using Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives when planning literature objectives, activities and evaluative measures.

Purves, Alan C. "Of Behaviors, Objectives, and English," English Journal, Vol. 59; No. 6 (September, 1970), 793-97.

Purves advocates behavioral objectives for English but not a la Mager.

Reeves, Ruth. "Preparing a Curriculum Guide," English Journal, Vol. 59: No. 4 (April, 1970), 520-23, 527.

A good starting place for course planning. It has several helpful lists of things to take into consideration when planning.

Rothstein, Herbert M. "A Humanistic Approach to Behavioral Objectives," English Journal, Vol. 60: No. 6 (September, 1971), 760-62.

The author supports objectives as "flexible guidelines," not as a "taxonomical approach." Article gives specific examples of the program the author recommends.

Part 5

THE NATURE OF FEAR

The teacher embarking on a fear unit needs to do at least some research on the subject. I will not attempt a comprehensive coverage of the topic, but I would like to give a few basic ideas which might help someone beginning the unit.

There are different theories on fear and it is important to let students know this. When the teacher is giving one person's theory it should be presented in just that way, as a theory, not as facts.

Research facts may be given as such, but encourage the students to question the research instead of blindly accepting with awe a lot of statistical data as positive proof. How large was the sample studies? What conditions may have affected the results? How might the researcher's biases have had an influence on his/her conclusions? Encourage the students to draw their own conclusions even if the data is accepted.

It is fine for the teacher to share her opinions with students, but here again, she should let the students know they are opinions. It is better to let students express their opinions first. Then they are less likely to be swayed by the authority's (teacher's) ideas and to think for themselves.

Fear is an emotion. There is general agreement on that. Whether or not the stimuli that arouses fear is mainly innate or learned is not so generally agreed upon. The debate on the issue may be interesting, but it is not particularly relevant to the unit as used with ninth graders. What is important is that fears exist. What to do with them once they are there is the crucial issue.

CATEGORIES OF FEAR STIMULI

"It would appear possible to subsume all fear stimuli under one of four general principles: intensity, novelty, special evolutionary dangers and stimuli arising from social interaction."¹

Intensity

Any kind of stimulation can create pain if the intensity is great enough. Suddenness causes a more intense reaction. Suddenness combined with an unexpected though harmless stimulus can produce a fear reaction: the sudden slamming of a door in a quiet classroom, an animal running in front of an unsuspecting motorist, the childish prank of sneaking up on someone and suddenly yelling something.

¹Jeffrey Gray, The Psychology of Fear and Stress, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), p. 20.

Novelty

The fear of novelty would account for the fear of strangers, the apprehension associated with going to a new place, an infant being frightened by its mother if the mother changes something such as a hair style or dons a pair of sun glasses. Novelty and therefore the fear associated with it is lost with repeated exposure to the object of stimulation.

Special Evolutionary Fear

"Where a particular situation is repeatedly responsible for the death of a significantly large proportion of the members of a species over a sufficiently large (on an evolutionary scale) span of time, the individuals of that species may be expected to develop an innate fear of some of the stimuli characteristic of that situation and to avoid them."² Having such innate fears develop would obviously increase the chance of survival for the species.

This would account for the fear of the dark in humans. We are a species highly dependent on vision and anything that interferes with the use of this faculty would place the individual in a dangerous situation.

Other fears which might fall into this category might be fear of water, heights, small enclosures, being alone, mutilated bodies, injury, death of an offspring.

²Ibid, p. 21.

Social Interaction

Since human beings are gregarious animals, the opportunity for social interaction is greater than for a more solitary species. Therefore, the fearful situations pertaining to social interactions are more plentiful.

There are fears of not being a member of a group, being ostracized from a group, social status within the group, and attracting members of the opposite sex.

Humans are usually members of many groups, the most basic and probably the most important being the family.

To be a member of a group the individual must think similarly to the other members, dress within a certain code, use a specific language pattern, and behave in a predetermined manner. Failure to conform may carry the risk of ostracism.

Many fears of children arise from the need of acceptance by the family group. The fear of not being loved is an underlying cause of many fears that begin in childhood and carry on through adult life, usually in disguised forms. Sibling rivalry is often a kind of fear: What if they (the parents) love my brother more than me?

For the adolescent the need for acceptance by a group usually involves a peer group. They will do many things deemed bizarre by adults to insure acceptance. The parent who is unaware of the fears surrounding rejection by the group usually have forgotten what it was like when they were adolescents.

Once a person belongs to a group, his/her status within it must be closely guarded. To go down in the pecking order is to be avoided, for to get too close to the bottom is to risk rejection. Fears such as getting up in front of a group of people may be a fear of doing something foolish and losing status.

Fears of not being accepted by members of the opposite sex begin emerging in the junior high years. This may lead to an exaggerated concern for personal appearance and the accompanying fears: acne, over weight, figure shape, hair style, dress, odor, etc.

Appearance is not strictly a concern for attracting the opposite sex. It is important for group status. Mate selection is important for the same reason. Therefore, the concerns surrounding getting a mate may be only secondary to concern with status position within the larger group.

MATURATION OF FEAR

The infant has few if any fears. J. B. Watson believed infants were afraid of loud noises, sudden loss of support, and pain. However, with maturation there is the emergence of fears and many occur at relatively fixed points in childhood.

Experiments have shown that before the age of two children show no signs of fear of snakes. There is cautiousness between three and four. At four signs of fear developed

and increased in intensity up to the age of about seventeen.³

Fear of the dark begins about age two and increases until about age five. Fear of animals rises to a maximum between about ages two and four. Fear of strangers begins at about seven months.⁴

From this point on, fears seem to be more a result of experience and learning than innate behavior, therefore the occurrence of fears will not have the fixed regularity they have in infants and young children.

ANXIETY

Anxiety is a kind of fear but the stimuli for this state are less direct. Often the cause of the anxiety cannot be pinpointed without psychological probing. Anxiety can arise through anticipation of what might happen instead of what actually happens.

A mother may be anxious about the safety of her children because of the possible dangers they might encounter. There is no immediate danger, yet the fear state is present.

Anxieties are hard to fight because the cause cannot be responded to in the normal manner. If a person encounters a snake, he/she can attack the snake to destroy it or flee from the immediate danger. With anxieties, there is no direct attack nor is there a way to literally run away from them.

³Ibid., p. 15.

⁴Ibid., p. 16.

PHOBIAS AND COUNTERPHOBIAS

Phobias are exaggerated, inexplicable and illogical fears. With normal fears the individual can still function and even encounter the fearful situation. With phobias the person cannot face or cope with the object or situation which provokes the phobic response.

A counterphobia involves facing the very thing that is feared most. For example, a person afraid of heights might take up skydiving to prove the fear is not there.

Counterphobias are compulsive and continuing because the person is attempting to deny a real fear with some symbolic activity.

Any action which is used to counter a real fearful feeling can be classified as counterphobic. A person who fears sex may be compulsively drawn to it. A person who fears death may take up auto racing.⁵

ACTIVITIES

1. Have students observe the ways adults plant fears in children. Make a list. Discuss in class the times when the adult is acting in the best interest of the child and when unnecessary fears are being caused.

2. Have students observe the ways the media contribute to fears (anti-smoking campaigns, cancer drive propaganda, seat belt use, etc). When is this good and when is this bad?

⁵Arthur Janov, The Primal Scream, (New York: Dell publishing Co., 1970), pp. 335-36.

3. Have a discussion on fears that express themselves in dreams. This is a favorite topic of students, so it is best to plan an entire class period for this activity. Discuss the ways the dreams might be used for short story ideas.

4. Have the students make a list of three of the fears they have that they wish they could get rid of. Ask them to list steps they could take to gradually conquer the fears.

RECOMMENDED READING

Gray, Jeffrey, The Psychology of Fear and Stress, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971).

A highly scientific study of fear and stress. For the individual interested in scientific research on the subject, an excellent resource.

Janov, Arthur, The Feeling Child, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973).

A continuation of the theory set forth in The Primal Scream. This book deals with the sources of neurosis in children and how it can be prevented.

Janov, Arthur, The Primal Scream, (New York: Dell publishing Company, 1970).

An interesting theory of the reasons for neurosis (fears included) and a therapy for treating it.

Kennett, Frances, Your Dreams and What They Mean, (London: Marshall Cavendish Publications Ltd., 1974).

Not the typical dream interpretation books prepared for the general public. Presents some of the studies done to study dreams and sleep. Gives some of the more generally accepted theories of dream interpretation.

Part 6

IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIT

For implementing the unit, I have not listed a definite order of activities to follow. While certain items, because of their relationship to other items, will tend to position themselves in the sequence of events naturally, there are too many variables which make an exact order of activities too sterile and ineffective. For example, a change in the regular school schedule because of a game or an assembly might make one activity preferable over another on that particular day. A movie or program on television might be an excellent reference for explaining certain concepts of the unit. An adjustment in the activity scheduling would allow maximum use of such a program.

