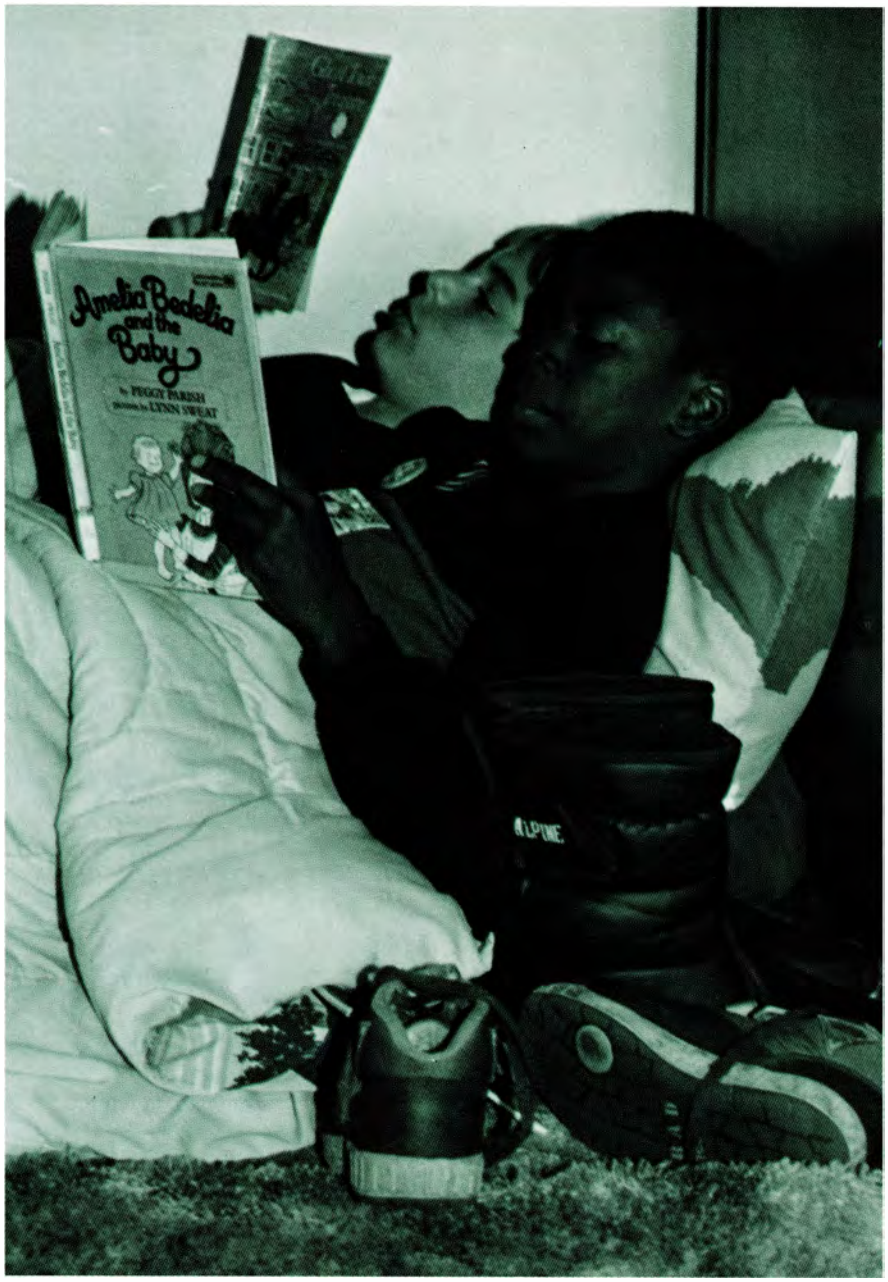
JOURNAL
CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS



READ AND GROW

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Editorial.

"Lick the Juice That May Run Down Your Chin"

BY LORNA VAN GILST

Some of us live in the books. My desk is surrounded by shelves of books. My kitchen table sits an arm's length from more books. I have a bookshelf headboard on my bed. Piles of books stack up on my dresser, on my piano, beside my favorite chair. I always slip a few books into my suitcase when I travel, and I keep one or two books in my car in case I get stranded somewhere with time on my hands.

I blame my compulsion to buy books on my parents. In the days of county school consolidation they used to go to one-room school sales and come home with gunnysacks full of used books. And we could each count on getting a new book from them every Christmas.

I know people who admit they rarely finish a book. They like to tell how they got through school on plagiarized book reports and yellow-striped Cliff's Notes. I feel sorry for those people, although they do not usually understand why. It seems to me that they have denied themselves the joy of tasting the real thing.

Poet Eve Merriam tells us "How to Eat a Poem." She starts her poem with these striking words:

> Don't be polite.
> Bite in.
> Pick it up with your fingers
> and lick the juice that may
> run down your chin.
> It is ready and ripe now, whenever you are . . . .

Perhaps the same is true for all worthwhile reading material. Readers have to bite in and get their faces and fingers immersed in the ripe juices to fully taste the richness.

Some people argue that they don't read because they don't like to read. I think they probably mean they are not motivated to read, or perhaps not motivated to read a certain piece of writing. I have yet to find a child who has never enjoyed having someone read him or her a story. In fact, I have seen junior high students awed by Rosemary Sutcliff's *Warrior Scarlet* and entertained by Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. I have seen young men in college moved to tears by Walter Wangerin's "The Empty Manger." If the story is ripe and the reader is ready, that reader will taste the richness of the writing.

The distaste develops, I suspect, when we try too hard to make somebody like our favorites. My father will never like stewed tomatoes, and I will never like coconut. Both of us loathe liver. Perhaps we have subconsciously chosen not to try. Nevertheless, we refuse what we dislike unless we find ourselves in a situation where mind must submit to manners. Readers make choices too, choices to avoid certain kinds of writing. Maybe they would like fantasy if they had to read it, but maybe some will never give fantasy a chance because no one has opened their minds to its qualities. Some people will never try a Dickens novel because they have a preconceived notion they won't like it. Some of us will never read scientific journals because we do not or will not develop a taste for them. All the same, if I am enrolled in a science class or if scientific information influences my own field of study, I had better develop my taste for scientific journals.

The need for information is a built-in motivation to read, of course. Virtual non-readers come alive when they need to read drivers' education manuals or risk failing the test. Along with that negative motivation of looming failure exists the positive incentive to get on the road.

We teachers must consider how we can design assignments that give students a natural incentive to read, aside from the threat of failure. We can encourage our students to discover fascinating storehouses of information if we build in incentives and direct the students toward appropriate resources. If we once get them into the storehouse, some will return again and again.

Unfortunately, some teachers do very little reading themselves. Overwhelmed by class preparation, hall monitor duty, unchecked papers, faculty meetings, and basketball games, they sigh that when they finally get home and drop onto the couch they need an entertaining television show or a few minutes to romp with the kids. I can understand their reasoning. On the other hand, they will probably find that reading, like exercise, can energize them if they read magazines and books that strengthen and enlarge their vision. But readers must be willing to be stretched for reading to help them grow. Perhaps administrators can build the incentives for teachers to do professional reading by referring teachers to particular books and articles and making copies available. The principal may sit down over coffee with a handful of teachers to discuss certain professional articles, or perhaps the entire faculty should be directed to certain reading materials. However encouragement is given, it will probably not work to require teachers to do assigned reading unless the topics are pertinent and the discussions lively and helpful. In that respect, teachers are no different from students.

I cannot recall ever meeting a pre-school child who hated storytime. I can recall several occasions when a first grade nephew asked me to listen while he proudly demonstrated his new ability to

read to me instead of my reading to him. Sadly, though, I do know young people who, somewhere in the later school years, have developed a strong dislike for reading. When I question those people about why they dislike reading, I usually get the following responses:

- We have to write book reports, which takes away the fun of reading.
- We spent six weeks on a book in class, and I had it finished the first week. I got bored.
- We have to read stuff I can't understand.
- The teacher tells us what we should get out of the book, but I think he makes up some of that stuff. Why do we have to analyze books so much?

In our attempt to help students get the full benefit of an excellent book, we sometimes kill the enjoyment of reading. In my early years of teaching I believe I was guilty of overteaching certain novels. I combed through each chapter for precise details and challenging vocabulary words, which I asked my students to recall and reproduce on quizzes and tests. Perhaps I thought I could transfer all the insights of my repeated readings to them by asking them to memorize my personal encounters with the literature. Predictably, boredom set in. Continuity and vitality were lost. I had to learn that the students need to make their own connections with the story if they are to appreciate it as much as I do.

Teachers must avoid the cod liver oil approach to literature: pinch the nose and force it in. Rather, our role in helping students consists more of whetting their appetites and providing pleasant opportunities for them to develop a taste for the literature.

Teachers are quick to say, "Students don't know what is good for them. We must not stop pushing them to read more." I think we must listen, however, and consider how we can encourage positive responses to reading while also nudging students to grow, for ultimately we hope they come to enjoy reading without having to be assigned to read.

Maybe traditional book reports ought to be replaced. A former student of G. Robert Carlsen (well-known for *Books and the Teenage Reader*) commends a teacher who used a reading wheel with spokes designating different genres of reading, which the students filled in during a school year. Another teacher remembers recording twenty new facts from the book in place of writing a formal book review (*Voices of Readers: How We Come to Love Books,* Illinois, National Council of Teachers of English 1988). Creative teachers can make book review projects as intriguing as the reading itself.

As readers gain maturity, reviews should replace reports. Gradually students ought to consider whether or not they appreciate the books they read and why. We need to help them listen to the sounds of the language as well as to the stories, for language on the page is a gift as capable of demonstrating creativity as the artist's sketch on the canvas.

Teachers surely ought to allow students to read books the students understand, but gradually they should edge readers into more and more challenging books, or more thought-provoking discussion of interpretation. Yet the effect is lost if teachers tell students what to think rather than lead students to points of discovery.

Most significant of all, whatever we read, whether informational or recreational, will have meaning and value for readers only if they can relate what they read to life. However, if students fly through books only to say they have completed every book on the required list, they will have missed the point of reading. Somewhere within the process, the reader needs to judge whether or not the writer reveals truth, or even intends to do so. A well-written story will give us a reflection of life—it will show us a universal truth, or the distortion of truth.

That is not to say all reading must be functional. Indeed, we spend too much time wrapping books' messages into neat packages that tell us how to solve life's problems. Perhaps my British instructor's concern was valid when he stated last summer, "You Americans always try so hard to make books do things for you. You seem to think reading a good book will change you. But you don't really become a different person by reading a book."

I suspect he is correct. Books don't change our natures, but they can move us as we read them. I find my own students wanting to endorse only those books that satisfactorily resolve conflicts in the lives of the protagonists. But today's literature is more realistic than that of the 1950s, and some of earth's problems do not resolve themselves. Whereas the writers of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries wrote stories to teach moral lessons, today's new realism writers seem more intent on showing that characters who make wrong choices must live with the subsequently evil results. Consequently, some books reflect the terrible tension between God's harmonious creation and man's devastating effects. Thus we get disturbing heroes such as Robert Cormier's Archie Costello, who wields power that devastates protagonists without resolve.

May Christian teachers direct readers to such books? Doesn't commitment to Christ require us to select literature in which resolution supports God's overarching theme that Christ is Lord? In earlier days I would have agreed. But now I believe literature must help students learn to recognize the tension that exists between eternal heaven and time-bound earth. And if we think such tension always resolves within human perspective, we deceive ourselves.

In one sense, perhaps, my instructor is wrong. We should expect to be changed by what we read. We should learn from what we read. We should grow wiser about conflict so we may carry away with us the comfort that a character or an author understands faith in God or the concern that such faith is absent. In reality, the greatest value of reading may occur in the act itself, when the reader takes words from the page and transforms them into one's own personal experience, when the reader actually bites in and feels the juice run down the chin. **CEJ**

Should Christians Read "Dirty Books"?

BY BARBARA PELL

As an English professor specializing in contemporary fiction, I am commonly called to defend my subject against the criticisms of many sincere, well-meaning Christians who classify most modern realistic novels as "dirty books" and repudiate them with the good advice from Philippians 4:8. It is a difficult and ongoing process to develop a scriptural perspective and discernment concerning the modern literature that a Christian teacher should read and teach, but let me suggest a few guidelines that I have tentatively arrived at.

Literature is concerned about ultimate reality and value. One of the objectives of my English courses is listed as follows:

> To explore how the literary artist, in his attempt to transmute the apparently random elements of the human condition into the ordered structure of significant form, can disclose in his own aesthetic way truths about God, man, and the world.

And there is not much conflict or controversy for the Christian in studying English literature from the middle ages to the nineteenth century. This is because the world views and values expressed in the greatest works—from Chaucer to Tennyson—were largely the products of Christian minds and/or predominantly Christian societies. Therefore, the study of these masterpieces can deepen our appreciation of (in the words of the Anglican Prayer Book) "all that is beautiful in creation and in the lives of people," and strengthen our understanding of man's creative, and sometimes destructive, powers in the context of God's purpose and judgement.

Therefore, as Christian teachers, we have to develop our perspective on literature with a sensitivity to the theological themes, the human values, and the technical dynamics being developed in these classic examples of human creativity. Because literature appeals to the heart as well as the head, the emotions as well as the intellect, it has always been a powerful vehicle for religious vision and experience. Like the parables that Jesus used to embody his teachings, literary works have often been the theological "word" made "flesh" of human experience, or (in the words of one of the finest Christian novelists of the twentieth century, Graham Greene) "metaphysics worked in concrete."

