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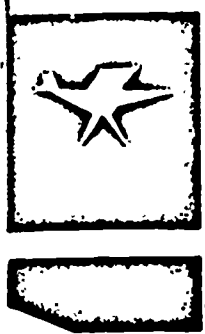
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PAPERBACKS AND THE THEMATIC UNIT

Jeanette Demicell and Nancy Cromer, Tempe HS

On a Monday morning, just before the first class of the week, an English teacher is about to close the classroom farther down the hall. The boy turns, pulls out of his shirt Dick Gregory's From the Back of the Bus, waves it at the teacher, and shouts, "I bought it man, I bought it. Bought four more while I was home. Didn't steal none." Bought or stolen, those five books were the first that boy had ever owned. (Daniel Fader, Hooked on Books, p. 59.)

The "textbook stigma" was not attached to his new, easily handled paperback books which he could conveniently stuff in his hip pocket. Interesting and colorful paperbacks have a more positive appeal than his old three-hundred-page, hard-back literature anthology.

The flood of attractive paperbacks, produced by hundreds of publishing companies and purchased by millions of adults, teenagers, and children, has made school more pleasant for both the student and his teacher. The ready availability of paperbacks has eased the task of the teacher who has tried to develop thematic units composed of various interesting literary works for teaching literature, but has been frustrated at the lack of materials available.

The thematic approach was first introduced in 1926 by Morrison's book PRACTICE OF TEACHING IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL. In devising a method of teaching to "combat the assign-study-recite trilogy", Morrison coupled Dewey's ideas with those of Herbart and the result was the teaching of literature thematically. (ENGLISH JOURNAL, March, 1967, p. 402). In the 1950's Morrison's thematic approach was revived and revised by Virginia Alwin and Richard Alm. In 1953, the ENGLISH JOURNAL sponsored a contest rewarding the three best suggestions for topics around which thematic units could be constructed. However, only in the past fifteen years has the teacher of English been able to painlessly use that approach to literature. The paperback book "BOOM" has been a "BOON" to the thematic approach to teaching literature: teachers are now able to inexpensively provide the multi-materials which are so appealing to young people and which are necessary for successful thematic unit teaching.

The thematic unit focuses on one concept or idea, and that concept or idea is the focal point for the study of the communication skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Multi-materials are used rather than one limiting anthology or textbook. Thus, during a thematic unit a student may engage in three levels of reading and/or activities: (1) in-common, (2) small group, and (3) individual. All are directed toward the treatment of the theme (concept or idea) inherent in the work.

"In-common" materials are those read and discussed together by the entire class. Also, during the unit students engage in small group activities involving four to seven students. These small groups may select or be assigned a selection to be studied by the group members. Perhaps the best feature of this approach is the opportunity for individualized instruction during the independent reading periods. To provide for the individual reading, a student, with guidance from the teacher, may select materials concerning certain aspects of the theme which interest him individually. This individual reading allows the student freedom of selection and allows the teacher time to work on a one-to-one basis with students. Through the variety in activity and through personal selection of available materials, the students become actively involved in the unit and realize that literature can be read and enjoyed.

Perhaps the key to successful thematic unit teaching is the selection of pertinent themes--themes that personally involve the students. The thematic unit purports to deal with a concept in depth; thus it is essential that teachers select materials which deal honestly with the theme rather than literature which must be stretched to "fit" the theme of the unit. The numerous adolescent novels in paperback (novels written about and for young people) offer the teacher a wide array of selection. It is the responsibility of the teacher to search out the materials--plays, novels, poetry, short stories, essays, and articles--dealing with the central theme of the unit and to make these materials available for classroom use. The paperback book has made this possible.

A thematic unit composed of paperback literature about Alaska and/or by Alaskan artists is effective for ninth grade students. Generally adolescents at this age level

are eager to read literature which is full of adventure and which deals with the unknown or the unexpected, as pointed out by George Norvell in his 12-year study on students' reading interests (READING INTERESTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE, Boston: Heath, 1950). By focusing the thematic unit on Alaska, the teacher has access to a wealth of literature in paperback form which is indeed of interest to the student. These two factors coupled with the various audio-visual material available through travel bureaus and film libraries set the stage for a successful experience.

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Here is a fine compilation of the famous Danish explorer's thrilling and

incredible battles with snow, ice, bears, wolves, hunger and danger. Also see PETER FREUCHEN'S BOOK OF THE ESKIMO (Dagmar Freuchen, ed., World, 1961, Nonfiction).

Machetanz, Sara. THE HOWL OF THE MALEMUTE: THE STORY OF AN ALASKA WINTER (Sloane, 1961) Nonfiction

This woman's account of her Alaskan winter--housekeeping in the Far North, social life with the Eskimos, filming the story of a sled dog from his birth to running with a team--is good reading!

Moody, Joseph P. and W. de Groot van Embden. ARCTIC DOCTOR (Dodd, 1955) P-Collier Biography

Dr. Moody traveled by aircraft, dog team, and canoe to visit his 2,000 Eskimo patients scattered over 600,000 square miles of the eastern Arctic.

Morenus, Richard. DEW LINE: DISTANT EARLY WARNING (Rand, 1957) Nonfiction

Morenus described here the building of the 3,000 mile DEW Line, vital link in the radar defense system along the Arctic shores of Alaska.

Rasmussen, Knud, compiler and translator. BEYOND THE HIGH HILLS: A BOOK OF ESKIMO POEMS (World, 1961)

"All human beings are poets in the Eskimo sense of the word." This is a beautiful collection of Eskimo poetry with magnificent photographs by Father Guy Mary-Rousseliere, an Oblate priest among the Eskimos.

