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Teachers must develop positive public-relation techniques to preserve freedom from censorship while maintaining the public's interest in school programs. Censorship of books by both individuals and pressure groups can be avoided or dealt with through a program which has been carefully prepared before any censorship attempt occurs. The first step should be selection of the book by several teachers familiar with the community and the students. Then, the reasons for the book's inclusion in the curriculum should be disseminated through the school system and should be made available to the community through news outlets, PTA meetings, and other avenues of communication. Thus, a general unity of purpose is fostered among teachers, and reasonable discussion is encouraged between teachers and community leaders. When censorship attempts do occur, the school should first consider whether or not the book is being taught in a sensational manner. If it is not, the school should then present to the censor the questions raised in the NCTE pamphlet, "Citizen's Request for the Reconsideration of a Book." Also, offering a choice of titles to a single class will not only provide for individual reading differences but also discourage the objector who claims that his child is forced to read one particular book. (LH)

The Growing Edges of Secondary English

Essays by the Experienced Teacher Fellows at the University of Illinois 1966-1967

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CENSORSHIP: THE NEED FOR A POSITIVE PROGRAM TO PREVENT IT (BOOK SELECTION AS PUBLIC RELATIONS)

by W. WINSTON YOUNG

Mr. Young took both his bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Pennsylvania. He has done additional graduate work beyond the master's degree at Pennsylvania and Temple University. He has taught at all levels of instruction in the school district of Philadelphia and in the secondary schools of Abington Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. In this paper he attempts to bring the school and the community together in developing a rationale for the selection of literary works.

A cursory examination of the *Education Index* for any recent month will show a growing concern of schools and schoolmen with public relations. Criticism of school programs both from within and without the educational community has made administrators and the boards of education to whom they are responsible particularly sensitive to all aspects of public relations. Most important to teachers of English is the effect this interest has had on their literary selections.

The cry of censorship is heard in the land at the very time that the accessibility of inexpensive paperbacks, the prevalence of new critical editions, and the emergence of college courses in contemporary literature have come together to liberalize the content of school English programs. An enlivened and constantly broadened public voice inevitably makes certain challenges to the teachers' academic freedom. How to preserve both of these cherished traditions of democratic education without letting either one cancel out the force of the other is one of the main problems we face today. To solve it, our public relations techniques will have to assume a very positive stance. The following discussion will be concerned with an examination and a rational solution of this problem without devitalizing compromise.

The National Council of Teachers of English, in its publication *The Students' Right to Read,* tells us that even such distinguished and established literary figures as Shakespeare, Hawthorne, Mark Twain, Thoreau, and Whitman have been found "unsuitable for school use" in some locales.[1] Indeed, such classics as Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* have been excluded from the schools of entire cities or permitted only in adapted form. The daily press and educational journals have fairly

[1] Committee on the Right to Read, *The Students' Right to Read* (Champaign, Ill.: NCTE, 1962), p. 5.

bristled with reports of controversy over books used in the public schools. Other groups in addition to the NCTE, among them the American Library Association, the American Book Publishers' Council, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Education Association, and the National School Boards Association, have published statements for the guidance of schools threatened with censorship.

Since these suggestions have been called into being to answer attacks of censorship already in progress, their approach provides mostly defensive rather than positive action. This leaves the schools with few guidelines for action after an attack by censors other than to gird their loins for the next assault. The only long-term way to secure the schools against the inroads of unwarranted censorship is to develop a program of book selection so well organized in its structure that it will relate to both the community and the total educational program. Book selection of this kind will carry in its basic structure its own best defense. The NCTE work points in that direction in its "Program of Action" section:

> Teachers of English, librarians, and school administrators can best serve students and the profession today if they prepare now to face outside pressures sensibly, demonstrating on the one hand a willingness to consider the merits of any complaint and on the other hand the courage to defend with intelligence and vigor a sound program in literature. The Council thereby recommends that every school undertake the following two-step program to protect the students' right to read:
>
> - The establishment of a book committee of teachers to consider book selection and to screen outside complaints.
> - A vigorous campaign to establish a community climate in which informed local citizens may be enlisted to support the freedom to read.[2]