But what about modern literature, now the product of a post-Christian worldview, and written almost entirely by and for people who are ignorant of, uncaring of, and even hostile toward Christianity? Twentieth century literature has provoked violent opposition, and even censorship, from many Christians for its content and themes, because the relentless realism in modern writing now mirrors a world in which morally "anything goes." Instances of human depravity—violence, sexual perversion and exploitation, and blasphemy—abound in contemporary fiction, drama, and poetry. This graphic naturalism is a result of a change in literacy theory (beginning in the nineteenth century) that has replaced an artificial decorum in literature with the real actions

and real language of real people, often in the most sordid and unpleasant areas of society.

How should the Christian reader react to offensive language, characters, and incidents? First of all, let us remember that Christianity in North America is largely a middle-class religion. So let us honestly ask ourselves if our reaction to some of the coarseness and vulgarity in modern literature is based on theological discernment or middle-class squeamishness. I was once told that some naturalistic scenes in a contemporary novel that particularly offended me were moderate compared to the scenes of human squalor and hopelessness witnessed by my friend, who was a public health nurse in a city slum. She implied that if I could get out of my ivory tower and my middle-class suburban community and experience the degradation and suffering of the majority of the world's people, if only through the realism of a modern novel, maybe I could begin to understand what the nurses and social workers and street missions were trying to do in a society where one couldn't run away from the consequences of human sin and need simply by closing the covers of a book.

On the other hand, in some modern literature, the scenes of human sinfulness—especially sexuality—are portrayed very attractively, even seductively. This is a problem for Christians, but not one to be solved by a censorship with scissors, or a concentration on those scenes without a consideration of the rest of the book. In *serious* contemporary literature (the only kind I am defending), the sex scenes and even the blasphemous language are a relatively small part of the total words and pages. And they are of literary necessity integrated into the development of character, plot, and theme.

Actually more serious than the problem of form—the incidents of sex, violence, or blasphemy in contemporary literature that have been easier and more obvious for many Christian critics to seize on—is the deeper problem of meaning. In its realistic depiction of a post-Christian world, much modern literature portrays themes of existential meaninglessness and moral relativism. As Sartre said: "If God is dead, everything is possible." The majority of modern literature portrays an insensitive and mechanical universe, indifferent to man's goals or aspirations, seemingly without ultimate meaning or purpose. Man journeys toward inevitable death in fear and anxiety, "doomed but not damned." It is a world in which Christian truth has been undermined by scientific rationalism and existentialist philosophy, a world which, Paul tells us, we should be "in" but not "of." But if we are to be "in" it and minister to it, we must understand it, and there is no better way intellectually and emotionally to empathize with our fallen world than through the creative portrayals of its literature. It is dangerous to submerge oneself in the faithless world without faith and without prayer to illuminate it, but it is equally irresponsible simply to dismiss it with smug self-righteousness and uninformed Phariseeism.

Let me leave you with some practical suggestions for reading and teaching modern literature (the so-called "dirty books") as a Christian:

1 I do not believe that Christian adults need to be "protected" from reading serious modern literature, but rather they need to develop a scriptural perspective and prayerful discernment concerning the literary and theological values in it. And this applies to modern "Christian" literature (from O' Connor to Updike) as much as to secular books.

2 I will, however, leave it to other teachers at the elementary and junior secondary level to establish the guidelines for what modern literature is helpful and what is detrimental to the maturation process of their young students. I think it is naive, however, to suggest that students over sixteen are going to be morally corrupted by literature selections that are relatively innocuous compared to the influences of their popular culture and contemporary society.

3 "Serious modern literature" obviously does not mean deliberate pornography or popular garbage. We do not know what contemporary literature will stand the test of time and be termed "great classics." But it is not so difficult for teachers to determine those books with aspirations to a serious treatment of society and human experience and to guide their students with those criteria.

4 When we read those books let us not overemphasize the sex scenes or swear words. Rather let us look for the themes of human suffering, the questions about the values of human existence that the author tries to answer or, perhaps, only asks desperately. These are questions for which we realize that Christ is the answer, but maybe we will be able to present him more effectively if we really understand the question first. The philosopher Karl Jaspers said, "God is encountered in the 'limit-situations' of human existence (sin, guilt, suffering, death)." Therefore, Christians must *share the concerns* of those crisis situations in order to communicate the Gospel.

5 Therefore, let us not react to these honest and creative portraits of contemporary human existence with smug self-righteousness or paranoid rejection. Rather, let us view these portrayals of human suffering and doubt—of positive values and of values that show the poverty of a world without God—with compassion, sensitivity, and a larger Christian perspective that realistically recognizes the depths of man's sinfulness but also the tremendous potential of God's grace. For remember, if God is the answer, we don't have to be afraid of the question. **CEJ**

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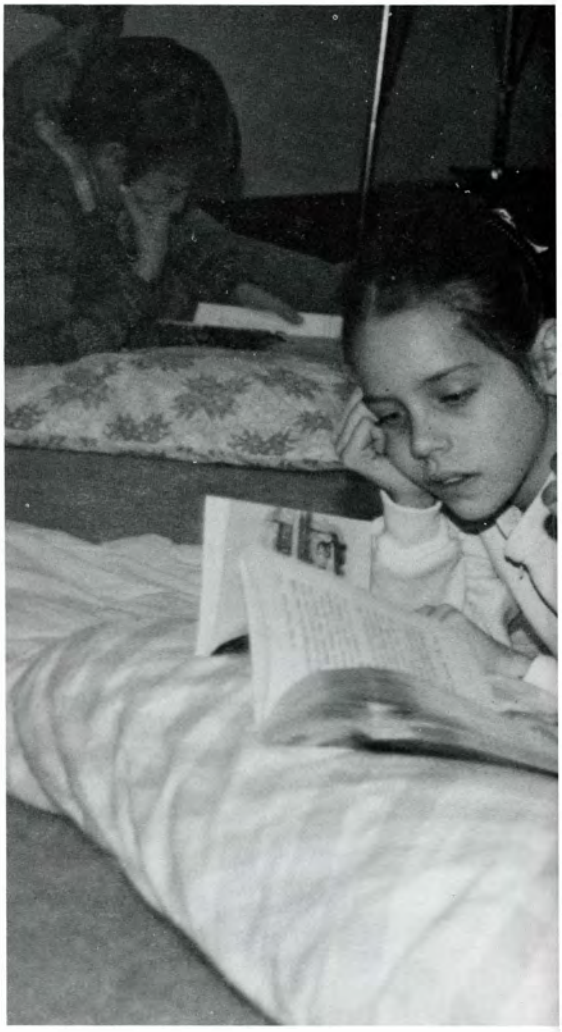
What Should Children Read?

BY LOUISE HULST



Christian parents, teachers, and librarians agree that children should be taught to read and to read well. We also agree that children should be encouraged to read and to develop the life-long pleasure of reading. Ever since 1955 when Rudolf Flesch wrote *Why Johnny Can't Read*, there has been a plethora of books and articles explaining why children can't or don't read, but only a handful suggesting what they should read.

Supplying children with interesting, mind-expanding books can contribute to their moral, intellectual, and emotional development. Good books can also motivate them to value reading. However, if you examine children's books, you'll find that many are trite, dull, or unchallenging.

What makes a quality children's book? There are some recognized standards. It is not simply a matter of "I like it," or "I don't like it." Taste in books must be developed.

A look at the literary elements of a book can help in judging its quality. Literary critics point to seven elements: plot, character, theme, style, setting, point of view, and tone. For children's fiction, a glance at the first four of these elements is usually enough to separate inferior from outstanding books.

To evaluate a book of fiction, first judge the plot. There should be some conflict, some unresolved problem that keeps the interest of the reader. Even the simplest stories have conflict. Will the wolf get the Three Little Pigs? But, although some conflict is essential, beware of sensationalism or unrelieved tension. Good stories have foreshadowing—subtle hints that everything is going to be resolved satisfactorily.

Watch out, too, for potentially frightening situations that can apply to the child's own life. For example, there is a children's book titled *Mr. and Mrs. Pig's Evening Out*, by Mary Rayner. In this book the pig children are left with a babysitter who is really a wolf in babysitter's clothing. The problem is resolved happily because of the ingenuity of the pig children, but why suggest to children that parents might leave them with someone who is dangerous?

Next look at the characters in the book. Whether toys or animals, human or superhuman, the characters must ring true. They should be worthy role-models, or such exaggerations that children see the consequences of outrageous behavior. Social groups should be portrayed honestly. Avoid books with stereotypes of races, women, the elderly, the handicapped, or any other group.

The theme or message of the book for children should always present sound values. There should be a clear line between right and wrong, and it should be obvious that sin or improper behavior brings negative consequences. Children should be able to benefit from the message of the book. Although children do not have to be shielded from life's problems, neither should they be carelessly or, even worse, deliberately exposed to terrifying situations.

Most children love Dr. Seuss and have learned to expect rollicking humor in his books. But in 1984, on his eightieth birthday, Dr. Seuss came out with his first new book in recent years titled *The Butter Battle Book.* It is a description of the arms race but gives no resolution. The book ends, "Who's going to drop it? Will *you*. . .? Will *he*. . .? 'Be patient,' said Grandpa. 'We'll see. We will see. . .'." One reviewer called the book "a bitter polemic." Children shouldn't have to read that kind of book. Their books should give them courage to face life's problems and the confidence that problems can be solved.

How the author says what he or she says is also important. The book should have vivid word pictures and colorful descriptions, introducing new words and ideas in a unique way. Avoid books that are moralistic or didactic.

Principles shouldn't be preached, they should be implicit. A good writer has something worth saying, says it in the best possible way, and respects the child's ability to understand.

Let's apply these suggestions to some familiar types of books.

First let's look at a typical Nancy Drew book. The plot is usually adequate. There's an interesting puzzle to solve, with plenty of exciting episodes along the way to the solution. The characters, however, are weak with no character development. Nancy has been 17 for fifty years. And she is unrealistic in the amount of freedom she has. The other characters tend to be stereotypes. The bad guys are dark with Italian or Greek names; the good guys are fair with Anglo-Saxon names.

There is no meaningful theme, but the message is clear. Young people can accomplish many things that adults cannot, and adults are basically unimportant in the lives of the young. This is certainly not the message Christian parents or teachers want young people to hear. The style of the book is trite. No new images are evoked, no colorful word pictures painted.

Nancy Drew books' only value is that they tell an exciting story and so lure reluctant readers into reading. Nevertheless, children should not be allowed to linger too long in this reading stage.

Next, apply the standard to books based on licensed characters, usually popular television shows or toys, such as Care-Bears, Smurfs, He-Man, or Sesame Street. These books are message books. They have a clearly stated theme: be kind, be a friend, cooperate, be honest. Although these values are important, these books have little plot, unbelievable characters, and dreary style. They offer nothing but a message. Children like them because they recognize the characters, but these books are not good literature.

Another type of book to evaluate is the "ad hoc" book, one written for a particular purpose. When there is a topic of current interest, the market is flooded with hastily written books on that topic. Past topics have included death, divorce, teen-age pregnancy, drugs, homosexuality, and mental illness. The current hot topics are abuse and nuclear war. These, too, are message books designed to get information to the older reader. Often they have little plot, matter-of-fact style, and weak characterizations; and the themes are dealt with in either a sensational or titillating way.

A final type of book includes those referred to as "Christian" books. This category is hard to define, but it includes books whose characters are or become Christians, those books that present the message of salvation or a strong moral lesson, and those books with Christian themes. It seems irreligious to criticize these books, but evaluate the plot, characters, themes, and styles of these books, too. With few exceptions, they fail the test. Often they are poorly written, uninteresting, and unrealistic.

Good books from general publishers can communicate values that are Christian: love of God, love of family, faith, honesty, courage, compassion. These books can produce awe, wonder, and respect for the world that God has made or that he has allowed man to discover. Gladys Hunt in *Honey for a Child's Heart* (Zondervan 1969) says it best: "Generally it is better to acquaint your child with a book of quality than with second rate writing where the plot is only a thin disguise for dumping the Christian message."

There are many fine, quality books for children. Authors such as Gladys Hunt in the book mentioned above, Jim Trelease in his *Read-Aloud Handbook* (Penguin Books 1985), and Madeleine L'Engle in *Trailing Clouds of Glory* (Westminster Press 1985) recommend excellent children's books. **CEJ**

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Ramona Reading Club Welcomes Your Membership

BY NELLENE DUIMSTRA

Children learn to enjoy reading by reading books. Although this statement is obviously true, we as teachers do not always focus on ways to get children and books together. Children need help in making the transition from learning to read to becoming independent readers. For most children this does not happen automatically. They need to be motivated and they need to be guided.

To help my students develop the reading habit and a lifelong love for reading I have been using what I call "Reading Clubs." Each month I drive to the public library with a couple of strong boxes in my trunk. I pick out about fifty books, lug them up to the circulation desk, smile at the librarian, and check out the books. Arriving back at school, I combine these books with several from my own paperback collection. I am now ready to set out books for eight to ten different reading clubs from which my students can select books for their independent reading.

Each club consists of a group of eight to twelve books by a particular author or on a particular theme. As I select the monthly clubs I make sure that the books consist of a wide range of reading levels to suit my class. (Since I teach third and fourth graders I need books that range from first to sixth grade level.) I also select different types of books, such as realistic fiction, fantasy, and non-fiction. I usually include a club of mystery books, sport books, or animal stories so there is a level and type of book suited to everyone. I have included one month's sample list of reading clubs at the end of the article.

In my classroom I have a reading corner with an inviting book display. Discarded plastic greeting card racks make wonderful book holders because the front covers of books are visible. These are used for three or four clubs and other clubs are grouped together on the shelf. The names of all the monthly clubs are printed on large cards on the reading corner bulletin board.