The organization of the unit is by goal areas. Activities are given which are designed to achieve the objectives of the unit. The selection and combination of the activities is left to the discretion of the instructor. It is not intended that all of the activities be used each time the unit is presented. Instead, the teacher may experiment with activities or select those which are appropriate for the time, place, and persons involved.

INTRODUCTION OF UNIT

There are several ways the unit can be introduced to the students. The important thing to remember when introducing a unit is to make the introduction such that the students want the rest. Give them something to look forward to.

Activities

1. Without prior explanation give a slide presentation of situations which may be fearful to many students. The order of presentation may be random or there may be groupings of types of fear.

Since many of the slide situations suggested require the cooperation of a group of students, the teacher may wish to use those slides which are easily obtainable without the help of students first. Then the other slides may be prepared using situations suggested by the students. A second showing would then be in order. For subsequent years the complete showing of the slides could be used the first time. However, it would be good to let students add situations if they can, and a careful watch should be kept to remove old slides which are no longer relevant or useful.

Some suggested slides:

1. Student worrying over an examination.
2. A group of students with one obviously uncomfortable because he/she is not dressed like the others.

3. Student in front of a class giving a presentation.
4. Student being bawled out by a teacher.
5. Student apprehensively approaching the principal's office.
6. Boy asking a girl for a date.
7. Person sitting in a dentist's chair or in a doctor's waiting room.
8. Young child being taunted by older children.
9. Person approaching a group of people of another race.
10. Person receiving a traffic ticket from a policeman.
11. Group of people in an unemployment line.
12. Person going for a job interview.
13. Adult (parent) attacking a child.
14. Hold up.
15. Fire.
16. Electrical storm.
17. Tornado.
18. Person boarding an airplane.
19. Person standing on a high diving board.
20. Snarling dog.
21. Athletic event.
22. Snakes.
23. Spiders.
24. Hungry children.
25. Car wreck.

26. An actor preparing to go on stage.
27. Babysitter worriedly looking at door.
28. Halloween figures.
29. Person walking alone down a dark alley.
30. Black cat.
31. Calendar showing Friday the 13th.
32. Person walking under a ladder.
33. Umbrella open in house.
34. The ocean.
35. Various zoo animals: lions, tigers, bears, alligators, etc.
36. War.
37. Funeral home.
38. Funeral.
39. Cemetery.

For the creative photographer, distorted images may be shown to represent various kinds of nightmares.

After showing the slides, lead the class in a discussion of what the theme of the slides might be. The object being to arrive at the topic of fear.

Go back through the slides having the students discuss the fear involved in the various situations. Encourage discussion on the particular fears the students might have. Invite a sharing of situations similar to those in the slides that they may have experienced.

Help the students divide the fears in categories. One way to categorize would be by death situations (this could include physical injury) and nondeath situations.

Have the students try and rank order some of the fears from small to great. For some of the rank orderings select fears that would be fairly equal. Use this to illustrate that fears are a personal thing. What is an important fear to one might not be a fear at all to another.

The discussion can take various directions. This would depend on what the class seemed to want to talk about the most. The main things the teacher should do are to make sure the discussion stays on the topic, a few people (teacher included) don't dominate the talking, and as soon as the one area has been covered sufficiently, the discussion is led a somewhat different direction.

Possible directions for the discussion to take would be: Why do people have the fears they have? (Past experiences, parental influence, common beliefs, etc.) What fears are characteristic of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age? How do fears change? How might they be overcome? What are differences in the ways people express their fears? How do males and females in our society differ with regards to fear?

2. Without telling the students that a new unit is being launched, write on the board, "Fear is. . ." Ask them to write down as many completion statements as they can in x-number of minutes. When the allotted time is up, collect the papers. Using some of the ideas in them begin a discussion on fear. (See activity 1 for suggestions.) The results of the "Fear is. . ." exercise may be used for a bulletin board.

3. Decorate the room to represent part of an old castle (the dungeon, perhaps) or a haunted house. If the unit overlaps Halloween, many Halloween items may be used to create an eerie atmosphere.

4. Ask students to bring pictures representing some aspect of fear. Use the pictures for beginning the introductory discussion. The pictures may then be used to make a collage.

5. Create a fearful situation in the classroom: Have the office call several students to report immediately to the principal's office. (Be sure to let the office know what you are planning.) When they get there they should sit for about five minutes waiting to see the principal. Then the secretary should tell them the principal is very busy at the present time so they should return to class until they were called to the office again. Announce to the class that due to poor behavior and grades in the past few weeks, fifteen down letters had been turned in to the office that morning for that class alone. Then hand out a test which consists of various problems that have no solution. Explain that the test is an intelligence indicator. Make up some statistics as to how long the average student should take per question. As they take the test, frequently remind them of the number of minutes that have elapsed and how far they should be at that time. Call time and collect the papers.

Explain to the class what has been going on. Discuss the fear reactions they experienced.

6. After using one or more of the previous activities, let the students know what the unit is all about. Though they need not know all of the course objectives, they should be informed of some of the goals which let them know what is expected from them. It is easier for them to put assignments in their proper perspectives if the students have an overall picture of the unit. This gives the assignments greater meaning and at the same times enable the student in the transfer of the skills he/she learns.

Let the students know at this time that the final project will be a short story dealing with the theme of fear and the assignments and projects of the unit are to help them write an effective story.

At this point I stress that I want them to be mentally creating short stories but the actual writing need not be started yet since there is much to learn before then.

Throughout the unit point out why certain activities are being done and how they fit into the overall picture. If an activity cannot be explained, perhaps that activity should go. Students are more demanding now than they used to be of why they are required to do what we ask them to do. It is important to have a reason for what we ask them to devote time to.

Recommended Reading

Kirkton, Carole Masley. "Class Discussion and the Craft of Questioning," English Journal, Vol. 60: No. 3 (March, 1971), 408-13, 421.

A reminder to the teacher that the amount of student talk should be greater than the amount of teacher talk during a class discussion. Contains excellent book reviews of materials to help the teacher improve her discussion skills.

BUILDING SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Building self-acceptance in students must begin the first day the student enters the classroom. It is the little things that count: learning names quickly; criticizing the action, never the person; liking the student; finding things to be positive about; learning more about a student than just his/her name.

For this unit, the emphasis is on helping students accept their fears.

Activities

1. Read an article which deals with the fears of famous people.⁶ By seeing that people they admire have or have had fears may help students better accept themselves inspite of their fears.

2. Have students find fears of well known personalities. Discuss some of these fears.

⁶Glen Evans, "Who's Afraid of What," Boy's Life, (November, 1973), 46-7.

3. Have students conduct a survey of siblings, parents, teachers, students, friends and neighbors to determine the fears of others. Compile the results. Draw conclusions from the results: age group fears, occupational fears, etc. Discuss the results.

4. Have the students find fictional characters with fears. Discuss the fears and how the characters handled them.

5. Discuss ways people have overcome fears.

6. Select various fearful situations from the compositions (see Writing section) or the survey and have students role play the situations.

7. Discuss the necessity of fear for survival.

8. "Publish" some of the materials the students produce during the unit.⁷

Recommended Reading

Evans, Glen, "Who's Afraid of What," Boy's Life, (November, 1973).

An article dealing with the phobias of famous people such as Richard Burton, Phil Rezzuto, Elizabeth Taylor, Howard Hughes, Ronald Reagan, George Wallace, etc. Contains a list of phobias and their scientific names.

Ferris, William P. "Raising Student Self-Esteem (for a change)," English Journal, Vol. 60: No. 3 (March, 1971), 379-81.

⁷Patricia J. McKearn, "Famous Seventh-Grade Authors: Building Egos the Lazy Way," English Journal, Vol. 60: No. 1 (January, 1971), 126-27

McKearn, Patricia J. "Famous Seventh-Grade Authors: Building Egos the Lazy Way," English Journal, Vol. 60: No. 1 (January, 1971), 126-27.
How the egos of slow seventh graders were built by publishing what they had written. An excellent motivator for young writers.

ACCEPTANCE OF OTHERS

At first students tend to be critical of the fears of others. This is probably an outgrowth of shame of their own personal fears. Through a greater acceptance of self, the student should become more accepting of others. The activities for building self-esteem should also help in the accomplishment of the objectives pertaining to the acceptance of others.

The use of small groups is especially helpful in assisting students with getting to know each other. Though it is desirable to allow students the right of choosing their own groups some of the time, the goals of the teacher can best be accomplished if she carefully selects groups. To select effective groups, it is imperative that the teacher know her students well.

Activities

These activities are designed to help students get to know each other better.

1. Have groups prepare an "Interest-Fact" collection of the group members. The students could search for the humorous (not vicious humor) and/or the unusual. (Sue was born in a Volkswagon; Sarah still needs her teddy bear; Joe walks in his sleep when the moon is full.)