The temperate nature of this statement, qualified with the word *sensibly* and suggesting a two-step program in which the second step is "to establish a community climate," makes it patently clear that the NCTE committee places more faith in wise preparation than they do in defense after the fact of censorship attack. Therefore, the teacher or school which selects books in a capricious manner cannot expect a miraculous cure for its selection ailment in the NCTE program. Quite evidently the security of worthy books in the school program must be based primarily on mutual agreement between the school and its community. Wayne Booth makes both sides of the argument equally apparent:

> To the teacher, any attempt by outsiders to censor teaching materials is self-evidently wrong. To the censor, it is self-evident that a respectable society must supervise what is taught to its children. . . .

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

> To convert any "enemy," we must show him not simply that respectability, or tradition, or the NCTE are against him but that he is wrong, wrong according to his own fundamental standards. To tell him that he is wrong according to our standards gets us nowhere, though it may be great fun; the problem is to find, somewhere among his standards, at least one that is violated by what he proposes to do.[3]

It must be remembered that the "enemy" in this case is a citizen of the community in which the school is located, in which the teacher probably lives, and a person who—quite incidentally—does help pay the teacher's salary. This does not mean, however, that the proper attitude of the English teacher should be one of subservience, providing he has selected his materials with care. Rather, the teacher whose stand is firmly based on "a curriculum arrived at by consensus" may not only forestall the censor but even, as Mr. Booth suggests, convert him. The Commission on English sees this consensus as

> . . . not laid up in a heaven of expert generalizations. It can only be where the teaching of English is going on, and it will be most authoritative in departments of English where teachers with a strong sense of their professional identity are joined in a common pursuit. It will be neither authoritative nor effective in departments staffed by teachers inadequately trained, lacking the judgment that should come from experience, or afraid of their responsibilities.[4]

The censor is certainly an "enemy" whom it would be more desirable to convert than to antagonize. Therefore, an examination of his nature might be the best first step in preparing a program to effect this conversion.

Potential Individual Censors

It is possible for censorship to come from two sources, the individual and the pressure group. When the individual parent objects to his child's reading a particular literary work, the school ought to retain its equilibrium by assuming that he speaks only in regard to his own child. By assuming anything more than this we magnify our own problem. Donald L. Ayres, a teacher writing in the *NEA Journal,* notes, "A parent may feel, with justification, that a particular book is not appropriate for his youngster's level of maturity." [5] If that is the situation, a frank discussion between the teacher and the parent may bring to either insight which he previously lacked and result in an adjustment

[3] Wayne C. Booth, "Censorship and the Values of Fiction," *English Journal,* LIII (March 1964), 155.

[4] *Commission on English, Freedom and Discipline in English,* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1965), p. 45.

[5] Donald L. Ayres, "Censorship of Textbooks," *NEA Journal,* LII (May 1963), 24.

that sacrifices neither the teacher's integrity nor the parent's highly personal understanding of his own child. The individual parent objecting deserves a courteous hearing, but on the assumption that he speaks only for himself and his child. To give him a questionnaire such as the "Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Book" without first trying to reach agreement more informally might be asking for trouble.[6] The question in the "Request" asking for organizations which the parent represents might suggest to him that he recruit backing.

While speaking with the individual we might avoid excitement by keeping in mind the comment of Edward Gordon, chairman of the Committee on the Right to Read:

> We should first admit that not all objectors are censors. Many teachers have used bad judgment in choosing books that they themselves have not read or they try teaching in the seventh grade books more suitable for the twelfth. We can assume this type of error would be obviated by having a department approve of the book.[7]

We should not assume that Mr. Gordon is changing his approach here because he is addressing parents in the *PTA Magazine,* whereas the year before his committee was addressing educators in *The Students' Right to Read.* Instead, he is expanding on its "A Program of Action" section, which was, after all, skeletal in form.