Excitement mounts on the first Monday of each month as my students hurry back to the reading corner to check out the new clubs. Early in the day I introduce the new books to them. We talk about

***RULE OF THUMB**

Open the book to a page with much writing on it. Read that page. If you come to a word you don't know, put down your thumb. If you come to another word you don't know, put down the first finger of that same hand. Each time you come to an unknown word on that page, put down another finger. If all the fingers of one hand are down before you finish that page, the book is probably too hard for you, and you should look for another.

Jennifer Striebel and Kristina Hall share a pillow during a read-in.

the content of each book as well as the reading level. Students are taught in September how to use the "Rule of Thumb"* to pick a book which is not too hard for them. By the time I have finished introducing the books (30-45 minutes), almost everyone knows which book he or she wants to read first. Then the reading begins!

Every day I give my students time to read. I also encourage them to take the books home and read each night. Students keep a record of their reading by using reading club sheets. To make these sheets, I simply photocopy a picture from one of the books and draw lines underneath it, then place several of the sheets in a pocket folder for each club. As students finish a book they take a reading club sheet from the appropriate folder, write the name of the book they have read on the line, and place it in their individual reading folders so that by the end of the year they have a record of all the books they have read.

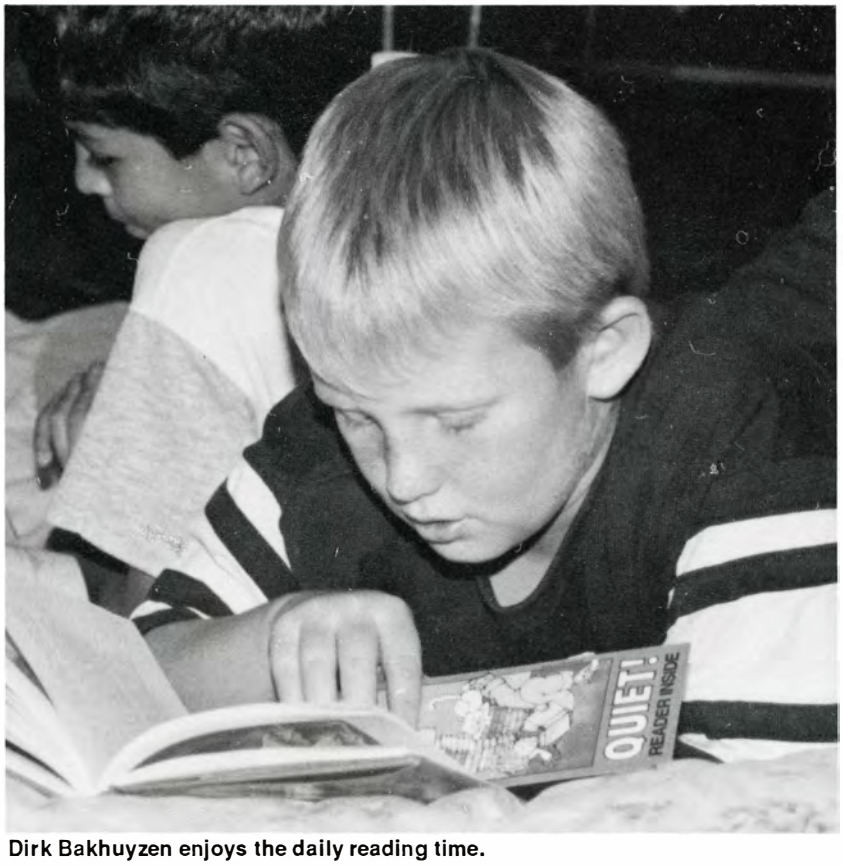
Students do not have to read all the books in one club before they move on to another club. They also do not have to make reports on the books they read. My objective here is reading for enjoyment, so I keep to a bare minimum any other requirements in this part of my reading program. I feel that there is nothing that can kill the love of reading more than knowing that when you finish a book an assignment awaits you.

We do share our reading in ways that are fun. We build a construction paper bookworm high on the classroom wall as the students add a segment from each book they complete. We dress up like a favorite book character one day during National Book Week in November. We do art projects such as dioramas and life-sized drawings or papier-maché heads of book characters. We share in the fun of reading together when we hold our class "read-ins." On read-in days we bring our sleeping bags and pillows so that we can push back our tables, lie on the floor, and read. We try to have four read-ins each year. The first one lasts one-fourth of the day. If that goes well, our next one comes about midway through the year and lasts one-half day. If the students show they can enjoy reading that long, we move to three-fourths of the day and finally to an all-day read-in near the end of the year.

I also integrate reading clubs with the rest of my curriculum. For example, if we are studying pioneers, one reading club that month would be the "Laura Ingalls Wilder Club." In February when we study famous people such as Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, and Martin Luther King I have a "Biographies Club." One year when we had a unit on disabilities we had two clubs that tied into that unit. One was a non-fiction club consisting of books about children with disabilities. Another was a club made up of books by Jean Little who writes books using characters with disabilities. I also integrate reading clubs with language as we write letters to authors or act out plays based on books.

I have found that reading clubs have helped me as a teacher to motivate, guide, and inspire my students to become readers because they have discovered that reading is fun, exciting, and interesting. When I asked my students why they liked reading clubs, Erica wrote, "I like reading clubs because books are fun to read. They make me feel like I am in the book. Books are [an] enjoyment to me."

CEJ



Dirk Bakhuyzen enjoys the daily reading time.

Reading: An Interactive Process

BY ARDEN RUTH POST

"C-a-t," sounds out Jamie, "Cat!" He proceeds along the line of print, "The cat ran up the t____." He hesitates.

"Sound it out," says his teacher.

"T-r-ee, tree!" exclaims Jamie.

In a neighboring school Janna is also encountering new reading materials. "What do you think this story will be about?" asks her teacher. "What words may be included?" When Janna comes to an unknown word, she is asked to make a prediction, based on her hypotheses about the story and the content which she has encountered thus far.

Both Jamie and Janna are involved in reading instruction in the classroom. Two very different approaches are in use, representing divergent opinions of what reading is. Which teacher is using the better method of instruction? The answer is not simple and suggests a brief review of the state of the art in reading, as well as some implications for a new model, combining the best of the two approaches used in the examples.

Approaches to Reading Instruction

One theory of reading suggests that reading is a bottom-up process in which the reader tackles individual words by sight or sound, proceeds through a sentence, and arrives at a whole paragraph. Meaning should result. This is often called a text-based, or code- emphasis approach; it is the approach Jamie was using.

A second popular view is the top-down approach. Readers hypothesize about meaning and read to confirm or disprove their

own hypotheses. They attend to smaller units of text—words and letters—only to facilitate hypothesis testing, or meaning confirmation. This is called the meaning-emphasis, or concept-driven approach; it is the approach Janna was using.

At this point we could stop and select either approach to reading instruction. However, are we doing justice to the complex process in which the readers engage from the time they open a first reader until the time they complete an advanced chemistry textbook? I think not. Reading is more than adding together what is on a printed page, more than a compilation of sounds and words. Simply stated, the whole of a passage is more than the sum of its parts. However, it can also be said that these very parts—sounds and words—contribute to the meaning one is in the process of obtaining and confirming.

Another view of reading is suggested, one that has a great deal of current appeal and widespread acceptance in the field of reading. This third and most recent view sees reading as an interactive process, the interaction of the basic skills suggested in the first approach and the meaning imposed by the reader in the second approach. The interactive view has widespread appeal because it makes sense and combines the strengths of two other emphases. By defining reading as an interactive process we are compelled to examine many interactions which occur and which make a significant impact upon the students we teach from elementary school through college.

Compatibility with Christian Education

Furthermore, there is an even more compelling reason for the Christian educator to examine the interactive aspects of reading. Christian education is itself an interactive process. According to Christian Schools International it involves three interacting goals: intellectual, decisional, and creative. The interactive view of reading is more compatible with these goals than are the bottom-up or top-down models. By providing a comprehensive approach to reading, the interactive view fosters intellectual growth—the student's capacity to know and understand—by means of specific skills as well as by probing for meaning. Just as intellectual growth should involve more than fact gathering, so should reading involve more than skill acquisition. The interactive view encourages thinking, understanding relationships, testing hypotheses, and drawing conclusions, as the student progresses in wisdom and insight.

Establishing the basis for intellectual growth leads logically to a consideration of decisional and creative growth. In decisional growth, students who have been exposed to the interactive model of reading have gained the capacity to critically evaluate what they read and learn, to consider moral options, and to make responsible choices. The way is paved for the students' active responses to life, the goal of creative growth. They have participated actively in the process of sorting out information and making decisions, becoming active learners who are preparing to lead productive Christian lives. Implied by these three goals is a compatibility among them and the teaching-learning process and the curricular offerings of the school. Is it not appropriate, then, that we examine reading, a prime subject area and a necessary educational skill, for the interactions which are involved in it?

The Interactions Involved in Reading

1 Reading is interacting with language that has been coded into print. It involves making sense of written language. (Gillet and Temple, Hennings, May). Anyone who has tried to teach foreign language speakers to read a basal reader or content area text in English knows the importance of oral language facility for reading. Knowledge of sound-symbol relationships, sentence structure, and word meanings, including idiomatic expressions, is imperative for comprehending the written word. Furthermore, these types of language knowledge are first encountered and developed orally. The implication is that oral language development is a prerequisite to reading at any age.

2 Reading involves the interaction of prior knowledge with the new information in the text. (Anderson and Pearson, Durkin, Pearson).

Elementary teachers are familiar with the process of introducing reading material. A typical scene might involve the following: "We are going to read a story about hamsters. Do any of you children have pets? Does anyone have a pet hamster? What can you tell us about hamsters?" Such introductory questions lead to motivation for reading and are followed by setting a purpose for reading and introducing vocabulary that will be encountered. Prior knowledge is activated and the stage is set for acquiring new information.

The implication is two-fold: (1) Some students do not have the prior knowledge or the background of information needed for reading, and they impose greater demands on the teacher to assist them in developing it. (2) Content area reading requires a similar activation or development of prior knowledge if chapters in history or science are to become meaningful. It is the activation of relevant prior knowledge and experience for content area reading that we teachers often neglect.

3 Reading involves the interaction between the reader's schema, or expectations, for the text structure and the actual structure of the text. (Meyer and Rice, Pearson, Stein and Glenn). Research has shown that beginning readers who expect to find certain kinds of information in stories—for example, characters, time, place (setting), a theme, series of events, and ending—do comprehend and recall stories better than those who have not such expectations. Likewise, older readers need to be clued in to the structure of content area texts, such as use of taxonomy, chronology, cause and effect, comparison-contrast, or expository-explanatory patterns of text structure.

This interaction implies that we need to clue our students in to the way texts are organized. In

addition, we can prepare diagrams, open outlines, guided questions, or pattern guides for them to use while reading. I have found many college students who appreciated this reading assistance when beginning a new course or discipline of study.

4 The reading act itself requires the interaction of several levels or types of specific reading skills. (Anderson, Hasenstab and Laughton. At the lowest level there exist the skills wherein the reader recognizes words by sight, or automatically, and by phonetic analysis of letter combinations and syllables. The second level involves knowledge of parts of speech and the way sentences are structured. The third level focuses on vocabulary, or word meanings, which combine into sentence meaning. The fourth level includes more intangible aspects: the author's purpose for writing, the intended audience, the style in which she or he writes, and the kinds of information she or he expects the audience to possess. Finally, a fifth level calls attention to the whole text or passage and asks such questions as, "How does the passage hang together? How do sentences and paragraphs relate to each other?" The focus here is on text cohesion.

A word of caution should be introduced here regarding the use of these levels. A hierarchy of skills, in which readers necessarily approach text from the lowest level and proceed to use of the highest level, is *not* suggested. Instead, it is suggested that readers approach the text at the level in which they are comfortable with the material. A good general approach may actually begin at the fifth level, text cohesion, in order to get the gist of the passage and then proceed through use of other level skills as necessary to obtain meaning.

The implication of this fourth interaction is that readers need to be aware of all five levels or types of skills to use in reading. Attention to these five skill areas is the responsibility of the teacher. By neglecting the higher levels and focusing on the first three mentioned above, we run the risk of not seeing the forest because of all the trees.

5 Reading involves the interaction between the teacher, who assigns the reading, and the student, who is assigned to read. Such a statement may appear far removed from the previous interactions. It goes beyond the text and brings in personalities. Since the very nature of our educational system involves teacher-learner interaction, it is important to consider how this interaction affects reading.

Recently, I did an informal study among some junior high school students about their favorite classes. I found that the name of the subject made very little difference, whether it was science, history, Bible, or English. Enthusiasm for a class was determined more by the person teaching the class. This carried over into the reading assignments for the classes. The teachers who made learning come alive by their enthusiasm and originality infected their students with this enthusiasm and infused the textbook with appeal and attraction. The teacher's own excitement with the subject of instruction *and* the written word was conveyed to the students.

The implication is that the approach we bring to the classes we teach results in attitudes our students carry over to the reading assigned for the class. Furthermore, our own attitudes toward reading encourage or discourage our students in their reading.