2. Have the class sit in a circle. Have one student begin by giving his/her name. The next student gives his/her name plus the name of the student before. This continues from student to student until each student has given his/her name plus the names of the preceding students.

3. Give each student a copy of the seating chart. Give a "quiz" over the chart to see if they know each others names.

4. Have each student give three interesting facts about him-/herself. Give a "quiz" over the facts. To receive a perfect score a student must be able to give at least one fact about each of the other students.

These activities may also help raise the self-esteem of the individual student by focusing nonthreatening attention on him/her.

Recommended Reading

Barone, Frank J. "The Small Group," English Journal, Vol. 61: No. 7 (October, 1972), 1051-53, 1059.

A student-centered, nondirective method of instruction through the use of small groups.

LISTENING

Seventy-five percent of the average person's time is spent listening, though I doubt teachers fall into this category, especially during school hours. Students probably spend more than that amount when in school. Regardless of the minutes per day one might spend using his/her ears, listening is an important skill.

Activities

1. Read orally to the class. It amazes me that in an age of television students enjoy being read to as much as they do. It is good practice for developing listening skills.
2. Have students bring recordings of songs which have fear as the theme. Play the recordings for the class. See if they were able to understand the song.
3. Play a recording of a radio drama. Besides following the plot, ask the students to be aware of the different kinds of voices used to portray character stereotypes, the special sound effects, and the kinds of music used to create special moods.
4. Record many everyday sounds. Play the recording for the class. Have them list as many of the sounds as they are able to recognize.
5. Give a series of verbal instructions for the class to follow. The instructions may involve very simple things such as numbering from one to thirteen in a vertical column, drawing circles with an x in the center, etc.

6. Give verbal directions to some location in the community that most of the students would be familiar with. See if they can figure out the destination from the directions.

7. Ask the students to pay careful attention to the announcements over the intercom. Give them a quiz to see how well they really listened.

8. Have the class be silent for five minutes and listen very carefully to what they hear. After the five minutes is over, make a list of all they heard. The same thing can be done when they are outside the classroom.

9. Play recordings of speakers with different accents and dialects. Have the students list various words and sounds which make accents and dialects differ from one another.

Recommended Reading

Hook, J.N., "Listening Creatively," The Teaching of High School English, 3d ed. (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1965), pp. 402-21.

An excellent resource for developing a unit and/or exercises on listening.

Johnson, Mercy S., "Objectives of a Ninth Grade Listening Unit," Ideas for Teaching English: Grades 7-8-9 Successful Practices in the Junior High School (Chairman of the Committee on English in Grades 7, 8, and 9 of the National Council of Teachers of English) Ruth E. Reeves, (Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1966), pp. 358-66.

A sample listening unit complete with objectives, discussions, activities, and specific instructions.

READING

Unfortunately, every teacher regardless of grade or subject taught, is not a reading teacher. Even those who prepare to teach English are not required to learn anything about how to teach reading. The assumption seems to be that students know how to read before leaving the elementary grades. It does not take any massive testing program to show this is simply not true. Many students graduate from high school without having learned to read.

Once in the classroom, the English teacher discovers she is a reading teacher whether or not she knows how to be. Some manage to find a few tricks that work, others just mumble about the preceding teachers who did not teach the kids how to read, and still others ignore the problem completely, assuming nothing can be done so late in the student's educational career.

It is never too late to learn to read, and the longer the student goes without learning this important skill, the harder the educational institution should work to provide the opportunity to remedy the deficiency.

In the mean time the English teacher can take courses to learn more about helping nonreaders, keep up to date on current research in the field, and encourage teacher education programs to require at least minimum training in the science (art?) of teaching reading.

Activities

1. Have as many reading materials as possible available in the classroom. These materials should be for varied interests and different reading levels.⁸

Students seem to especially enjoy magazines, but unless funds are abundant, magazines may be an expensive reading resource because of their limited time value. (There are exceptions to this, of course.) If this is the case, be especially aware of the magazines which are read the most by the greatest number of students. The exception here would be magazines which appeal to the reluctant reader but not necessarily to average readers and above.

Paperback books are a favorite of many. Use school funds whenever possible to purchase a variety of titles. It is easiest to order sets which have been selected by authorities on adolescent readers. It saves the teacher the time of deciding what titles to purchase, a skill more difficult than it may seem.

If the school does not provide unlimited money for purchasing paperbacks, let people know you would appreciate donations of books to be used in the classroom. Make pleas at Back-to-school Night, in the news bulletin sent to parents, to students, to fellow teachers, and to anyone else you might be able to corner for a brief moment. Many

⁸Thomas G. Devine, "What Does Research in Reading Reveal—About Materials for Teaching Reading?" English Journal, Vol. 50: No. 6 (September, 1969), 847.

people are happy to do a little housecleaning to get rid of those piles of books they no longer want but would feel guilty just throwing away.

Display the books such that browsing is encouraged. Many of my paperbacks are displayed in a rotating metal rack. It gives the browsing area a bookstore appearance. The rack has been a mixed blessing, however. It is fun to give it a quick, hearty whirl and watch the books go spinning around the room. On the brighter side, book check outs increased after receiving the rack.

I have not found an efficient method of checking out and keeping track of the books in my classroom, so I lose several each semester. But the enthusiasm the students have for the books makes the loss minimal.

Newspapers are good to have available for the students to read. They are expensive though, and if the local news printer will not donate free papers, it might be better to bring day old newspapers from home. To get a variety of papers, check with other teachers to see which ones they subscribe to and if they would be willing to donate recent ones.

Comic books are a controversial reading resource to use in the classroom. Personally, I like to keep a few in the room for the student who has trouble reading much else, though good readers enjoy them too. I do not buy them, but I am more than willing to accept them from students who are willing to donate them.

A conveniently located bulletin board can be a good way to get students to read. Keep it covered with cartoons, interesting short articles, and student writings. Be sure to change materials often to keep the students checking the board. Invite the students to bring in appropriate items.

One of the most read books I have is one I made as a project for a class I took. It is simply a collection of interesting articles and pictures pasted in a book. The materials from the bulletin board could be placed in it. When one book gets filled, start volume two of the "Miscellaneous Reader."

2. Allow time for reading. Some students will find time to read no matter what. These are not the students the system needs to reach. It is the student who complains about never having time to read or they don't like to read that we need to be concerned about. The argument of not enough time can be easily squelched by providing class time. The student who doesn't like to read offers a difficult challenge. Hopefully by providing a wide variety of materials on his/her interest and reading level, the reluctant reader may become a little less reluctant.

Assigned reading. For materials the students are required to read, do something to help them "get into the story." This may involve giving a preview of the story, pointing out something exciting or unusual to look for, or it may help to begin reading the story to the class. Stop at a point which makes the reader want to know what happens next.

For certain stories I have found it helpful to begin reading to the class without any introduction. I stop reading at a tense point in the story and tell the students where to find the rest of the story. This gets a better response than the usual: "Take out your literature books." "Oh, no! Do we hafta?" "Turn to page 62 and read the story. There will be a quiz first thing tomorrow over what you are to read." Commotion. Mumbling. Groans. The sound of eyelids meeting.

Free choice reading. For free choice reading it is a good idea to have a special time set aside just for that purpose. Perhaps every other Thursday could be set aside for Read Day. That means no other activity should be done on those days. If the students consider it a study hall the purpose of having a Read is lost. Do not allow reading of text books for other classes. It should be a day that begins with reading the moment the bell rings. It may take a few weeks to get this across, but it is well worth the initial effort. Do not let the students try to use Read Days as a time to do makeup assignments for other classes, ("Since we're not doing anything in here today, could I. . .") visit the counselor's office, daydream, write notes, etc. Though all of these may be important activities, reading should be the only important activity allowed on Read Days.

3. There is a debate as to whether or not students should be required to report on what they have read.

On the one hand the argument is, if students are not required to report on what they have read, many will not read anything. On the other side we hear: The reports discourage reading by making it a requirement. Students will read if properly motivated and book reports are not proper motivation.

I have tried no book reports. Then at the end of the semester I had the students list the books they had read that semester. Evidently I had not engaged in proper motivation: Many of my students had not read a single book. When I require book reports, assuming the majority are honestly written (and I think they are), I feel that more students are reading more; therefore, I lean toward the report group.

To ease my conscience that I may be killing reading interest by making reading a required, i.e., distasteful chore, I try and make the book reports as painless as possible. I require the minimum basic facts about the book (title, author) and from there the student merely convinces me he/she read the book. Grammar or composition form is not graded.

The final book report grade is based on the number of pages read. I have a card for each student on which I record the book titles read and the number of pages. The growing list of titles and pages seems to motivate some student to cover the card. Hopefully somewhere the card covering leads to an interest in the reading that goes with it.

Whenever possible I try and have a brief, informal discussion about the book. When the reports are turned in

a comment on my part will often elicit a series of comments from the student regarding the book. This usually gives me a clue that the student did read the book; something the anti-report group claims most students do not do for book reports.