If the book has been approved by the department according to well-organized procedures, the objecting parent can be informed that certain decisions are within his rights regarding the reading of his own child, but that they do not carry over to the children of other citizens. But just as it may be the individual parent's right to keep his child from reading a book which he feels his child lacks the maturity to handle wisely, so it is the other parents' right to be permitted to have their children read the book if it has been carefully selected. If we do not challenge the individual objector to recruit support by reading more into his attack than he intends, he might be satisfied with an enlightened discussion of the reading habits of his own child.

The committee anticipated this possibility in *The Students' Right to Read.* "At first, except for acknowledgment and explanation of established procedures, do nothing. The success of much censorship of this sort depends upon frightening an unprepared school into an unwise course of action." [8] Obviously, the individual has the right to object

[6] Committee on the Right to Read, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

[7] Edward Gordon, "Freedom to Teach and to Learn," *PTA Magazine,* LVIII (October 1963), 7.

[8] Committee on the Right to Read, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

through proper channels, but a well-planned literature program may very properly have the answers to censorship on hand prior to the attack. A case in point is J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*. After successful use for a number of years in the literature programs, the book has been timidly withdrawn from a number of schools—sometimes on the basis of the complaint of one parent. If the book was indeed offensive to the objecting parents on the basis that their children were not ready for it, it would be a pity if the book were to be denied the many who can profit from it.

Pressure Group Censors

The pressure group is another matter—potentially more dangerous in its threat, certainly more far-reaching in its effect. Its existence in American culture is a fact that educators can neither deny nor completely derogate. Therefore, it is advisable that teachers document what the Commission on English terms "curriculum by consensus." With a basis of departmental agreement and positive community involvement in the curriculum, it may be possible to bring the force of this phenomenon in American society to the support of the school's literature program. In fact, William O. Stanley sees a positive value in the existence of the pressure group:

> Despite the supreme importance of academic freedom for both students and teachers it is doubtful that a negative approach will enable the educator to penetrate to the heart of the problem posed for education by the demands of organized interests. For . . . these organizations are more than pressure groups; they are the means through which large and significant sections of the American public express their needs and their experiences. It is one thing for the educational profession to insist that freedom of study and inquiry must be preserved and that the school must not become a propaganda agency for any selfish or partial interest. But it is quite a different thing to assert that the ideals and aspirations of the major functional groups in American life have no significance for the ends and purposes of education, or that the accredited representatives of these groups have no legitimate role in the definition of educational objectives.[9]

The desirable course for English teachers is to bring as many of these interest groups to their side as possible by acquainting them with the selection procedure. This is not to say that the teacher should abrogate his role as the prime selector of books. His training, his inclination towards literature, his knowledge of the school program make him preeminently the person best qualified for that function. But, like all

[9] William O. Stanley, *Education and School Integration* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1953), p. 11.

judges, any individual teacher of English is not unassailable. He does not arrive at his decisions of what is to be read by a mystical route; he arrives there in the company of a number of his colleagues. Therefore, much support is to be gained and nothing lost by the English department's making clear to interested groups the procedure it follows in the selection of books. James R. Squire and Robert F. Hogan have suggested that the PTA act as an agent for this type of liaison between the school and the community. "Teachers and librarians in NCTE look to the National PTA and its local units for joint efforts to reach a common goal."[10] In essence the leaders of the NCTE encourage anticipatory action that will preclude use of the "Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Book."

In these days of preventive medicine, why not take measures to prevent censorship? We no longer wait for the child to come down with chicken pox or measles before we do anything about it. A cure for either is not nearly so important as finding out how to avoid the disease in the first place. Thus it should be with our books. When we get to the stage of the "Citizen's Request," or of "defense for the beseiged book," we already have a problem and battered public relations for the district at best.[11] The following plan, I believe, with due allowance for differences among schools and districts, would help to prevent misunderstandings that sometimes result in censorship.