To summarize, I suggest that the interactive view of reading flows logically from the three interacting goals of Christian education. Beversluis argues, "that the three kinds of educational growth. . .can most directly and most suitably. . .meet the nature and needs of young persons," and these goals further suggest ". . .a careful selection of the curriculum pattern that will most directly promote these kinds of growth" (62). Because of the pervasive nature of reading we must recognize the needs of young persons to study a curricular area, to learn a skill, to have a medium for content subject learning, and to enjoy a means for critical thinking and decision making. The product is an active learner who is preparing to lead the Christian life. Can we do any less than to examine the important implications which the interactive process of reading suggests as we plan our reading programs and instruction? **CEJ**

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Swinging Off the Popcorn Beat

BY MARY ELIZABETH MUELLER

"Honey, your corn's popping!" I yelled as a steady staccato tap exploded from the stove. "Better hurry or you'll have popcorn everywhere."

"Coming!" shouted my husband from the back of the house. Smiling at the fragrance of freshly popping corn, I picked up my newspaper and settled back comfortably in my easy chair. Although I tried to concentrate again on the front page, my attention was soon riveted to the rhythm of pop, pop-pop, pop-pop-pop-pop, and soon I found myself reading silently to this peculiar beat.

"You're popcorning it, just like your elementary students," I scolded myself.

Instantly, my thoughts flashed back to yesterday morning's tutoring session.

"Now, Laurie," I heard myself say to my youngest student, "why don't we read your assignment now? Can you read this page for me, honey?"

The little blonde girl quickly shook her head; however, her doubtful blue eyes quietly searched my face for encouragement. Leaning back in my chair, I remembered smiling and nodding affectionately at her to begin.

"I-see-you. Ann-sees-you," she had stammered.

Now I grimaced as I recalled how painfully belabored each word had sounded.

I wonder why she can't seem to understand anything she reads, I mused. She's only in the preprimer.

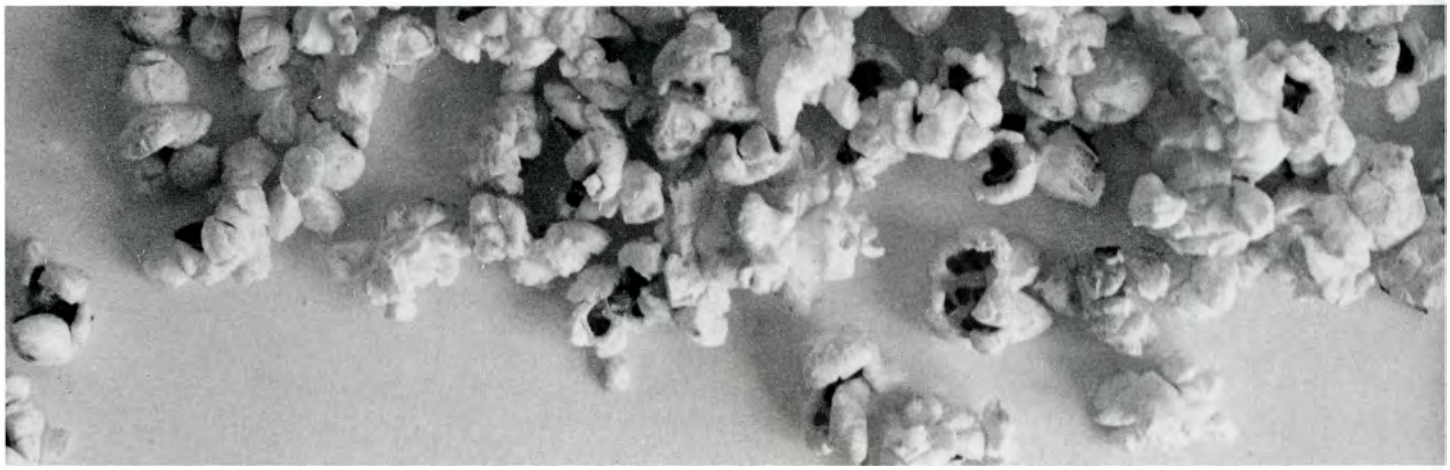
A waft of corn floated past my nose and again the sound of pop-pop-pop-pop arrested my attention.

That's Laurie's problem, I suddenly realized. She reads so disjointedly, she can't remember what she reads!

The term "popcorn reading" may describe staccato reading a bit facetiously, but in doing so it can "break the ice," producing a smile or a giggle from the otherwise nervous student. Also, this analogy of popcorn popping to a peculiar phrasing style can cause the student to recognize his need for remediation, for staccato or "popcorn reading" has become a frequent problem among many primary oral readers.

"Popcorn reading" can thus be defined as incorrect phrasing of the sentence. Instead of imitating the natural sentence flow by coupling words into phrases, the young reader mouths each word in the sentence individually. So he or she reads the short sentence "I went to the store" as "I- went- to- the- store."

Obviously, popcorn readers cannot derive meaning from the sentences they read, or they would instinctively follow the true phras-



BETH VAN REES

ing. Therefore, because their phrasing is incorrect, they obviously do not recognize words within the sentence, or they have not been trained in the art of sentence phraseology.

Unfortunately, the Christian school teacher's efforts in teaching reading can be strained by this perplexing problem. Sometimes pupils transferring in from other institutions, particularly public schools, must be given immediate special attention in oral reading skills.

How can the Christian teacher remediate this peculiar reading difficulty? First, by tracing the source of "popcorn reading." In all probability, the student has been taught merely to memorize the unfamiliar word instead of decoding it according to its letter sounds. Thus, from the beginning, the student's word recognition skills have been based not upon how the word sounded, but upon how it looked. Consequently, the reader has formed the highly undesirable habit of focusing upon the word, not upon the sounds within the word.

Although this early tendency of scrutinizing each word may appear quite harmless, its effect in later years is to produce a crippled reader. Not having mastered each new word by sounding it out, the primary student cannot advance to decoding phrases. Instead, the student continues trying to recall each word and the obsession with reading each word grows.

Most capable primary students, despite the drawbacks of memorizing each word, do eventually overcome the tendency to read word-by-word and do advance to become good readers. However, the less able child, not having such a retentive memory, may carry word-by-word reading into the intermediate grades. In doing so, the student becomes even more crippled, for now she or he reads silently each sentence, word-by-word, not noting the sentence phrasing or establishing its main idea. Because the reader has not mastered sentence reading, neither will he or she be equipped to read and to understand paragraphs, subchapters, or chapters.

What should the Christian teacher do with this child? The answer is simple. Go back to the sentence and establish its phraseology.

If the student has only begun oral sentence reading, remediation is relatively easy. Read the sentence orally and ask the student to repeat it over and over until the phrasing is correct. Then, if he or she has not been taught to read phonetically, use a reading series that assures that child of a systematic presentation of word recognition skills and guards against relapses of haphazard, senseless oral reading.

However, if your student has advanced into the second, third, or fourth grades, remediation becomes more challenging. First, establish how the child reads by listening to the oral flow of sentences. Note if there are any phrasal patterns within the sentence. The severity of a word-by-word reading habit can be determined by the way the reader phrases sentences orally.

The older the reader, the greater the problem. More than likely, the older elementary student now has transferred early oral word-by-word reading into silent word-by-word reading. In order to break the reader of this habit, the teacher must first make the child aware that he or she now reads individual words, not phrases. A survey of his or her oral reading can demonstrate this handicap rather effectively.

Begin reading orally by placing your student three or four levels below the given grade level (i.e., place a fifth grade student in a first or second grade book) and instruct him or her to read aloud. Listen to the phrasing. If it is correct, move up to the next level. Continue moving up until the student begins to phrase sentences improperly.

After choosing the correct reader to focus on the difficulty, instruct the child to read aloud. Listen to the manner of phrasing, and, when it is incorrect, stop the child immediately. Read the sentence aloud and ask the student to repeat it. Then ask the child to read the next sentence orally, stop him or her, reread the sentence aloud yourself, and ask the child again to reread it orally. Gradually work through the paragraph. Then reread the entire paragraph over to the child before asking him or her to read it back to you orally. Proceed through the next paragragh, sentence by sentence, in the same manner. When you have finally completed the entire page, ask the child to read the entire page and summarize its contents for you.

If you and your impatient elementary student should balk at such concentrated oral reading, employ an alternative method of first dividing the sentences into phrases, placing the phrases between parentheses, and then reading each phrase aloud.

First, point out to your student the ground rules for determining the phrasing of the sentence (i.e., the necessity of placing subject with verb and preposition with its object). Then ask the student to mark the first sentence. For example, (I went) (to the shopping center) (last week).

Next, ask your student to read each parenthetical element as a mini-sentence and then put the elements together. If the student cannot do so, demonstrate aloud, and ask him or her to reread the entire sentence aloud. Proceed through the paragraph, sentence by sentence, marking, then reading. After you have completed marking and reading the entire paragraph, ask the student to read the entire paragraph aloud. Continue sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, until you have completed the entire page. Finally, ask the student to reread the entire page aloud and summarize its contents for you.

Although this oral remediation is laborious, tedious, and time consuming for both teacher and student, it does effectively instill sentence phraseology into reading. Moreover, it actively promotes greater comprehension, for effective oral reading transfers into efficient silent reading. **CEJ**

Having taught at every grade level from junior high through adult education, Mary Elizabeth Mueller submits an excerpt from her own tutorial system, Megastructure: A Curriculum Guide for Grades 1-12.

A Plus in

BY RUTH VANDE STROET

I have observed in the early grade classroom and remedial reading room that oral reading is usually done round robin style. Each student waits his or her turn to come. Some children get bored and their minds wander; others are attentive and read along while the reader, who hasn't rehearsed, stammers through a page. The results of such techniques have caused widespread controversy over the use of oral reading in the classroom. Oral reading can be used more effectively in the classroom when teachers consciously strive to incorporate it into their lessons.

Some of the controversy exists because adults who have grown up on oral reading in class hold mixed feelings. Those with a low self-image or those who were poor readers may have dreaded the routine in years past and consider its value minimal. According to an article by Mary Newton Bruder and Shirley Biggs in the May 1988 *Journal of Reading,* a class of adults enrolled in a literary development class gave these responses about their memories of oral reading: 56 percent had negative feelings, 36 percent had positive feelings, and 9 percent did not remember the experience. Those who had negative feelings said they "were embarrassed, refused to read, or were afraid of making mistakes" (737). Those with positive feelings recalled being fluent readers and enjoying oral reading. The authors observe, "If reading aloud is a measure of reading ability, we reasoned that better readers should have more pleasant memories, since oral reading would have been a successful experience for them" (737). Yet this was not always true; some students with good memories still disliked the use of this technique.

Bruder and Biggs assert that the success of oral reading depends on why and how it is done in the classroom. They emphasize that the purpose should be well-defined and carefully examined. Is oral reading used to increase reading ability, or is it used to evaluate the student's progress? Criteria necessary to improve on the technique include meaningful material, individual assessment, and an opportunity for the reader to rehearse. Adherence to these methods can produce a more positive effect.

Elinor P. Ross (*The Reading Teacher*, December 1986) reports that oral reading has been proven successful in the classroom by several experiments which show that through oral reading, students better sense the relationship between the spoken and written word. Furthermore, these experiments show that a child who is learning to read makes a natural transition from speech to print.

Ross gives examples in which teachers used different ways to encourage oral reading. One teacher used dramatic activities to teach the students. She had students read into a tape recorder privately and then listen to themselves, noting where they needed improvement. She found that for this technique most students were willing to practice on the skill of oral reading. After students practiced their parts, she video-taped them and had them perform for the classes. Even though the attitudes of the students toward oral reading did not change, they became aware of their strengths and weaknesses and gained confidence and skill in oral reading.

Oral Reading: the Classroom

Another example of success was reported by two third grade teachers who sent notes home to parents informing them of what the class would be doing and asking the parents to help. The students were given passages to practice at home and offered advice at school on improving their oral reading. Each Friday the teacher listened to the students individually and filled out a checklist on their progress. By the end of the trial period the teachers found an improved proficiency in oral reading. As a result the students were given the privilege of reading to kindergarten students.

These experiments were successful because of the strategies used: the students were encouraged to rehearse, they were instructed on the use of self-evaluation, and they were given a purpose for oral reading. In addition the teachers provided good role models. These experiments seem to indicate that if teachers take the time to organize meaningful activities, students can actually improve their oral reading and enjoy it.

Another valid use of oral reading is as a method for evaluating how a student reads a passage. Barbara M. Fleisher (*Reading Research and Instruction*, Spring 1988) observes that better and poorer readers use different cues when reading, especially in more difficult passages. She conducted the study to determine how best to improve reading skills; however, she found a marked difference in how the two groups decoded a passage.

Fleisher used a very detailed way of assessing the errors made by each individual. She found that poorer readers paid closer attention to letters than meaning, whereas better readers focused on meaning first, then noted the letters. However, this real difference did not occur until the material became difficult. Then too, better readers were less locked into graphic cues—maps, diagrams, and headings—focusing more on contextual cues. In contrast, the poorer readers depended on graphic cues, therefore losing meaning at high levels of difficulty. Finally, Fleisher found that better readers worked to comprehend while poorer readers tended to decode.

Another distinction between poorer and better readers that Fleisher discovered was the different ways teachers instruct students in reading. The poorer readers are interrupted more often for mistakes and are encouraged to look at letters to decode words. The better readers, on the other hand, are interrupted less for the same number of errors and are encouraged to look at context when having difficulty with a word. This discovery may help teachers to be more aware of how techniques can influence readers.

Fleisher concludes "that comprehension and decoding may not be separate reading tasks, nor should they be taught as isolated skills in the reading curriculum" (48). Teachers should encourage all students to be better readers, thereby, making reading an enjoyable activity for more children.