In addition to motivating (forcing?) the students to read, the book reports serve other purposes. They let me know about the interests of students. They have the necessary information for composing a ninth grade best seller list. They often determine the books I try to read in order to keep up with my students. It is interesting watching the trends in adolescent reading from year to year.

Some might question the lack of reading requirements with regards to book categories. I believe that by limiting reading choice only minimally, I am more likely to encourage instead of inhibit reading. I do have students who read basically one kind of book. My only argument, no matter how feeble, is, they are reading, aren't they? This past year I had a student who read thirty-plus westerns, most by the same author. His last report was on a nonwestern. I asked if he had run out of westerns. No, he was tired of them.

I do not use oral reports at all. I always hated giving and listening to them. Though I am sure there are many creative and interesting ways for oral reports to be given, I feel they are too time consuming for the large number of students I have and the limited amount of time.

4. Correlate literature with effective use of the language by using what the students read as examples of ways they may use the language better.⁹

Literature may be an isolated discipline pursued merely for the sake of literature. However, time is at a premium in the classroom, so get as much mileage from literature as possible. This does not mean to wring everything possible from one story; that would serve only to kill that story.

Plot study. Students have a vague understanding of plot. By building on this understanding, the teacher will help them better understand the concept.

1. Take a story which is familiar to all the students. With the help of the class, list the important actions of the story.

For example: A plot outline of "The Three Little Pigs"

- a. Three young pigs leave home to seek their fortunes.
- b. First pig purchases straw and builds poorly constructed house.
- c. Second pig buys sticks and builds flimsy house.
- d. Third pig buys bricks and builds strong secure house.
- e. Wolf blows down houses of first two pigs and devours pigs.

⁹Yakira H. Frank, "Correlating Language and Literature," English Journal, Vol. 61: No. 2 (February, 1972), 239.

- f. Wolf fails to destroy house of third pig by blowing.
- g. Attempts entry through chimney.
- h. Wolf perishes in a cauldron of boiling water.

Emphasize that only the action is important for a plot outline. The characters are used only as they are involved in the action. This is a rough plot outline and the form need not be formal.

2. Have the class as a group outline a book, a movie, or television program. Select something a majority are familiar with. On the board, chart the plot, writing down the major events in the order they occurred.

3. Assign a short story to read. Ask the students to write a rough plot outline of the story. Put the outline on the board. Select one of the events and ask for ways that event could have been changed. (What if the hero had been caught while snooping in the villain's room?) Ask the class to go through the rest of the outline to see how the one change necessitates changes in the rest of the plot.

4. Select a short story the students have not read. Prepare a plot outline of the beginning of the story. Before reading the story, have the students complete the plot outline. Read the story. Share with the class the various ways the members of the class finished the story.

Conflict.

1. Give a brief plot outline devoid of conflict.
(Boy meets girl. They fall in love. They marry and live

happily ever after.) Ask what's wrong with the plot. The answers tend to be: It's boring. Nothing happened.

Put the plot on the board leaving ample space between items. Ask the class to make the plot more exciting.

An example from a class:

- a. Boy meets girl.
- b. Girl loves boy's best friend.
- c. Best friend goes away to war.
- d. Girl depends on boy for support and comfort.
- e. They fall in love.
- f. Girl plans to send "Dear John" letter.
- g. Receive notice friend has been injured.
- h. Girl and boy feel loyalty to wounded friend.
- i. Boy and girl part.
- j. Friend returns with confession he is in love with his nurse.
- k. Boy and girl marry and live happily ever after.

It is not hard at this point to explain the literary concept of conflict. It is easy for the students to recognize the stumbling blocks placed along the way to make the story interesting.

2. Discuss the plots of stories the class has read. Identify the conflicts and remove them from the story. This is to emphasize further the need for conflict to have a story.

3. After discussing and identifying conflicts in various stories, ask the students to categorize them. The goal is to help them arrive at the classic conflict categories

of Man vs. Man, Man vs. Nature, Man vs. Self, Man vs. God, and Man vs. the Supernatural.

Characterization. Point out that in the plot outlines there was no need to describe the characters. From the outlines we had no knowledge of the characters. However, for a plot to be enriched the importance of the personalities is very important.

1. Using several of the stories the class has read, go through and select several of the important characters. Ask the students to list the various ways the author revealed the characters' traits.

The ten basic ways character is revealed:¹⁰

- a. What he/she says.
- b. How he/she says it.
- c. Physical description.
- d. Psychological description.
- e. What he/she thinks.
- f. What he/she does.
- g. What others say about him/her.
- h. His/her environment.
- i. Reactions to others.
- j. Reaction of others to him/her.

2. Do a characterization sketch of a fictional character. The class may choose to do an individual from a story they have read, a movie, or a television program. They should list the information they are able to obtain about the character plus how they obtained the information.

¹⁰Francis R. Gemme, "On Teaching Characterization," The Structure of Literature: A Guide for Teachers (ed), R.F. Beauchamp, (Middletown, Connecticut: American Education publications/A Xerox Company, 1969), p. 17.

Point of View.

1. Consider the point of view of several of the stories the class has read during the unit. Who tells the story? How much does the narrator know? What restrictions does the narrator have or impose upon him-/herself?

2. Take a well known story. Have the students consider the effect a change in narrators would have. For example, in the "Three Little Pigs" what changes would occur in the story if the story were told from the wolf's point of view?

3. Take a mock situation: Student A has been caught throwing food in the cafeteria at student B. Have students role play and present three different points of view regarding the one situation: (1) student A, (2) student B (3) an indifferent observer. Discuss.

Setting. For the purposes of this unit the student need only know what setting is with reference to literature. The important treatment of setting will come under the writing section.

Story beginnings. Read several story beginnings to the students. Ask them to rate the beginnings as to how much desire they have to finish the story. Discuss what makes the beginning stimulating or uninteresting.

Climax. Help students find the point of several stories where the central character is on the verge of winning or losing. Ask how much happened after the climax. Emphasize what

would have happened to the reader if the story had dragged on once the climax had occurred.

Recommended Reading

Beauchamp, R.F. (ed), The Structure of Literature: A Guide for Teachers, (Middletown, Connecticut: American education Publications/AXerox Company, 1969).

A handy quick reference for the various literary techniques. Offers approaches to teaching literature.

Carriar, Shirley M. "Teaching Reading Skills in the Junior High School," English Journal, Vol. 58: No. 9 (December, 1969), 1357-61.

A guide to specific areas of literature interpretation to use with junior high age students.

Devine, Thomas G. "What Does Research in Reading Reveal—About Materials for Teaching Reading?" English Journal, Vol. 58: No. 6 (September, 1969), 847-52.

The first step in helping improve students' reading is to have many varied materials available. Excellent list of materials.

Frank, Yakira H. "Correlating Language and Literature," English Journal, Vol. 61: No. 2 (February, 1972), 239-45.

A guide to using literature to help students appreciate the intricacies of language.

Johnson, Laura S. "If It's Fun, It Can't Be Reading!" English Journal, Vol. 59: No. 6 (September, 1970), 837-845.

Methods and gimmicks for encouraging even the most reluctant to read.

WRITING

Writing is hard work. Teaching writing is harder work. It is so difficult to know where to begin with the teaching of writing because it is so personal, individual, and skill levels so strung out at the ninth grade level. The limited research available on effective ways of teaching writing only adds to the discouragement.

I believe the best way to improve writing is to write. The more, the better. At first I felt that each writing assignment had to be carefully graded or it had no merit in improving the students' writing skills. I don't feel this way any more. Correction may help somethings. Suggestions may help others, but the biggest factor in improving writing is the self-correction process that goes on when a student reads what he/she has written. The more he/she writes, the closer he/she will come to achieving his/her maximum potential.

The greatest improvement I ever noticed in the writing of my students during the course of a semester occurred when I required weekly journals. The students were given ten points per page of writing up to thirty points/week. They could write on any topic, but I wanted the writing to be in English sentences. (Some wanted to turn in repeated words or French exercises.) The penmanship had to be at least somewhat legible.

The only topic restriction I placed on the journals was they not be highly offensive to the person reading them,

namely me. I did not define "highly offensive" and I was never highly offended, though I did come under attack occasionally in the journals.

The journals were read only by me unless a student specifically indicated he/she wanted someone else to read it too. Occasionally I read a journal to the class with the permission of the author. I never discussed with anyone except the student what was contained within his/her journal.

At the initiation of the assignment I told the students I could not read all of the journals every week. Often I would skim a page to see that the minimum requirements were met. I would read completely as many as I could find time to handle.

The topics varied. A common one at the beginning was how much they hated writing stupid journals. It was a waste of time, paper and ink, blah, blah. . . I didn't bat an eyelash or change the assignment. As weeks passed the journals began to take on an important function for some of the students. The shy student was letting me know him/her. The angry student was getting rid of hostilities via the written page. The lonely student was finding a friend. The clown was finding a way to be clever and receive credit instead of criticism for it.