A BOOK SELECTION PROCEDURE

When a book is recommended by a member of the English department, reasons for the choice should be put in writing and kept in a file in the departmental office. A form for this information could be developed by the book committee which *The Students' Right to Read* suggests each department establish. Of basic importance in this recommendation should be the proposed contribution of the book to the total program for the grade level to which it has been recommended and, if possible, its value to the curriculum in general. Further, reviews and comments from other members of the department should be encouraged. A folder of these recommendations can be kept in the English office for future reference. Also, the chairman or some other department member can check published lists of recommended books by such groups as the NCTE, the American Library Association, the National Association of Independent Schools—making a note on the folder as to which of these

[10] James R. Squire and Robert F. Hogan, "Should We Censor What They Read: A Symposium in Print," *PTA Magazine*, LIIIX (March 1965), 12.
[11] Committee on the Right to Read, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–19.

organizations, if any, endorsed the title for school use and with what reading or grade level it was associated. In this way some information is gathered on the educational status of the book even before it is assigned, let alone attacked. This information would also be of value to the department members for directing their own reading and the independent reading assignments of their students. Since the reviewers know their opinions will be on record, they will approach their task with an appreciation of its importance, citing specific reasons for their recommending books which they find to be of significant value to the English program.

Another aspect of this stage of book selection is the status of the recommending teacher. To say that a teacher should be on tenure to make a valid recommendation may be too demanding, but he should have taught in the school long enough to identify with the total department, thereby viewing his own recommendation within a scope broader than that of his immediate classroom experience. It is true that the younger teacher may in fact have more ideas for book selection than his more experienced colleagues, but a process involving several reviews and recommendations would temper the enthusiasm of youth with the wisdom of experience.

A policy of departmental cooperation to get other favorable reviews in addition to the initial reviews will actually help to unify the department, bringing the experienced and the inexperienced together in a serious purpose. Certainly the teachers who have been in the department long enough to have a thorough understanding of its total program should be encouraged to make the initial recommendations. Obviously books ordered in quantity and which represent an investment that will have to be used over many years should be selected neither on a basis of mere personal preference nor extremely limited experience. Unless the department has an unlimited budget, adaptability of the books ordered to various levels and types of classes should be an important consideration. Therefore, except in the case of limited sets ordered specifically for experimental use, book recommendations ought to be supported by favorable reviews from experienced members of the department. Titles favored by more than one teacher, with reasons documenting their choice, will certainly have a built-in advantage in the event of attack. Departmental support for a recommendation can also be of value in deciding whether to order paperback or clothbound copies. Specific details, naturally, will vary with the size and location of the department.

The NCTE in *The Students' Right to Read* emphasizes the need for deliberate, cautious movement in the handling of attacks on books. If

this caution is used in the ordering, it may be possible to avoid or greatly reduce attacks. Every established school has a supply of reading materials. (We shall not concern ourselves here with equipping new schools.) But in supplementing existing materials it is certainly better to order no books than to order books poorly suited to the curriculum, age level, or community for which they are intended.

The comment has been made that the program that is not attacked is not necessarily the best program. But then the program that reaches out to be startling for its own sake may not be the most sound. The department recommendation procedure suggested above should not be construed as guaranteeing a safe but dull program. Rather its purpose is to provide a program that can be justified and which represents a consensus of the department, since individual teacher selections which bear no relationship to the curriculum as a whole are similarly not the best program, either. In fact, such selections are matters of mere personal choice and no program at all. Surely, not only the chairman but all members of the department ought to know every title that is being taught and the reasons for its selection. If the title is frankly experimental, public reaction can be expected, and a candid explanation of the book's status by a delegated authority might be sufficient to satisfy the objector.