A dramatic example of how teachers can make a difference in the lives of their students is discussed by Michael Brownstein in *Learning* (April 1988). Brownstein's sixth grade student, Grace, could not read. He encouraged her to attend an after-school tutoring program which he directed. At first she did not attend; however, once she began, her success was fantastic. Within the program they also included a 4-H Club whose members were preparing for an oratory contest. Grace became interested in participating in the contest. She researched a topic, prepared a speech, and won second place. By the end of that school year she had made a 34-month gain on a standardized test because a teacher provided a purpose for oral reading and encouraged Grace to be successful.

Not every student will experience such a dramatic change, but oral reading, if properly carried into effect, can result in positive improvement and ultimate enjoyment. **CEJ**

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Improving Reading and Learning in History

BY BEVERLY J. VERDIER

David is an eighth grade student who is having difficulty in his American history course. He has trouble reading and understanding the material he is required to read from his history textbook. In addition, he lacks interest and motivation to learn about American history. He just does what he can to pass the course and anxiously waits for the school year to end.

The problem just described is one of many that exist in today's history classrooms, making the teacher's instruction of the course challenging and exciting while at the same time quite frustrating.

The history teacher must recognize that the students in his or her class represent a wide range of ability levels both intellectually and developmentally. With this in mind, the teacher is not only confronted with the expectation to provide the most effective instruction that will allow each student to learn the material required of the course, but she or he is also challenged to find appealing ways to package this material to make it interesting and exciting for students to learn. To meet this challenge the teacher should direct attention to promoting a learning environment that is sensitive to the reading/learning demands required of the students.

Reading Demands of the Text

In order to understand the events that occur in history as communicated by the textbook and other related reading materials, the students must be able to recognize structural patterns of text writing. These may include sequential order and development, cause/effect relationships, compare/contrast relationships, listing patterns, and problem-solving formats (Vacca and Vacca 31).

Because of the wide variety of reading levels that exist in the classroom, some students, if not many, may have difficulty using their textbooks effectively to acquire meaningful information. From their textbooks or other related materials, students need to be able to establish generalizations and identify relationships in order to truly understand history. The use of study guides is a learning tool that may compensate for the wide range of reading levels in the classroom. Students at various levels will benefit from study guides that encourage inquiry, integrate present knowledge with new knowledge, and promote reflection on past experiences (McClain 321).

Often faced with tedious informative writing in history texts, students need to be introduced to effective strategies of making their reading/learning experience more worthwhile. Students need to know how to study and how to gain the most from reading assignments. Along the same lines, students need to be motivated by these strategies to want to read about history. The students' attitudes and feelings about learning history can make or break the success of a history course. Boredom and discouragement greatly impede such success.

McClain's Study Guide

To assist students in gleaning the information communicated by history texts, study guides can be effectively used in the history classroom. McClain suggests that a study guide be divided into five sections which involve a step by step method of attack (322-325):

■ Section 1

This section focuses on the students' background knowledge. The purpose is to get the students to come up with generalizations and reasons for reading the assigned pages. In this section of the study guide, the teacher has a few sentences describing the topic which will be read, along with a series of questions the students should try to answer before they begin reading.

■ Section 2

After the initial approach to the topic, students must deal with the expected vocabulary. In this section of the study guide, the teacher lists vocabulary words and page numbers where they may be located. Also, each word is followed by a listing of three or four possible meanings from which the reader may choose. Students are encouraged to attempt to define each listed word prior to reading the text so that they will be more aware of their purpose for reading and more alert to key words in the material.

■ Section 3

Once students have read the material, they are encouraged to look at details in the text and relate them to one another. In effect, they decipher the organizational pattern of the text. In this section of the study guide, the teacher may have an activity such as sequencing or name/place matching that encourages the students to look at the organizational structure of the material being read.

■ Section 4

Thinking processes involved in reading carry beyond the printed detail. Prevalent attitudes or practices in a historical setting may swell the importance of a recorded event but may be inadequately stressed in the test. Cause and effects might be only implied yet essential to a full comprehension of the material at hand. This section kneads student thinking in matters such as relationships. A teacher may choose here to create a list of facts from the selection and a second list of results from these actions, which the student will have to match.

■ Section 5

This section picks up the facts and ideas that have been left out of the previous sections by having students respond to questions related

to the text. It is suggested that the questions be noted according to difficulty; therefore, individual students will have different requirements. In this section of the study guide, the teacher has a list of questions with page numbers along with a rating, so students will be able to recognize their level of difficulty.

Upon completion, McClain suggests, the guide should be reviewed aloud, either by the whole class or in small groups. She also suggests that the class go back and review the background questions (Section 1) to remind the students that the material can be meaningful to them.

Locating Main Ideas in History Textbooks

In order to grasp the main idea in a paragraph, "the reader has to understand the logical relationships that exist among the component sentences" (Donlan 137). This strategy for locating the main idea consists of a three-stage process: (1) exercises in learning word relationships, (2) exercises in detecting relationships of key words, (3) exercises in detecting relationships of key words in total paragraphs.

■ Stage 1

The word-relationship exercises focus on the semantic analysis of words in identifying their relationships: equal, opposite, superior/subordinate, no relationships. Students are given exercises in which they explain the relationships between a pair of words from their history text (example: fleet/battleship, democracy/dictatorship). Extra assistance may be needed in showing students how to identify superior/subordinate relationships by providing example diagrams of the structure. **See figure 1.**

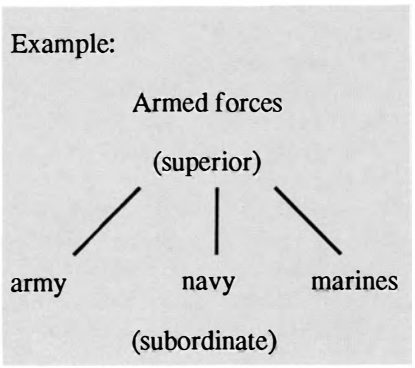

FIGURE 1

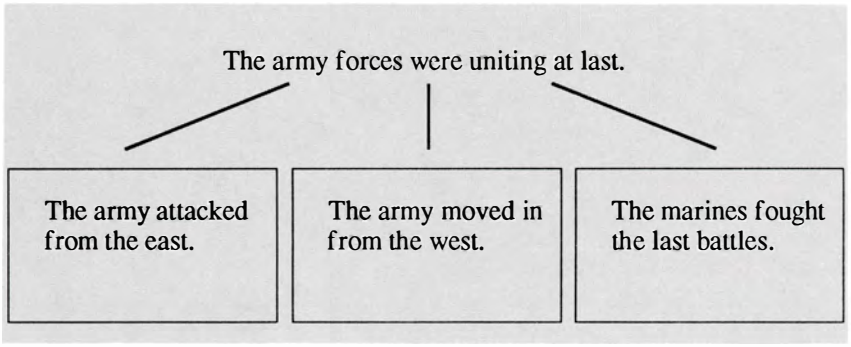

FIGURE 2

■ Stage 2

In activities basically extending from the word-relationship exercises, students must now focus on the relationships between sentences: sentences that have superior/subordinate relationships, sentences that have no relationships. Donlan (1980) provides some examples: (1) The war lasted three years. The allies lost the first battle. (2) Hitler remained in command in Germany in 1945. Rudolph Hess was captured by the British earlier. Once again, extra assistance may be need in helping students identify superior/subordinate relationships in sentences. **See figure 2.**

■ Stage 3

Working with complete paragraphs follows. Students are encouraged to diagram the paragraphs by identifying the superior sentences (the main idea) and the subordinate sentences (supporting ideas). Donlan's example follows:

Main idea (superior)

1. United States interest in foreign affairs increased during the 1920s.

   2. Americans were active in the international disarmament movement.
   2. American businessmen were keenly interested in world trade.
   2. The U.S. abandoned its former role of policeman of the western hemisphere and tried to be a "good neighbor" to Latin America.

Continued practice using passages from the history text is recommended to assist the students in transferring this skill to their independent reading.

By incorporating these strategies into the history classroom the teacher may be able to assist students like David in developing a new outlook on learning about history. The instructor recognizes David's individual reading needs and assists him in becoming a more proficient reader. David learns to express his feelings, ideas, and opinions and relates them to the material he is studying.

With these opportunities he can acquire intellectual tools that will assist him in learning about history. He will more readily develop an inquiring attitude about history as he relates his own knowledge and ideas to the new information he is learning. These skills will be beneficial to David far beyond his school subjects into an unending variety of topics and settings in his adult years. **CEJ**

Beverly J. Verdier is a recent Calvin College graduate with a master of arts in teaching with a reading emphasis.

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The Use of Writing in the Primary Grades

BY PAM ADAMS

Are you looking for a way to teach skills in an exciting way? Are you concerned about individualizing your curriculum to meet the academic needs of your class? Are you searching for ways to build cooperation between students? Making writing an important part of your curriculum can help you solve some of these problems.

Writing is inherently exciting. Given the opportunity to do work sheets or to write, most students would choose to write. Writing can also be individualized easily. The teacher can work with the student at his or her own level. The beginning writer might need the teacher to do the actual writing while the more advanced writer can be introduced to skills needed to do his or her own writing. Cooperation can also be built by having the students be each others' helpers. The students can act as editors when they work in small groups. They can also serve as an audience for the writings. Naturally, the children must be taught editing skills as well as conferencing skills, but the ability to work with another student is a valuable skill that we should not overlook. When students learn to appreciate each other they build each other up in an important way.

Recently, writing has received more attention than in the past. In the Christian schools I am familiar with, writing content is receiving the attention that correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar used to receive. Teachers are discussing student writings and are proudly displaying them in halls, libraries, and classrooms. Writing can be a freeing experience for both student and teacher. It can enable them to use the creativity and imagination that God has given to us all. I personally find it hard to believe I am teaching Christianly if I am simply following the teacher's manual and not using any of my own ideas. Allowing students the freedom to express ideas without the constraint of perfect penmanship, spelling, and grammar can free their imagination and enable them to be "natural and unique."

Reading and writing have traditionally been taught as two separate areas of our school curriculum. Little or no relationship was recognized between the two areas of language arts. In primary grades reading was given an understandably important position, often taught to the exclusion of writing. Reading readiness became the central curriculum in kindergarten with phonics, sight vocabulary, and beginning reading receiving much stress in the early grades. Writing was put off to a time when students could read, spell, and punctuate. However, now, thanks to such people as Donald Graves and Lucy McCormick Calkins, one can walk down the hall and see proudly displayed stories written by students who were once thought to be too young to write.

Teachers are encouraging their young students to write, write, and write some more because research has shown that writing is a very valuable activity for all students. Regarding the older student, writing allows one to process the ideas of the material being studied. It aids comprehension and helps the writer retain the information studied. Writing also requires high-level thinking skills. But what about the younger child, the child who is just entering school with little or no knowledge of letters or sounds? Why should she write?

Emergent literacy, the beginnings of the child's ability to read, has been the subject of research because it might hold an important key in successful reading instruction. In order for young children to learn to read, they need to understand the relationship between spoken language and written language. They also need to learn the linear direction of print. Writing has been shown to accomplish both of these readiness tasks in an exciting manner. Everything that happens during writing relates to reading skills,which have traditionally been taught in isolation. Writing focuses students' attention on the same material that reading exercises ask them only to recognize. Writing is also much more exciting and meaningful to the young student.

A young student can participate in writing even if he or she knows only a few letters and a few letter sounds. Teachers must recognize that writing develops in stages. A writing program can be tailored to the stage of develop-

ment of the child. The stages of writing ability as recognized by several researchers are these:

1 **The scribbling stage** Marks are made in imitation of writing.

2 **The letter-writing stage** Letters are written at random with no knowledge of sound/symbol relationship.

3 **Beginning sound stage** The student recognizes the beginning sounds of words and writes the letter to represent the whole word.

4 **Beginning and ending sound stage**—The student writes both beginning and ending sounds to represent the words.

5 **Vowel stage**—The student adds vowels, and his spelling is very close to conventional spelling.

6 **Conventional spelling** The child spells, following the rules of conventional spelling.

A teacher should permit her students to experiment with this inventive spelling and allow them to progress from individual levels at different paces. The teacher can also give a gentle nudge when she feels that the child is ready for the next stage. Spelling assistance during writing time should be held to a minimum. Not only does worrying about correct spelling stifle creativity and flow of thought, it also robs the student of the active, creative play involved in inventive spelling. Using inventive spelling requires a higher level of consciousness about language, symbols, and sounds than does recognition of sight words or spelling by rote.

Language experience stories are a good way to start. Start with group experience stories, but shift to giving one student the opportunity to "write" each day while the rest of the class listens. This reinforces the directional nature of print, sight words, and the spoken language-written language connection. It also raises the esteem of the "author." Start with volunteers, but encourage all to participate.

Dictation is another valuable way to begin with young writers. Have the student draw a picture on the top of the page, then write down his or her story, as told, under the picture. Read the story to the child and then have him or her read it. If the child is capable, have him or her copy over the words with marker. Older students can be helpful to the teacher by acting as scribes during the dictation process. This can also build good relationships between students of various ages as well as teach the older students an appreciation for helping others.

Journal writing is valuable for all ages. The student can draw, make letters, or write daily. The journal can be used as a source of ideas for other writings. The ideas in the journal can be shared with others or be kept private.

Giving young authors an audience for their writing is important. It gives them a reason for writing. They need to see that their work is important. "Publish" their stories in books to be shared, display their work, or have them write to pen pals. These techniques are motivating because the student sees the need for writing.

Even though content has been stressed in this approach, skills are not neglected. Writing skills are introduced when the student is ready for them and needs the skill. Using the students' actual writing is an excellent way of introducing skills. The students can learn capitalization, punctuation, and spelling through samples of other students' work or from their own. They will see the need to correct mistakes when they feel the need to communicate. When they realize that others can't read what they have written, they will learn how to correct their mistakes.