I would write comments on the papers I read. Soon students were looking forward to the comments. In some cases there was a correspondence going on from week to week between several students and me. I was becoming Ann Landers

to others. Students who didn't receive comments were hurt. Some would comment that I must never read their papers. I tried to read more of the papers. My student teachers left. I was alone with six classes a day and 180 journals a week. One hundred-eighty times three equals 540 pages a week. The results were great, but I was exhausted.

The next year I abandoned journals and had more free time. My students didn't write much that year nor did their writing improve much. Next year I plan to use journals again, only this time I will try to find the happy middle road between martyr and never-take-a-thing-home.

This does raise an important question for the English teacher in particular: At what point should the classroom activities cease to dominate a teacher's life?

Activities

Penmanship. It may seem rather ridiculous to mention such an elementary topic as penmanship, but many students get poorer grades than they should simply because they cannot write legibly.

Strangely enough, most students rather enjoy the penmanship exercises though with some classes it may help to humor the situation along by having "kindergarten time" for working on such.

1. Have the students copy a short paragraph writing as fast as reasonably possible. Have them exchange papers with another student. The papers are to then be checked for all letters and words which cannot be read. The

papers are returned to the owners to make a list of any letters which are marked three times or more.

2. Repeat exercise 1. However, this time the writing is to be done as neatly as possible. The papers should be exchanged again to look for letters and/or words which cannot be read.

3. Look over the papers from exercises 1 and 2 to identify those students with severe penmanship problems. If the problem is with a few letters, work with these students on the letters they have trouble making. Periodically give them an exercise whereby they have to write as neatly as possible.

Vocabulary. Effective use of the language is facilitated by a large and varied vocabulary. Most students enjoy learning new words, provided they really understand the word and have a use for it in their language. A careful selection of words will help make vocabulary work interesting and relevant.

When trying to decide which words to use for study keeping alert seems to be the most important thing. Watch for words you use which the students do not understand. Look for new terms which have suddenly started being used a great deal.

1. To stress the importance of vocabulary improvement read some of the findings on vocabulary studies. The results of these studies are frequently found in abbreviated form in the introduction of paperbacks which claim to give the

reader instant vocabulary success in thirty days or so.

2. Give the students a paragraph rich in vocabulary. Using a dictionary for the words they do not know, have the students change as many of the words in the paragraph as possible to simpler, more common words. Read the simplified version.

3. Divide the class into small groups. Hand out several horror stories to each group. Have them go through the stories searching for good fear words.

4. Select some of the words from activity 3 for a vocabulary list and dictionary work.

Some typical words of such an exercise might be: macabre, ominous, sinister, diabolical, malevolent, palpitating, necropolis, cadaverous, emaciated, etc.

5. For students to be able to incorporate words into their speaking vocabulary, it is necessary for them to be able to pronounce the words.

Using the words selected for the vocabulary worksheet, ask for volunteers to try and pronounce the entire list. After the entire list has been correctly pronounced ask for other students who think they can pronounce all of the words correctly. It helps to give a few extra credit points to those who successfully pronounce all of the words. Do not allow excessive class time to be spent on this activity since most students do choose to participate and some for try after try. However, since the purpose is for them to learn how to pronounce the words, when the activity is cut off, tell them they may come in before or after school or between classes to

say the words. This will usually get even the shyest of students.

6. For practice in using the phonetic spellings, transcribe into phonetics a short paragraph. Have the students return the paragraph to "normal" English.

7. Give a list of words the students have probably never seen before with the phonetic spellings. Help the class sound out the words, then ask them to pronounce the complete list following the procedures of activity 5.

Some words which might be used: thermoperiodism, pteroylglutamic acid, polygynous, stereoisomerism, diapophysis, diastrophism, etc. The longer the word and the more complicated the spelling the better. At first the words may look impossible to the students. Emphasize the use of the phonetic spelling and attack the pronunciation syllable by syllable. The exercise is a lot of fun and the students enjoy mastering the awkward tongue.

8. Show the students how to use a thesaurus. Do not give specific exercises over the usage unless each student has a copy. Try and have several classroom copies available for students to use. Often students will ask for a better word. Get out a thesaurus and help the student find a better word.

Spelling. Spelling is another area of language arts under debate. The weekly spelling list has come under fire the most. In spite of spelling lists, poor spellers are still amongst us. Many claim that the youth of America are getting to be worse spellers every year.

To improve the spelling skills of my students I have tried lists from books, lists from student writings, grouping students by spelling abilities based on a series of pretests, dictations, spelling rules, and doing nothing. My conclusion? Doing something isn't much help, but it is better than doing nothing.

The semesters I did nothing particular with spelling I had more originality in spelling than usual. I don't think my students were any worse spellers those semesters, but they thought I didn't think spelling was important so they didn't bother to put their best spelling forward.

The moral of the story: If you want students to be good spellers, let them know it is important and then nag, nag, nag.

1. Pronounce a list of words to the class. Have them write down the words, spelling them as best they can. Have them find the correct spelling in the dictionary.

This is a good exercise for them to do in pairs if they are matched according to similar spelling abilities.

2. Return written assignments to students for them to correct the spelling errors before giving credit for that assignment. If the student is completely stumped by the spelling of a word, help him/her look it up in the dictionary.

Sentences. Words in themselves are not particularly difficult; putting them together to convey thoughts is. Once a student can construct a logical, coherent sentence

consistently, much of the battle is won.

1. Put a simple sentence on the board.

The boy ran.

Call on various students to add words or phrases to make the sentence more exciting.

The ugly boy ran silently.

The ugly boy with the stolen apple ran silently through the streets.

The ugly boy with the stolen apple clutched beneath his ragged clothes ran silently through the crowded unfriendly streets of the city.

After doing several similar examples on the board, give several basic sentences for the students to expand individually.

The next day have some of the better sentences written on large pieces of paper and displayed around the room. Nothing need be said. Quality will speak for itself.

2. Have students write composite fear stories.

Each student takes out a sheet of paper. He/she writes one sentence that might well be the beginning of a fear story. When he/she finishes, the sentence is passed on to the next student who adds a sentence to go with the previous one(s). This continues for 20-30 minutes. When time is about up, ask the students to try and conclude the story they currently have. They may add more than one sentence at this time if necessary.

Read some of the stories orally.

3. Have the students write "Instant Sentences."

The		boys		ran		into		trees
	+	girls		jumped		through		houses
Some		monkeys	+	flew	+	over	+	mud
		turtles		dived		under		lakes
		cars		drove		around		bananas

Grammar usage. To go into the ways of teaching grammar would involve the writing of another report. For this reason, plus the variance in grammar skills that might be chosen for this unit, I will only touch on the subject.

The first task the English teacher should undertake when beginning a study of grammar is to first convince the students that there are reasons for studying grammar besides the passing of a required course. If they can be even half way convinced, students will work harder on the inevitable exercises, drills, and examinations.

The second task is to relate grammar to actual use of the language. Save examples of student writings which illustrate better than a lecture why such and such a skill is important.

The third task involves keeping up with grammar trends and changes. Be careful not to teach something as incorrect which is now acceptable in even the most fastidious of circles. Let the students know of the changes that are in the making.

1. Give examples of sentences which are almost identical but because of one small difference in grammar, the meanings are very different. (See recommended reading: Maxwell Nurnberg's book for suggestion.)

2. Use examples of student mistakes in the same way as activity 1. Make your own collection and while waiting for enough, use examples from True Classroom Flubs and Fluffs. (See recommended reading for complete bibliographical information.)

3. Play recordings of speakers using correct and incorrect grammar. Ask who the students would probably vote for for President and why.

Paragraphs. The concept of a paragraph is relatively hard for ninth graders. Obvious topic changes do not give them too much trouble, but the more subtle changes do. Explaining what a paragraph is will help, but not much. Practice, practice and more practice is necessary before the concept is internalized.

1. It helps to begin with the topic sentence, though it was a long time before I considered topic sentences worthy of mention. However, once students understand them, it makes paragraphing much easier.

The best way I have found for students to learn what a topic sentence is is the old method of finding hundreds and hundreds of topic sentences. Have a variety of paragraphs on file and use as many as necessary to get the idea across. Perhaps a collection of unusual paragraphs would take some of the drudgery out of the exercises.

2. Take three paragraphs and list the sentences from them in a random order. Give the students the list and ask them to put a letter A by one set of sentences which go

together, B by another set, and C by the third set. Ask them to star the topic sentences for each paragraph.

3. For organization of materials within a paragraph, have the students arrange randomly presented sentences from paragraphs in order. They may then compare their organization with the original and support why or why not the original is better than theirs.

4. Have the students write lots and lots of paragraphs. Make sure every sentence is related to the others. Since paragraphs are relatively short, they do not take long to grade. However, let the students grade each others papers whenever possible. Grading is a good way for the students to learn.