Intramural Relations

After enough review folders of recommended books have been accumulated, the next step is to duplicate a list of the titles. The list could be used for departmental discussion, class discussion, and publicity release. Department members should be urged to examine the folders from time to time so that they will be prepared for the meeting at which the titles are to be considered. Also, administrators should be informed of the folders' existence so that they too can examine them on occasion. As a matter of fact, administrators are often interested in reading in the various disciplines, and the English recommendations would give them worthy direction based on the opinions of people specifically trained in the field of literature. A natural interest in suggestions for their own leisure reading will help attract them to the English department file. The faculty book club which exists in many schools might also consider this file in the selection of its titles. The broader the faculty basis of book familiarity and approval, the greater the strength the school can muster in the event of attack on its books. In the case of the administrator, particularly, a knowledgeable stance in respect to the items on the school's reading list is essential to a sound commitment to it. His understanding of the reasons for his teachers' book selections will give added

support to the total program and at the same time further develop his respect for the opinions of his teachers in that he will have a continuing opportunity to refer to their ideas in written form.

With a list of recommended titles in hand, teachers might occasionally ask their classes for reactions to the suggested books. If the recommended book is a current one, there is a good chance that some class members will have already read it. Discussion of the work will give the student a chance to bring some of his outside reading into the classroom and simultaneously will give the teacher a chance to learn his reaction. In the case of classics which seem threatened by attack, a discussion with advanced students who are already familiar with them, supported by faculty documentation of their value, could be both educationally rewarding and wisely anticipatory.

Extramural Relations

The recommended list could also be made available to local newspapers and radio stations for possible book reviews by English faculty members or book discussions by students monitored by their English teacher. The communications media at the local level are anxious to have subject matter information from the schools and are often honestly puzzled as to why they get so little. If the sports program gets more than its share of publicity, the reason may be that the athletic director is more vocal than those to whom speech itself has been entrusted. This step could prove to be a very preventive one in regard to future attack. In a sense it educates the community, a necessary process and one that cannot be done overnight. It would be particularly useful in conveying the educational value of established classics now coming under attack in some communities. For example, a student discussion of *Huckleberry Finn* or of *Romeo and Juliet* on the local FM station or in the local weekly newspaper would serve the double purpose of acquainting the citizens with the school's English program and establishing the timeliness of the works studied, even though they are a part of our classic tradition. On the other hand, a review of Edward Albee's canon in the genre of the modern drama by an interested member of the English department could show the educational value in the examination of current trends in the theatre and their relationship with the drama of the past. Rapport with the community is, after all, the foundation of sound and functional schools.

In our day of large adult evening school enrollment, the list might also be used as part of the reading and discussion for literature courses there, of both the contemporary and great books variety. Many of the

evening students may be parents of youngsters in the regular high school. Therefore, this could serve both as a platform for the English department's experimentation and as a laboratory for the community's reaction. Of course, what an adult enjoys for his own reading he might not approve for his children's study, but questions eliciting his reaction to its use for high school students could be inserted into the discussion. Naturally, the final selection of new titles is the prerogative of the English department, a duty which its members must not delegate to any group of parents. But a test of reaction to new titles among limited groups can be a valuable measuring and publicity device.

Another approach at the adult level is that involving the Parent-Teachers' Association or the Parent Council of the high school. These groups can be differentiated from the pressure group category mentioned earlier in that they have no avowed specific purpose for existence other than to relate the purposes of the school to the parents. Their function is therefore a completely positive one and properly allied to the problem examined in this discussion. Such groups actively seek worthwhile activities to make their programs meaningful. Discussion of a proposed reading list after some personal exposure to its content and an acquaintance with critical reviews as well as teachers' opinions will give this influential community group an understanding of the English program and the school a valuable ally in the event of censorship attack. At the same time it would serve to bring influential members of the English department and parents together in a directed activity related to the department's subject matter.

It is a common fact that a parent who does not object to his child being brought home with a broken leg by the high school coach may in fact object to a particular book that same child is to read. And this is true to a considerable extent because the coaching staff has been careful through football banquets, dads' night programs, etc., to develop a climate of good public relations, whereas the English department has not. Some writers have gone so far as to suggest that English teachers get a signed release from parents for the use of controversial books in the manner of a sports injury release. I don't think we need follow our physical education colleagues to that extent, but we could profit from studying some of their superior public relations techniques.