Sharing good literature is another way to build quality writing. Have the students read each day from trade books and read each day to the students. Surround them with good literature. Choose books that appeal to the age group of the students, but also choose books that widen their horizons and teach them about the joy of living as a Christian. The *Little House* books and the *Narnia Chronicles* are excellent examples of books worthy of our time and attention. The most valuable and enjoyable time in the school day can be a time of combining these activities. The teacher can start this time by reading for ten minutes to the students, followed by ten minutes in which the students read from books of their choice, and ending up with a ten-minute period of the students writing in their journals.

Teaching students to write can be both pleasurable and worthwhile. It is economical of teacher time because reading skills and writing skills can be taught together. It also gives us an opportunity to integrate the various subjects in the curriculum. The students can see for themselves the goal for an assignment, take real pleasure in exploring with words, and hopefully develop real enjoyment for God's gift of language to us. **CEJ**

Pam Adams currently teaches in the education department at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, after nine years of teaching third and fourth grades at Sioux Center Christian School.

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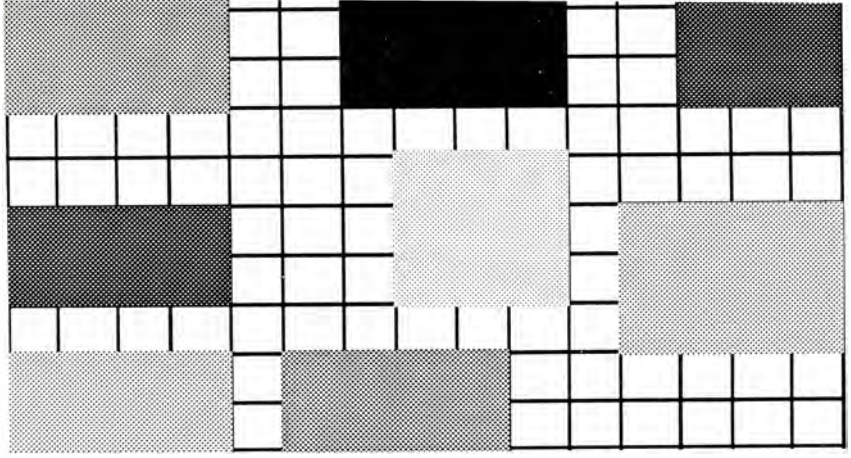

Book Pursuit

BY HELEN HEYBOER

Children need something creative and concrete to stir their interest and motivate them to read as well as to use the knowledge they acquire while reading. Creativity sparks a child's excitement and prevents boredom.

Book Pursuit is a game to encourage and motivate children to read. Books should be chosen from several different categories such as these: adventure, science-fiction, mystery, fantasy, comedy, and romance.

The game may cover many books, and having several books in each category gives the game versatility. Some examples of good quality literature that you might use are C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*; Cynthia Voight's *Dicey's Song*; S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*; and Katherine Paterson's *Jacob Have I Loved.*

Materials Needed to Make the Game

Poster board, markers or crayons, different colored construction paper, two dice, objects for players to move.

To construct the game board, draw seven rooms (or as many as you need for your category list) on the poster board, each one assigned to a different category. Create a traveling route for the players made up of several square spaces, some with special directions on them. The route should allow players to reach the various rooms without too much delay, but the various hazards or opportunities marked on certain squares will hold attention by their unpredictability. Examples: "Move back one" or "Go to fantasy room" or "Fantasy question." Make sure each room has a blank space next to it, which is used as a door. You might want to write *enter* on this space. Also mark starter spaces around the board, numbering or drawing a design on each to distinguish them.

Prepare a variety of questions pertaining to each category and write or type them on cards cut from construction paper of two different colors. Answers to the questions should be written on the back sides of the cards. You may want to leave some question cards blank, too. Also make sets of cards, all of a third color, that have only the rooms' names on them. The number of players will determine how many room-name cards of each category you must make. Place a star or any large design you choose in the center. On that spot place a card with a final question, which must be answered to win the game. In each room place the three stacks of different colored cards, two of which contain questions pertaining to that room's category, and the other labeled with the room name.

Directions

The game may be played by as many as seven people. Each player starts on a starter space. If the spaces are numbered, the person who has his or her man on number one rolls the dice first. The player then moves the number rolled. The player may move in any direction. When stopping on a space, the player must do what the space instructs, for example, "Move back" or "Move right one" or "Go to fantasy room." The player may enter a room if he or she rolls the number of spaces needed to enter.

When you start the game you will see three stacks of cards, perhaps yellow, blue, and green. The player on your left must ask you the question on the yellow card or make up a question if the card is blank. If the question is correctly answered, the player on the left asks another question, this time from the blue card. This is the final question. If the answer is correct, the player collects the green card with the name of the room on it. If the answer is not correct, the player stays in the room and continues where he left off until his next turn.

When the player is finished another player rolls the dice and the player on his left asks him or her a question, etc.

Each player's goal is to collect the entire set of green cards, one from each room. This accomplished, the player goes to the center and must answer the final question to win.

Rules

1. Each player must answer the question on his or her own with no help from other players.
2. The player may not enter the room without rolling the number needed to enter, unless the space directs the player to go there.
3. Players may not leave the room without answering both the yellow and blue card questions and collecting the green card.
4. The player may keep going until he or she answers a question incorrectly or lands on a space that requires staying on that space. **CEJ**

Helen Heyboer from Hudsonville, Michigan, is an education major at Dordt College.

Idea Bank.

Censorship

Sandy Westra, media specialist for nine years at Denver Christian School in Colorado, responds to the following question:

Should Christian schools avoid censorship issues by not allowing books with explicit sexual scenes or vulgar language in their libraries?

Although there are valid reasons behind the act of censorship in a Christian school library, I am more concerned with those parents and constituents who would remove *all* books that contain controversial elements, particularly sex and profanity. It is ironic to me that some of these same people exert little, if any, control over the movies and television programs brought into their homes, and yet become upset if their child comes home with a book from the school library that contains bad language or a graphic description of sex. Is literature's power to corrupt and mislead greater than other forms of art?

Since our 7th graders select books from the same shelves as our 12th graders, I do try very hard to differentiate between the appropriate and inappropriate materials for them, but differences of opinion will always exist about the nature of quality literature and what is objectionable. That's why it is so important for schools to have a selection policy that establishes a set of principles articulating a rationale for the materials chosen for the school library. Our policy states that books that go out of their way to be profane and books that exploit violence and sex will not be selected, but "honest" books that will not only entertain students, but also stimulate their critical and creative thinking will be on the shelves. Were it not for commonly taught and commonly challenged books like *Of Mice and Men, The Diary of Anne Frank,* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, many of today's young people would have little opportunity to learn about—or discuss—the concepts and consequences of such realities as injustice, inequality, intolerance, and inhumanity. Books read and discussed—in Christian *homes* and schools—help to make these goals reachable.

It's relatively easy for me to justify having a book of obvious literary merit in our library, but some of the other books that are on the shelves and do also contain some objectionable material are not "classics." The characters in these books at times drink, swear, or have sexual relationships, yet rationale for the selection of these "young adult" books exists. Many students are reluctant readers and are not motivated to read or appreciate literature for its aesthetic value. Thousands of young adult titles are available that are likely to interest these students. This kind of literature allows readers to see themselves in a book, to read the book with ease and interest, and to gain new information that relates the new to the familiar world of young adulthood.

Often, these young adult books are criticized for being too realistic, but we can't isolate our students from evil conditions. The Christian home and school are ideal places, in a controlled situation, to confront war, violence, hatred, bigotry, lust, and greed without being destroyed by them. We can help our students become intelligent Christian adults who are able to better face ethical decisions, partly because of the literature they have read. This can't happen if they aren't reading at all.

Fine literature that is serious in purpose and intellectually and morally provocative certainly does involve the reader emotionally and intellectually. Reading is not always a harmless pursuit, but in and of itself it cannot cause students to become thieves, atheists, or pregnant. In my opinion, reading may help us to expand our horizons, deepen our insights, and focus our ideas, but it doesn't *cause* us to do anything.

I would encourage parents to share the responsibility of deciding what their child reads, but they do not have the right to control the reading materials of others. Students using the school library can choose to read or not read certain materials. As Henry J. Baron, consultant for CSI, states in his curriculum resource paper No. 8, "Dirty Books in Christian Schools," "The fact that a book may be disturbing, that it may probe perplexing human problems and raise hard questions, ought not to constitute reason enough for denying young people access to it; we ought rather to exert ourselves toward providing more guidance in the reading of such a book." **CEJ**

You are encouraged to send questions on any topic related to the Christian teacher's role and response, regardless of grade level.
The editor will solicit responses from additional sources when appropriate.
Address questions to:

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2135 S. Pearl
Denver, CO 80210

CONFIDENTIALITY IS ASSURED.

Query.

Fran teaches vowel sounds to her class.

Fran Engel Starts a New Chapter

BY BARB POEL

"My life is like a book with a front and back cover and many different chapters in between, and now, I'm beginning a new chapter."

"Retirement" could possibly be the title of the next chapter in Fran Engel's book, but if we make a structural analysis of the word *retire* it would hardly be appropriate. The prefix *re-* meaning "to do again," added to the word *tire,* leaving "to tire again," just does not fit Fran.

This small, energetic white-haired woman can not be tired again; she's never seemed tired at all! Not even after having taught for 34 years.

Fran always wanted to be a teacher. After being raised mainly in Edgerton, Minnesota, where her father was a minister, Fran (then Ehlers) went to Calvin College to work on her teaching degree. Two years into the program the demand for teachers was so great that she took on a third and fourth grade combination of forty students and got a year of experience as well as a real education!

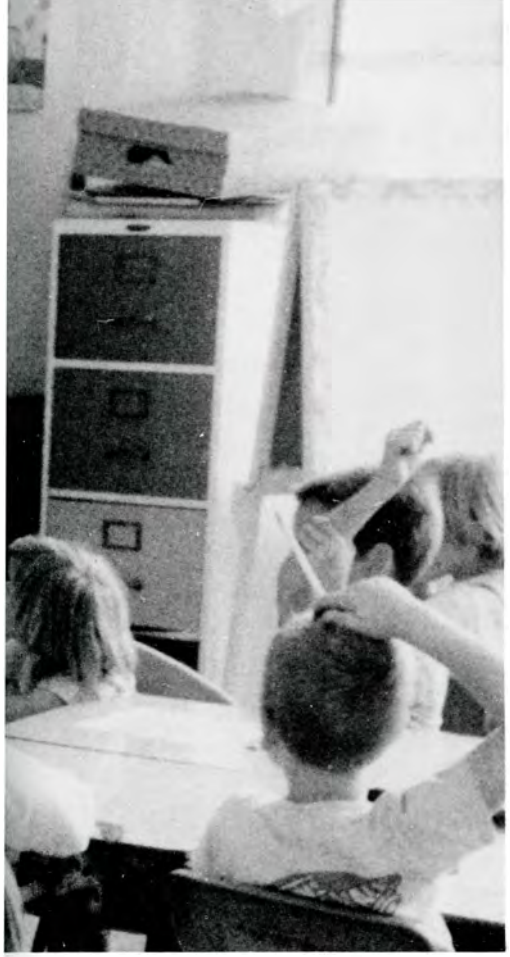
After finishing her last two years at Calvin, Fran accepted an offer to teach second grade at Oakdale Christian in Michigan. She had taught there one semester when she got a call from Celeryville, Ohio, asking her to come right away to take a fifth-eighth grade teaching principal position. The next thing she knew, there she was!

Fran is the adventuresome type and, after two and a half years in Ohio, she decided it was time to try something new. She started skimming the "Teachers Wanted" pages and spied an opening in southern California that looked as if it were worth a try. She moved halfway across the country to take on a class of second graders, deciding never to teach first grade because she did not want the responsibility of teaching kids how to read.

Fran taught in Bellflower for three years, and during that time her roommate introduced her to a young Dutch man named Jake Engel who was working on a dairy in that area. It was not long before Miss Ehlers became Mrs. Engel.

In those days, once women got married and started having children, their careers outside the

Profile.



home were abandoned to take on the role of being a mother. After Jake and Fran's first daughter, Charlene, was born, Fran was ready to throw out her teaching, but her wise husband said, "Just hang on to it. You never know when it might come in handy."

The Engels moved from Bellflower to Hanford. Here their family grew to include another daughter, Twyla, and a son, Randy. Fran was enjoying motherhood at home with three small children, not thinking about going back into teaching.

Then one fall, the year Charlene was going into first grade, the Hanford Christian School was in need of a first grade teacher. They approached Fran, asking her to step into the classroom for just one year. Without her they faced the possibility of sending their first graders to other schools. Keeping in mind her own daughter (as well as the other children) and her commitment to Christian education, Fran consented.

Jake's work schedule allowed him to take care of Twyla and Randy during the day while Fran was at school. They all pitched in, and as a busy young family they were able to manage. One year back into teaching turned into 27 years of teaching first graders to read.

Twenty-three of those 27 years were spent at Ripon Christian. Jake and Fran chose to move to Ripon because their children would be able to attend a Christian high school and because there was a teaching position open. Jake was able to get a job with an almond farmer, and the following year he started driving the bus for the school. Fran again taught first grade and it soon became her favorite. In time, she finished the graduate work she had pursued at the University of Michigan and Fresno State, earning her masters degree from University of the Pacific in Stockton, California.