5. Read a short story or an article to the class. Have the students write down the first two or three words of each paragraph in the story. Articles work best unless you can find a short short story.

CREATIVE WRITING

Creative writing can and should be fun. However, like most writing, it is very hard work. Some will argue that it should be studied only by those students who really want to do writing of this kind. The average student will never need to do creative writing outside the classroom, therefore writing efforts should be directed toward more practical kinds of writing.

Nonsense. The goals of the two are identical: to effect a desired response in the reader. The desired response varies a great deal, but the approach is similar. By a study of creative writing techniques the writer is better aware of the power of language and the ways the language can be manipulated to control the reader. The same thing can be accomplished through a study of practical writing, but it isn't as much fun and no matter how worthy something might be, if the student isn't interested, the benefits are quickly lost.

Activities

It is easiest to teach creative writing when it is closely used with the reading of creative works. After learning a literary technique from a literature study, it is a good time to practice application of the technique to a writing situation. The activities in this section should be closely correlated with those under the reading section.

Plot.

1. As a class, create an original plot outline for a fear story. (This should follow the activities on plot outlining from reading.)

Begin with a basic idea such as werewolves, vampires, ghosts, etc. The following is an example of a plot outline created by one of my classes. Others who have since seen the outline claim they have seen similar ideas in movies and on television. I am sure the plot is not entirely original, but it was original for the class as they argued and discus-

sed trying to decide what they wanted to happen next.

- a. Young girl (Mary) receives a beautiful doll from an aunt who lives in Haiti.
- b. Discovers the doll is a voodoo doll of herself. (For a skeletal plot outline it is unnecessary to indicate how she discovered this. The students had many ideas. The individual author would have to decide this.)
- c. Little girl next door (Sally) wants to play with the doll. Mary is afraid Sally may discover the power the doll has.
- d. Sally manages to "borrow" doll without Mary's knowledge.
- e. Mary becomes very ill because Sally is very rough on doll.
- f. Mary tells her worried mother she needs her doll. She thinks Sally has it.
- g. Mother goes next door to get doll. Sally denies possession.
- h. Sally is afraid of being caught with doll after lying.
- i. Sally dispenses of doll by throwing it in nearby creek.
- j. Mary dies. Apparent cause, drowning.
- k. Another little girl discovers the doll on creek bank.
- l. The doll then becomes a voodoo doll of her.

2. Have the students write at least one original plot outline. These may or may not be the ideas they later develop into a short story. Emphasize it is important to plan a story, but I think it unfair to hold a student to an outline of this kind. Too many creative ideas may develop

during the course of the story writing.

The object of writing the plot outline is to show the student he/she can develop a story idea because many students are honestly convinced they cannot think of a story.

3. Read some of the plot outlines to the class.

Ask for suggestions and variations.

4. For the student who is interested in creative writing, have them keep a card file of original plot outlines. It is a good habit for the serious budding writer and most will welcome the chance to do such a project.

5. Discuss formula plots from horror movies. What kinds of things seem to always happen. For formula plots Saturday morning cartoon offer many good examples.

6. Have the class keep a file of newspaper articles which might be good story material. Periodically go over some of the materials asking how the ideas could be used for stories.

Conflict.

1. Have the students take a simple child's story that all are familiar with and rewrite it adding as many conflicts as possible. The results will be an absurd story, but it really gets the concept across, plus it is fun for the students.

2. Have students point out the conflicts of the plot outlines written by the class. Often there will be a plot with little or no conflict. By suggesting conflicts the class may turn a poor plot into an exciting one.

Characterization. Once the student has a story idea he/she wants to develop, then it is time to decide what characters are needed and what features they need for the working out of the plot.

1. Bring in a book or magazine of movie monsters. Before showing the pictures ask the students what kinds of techniques the movie industry employs to make frightening creatures and people for movies.

Show the pictures. Some of the categories the pictures might fall under:

- a. Scars and physical deformities.
- b. Grotesque size (King Kong, Godzilla, prehistoric monsters, etc.)
- c. Supernatural creatures (the devil, spirits, skeletons, vampires, werewolves, witches, etc.)
- d. Massive quantity of creatures (The Birds, The Naked Jungle, The Bees, Willard, Ben, etc.) Hollywood frequently exploits the idea that even the smallest and most harmless of creatures can be frightening if the quantity is great enough.

For these categories, the teacher doesn't need many examples. The students have vast quantities of them, and they are eager to share.

2. Have the students develop a creature using as many descriptive words as possible. The object is to try and present a mental image to the reader.

3. Read the descriptions from activity 2 to the class. Discuss which ones are effective and why.

Point out that terms such as "big" do not communicate

anything to the reader. How big? Saying the monster was "grotesque looking" conveys nothing. The reader needs descriptions of the specifics that made the monster grotesque.

4. Dialogue is very important in creating a character. Help the students write realistic dialogue that is appropriate to the characters they are developing. Some composition topics which might help: Write a discussion between—

- a. Teenager well versed in the latest jargon and his/her grandmother.
- b. A Shakespearian scholar and a juvenile delinquent.
- c. A young child and an adult.
- d. A cowboy and a British banker.
- e. A hillbilly and a city slicker car salesman.

Point of View. For this unit the important thing here is that the student be able to select an appropriate point of view for his/her short story. Consistency of point of view is important. When the student has begun his/her story ask him/her from what point of view the story will be told. If told in third person, ask what limitations will be placed on the narrator. Once the student has decided this, it is easier for him/her to be consistent throughout the story.

Setting.

1. Have the students list the five most typical settings for fear stories. Make a list on the board. Go through the list and discuss why these particular settings

are used so often.

2. Give the students a simple setting and situation. For example: A person walking down an alley. This is not a fearful situation in itself. Ask the students to add things to the setting to make it fearful.

- a. The person is alone.
- b. Night.
- c. Noises (sudden, unexplained; footsteps, screaming, etc.)
- d. Wind (this can create noises and cause movement of shadows.)

This is a good time to stress the importance of timing when revealing to the reader the source of fear provoking things. For example, a banging shutter is not frightening if the person instantly knows what the noise is. The writer should describe the noise, have the person react with fear, then if the source must be revealed, reveal it. The fear is a result of the unknown, therefore it must remain an unknown, at least temporarily.

3. Bring in pictures of settings which might be good for fear stories. Have the students write a descriptive paragraph of the pictures.

Climax. For climax I mainly stress that a story needs to have a point at which the dilemma is resolved. I do not want an exciting story that is suddenly terminated by having the hero awaken and discover the whole thing was a nightmare, unless upon awakening there is some discovery that suggests it was not just a dream, but it really happened

or it is going to happen.

The Short Story. The story is the important project of the unit. The readings, the grammar, the compositions have all been pointing toward this endeavor. It is tempting at this point to want to sit back, relax, and let the students take over. For quality short stories that make both the student and teacher feel the unit was worth the effort, the teacher must work hard until the bitter end.

1. Give the students time to work on the stories in class. They shouldn't have time to do the entire story during school time, but let them at least get a good start.

2. While they write, circulate. Read a portion of each story. Offer some advice and lots of encouragement.

3. Have the students get in groups of 2-4. Each student should read his/her story aloud to the others in the group. The listeners are not there to tear the stories apart but to offer helpful suggestions.

4. Set up format criteria for the stories. This may seem stifling to creativity, but a neat pleasant appearing story makes the student proud of the accomplishment.

5. For the better stories, encourage the student to try and get it published. Provide possible places for publication and then help the student get the paper in an acceptable form.

Recommended Reading

Backscheider, Paula. "Punctuation for the Reader—A Teaching Approach," English Journal, Vol. 61: No. 6 (September, 1972), 874-77.

An approach to teaching punctuation which stresses the reader and not the writer. Gives rules for punctuation which are simple, practical and easy to teach.

Cooper, Charles R. "An Outline for Writing Sentence-Combining Problems," English Journal, Vol. 62: No. 1 (January, 1973), 96-102, 108.

A recommended program for helping students "write sentences of greater structural variety and complexity." Contains an outline for writing sentence-combining problems: noun modifiers and noun substitutes.

Graves, Richard L. "DEHAE: Five Steps for Teaching Writing," English Journal, Vol. 62: No. 5 (May, 1972), 696-701.

How to teach composition by using (1) identification of the concept, (2) examples, (3) highlighting, (4) activities, (5) evaluation.

Harris, Josephine. "What Writers Advise on the Teaching of Creative Writing," English Journal, Vol. 60: No. 3 (March, 1971), 345-52.

Though there is no consensus of thought on teaching creative writing, there are many suggestions from famous writers such as John Updike, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Saul Bellow, etc.

Judy, Stephen N. "Writing for the Here and Now: An Approach to Assessing Student Writing," English Journal, (Vol 62: No. 1 (January, 1973), 69-79.

An approach to grading student writing by concentrating on just the paper itself and not on the attainment of future writing perfection.