With before-the-fact preparation of this kind, the school's reading list will have a basis of community support that will grow with the passing years. But its manner of presentation to the students can be of the greatest importance to its ultimate acceptance. The student's knowledge of reasons for reading a particular book is as important at the high

school level as his knowledge of its content. As teachers we must be sure to explain the reasons behind the selection of a particular title, since we cannot count on the high school student figuring this out for himself. The fact that the title is on the list or the set is in the bookroom is not reason enough. We must acquaint ourselves with the rationale for its inclusion in the curriculum, if we were not there when it was added, and communicate this to our students. In the process of explaining this rationale we can justify the use of controversial passages or ideas, thus anticipating some objection and thereby possibly forestalling attempts at censorship. Although we usually have more to do in our busy high school English program than to teach books merely because they are controversial, we owe it to our students to establish that some degree of controversy is a fact of life.

Fewer classwide assignments and more flexibility of selection by the student within certain bounds set down by the teacher not only are educationally justifiable but also serve to direct important controversial works to those students who have the maturity to properly deal with them. To be sure, most English teachers are not yet willing to supervise a literature program involving different titles for each student. But a variety of reading within each class for at least some assignments encourages vital discussion with all its educational advantages.

A good means of achieving this effect is to offer a number of titles by the same author, let us say John Steinbeck. This technique provides a common core for discussion and at the same time a variety of levels of difficulty and maturity for the selection of individual students. Every high school student in a particular class may not be ready to read *East of Eden*, but surely most can handle *Of Mice and Men*. Or let us consider William Faulkner. It would be difficult to find any class all of whose members could profit from *The Sound and the Fury*, a marvelously complex work. *Sanctuary*, on the other hand, is simple in structure and has been influential on contemporary American literature in spite of its melodrama and its sophomoric sexual episodes. *Intruder in the Dust* represents a fairly "safe" example of the writer's style, one that should not give offense to even the most sensitive tastes. There might very well be some classes in which no student could read *The Sound and the Fury* and no student should read *Sanctuary*. But, for the class with diverse abilities, a broad choice to which individual members can be guided with the help of the teacher can often prove to be extremely effective.

Sometimes student selection from a combination of contemporaneous authors such as Dreiser and Norris or Fitzgerald and Wolfe can provide significant comparisons of thematic and stylistic relationships. In the

course of a liberal education a student need not have read personally all the books he becomes acquainted with. Through class discussion of a number of titles the student learns about those books he has not actually read, and the superior reader may himself read more than one.

Offering a number of titles to a single class not only is educationally sound but also frustrates the would-be censor who would argue that his child was made to read a particular book. The censor who objects to *Tender Is the Night* can be told that his child could just as well have selected *This Side of Paradise.* The one who objects to *Look Homeward, Angel* can be told that his youngster could have chosen *The Web and the Rock.* Thus, all titles are saved for availability to other students. To achieve an inventory of this type, it is true that English departments would have to wean administrators and business managers from grade level across-the-board ordering. But if they are abreast of their professional literature they are aware that school programs are becoming more custom-tailored to the student than they were in the past, and the concept of grade level is itself open to question. Administrators sometimes wonder why their teachers remain so traditional while the teachers themselves labor under the delusion that dull conservatism is expected of them.

POSITIVE PRESENTATION

With the use of the before-the-fact preparation suggested above, there may be little or no objection to the books required. But, in the event objection should come anyway, there are some basic questions the English department might ask itself in regard to the presentation of literature to a class.

1. Was the class adequately prepared for the book, especially if it contains passages that might be considered objectionable or controversial? Such passages usually relate to sex, religion, race, or politics.
2. Has the teacher noted that unsavory characters and events represent the historical or sociological milieu of the book? Has he explained that their habits and actions are discussed in respect to their station in life and their time? Has he noted that offensive dialogue is typical of the character who uses it, inserted for the sake of verisimilitude, not necessarily as an expression of the author's beliefs?
3. Has the work been taught as a whole with all parts contributing to its basic unity, not merely as a device to test the students' ability at dichotomized memorization, a poor but frequent use of literature?
4. Has the teacher given the student any area of choice in the selection of the book?
5. Can the overall value of the work educationally counterbalance its controversial parts, as defined in the first question? While the teacher need

no longer ask along with Wililam Dean Howells whether the book is appropriate oral reading for his daughters, he must be careful not to identify with the students to the extent of compromising his selections to what is merely popular. The most educationally appropriate books for high school students are not always those in which they are most interested at the time.