Charlene and Twyla must have been impressed by the enthusiasm and joy that their mom got from teaching. They both went to Calvin College and got into teaching and now share their mother's interest in reading. Charlene is teaching in Washington, and Twyla has recently taught in Australia for a year. Although Randy was not interested in teaching, he was surrounded by teachers and attracted to one. Last summer he married Janet Dykhouse, the physical education instructor at Ripon Christian, so there is still a Mrs. Engel there!

When teaching has been a way of life for so many years, one might wonder what to do upon stepping out of it. Fran has several plans in mind. There are all those books that she has been waiting to read, a garden to tend to, handwork that just does not get picked up when there are papers to correct and bulletin boards to make, places that need volunteers, and vacations to take.

Traveling has always been a favorite activity for the Engel family. They have traveled to the eastern United States, Alaska, Hawaii, Holland, Hong Kong, and China. Last fall Fran and Jake spent a month in Australia with Twyla.

As Fran thinks back over her years in the teaching profession she remembers 34 years of doing things she loved to do: holding children spellbound while telling stories, stimulating their creative juices, hearing a child read through his or her first reading book, watching the receptiveness of a foster child to God's word, wondering if the seed had been planted, teaching a favorite Dutch song ("Eere Zij God") to her 23 classes of Ripon first graders, dealing with little people who were always bringing something new and exciting into her life.

What makes a good teacher? "Patience and love for children and a genuine love for Christ," says Fran. Each of these characteristics has been visibly displayed by Fran in her home, school, and church life. She admits that a good teacher must establish priorities and realize the limitations of time. Those limitations include a time for teaching and a time to stop teaching.

And so, the new chapter begins. **CEJ**

Barb Poel is on leave of absence from Ripon Christian School in Ripon, California, for a year of volunteer work at Faith Christian Reformed Church in Nashville, Tennessee.

Fran bandages a student's hand.

Ongoing Drama Links Bible Stories with Students' Lives

BY AGNES STRUIK

I recently observed a teacher implementing a technique in biblical studies that was effectively used to enable the students to explore the life and times of the Israelites as they traveled from Egypt to the promised land.

The activity "Ongoing Drama" required the students to develop a character of one of the members of the Israelite community, which they would take on for the duration of the study. The steps for planning an ongoing drama activity and the format used for character development follow:

Ongoing drama

This type of drama is based on a subject and continues from session to session.

Steps in Planning an Ongoing Drama for a Biblical Improvisation

1. Choose a subject or biblical story that involves a group of people.
2. Focus on the subject and create an opening incident.
3. Create or select roles for the students to play. The leader usually takes control.
4. Plan questions to motivate or challenge the group in the drama.
5. Clarify and focus the problem in the drama.
6. Promote further thinking on the subject by promoting and encouraging further research and study of the topic.
7. Develop tangible rituals that are appropriate to the drama.
8. Establish concrete materials to use that will help the group get involved in the drama (i.e., props, costume pieces, maps, use of blackboard.)
9. Introduce intensification of drama when the group needs further challenges.
10. Stop drama at certain points to refocus and deepen concentration.
11. On the last day of drama or during drama, have students debrief by exploring it in another art form, e.g. mural, book, journal, film, slide show.

A junior high student filled in her Character Development Form for Ongoing Drama as follows:

Name: Joshua
Family Background: I am the eldest of five kids. I have a younger sister who is lame and my mother is quite busy with her. My father is not too pleased with Moses' leadership. I agree with him. Egypt wasn't great, but this is the pits. My mom gets really upset when we talk this way.
Age: 15
Character Qualities: (three adjectives)
Arrogant, rebellious, loving toward my little sister.
Other Important Information: I think my father is part of a group to subvert Moses' leadership. Sometimes, like Mom, I get mad at my dad too. There's seven of us and we hardly have any food to eat and yet my dad spends all his time talking to Reuben and Joseph.
Important Goal: I want to keep our family together.
Relationship to God and Significant Others: I love both my mom and dad, but they're so different. Mom thinks Moses is a wonderful leader with a really tough job. Dad thinks he throws his weight around too much.
I'm not as close to God as I used to be. When we left Egypt and went through the Red Sea I felt really close to God, but now I don't know. We've been in this desert for days and days and days.

At one time the students had read and studied the event of the near starvation in the desert prior to reaching the waters of Mara. The whole class took on their roles of rebellion, loyalty, and faithfulness and re-enacted the event. Some characters were old, some young, some wise, and some foolish.

At another time, the students had spent a number of classes studying the laws as presented in Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. The teacher then presented a situation for which they improvised on the spot using the information they had gained in their research.

EXAMPLE

A woman has accused her neighbor of stealing her goat. The argument has gone on for a number of days. Tempers are short. Food is scarce. The children of each family are bickering as well. How can this problem be resolved?

Two students offered to play the role of the women. The accuser had the character of a middle-aged woman. The other woman had the character of a seventy-year-old woman. The student drew on their research of the role of men, women, the elders of the tribe, and the laws in order to re-enact the situation. Because the students knew they would need this material in dramatizing these issues for the rest of the class, they took a greater interest in learning the material.

Stories about the Israelites were no longer a series of unrelated events, but stories of a rebellious people and God's faithfulness. Students began to sense, experience, and tell their own stories of God working or not working in their lives. **CEJ**

Agnes Struik, educational consultant, is currently doing graduate work at York University in Toronto.

"The Black Cat"

BY H.K. ZOEKLICHT

It was ten before ten on a gray Tuesday in March. Jenny Snip, veteran secretary at Omni Christian High School, and Susan Katje, librarian old enough to resent having the library called "the learning center," had skipped chapel to come early to the faculty room for a more leisurely morning break.

"It's sure a good feeling to beat the crowd this way," declared Snip as she surveyed the array of morning pastries on the tray next to the coffee urn. "I think I'll go Danish this morning."

"Yeah, it sure is," responded Katje. "It's a good feeling to get the jump on John in getting the pick of the pastry," she said, referring, of course, to John Vroom, gourmet Bible teacher. "We should hide the rest of the jelly doughnuts this morning. That'll get a rise out of him."

Snip smiled. "I like these light Danish from Jaarsma's. They are so flaky," she said. Then she added, "Their banket is the best, don't you think?"

"Oh yes," confirmed Katje, "that's because they use so much almond paste. I do think, though, that Vander Ploeg's raisin bread is hard to beat, and their Santa Claus cookies."

Now the chapel crowd began pouring into the faculty room. Ren Abbott, basketball coach and English teacher, spotted the guilty truants and trumpeted in his big voice, "Oh, hi Jenny and Susan. Dr. Carpenter was asking why you weren't in chapel."

"Well," snapped Snip, "tell her we needed food for our bodies more than our souls this morning." The irritated secretary walked over toward the window on the south side of the room and gazed into the cold spring rain.

Matt De Wit sidled toward her and joined her in looking out of the window. They stood in silence for several minutes.

"A penny for your thoughts, Matt," said Snip softly.

"I'll take that penny," smiled the science teacher. "I was wondering if Steve is in some kind of trouble. I hear that his name came up at the board meeting Tuesday night. D'ja hear anything about that?"

Jenny Snip looked warily around and moved a bit closer to De Wit before saying, *sotto voce*, "It's his drinking, Matt."

"His drinking?" said the startled science teacher too loudly. "What are you talking about?"

"Now Matt," said the secretary defensively, "you know as well as I do that every other Friday on payday Steve goes to the bank, cashes his check, and then stops in The Black Cat a while before he goes home."

"No, I didn't know that. But so what if he does? Why is he in trouble?"

"Well," confided Snip, "it seems that Mrs. Reiffer saw him coming out of there last Friday, and she complained to a board member,

Asylum.

I think it was Van Oyen, and he brought it up at the board meeting last night."

Others in the room, no doubt noticing the clandestine postures of Snip and De Wit, had been drawing within earshot, but De Wit chose to continue the conversation anyway. "That all seems highly irregular to me," he announced. "What happened?"

"Well," said Snip, turning up the volume a decibel or two, "the board discussed it briefly, but they didn't take any action."

"Well, I hope not," declared De Wit.

"But they did ask Carpenter, as principal, you know, to sort of 'have a word with him' about it. That's all they did."

"And did she?"

"Oh sure," came from Snip. "This morning before school. I saw them talking in her office. The door was open you know. She was telling him that she regretted the hearsay nature of the report and the gossip and all." The secretary blushed as she continued. "Dr. Carpenter also told him that he had a right to have a whiskey sour if he wanted to, even in The Black Cat, but that she hoped he would use discretion." Snip put emphasis on the word *discretion.*

"Now what in the Sam Hill does 'discretion' mean?" inquired De Wit. "Either you go in a public place on payday to have a whiskey sour or you don't. Is he supposed to put a bag over his head or something so that gossipy Reiffer can't see him?" he crumpled his empty styrofoam cup. "I don't much like that business."

Now John Vroom, who had overheard the last part of the conversation while earnestly chewing a Jaarsma's vetbal, fixed a baleful glance on the science teacher and pronounced, "The Bible says, 'Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.'" He resumed his chewing.

"But John," protested a grinning Rick Cole, "the Bible also says, 'Give strong drink to him who is perishing and wine to those in bitter distress.' How else can you describe a teacher on a late Friday afternoon? I think Steve was in bitter distress, close to perishing, and he needed something to 'gladden his heart.' Now what's wrong with that?"

Vroom remained in deep thought, each fleeting idea measured by the rhythmic chewing motion of his lower jaw. When his thought needed replenishing, John took another bite.

Now Ren "Rabbit" Abbot, head coach of Omni's formidable basketball team, ventured an opinion: "Sometimes I wish a big wet-vac would just suck up all the beer and wine and whiskey in the world and drain them into the Atlantic. I don't care what you say about moderation and all that; the world would be a lot better off without all those drinks. And the fish would be happy too." He smiled at his own joke and added, "I don't care what the Bible says about that either. It isn't plain on anything anymore anyway, just like on women in the churches. You practically have to stand on your head to make what Paul says somewhere in Colossians about women keeping silent in the churches square with having women preachers, but that's what it's coming to."

Vroom said, "That's II Corinthians 12, Ren."

Katje said, "That's I Corinthians 14, John. Verse 34."

At this potentially explosive moment the group noticed that Steve Vander Prikkel himself had entered the room, and they were suddenly aware that he had been within earshot for the past several minutes. Ren Abbott cleared his throat unnecessarily and explained, "I didn't mean anything personal about you, Steve, when I took the teetotaling line. That's just how I feel."

"Well, I agree with you on that, Ren," said Lucy Den Denker softly. "Don't ever apologize for that. Bob might still be alive if that driver hadn't been beered up. But," she added thoughtfully, "asking people not to drink is never going to work. Even MADD folk understand that. But I do think it might be a good thing if we teachers in Christian schools would model to our students that abstinence is a good way—no great sacrifice."

There was a moment of silence before Jenny Snip said, with a sideways glance at the silent Vander Prikkel, "I hear that at the board meeting they did briefly discuss whether it would be okay to inquire from applicants for teaching positions at Omni what was their attitude and practice on drinking."

At this Rick Cole exploded. "The fundamentalists are among us!" he announced. "I knew that the day we started having non-Reformed people on the board that we would run into things like this. I just. . . ."

"C'mon now, Rick," laughed Abbott. "You don't have to be a fundamentalist to see that, generally speaking, drinking does a lot of people a lot of harm and hurt." He looked meaningfully at Lucy Den Denker.

John Vroom nodded approvingly and intoned, "Look what Noah did when he was drunk."

Cole half smiled and inquired, "Jenny, did the board do anything else?"

"Well," said Snip, "someone said that at our faculty parties there are quite a few bottles out, if you know what I mean."

"Is that all they said?" asked Cole?

"Well, what else could they say," said Katje. "Louie Borduin is the secretary of the board, and he owns the Hi-View Market, and they sell more beer, wine, and whiskey than any place in town."

"I think he must own a piece of The Black Cat too," grinned Steve Vander Prikkel. "And since I somehow started all of this, I'd better say something. You know Carpenter did talk with me this morning and we had a good talk. I agree with her that we have to distinguish between our personal rights and our obligations to this Christian school community. I think I have the right to have my whiskey sour in The Black Cat, but I don't mind giving that up. I'll just mix one up when I get home. It's no big deal." He shrugged his shoulders and added, "I can't imagine that when I go into The Black Cat, I'm doing these kids any harm, but if other people whom I respect think I am, it's okay with me to give it up." Then he added, with a twinkle, "But it won't be half as much fun at home." **CEJ**

A Fable

BY DAVID SCHELHAAS

Once upon a time, which was always, there was God. And there was a world which God made which was not always because God made it. And the world was gray. The water was gray and the grass was gray and the sky was gray and the trees and animals were gray. There were two people, a man and woman, and they were also gray. They were neither happy nor sad, good or bad.

And God looked at all that he had made and it did not please him. For the birds in this world sang, but only one note. And they all sang the same note. They couldn't fly very well either—not much better than chickens. Frogs in this world could hop but just barely; cheetahs ran as if they had overshoes on; sailfish had all they could do to get their tails out of the water.

There were no real flowers in this world, just some weed-like growth of stalk and head. The food plants in this world—vegetables, fruits, grains—all tasted about the same. They had a kind of bland innocuous taste that was neither sweet nor sour, delightful or repulsive. The apples tasted like the beans. The beans tasted like the pineapples. The pineapples tasted like the corn, and the corn tasted like the apples. And they were all gray.

God looked at all this again and he said, "It's not good."

And he looked at the man and the woman as they sat by their fire. And he looked at the fire which smoldered but did not flame. He heard the man and woman talk.

"More food?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"Did you plow today?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "And you have sewn skins for garments, I see. They will do."

"They will keep us warm in the cold time," she said.