Kahle, David J. "Student Centered Vocabulary," English Journal, Vol. 61: No. 2 (February, 1972), 286-88.

An interesting approach to selecting words for vocabulary study by letting the students find them.

Morris, William. "The Dictionary as a Tool in Vocabulary Development Programs," English Journal, Vol. 59: No. 5 (May, 1970), 669-71.

Use of student prepared dictionary to stimulate interest and increase knowledge of the dictionary.

Mueller, Lavonne. "Stealing Apples: Creative Writing for All Students," English Journal, Vol. 61: No. 7 (October, 1972), 1020-25.

Author considers creative writing a necessity for three reasons: (1) the steal (using the ideas and styles of others, (2) the feel (immersion in the work) and (3) the real (using creative writing to cope with the environment.

Nurnberg, Maxwell. "Does It Make Any Difference to You?" Questions You Always Wanted to Ask About English* *but were afraid to raise your hand, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1972), pp. 2-6.

Some good examples of sentences which well illustrate the importance of correct grammar.

Olson, Dorothy C. "A Perfectly Normal Spelling Dilemma," English Journal, Vol. 58: No. 8. (November, 1969), 1220-22.

An interesting list of fifteen "facts" to ponder when planning a spelling program.

Perron, John D. "The Game of Writing," English Journal, Vol. 61: No. 1 (January, 1972), 92-99.

Some language games for the classroom to improve writing skills without a lot of teacher preparation time.

Petty, Walter T. and Mary E. Bowen. Slithery Snakes and Other Aids to Children's Writing, (New York: Meredith Publishing Company, 1967).

A creative collection of ideas for teaching writing. Though designed for young children, many ideas are adaptable for older students.

Rank, Hugh. "Audience-Directed Writing: Magazines and Personae," English Journal, Vol. 59: No. 3 (March, 1970), 405-408.

Students should be encouraged to write for a specific audience and that audience should not be the teacher.

Redd, Virginia P. "Teaching Writing in the Junior High School," English Journal, Vol. 59: No. 4 (April, 1970), 540-47.

Ways of motivating the junior high writer. Gives eight basic statements pertaining to motivating students of this age.

Robinson, Jerry (compiler). True Classroom Flubs and Fluffs: Actual Answers to Teachers' Questions, (New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1970).

For the teacher who hasn't built a file of student mistakes, this is a good humorous source.

Stanford, Gene. "Word Study That Works," English Journal, Vol. 60: No. 1 (January, 1971), 111-15.

A teacher's account of failure with word roots and prefixes and tests as a means of teaching vocabulary before discovering a method that worked with his students.

Strong, Jonathan. "The Short-Story Workshop," English Journal, Vol. 59: No. 6 (September, 1970) 811-823.

The author doesn't give rules for writing but a helpful "collection of tendencies of young short-story writers." Deals with character, action, narrator, etc.

Tate, Gary and Edward P. J. Corbett (eds). Teaching Freshman Composition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

Though designed for the graduate student teaching freshman composition, a collection of articles on composition helpful to any teacher of writing.

Ziegler, Isabelle. Creative Writing, (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1968).

A practical guide for the person interested in writing to sell.

Part 7

EVALUATION

Evaluation may be either formal or informal. Some will argue that informal evaluations are too subjective to be of value. Perhaps the argument is valid, but I continue to trust my observations and feelings when evaluating some areas of student behavior. To not do so would be to abandon evaluation of some objectives.

EVALUATION OF THE TEACHER

While we are forced by the system to evaluate students, it is easy to overlook an equally important: evaluation of ourselves. Periodically we need to try and take a look at ourselves as others see us.

The best way to get a good look at ourselves through different eyes is through the use of a videotape machine. It can be horrifyingly blunt. However, they are better than human observers because the machines do not try to be nice. Their quality is based on honesty of reproduction, not on the number of friends they have.

If videotaping is too much of a hassle or the equipment is not available, tape recording can be used in addition to or instead of videotaping. It is easier to use, less distracting, and of value in evaluating the nonvideo aspects of

teaching. It is especially helpful in keeping track of the teacher talk vs. student talk.

Comparing ourselves with other teachers can give us a guideline for self-evaluation. It is easy after several years of the same routine to convince ourselves we are doing the best we can. By looking around we may discover someone who is doing better than we are in some areas of teaching. If we try and profit from another's strengths, we become stronger. All too often, however, teachers become defensive when they see success and search for ways to tear down instead of self-improve.

Check lists and questionnaires found in numerous educational textbooks may be helpful. They may ask questions pertaining to areas we had not even considered. They make us stop and review our behavior so we can answer the questions.

Evaluation by students can be a frightening experience for the teacher. It is hard to leave our personalities so open to attack. Because there is a certain amount of risk involved that may be more damaging than helpful, I think it is better to restrict evaluations of teachers by students to course evaluations, not personality attacks. These evaluations are more helpful if they come periodically after specific units instead of only one at the end of the course.

Administrators often inherit the task of evaluating every teacher once or twice a school year. With some exceptions I do not believe the average administrator makes an effective

evaluator with regards to good teaching. Though administrators were once in the classroom, their perspective changes when they change job titles. It is amazing how quickly the realities of the classroom are forgotten once they are left behind.

EVALUATION OF THE STUDENT

How much should a teacher know about a student? Ideally, only those things which help the teacher help that student in the learning environment should be known. Those things which may negatively influence the teacher with regards to helping the student should not be known by the teacher.

Studies have shown that teachers' expectations of what their pupils can do affects what the student actually does. Should a teacher know that Johnny's test scores show that he reads in the bottom .5 percentile of his age group? Would this information make Johnny read more poorly because she expects him to read poorly, or would it help the teacher develop a program for Johnny that helps his reading? Is Johnny really that poor a reader, or is the test just a device to wreck his self-confidence?

I honestly do not know. Based on a recent television special dealing with testing, I want to shy away from test scores, yet, there are times I want to know how a certain student performed on a standardized test to give me an idea of the student's potential.

Regardless of the pros or cons of tests and scores, teachers are required to assign grades to students. I think it is important to stress to the student that the grade he/she receives is not an evaluation of him/her as a person, but merely our opinion of how well he/she met the course requirements. Unfortunately, parents often consider the grade a personal evaluation of their worth as parents.

When assigning grades it is important to have a system of grading—a system the students (and parents) can understand. This makes the grade less of a personal attack. The grade is a reflection of the student's work, not the teacher's whimsical ideas of what the student deserves.

This is not to say a teacher has to go "by the points" all of the time. It is within the philosophy of most teachers to upgrade some students because of supreme efforts by them. Some students are honestly doing the best they can. If "F" work is the best they can do, it is not within my conscience to fail them. I believe, however, a student should never be graded down because he/she is not working up to potential. If a student can earn top grades using a fraction of his/her mental energies, we should give him/her the top grades.

Student Self-Acceptance

For the dedicated psychologist studying self-concept changes, a series of elaborate personality tests could be administered to determine how well a student accepts him-/herself and how this acceptance may change over a given period

of time. However, for my purposes I trust the simpler approach of a composition in which the student is asked to write about how his/her feelings about him-/herself have changed. Not terribly scientific, perhaps, but effective nevertheless.

Acceptance of Others

To determine how well students accept each other, the composition approach may be helpful in some instances. However, I prefer to use my own observations of class interactions. The teacher is usually perceptive of conflicts and friendships among students if she tries to be.

Listening

I always thought I could evaluate how well a student was listening by visual observation. Some of the time this may be true. A sleeping student is not listening very well. However, I have decided many students have mastered the art of attentive appearance while listening to everything but the teacher.

When a teacher has to constantly repeat simple directions, she begins to suspect students are listening without hearing.

For specific listening exercises, short quizzes over the materials are probably the most effective way to evaluate listening skills.

Speaking

For my purposes, speech evaluation is simple: Was the student able to speak at the appropriate time in a manner that could be understood?

At some time I want some verbal contribution to a discussion from every student. It doesn't take much effort to know when a student has never participated.

For the extremely shy student it helps to make a special point to say something to them on an informal basis such as when they enter the room. By keeping it brief and on a lighter note, it helps the student relax and relaxation is important before the student will want to run the risk of participating.

If necessary, directly ask for a contribution from a student, but never preface it with a reference to his/her quietness or lack of participation. At first, ask questions that need only a short, simple reply.

Obviously, some people talk more than others. This will always happen, so the goal is not equal participation by all.

Reading

In the evaluation of reading my first concern is not with reading comprehension but with the amount of reading the student does. The student who reads a lot must have acceptable comprehension or he/she would not continue to read. The student who does not read much will automatically improve if he/she reads enough.

For the evaluation of reading skills when the student begins the course, I trust the students' estimation of their reading ability as much, if not more, than standardized reading scores. Students know how well they read and they will honestly tell the teacher who asks.