6. Has the teacher been careful not to emphasize spectacular and provocative passages either by undue analysis or omission? Has he been careful to see that students put such episodes into perspective, thereby justifying their presence in the work?

If all of these questions can be answered positively and still there is parental objection to the book, then some of the items on the NCTE's "Citizen's Request" can be of some value. These are such questions as whether or not the objector has read the entire book, has an awareness of its evaluation by literary critics, and has clearly indicated the parts to which he objects.

The departmental folder on the book with its recommendations and clippings of reviews would at this point assist the chairman and the book committee in satisfying the objector's question about its educational value. The would-be censor must be made to understand by the school's representative that he cannot legislate for the children of others. Whatever his determination in regard to the reading of his own child, that is as far as his decision should extend. Above all, the department must retain the right to suggest replacements, if such action should become necessary.

As English teachers we must be alert to the fact that colleges no longer consider a specific list of works essential to the reading of the liberally educated. Where lists of suggested books are offered, all sorts of combinations will serve for any particular student. While this trend gives us a greater area of choice than ever before, it also confers a greater responsibility on our choices. Dogmatism about the use of a particular title may result in the use of expurgated editions, which represent a greater threat to the understanding of literature than does the complete elimination of a title. The experience of a class reading an adapted *Huckleberry Finn* or an adapted *Moby Dick* can be more destructive to their literary values than their not having read those works at all, for in reading the expurgated or adapted form the students will be misled into believing that they have an understanding of the author, when what they may actually have is quite the opposite of the author's intent. For example, Mark Twain's clear depiction of depravity in some of the white characters of *Huckleberry Finn* becomes grotesque psychosis if it is not balanced by the irony of racial ambivalence in the mind and conversa-

tion of Huck. Similarly, the human relationships that Melville symbolizes in many of the processes of whaling in *Moby Dick*, a part of the book at least equal to the importance of the voyage itself and the chief concern of the author in all his later works, are the parts that abridged editions leave out. Were Melville writing a book just about whales or voyaging, there is every evidence that he would have produced quite a different work—a fact that he confided to Hawthorne in his correspondence. We must strive through our preparation and selection to keep a truly valuable book available even though it is not a work that every student in any class can read with profit.

Basically, the effective teaching of literature should be neither lecture nor recitation nor even dialogue. It is, at the secondary school level, total communication about a work of art between a teacher and his students, the students and their parents, the parents and the community, the community and the school officials. It not only affects what people know and think but possibly what they do. In this sense the teaching of literature is not directly comparable to the teaching of science or mathematics because unlike those disciplines it involves content as well as process. And unlike social studies it involves much more process per unit of content. A reader can go out and experimentally repeat the action he has read about in a novel. He cannot, while he is a student, create history. In short, the teaching of literature is not merely dialogue, because it may result in an interchange of action as well as words. Potentially it is very dangerous stuff. Therefore, the responsibility of the teacher of literature is one involving social concern. Not only must the content of the work of art be made clear but its use must be clarified as well.

The book itself is an artifact which the student takes home with him and which the parents may read. If they do so, they may bring more or less sophistication to the reading than does their child. Thus the child must be acquainted with the book in a manner so that he can communicate about it. The work is not complete in itself until it has an interpreter, and there may be various approaches to the role. If the teacher of literature has been careful not to use the work as a cudgel for grades, a spectacle to command attention, or a springboard for shallow exploration of varied disciplines, he has before him a broad opportunity to make the work a field of development for his students' minds. Tactful avoidance of dogmatism on his part may help to discourage it in the student and his parents. For the English teacher to suggest that only he knows the right answers about a book is absurd. It is possible that no one person is completely right about the work just as it is possible that no one person is completely wrong. The teacher must rightfully lead his stu-

dents, but with reservation for perfectly valid opinions different from his own which they may develop along the way.