"We will have food in the cold time also," he said.

It was the longest conversation they had ever had, for there were no stories in their minds and no songs on their tongues.

And God felt sad for them and went down to them and sat by their fire that did not flame. And God said, "Shall I make beauty?"

And the man said, "What is beauty?"

And God said, "There will be color—green and blue and red and gold. Green grass and blue skies and a sun that is red and pink and gold. And there will be flowers, oh, flowers of all different shapes and smells and colors—purple and magenta and violet and fusia and blues of twenty different hues. And the birds, each with its own coloring, will swoop through the air each singing its own particular song. The wind will sing as it blows through the trees. The cheetah will run like the wind. And you will tell stories and chant poems and lift up songs of praise and dance like the branches of the trees in the wind.

And the man said, "We have the skins for warmth in the cold time and we have the food. It is enough. Of what good is beauty?"

And the woman grunted her agreement.

Then God smiled at them sadly and tenderly. He stood up and touched his finger to the smoldering gray fire, and a tongue of flame leaped forth. It was orange and blue and gold, and it danced on top of the sticks and cracked.

And the man and woman jumped up. They clapped their hands and danced like the flame. They danced and danced. When finally they were tired, the woman looked at God and said, "Let us have beauty."

And the man said, "Amen."

Then the man smiled, his white teeth flashing in the sunlight. The woman smiled and her blue eyes sparkled. And they praised God singing an "Alleluia." And the frog leaped, the cheetah raced across the green grass, and the sailfish soared. The mockingbird sang hosannas. And a rainbow dazzled the blue heavens as God said, "The world will not be gray again, ever." (Moral: Next time don't ask your English teacher, "What good's it gonna do us to read this poetry?")

CEJ

David Schelhaas is currently on leave from Western Michigan Christian High School in Muskegon, Michigan, to teach in the English Department at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, **Delaware County Christian School**

More Pain Relief for Play Directors

The second in a two-part article on play direction in the Christian school

BY LINDA MILBOURNE AND GINA BARRET SCHLESINGER

In the last issue of CEJ you received the first dose of our prescription for producing a successful play. You learned how to set practical goals, choose a play, and take care of business items. You still need one more dose, however, to cure Director Distress. This is a pleasant prescription, for it has to do with the most creative part in forming the play: directing.

First make your director's book. Your book will contain notes on blocking (the actors' movement around the stage), business (small movements such as drinking from a glass), lighting, sound, exits, entrances, and set changes. The book can be made in one of two ways, both of which require the use of sturdy white paper a couple of inches larger than your script. One way is to cut a window a bit smaller than a page of your script in the white paper. Separate the pages of your script and glue each page on the white paper, so that both sides of the script page can be seen through the window. A simpler but more expensive way to make your director's book is to forgo cutting windows in the white paper, and simply take apart two scripts to paste onto the paper. Then draw a rough overhead diagram of your set in the margin of each page of your book.

Now read through the play carefully, visualizing the action. You may come up with marvelous ideas that the script's stage directions never mention. Only after you have exhausted your own creative possibilities, or if you haven't the time to do this creative imagining, should you fall back on the script's stage directions.

Plan out your actors' blocking, keeping in mind the type of play you are doing. For instance, if you are directing a farce such as Chekhov's *The Anniversary,* you'll want plenteous, swift movement with lots of broad physical comedy.

Remember that the way characters stand and move about the stage is an important way of communicating the play. For example, to emphasize one character's power or dominance over another one, you may have the dominant character stand often while the recessive one sits. (Remember the Siamese law in *The King and I* that required the subjects to be lower than the king at all times?)

Have the characters inhabit the whole stage rather than playing every scene in one or two spots. Avoid instructions that would have actors stand behind large pieces of furniture. Whenever possible, have actors move on their own lines and stand still on others' lines, as movement attracts attention. In one production at a Christian college, a minor character flagrantly upstaged (drew attention to himself and away from the characters it was supposed to be on) by engaging in comical movement. Although the audience enjoyed his antics, the impact of the play as a whole was diminished.

If you have crowds on stage, avoid the chorus line effect by having them grouped in small triangles of three or four people each. Remember also that a diagonal movement across the stage is more interesting than a simple right to left.

Sketch the actors' general movements on the rough overhead diagram of your set that you drew on each page of your director's book. In addition, write blocking notes in the margins. It is helpful to write these notes in shorthand form. In the box on page 33 are basic symbols you can use. So, for instance, if you want Romeo to stand up, cross to the left, and then sit down, just write "R↑XL↓". (And remember, always write/draw in pencil, as you will make many changes.)

Teach your older students this shorthand system, so they can swiftly write your instructions in

their scripts. To teach your actors stage geography, have them stand on the stage looking out at the audience. Tell them to raise their right hand. That direction is "stage right." "Stage left" is *their* left. Remember, it's the opposite for you sitting in the audience. If you want actors to move toward *your* right, tell them to move "stage left." Also have them think of the stage as a staircase which descends towards the audience. If they are at the back of the stage, they are upstage. If they are at the edge of the stage, they are downstage. So if Romeo is standing in the "stage right" corner at the back of the stage, and you want him to move to the opposite corner, write in shorthand, "RXDL."

You may either be very specific in pre-planning blocking, or leave most of it up to the students when they rehearse. Most inexperienced actors gain a sense of confidence if the director can give them at least a minimal sense of when and where to move. No matter what kind of planning you do, however, remain flexible and be open to your students' input. On the other hand, if you have an idea that makes them uncomfortable, insist that they try it anyway, reminding them to trust you to shelve it if it doesn't work. With this give-and-take attitude, you can foment an exciting creative joint effort between the pupils and yourself.

When the actors are not on stage, have them quiz each other on their lines, work on scenes, or even help paint sets. Rehearsal time is precious—make sure they don't waste it.

Remind them of the basic stage rules: to not turn their backs to the audience, to cross in front rather than in back of people when they are saying a line, to pick up objects with their upstage hand. These rules, which basically insure that the actors are as visible and audible to the audience as possible, can be broken for a purpose, or for a situation in which they are impossible to keep. Tell your students, however, that there is one rule that is written in stone: they must never break character. That is, they should continue pretending to be the character they are acting out, even if they are seized with a fit of giggles, even if the stage scenery falls down, even if another actor forgets his or her lines. Realistically, of course, young children are likely to break character during performance because of nerves. Accept this with good grace during performances, but don't let them get away with it during rehearsals.

Although you'll print due dates on their rehearsal schedule, frequently remind the actors of deadlines for line memorization. On the appointed day, have your assistant director prompt (and there will be lots of prompting, since most of the lines will have been crammed the night before and between classes that day). Stand firm and don't let them retrieve their scripts, even if it means they have to repeat their every line after the prompter. They need to be faced with the reality that they will have to *really know* these lines come performance time. In the next rehearsals they will do better.

A few rehearsals later, hit older students with another challenge: no more prompting at rehearsals. Elementary, and perhaps young middle schoolers, can be prompted during rehearsals and performances, but by the time the students pass that age, they need to learn how to think on their feet. This will not only spur them on toward getting a true grasp of their lines, but it will also help them learn to stay in character and to ad lib (make up lines the character might logically say). Warn the older ones from the beginning that there will be no prompter during performances. If someone on stage forgets a line or if some technical emergency occurs, the actors will have to stay in character, think on their feet, and help each other out of this predicament. By following this procedure during rehearsals, things will go more smoothly during performances if some glitch does come up.

Show time

Come show time, back off. Although you will probably be exhausted and anxious, communicate a sense of calm to your students. Give them a pep talk, remind them of a few basic things they need to remember, assure them that the Lord is in control, and pray with them. Then, in the case of older students, disappear. Leave your assistant director or stage manager in charge (you will have prepared this person for this and informed him or her where you will be). Sit in the back row of the audience, where you can monitor audibility. If you have a hard time hearing the actors, you can go backstage between acts and urge them to speak louder.

Sitting in back has another advantage: it keeps the audience from seeing you squirm when mistakes occur. No matter how hard you prepare, there is rarely a flawless performance. Accept errors, be thankful for them, and realize that, most of the time, the audience doesn't suspect that anything is amiss.

Dramatic Recovery

Do you still feel sick with fear when you think about directing your school's play? By considering the suggestions from this two-part series, you have already made progress toward a healthy directing experience. Already you are mentally setting goals. You are getting down to business. Possibly you have thought of the perfect colleague to act as assistant director. Names of enthusiastic, responsible students who will be just-right leads may already be popping into your brain. You might even be imagining new ways to use your tiny stage.

You *are* feeling better. Great! We wish you and your play the best of health, or, as they say in the theater, "Break a leg!" **CEJ**

Linda Milbourne and Gina Barrett Schlesinger are experienced teachers who have coached drama at Delaware County

Blocking Symbols

R	right	↑	stand
L	left	ex.	exit
D	down	ent.	enter
U	up	⌐¬	chair
X	cross	⌐‾¬	sofa
↓	sit		

INSULT TO INTELLIGENCE: THE BUREAUCRATIC INVASION OF OUR CLASSROOMS
by Frank Smith

Arbor House, New York; 1986, 289 pp., $18.95 (hardcover)
Reviewed by Robert W. Bruinsma, Assoc. Prof. of Education, The King's College, Edmonton.

Insult to Intelligence constitutes a robust assault against the thousands of mind-numbing computer programs now available which claim to provide everything a child needs to learn to read and write, to learn math, history, geography, science—in fact, to learn almost every subject in the curriculum. It challenges the pattern of much current language arts instruction that operates on the principle of "fill in the missing blank and find out whether you are right or wrong." The pedagogy involved here is that through sequential responses to simple questions the student will acquire the desired skill. In the profession, this technique is called "teach and test"; Frank Smith, who has impressive credentials of his own, calls it "drill and kill."

Smith opens the book with an account of a demonstration of a computer-based reading lesson at a recent annual convention of the prestigious International Reading Association. A cartoon invites the learner to fill in the missing letter in the word r_bbit. The demonstrator invites the teacher first to give the wrong answer—*k*. Bells ring and lights flash and the rabbit's ears droop. Would you like to try again? When the correct answer is given, bells ring and lights flash once more, the rabbit's ears perk up, and the rabbit munches on a carrot that appears from off-screen. The computer congratulates the learner on the 50 per cent improvement in his performance. Says Smith: "I looked around. The entire audience of professional educators was entranced" (p.2).

Smith's book, thus, is first of all a critique of many of the prevailing practices of programmatic teaching and testing (chapters 5 and 6), practices whose origins lie in American behaviorist psychology. But it is also a challenge to educators to acknowledge the revolution in our understanding of how children learn to speak, and to adopt promising holistic alternatives (chapter 7), developments in which, as it happens, Canadian teachers are international leaders. Chapter 8 provides a balanced view of the use and abuse of computers in classrooms. Chapter 9 argues for the right—and obligation—of parents to be involved in the classroom learning of their children. The section on what parents should look for in the education of their children at school is already worth the price of the book.

Though Smith makes no claim to be a Christian, his emphasis on holistic meaning over fragmentary technique, of modeling and demonstration in place of mindless imitation in the learning process, should strike a responsive chord in Christian parents and teachers who confess that the world is deeply imbued with created meaning. The book is highly recommended.

N.E.A., TROJAN HORSE IN AMERICAN EDUCATION
by Samuel Blumenfeld

Paradigm Co., P.O. Box 45161, Boise, Idaho, 83711 Reprint (orig. 1984), 284 pp., $9.95 paperback
Reviewed by Mark W. Fiscus, 6565 Algonquin Road, Algonquin, IL 60102

It is an article of faith long accepted that those who control the schools control the future. Mr. Blumenfeld contends that the National Education Association is being used by the radical left to achieve power in America through the organized political action of public school teachers. He writes to trace the development of this movement and to alert educators to it.

The book contains five sections: educational history, the creation of the N.E.A. establishment, N.E.A.'s war against the independent mind, the politicizing of the educational establishment, and a caveat about N.E.A.'s push for total power.

Mr. Blumenfeld does not believe that the public educational system can recover from its educational and moral decline. His solution: a mass exodus to the private schools of our country. Only such a drastic step will alert our government to the acute problems our nation faces in the area of education.

Recognition for thirty-five years in Christian education.

PAUL ASSINK
Chicago Christian High School, IL—history, Bible, library—1966-present; Roseland Christian School, IL—science, assistant principal—1953-1966.

IRMA FENNEMA
Creston-Mayfield Christian School, MI; Los Angeles Christian School, CA; Kalamazoo, MI—various elementary grades—1952-present.

LOUIS DE JONG
South Christian High School, MI—history, government—1966-present; Bellflower Christian School, 1959-1966; Fulton Christian School—principal—1957-1959; Bellflower Christian School, CA—1954-1957.

ANN HOLSTEGE
Holland Christian School, MI—third, fourth, fifth grades—1958-present; Hudsonville Christian Elementary School, MI—1953-1958. Former CEJ board member.

ANDY TEN HARMSEL
Hudsonville Unity Christian High School, MI—coach—1953-present.

HENRY TEUNE
Zeeland Christian School, MI—junior high and sixth grade—1954-present; Cutlerville Christian School—1953-1954.

GORDON VANDER ARK
Pine Rest Christian Hospital, mentally and emotionally impaired students—1961-present; Ripon Christian High School, CA—1956-1961; Southwest Minnesota Christian High School, MN—1951-1954.

WILLARD VAN ESSEN
Sylvan Christian School, MI—principal—1957-1989; East Martin Christian School, MI—principal; Grand Rapids Westside Christian.

Send us your school's thirty-five year veteran teachers' names if you wish to honor them on this page.