To evaluate whether or not the student's reading has improved during the semester is not easy. My main gauge for judging success with reading is how much I can get students to read. The evaluation of this is highly subjective.

I have considered asking the students to fill out a simple short questionnaire on how much they read before entering the class and how much they read during the class and how much they plan to read in the future. The problem is the results might be misleading if the research findings are accurate that ". . .there is no doubt that the very junior high schools with which we have been working since 1960 have reported the same sharp downturn in the independent reading of self-chosen books that Waples found, and at the very same point, at the end of Grade 8."¹¹ If ninth grade is the beginning of the end of the "reading era" the teacher should beware of a decline in reading quantity (not ability) during ninth grade.

The reading used for the Fear Unit is mainly for the study of writing techniques, therefore, the short story is the main criterion for evaluating whether or not the reading

¹¹Paul B. Diederich, "What Does Research in Reading Reveal—About Evaluation in Reading?" English Journal, Vol. 58: No. 6 (September, 1969), 864.

objectives were accomplished.

Writing

"Common sense and the experience of most teachers indicate that the research is accurate—that our grading and evaluation schemes, old or new, simple or sophisticated, have not led to significant improvement in student writing."¹² Discouraging? Of course. The time spent each year by English teachers grading student writing is astronomical and to think those millions of hours are doing so little good is truly depressing.

A ninth grader writes better than he/she did as a third grader. There has been improvement because of maturation and practice, but there has been improvement. Perhaps we should concentrate more on the positive than on the fact student writings are not perfect. No one ever achieves perfection in the use of the language anyway.

When evaluating writing it is important that the student understand the objectives of the assignment. Then it is easier to let the student know how close he/she came to attaining the goals. With the fear short stories, the object is to write a good story. That may sound too vague to be meaningful, but it is not. Students have read stories. They know what they consider good.

¹² Stephen N. Judy, "Writing for the Here and Now: An Approach to Assessing Student Writing," English Journal, Vol. 62: No. 1 (January, 1973), 70.

When the story is evaluated it is necessary for the evaluator to be as specific as possible on what made the story good or bad. The plot may have been exciting, but the story moved too fast for the reader to become excited. Maybe the plot was boring because so little happened, but the description of the cemetery was spine tingling. Often a student will write an exciting story but he/she fails to develop the main character enough for the reader to care what happens to him/her. Though there are many things involved in writing a good story, study the techniques so the student can use them well, but they need not be stated in the criteria for evaluation.

For the final evaluation of the short stories I have each paper graded by at least five students and once by me. I remove the names from the short stories and assign a code number. A class never grades a story of a member of that class. Hour two may grade papers from hours 1,3,5,6, and 7 only.

The student graders are asked to make at least one positive comment though there are no restrictions on the negative ones. They may then assign a letter grade, mainly because students are so used to thinking in terms of grades it helps them give their opinion of the story plus it helps the author interpret the evaluation better.

I have tried a separate form for each student grader and the single sheet and I think the single sheet is as valid plus it has the advantages of saving time and the graders enjoy reading the responses of other students. Frequently

graders will write comments to other graders with whom they strongly disagree.

The graders star papers they want read orally. A five star paper is always read.

I keep a supply of grading pencils available for the student graders to make the grading more "official" and to make it easier to spot the students' corrections.

Most students enjoy grading the short stories. I do not have trouble getting the minimum five student graders per story. Most stories have been graded anywhere from seven to ten times.

I then grade the story using a different colored pen than the students used so my comments can be sorted out if necessary.

Most of the time there is a general consensus on what grade a story receives, but occasionally I will discover an excellent story that was too subtle to be understood and appreciated by the average ninth grader. I give this kind of story a higher grade than the students did. If, on the other hand, I encounter a story which for some obscure reason or other, the student graders gave high marks I disagree with, I give the story a higher grade than I normally would have, though not necessarily the average of the ones given by the students. After all, the story succeeded with an intended audience.

When I grade I try to relax and enjoy the story. I approach it more as an editor looking for stories to "buy" than as a teacher. I mark the obvious errors and error

trends but I do not worry about the hundreds of mistakes I am sure I miss. As I tell my students, the story may get so exciting I forget about looking for mistakes.

When the grading is over, I remove the names of the graders from the grading form and return the papers to the owners. I then recollect the starred stories plus those the students feel should be regraded plus those the students are willing to donate to my growing file of student written fear stories.

Recommended Reading

Dieterich, Daniel J. "Composition Evaluation: Options and Advice," English Journal, Vol. 61: No. 8 (November, 1972), 1264-71.

A report on ways to evaluate composition: lay readers, computer evaluation, tape-grading, peer grading. Contains ERIC summaries pertaining to these areas.

_____, "What Does Research in Reading Reveal—About Evaluation in Reading?" English Journal, Vol. 58: No. 6 (September, 1969).

A summary of the research available on: Reading Comprehension Tests; scaled scores and Independent reading and company made tests on novels.

Hipple, Theodore W. "The Grader's Helpers—Colleagues, Peers, Scorecards," English Journal, Vol. 62: No. 5 (May, 1972), 690-93.

Helpful suggestions to save time on composition evaluations: (1) teachers in other courses should grade writing; (2) use student graders; (3) grade on only what was specifically told to the student as what would be evaluated on that particular lesson.

Judy, Stephen N. "Writing for the Here and Now: An Approach to Assessing Student Writing," English Journal, Vol 62: No. 1 (January, 1973), 69-79.

An approach to grading student writing by concentrating on just the paper itself and not on the attainment of future writing perfection.

Kehl, D.G. "The Art of Writing Evaluative Comments on Student Themes," English Journal, Vol. 59: No. 7 (October, 1970), 972-80.

Emphasize the importance of reacting to student writing with good written prose.

Vogler, Stephen H. "Grading Themes: A New Approach, A New Dimension," English Journal, Vol. 60: No. 1 (January, 1971), 70-74, 96.

The use of cassette tapes for grading student writing.

Part 8

SUMMARY

Fear is an excellent unit topic for language arts for several reasons:

1. Because of its high interest level, motivation for the students is practically automatic.
2. It renders itself well to creative writing which in turn may incorporate many language arts skills.
3. Materials are readily obtainable. Almost any English classroom has enough materials already available so that the unit may be piloted without additional purchases.
4. It meets a student need that is overlooked in the curricula.
5. It is an enjoyable experience for the teacher as well as the students.

For the teacher deciding how to approach the unit, it is helpful to briefly outline her educational philosophy to determine what parts of the unit are and are not compatible with that philosophy. If a teacher believes fears should be kept hidden or that discussing them only makes a person more fearful, the unit is incompatible with that teacher's philosophy and should not be considered. However, for the teacher who believes that language, both written and spoken, is an

effective way of coping with emotions and that getting problems out in the open is important for mental health, this unit offers hundreds of possibilities.

The objectives should then be carefully selected keeping in mind the personalities of the teacher, students, and component classes; community conditions which may be relevant to the topic; available materials and resources; and overall needs of the persons involved.

Implementation of the unit should evolve from the objectives. If an objective has been chosen as important, yet no provisions are made for accomplishing that goal, it should be removed from the program.

The choice of activities makes the unit personal, however, there needs to be a balance. The discussions are particularly important for the success of the program. The teacher who is uncomfortable with discussions should find this an excellent unit for improving her self-confidence with discussions. If the teacher avoids the discussions, the effectiveness of the unit is destroyed.

I have not listed the materials I use for several reasons: (1) I change so frequently because of the hundreds of choices which serve my objectives. (2) Much of the material needs to be updated regularly. A television program may be excellent for the topic, but it cannot be relied upon the following semester or year. (3) For the teacher first beginning the unit, it is easier, more efficient, and time saving to adapt materials familiar to her.

Evaluation of the unit is not unique to the program. The methods of grading vary from teacher to teacher and the only important thing is that evaluation needs to be done in some way.

For evaluating the short story, the method used may depend most on the teacher's student load. Since I have between 325 and 350 stories per year with this unit, I have had to search for easier, less time consuming methods of story evaluation than I would have needed had my number of students been small.

For every teacher who might do a fear unit, each program would be different. The main thing I hope would not vary would be the opening of an opportunity for students to express themselves on their fears.

FEAR: A UNIT OF STUDY FOR NINTH GRADE LANGUAGE ARTS

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1975

This report develops an English unit based on the theme of fear. The unit attempts to integrate the language arts skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Emphasis is also placed on improving student self-concept and acceptance of differences in others.

The main project of the unit is the writing of an original short story by each student developing some aspect of fear.

The organization of the unit is by:

1. The philosophy of the unit.
2. Objectives which were selected to support the philosophy.
3. The implementation of the unit based on lists of activities designed to accomplish the unit objectives.
4. Evaluation techniques to determine the accomplishments of the unit.

This report is offered as a guide for teachers interested in developing a similar unit. Though developed for ninth graders of heterogeneous groupings, it is organized such that the activities may be easily adjusted to meet a variety of teaching needs and situations.