To suggest that a writer of fiction is a consistent philosopher is equally absurd. If he thought of himself as such, he would probably not have turned to the writing of fiction. Labels can be dangerous things, indeed. Crane is not consistently a naturalist, Dreiser a communist, Steinbeck a realist, Mark Twain a humorist. Therefore, careful analysis of the literary work as art is the prime function for the teacher of English without abandonment of that role for one of amateur philosopher. L. A. Waters sees this role of the English teacher as his basic one in a very sensible observation in his recent article in *College English:*

> Ours is a humble profession, after all, in the great world. We are artists and critics and defenders of the English tongue. In the academic world there is a field of philosophy, and one of theology, of science, of mathematics, and sociology, and dozens of others into which we have no professional competence to enter. Perhaps it is this very fact, growing out of our academic position, which makes some English teachers restive. Some prefer to pose in the wide world as masters of all things knowable and a few others. But in plain truth we are what we are, teachers of language and literature, and it is false for us to claim laurels as psychologists, or sociologists, or philosophers.
>
> It is on these grounds that we should appeal to our students and the citizens of our country, to allow us because of our profession of literature to choose the literary works that we will read and teach in our English classrooms and libraries. We are concerned, as everyone else is concerned in the academic world, that right solutions and answers may be found to our daily problems, but we have no right to make the insincere claim which we know to be insincere—that literature is able to seek out what is true and what is false in whatever subject matter a novel or a drama or a poem involves.[12]

However tempting it may be to the English teacher to assume the role of all things to all people, he must resist it in consideration of the community reaction and in honesty to his chosen profession.

What is the value of the English teacher's and the literature program's rapport with the community? It is the sine qua non of successful education at all levels. A diabolical suggestion of the community being against its teachers never ceases to have currency in our culture, perhaps stemming from the image of the schoolmaster and the schoolmarm as unbending wretches. To replace this image with that of the unassailable expert is not the solution to the problem. We must rather replace the image with that of a member of the community who has arrived at his

[12] L. A. Waters, "Right to Read—as the NCTE Presents It," *College English,* XXVII (November 1965), 163.

knowledge through a process of study which he is willing to share with his students and their parents in articulate communication.

If we remember that as teachers of English our role is to communicate, not just expostulate in the classroom, we will view the proper teaching of literature as communication with the entire community. We should not expect silence on any side, but difference of opinion tactfully handled need not lead to a cause célèbre. No amount of preparation or of tact will ever equate *The Bay Psalm Book* with *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* but reasonable precaution may well keep the English teacher's energies in reserve for instruction rather than polemics and return the demon of censorship to its place in history.

Kenneth L. Donelson in a recent article in the *English Journal* summed up the teacher's relationship to censorship and the community's interest rather comprehensively:

> One public relations duty we need to perform, else it will be handled for us, concerns the books we ask students to read. The problem of censorship is always with us in English, probably more than in any other discipline. Public discussions of books we use will not, of course, forestall all attempts at censorship, but they might remove some objections from citizens who are not aware how books are chosen. A valuable side effect for teachers of English might be in forcing intemperate teachers to justify their selections. And for the inevitable attempts at censorship that will arise, the English teachers will have a clear duty to devise a method that will insure fairness for both teacher and citizen.[13]

The care that the English teacher uses in the preparation of his literature program will not only give him a strong defense in the event of censorship attack but place him in the forefront of positive public relations for his district. In this role he is particularly well equipped to act as academic spokesman for his school. By fulfilling this role wisely he may help turn the role of negative public interest to a positive understanding that will greatly advance the cause of American education.

[13] Kenneth Donelson, "The Discipline and Freedom of the English Teacher," *English Journal,* LVI (April 1967), 570.

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