Clarke, Tom E. NO FURS THE CZAR LOTHROP (1965) Novel

In primitive Alaska in 1805 Vassili Tamaroo found head-hunting, native hunger, and bitter cold--and a purpose for living.

Through reading good literature during the Alaska centered thematic unit, students enjoy the excitement, adventure, and uniqueness of the northern frontier and gain a more vivid picture of the often ignored, isolated portion of the United States.

A thematic unit prepared for use in the tenth grade focuses on "Conflict". During this unit various genre are read and discussed in terms of the inherent conflict. As a student progresses from one literary work to another, his understanding of the concept of conflict is broadened and deepened.

The play WEST SIDE STORY is read and discussed from the standpoint of family and racial conflict, and compared with the similar elements of conflict in the short story version of ROMEO AND JULIET in STORIES FROM SHAKESPEARE by Marchette Chute (NAL, 75¢). Both the plays WEST SIDE STORY and ROMEO AND JULIET are available from Dell for 50¢. The complete novel of WEST SIDE STORY by Irving Schulman (Simon and Schuster, Inc., 50¢) can be used as independent reading by a capable student.

Bella Rodman's adolescent novel LIONS IN THE WAY (Avon, 60¢) presents the racial conflict through the eyes of seven Negro teenagers who first attend an all-white high school in Tennessee. The play "Trouble on Sycamore Street" by Reginald Rose found in BEST TV PLAYS (Ballantine Books, 50¢) depicts the conflicts of an ex-convict who strives to secure a position in society after being released from prison.

The various literary works in the Conflict Unit are all readily accessible in inexpensive paperback books; otherwise the unit would be virtually impossible to present. The examples of literature mentioned are only a few of the books that could be used for a unit dealing with conflict. Since most stories are based upon some conflict, the problem is not in finding enough literature, but in choosing the best examples. At this point it is necessary for the individual teacher to isolate whatever elements

of conflict he wishes to explore and add literary works illustrating that conflict.

Other units using paperbacks:

A thematic unit on the theme "Who Am I?" is appropriate for ninth grade level as this age students are in a transition period trying to establish individual identities. The literature that is included depicts many different types of individuals in various situations as they struggle to know and understand themselves. Marjorie Smiley's collection WHO AM I? (Macmillan) can be used as the initial in-common reading. It contains not only short stories, but drama, poetry, and non-fiction as well. For instance, in "The Wise and the Weak", by Philip Aponte, the main character learned that it was better to avoid a situation than to try to be something he really wasn't.

The following list of literary works could be used for individual readings:

JAZZ COUNTRY, Nat Hentoff (Dell, 50¢)
LIGHT IN THE FOREST, Conrad Richter (Bantam, 50¢)
APRIL MORNING, Howard Fast (Bantam, 50¢)
ACROSS FIVE APRILS, Irene Hunt (Tempo, 50¢)
WHEN THE LEGENDS DIE, Hal Borland (Bantam, 60¢)
JAMIE, Jack Bennett (Bantam, 50¢)
SWIFTWATER, Paul Amnixer (Paperback Library, 50¢)
WATCH FOR A TALL WHITE SAIL, Margaret Bell (Tempo, 50¢)
MAGGIE, Vivian Breck (Tempo, 50¢)
A SEPARATE PEACE, John Knowles (Bantam, 75¢)
CATCHER IN THE RYE, J. D. Salinger (Bantam, 75¢)

Loneliness is a feeling that every person experiences at one time or another; thus, a unit centered on the theme of loneliness is universal in its appeal. Though this unit is designed for sophomores, the varied levels of literature should make it applicable to almost any grade level.

The following works could be used in the unit:

ROOSEVELT GRADY, Louisa R. Shotwell (Tempo, 50¢)
WATCH FOR A TALL WHITE SAIL, Margaret Bell (Tempo, 50¢)
THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG DISTANCE RUNNER, Alan Sillitoe (NAL, 60¢)
MEMBER OF THE WEDDING, Carson McCullers (Bantam, 60¢)
OF HUMAN BONDAGE, Somerset W. Maugham (Pocketbook, 50¢)
CATCHER IN THE RYE, J. D. Salinger (Bantam, 75¢)

Instead of approaching American literature chronologically, the use of various themes of American literature give a more unified approach to the study. America was founded on "protest", and this theme has carried through the development of the American nation. Thus, "America in Protest" could form a lively literature unit for juniors. The following list is only a few of the titles that could be used.

WALDEN, CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE, Thoreau (NAL, 50¢)
TORTILLA FLAT, Steinbeck (Viking, \$1.45)
THE SOUND AND THE FURY, Faulkner (Random, \$1.45)
THE FIRE NEXT TIME, Baldwin (Dell, 50¢)
MAIN STREET, Lewis (NAL, 95¢)
ARROWSMITH, Lewis (NAL, 95¢)
BABBIT, Lewis (NAL, 95¢)
TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD, Lee (Popular Library, 60¢)
THE UGLY AMERICAN, Burdick and Lederer (Fawcett, 60¢)
FAMOUS AMERICAN PLAYS OF THE 1930's, Clurman (Dell, 75¢)

For seniors a thematic unit of world literature in paperback might be developed around the theme of "Around the World in Eighty Days". If possible, the film of Jules Verne's story should be used as an introduction to and motivation for the varied literature in the individual reading list. If the film is not available, Verne's book of the same title might serve as in-common reading.

THE PEARL (Mexico), John Steinbeck (Bantam, 50¢)
GREAT EXPECTATIONS (England), Charles Dickens (Many editions)
LONELINESS OF THE LONG DISTANCE RUNNER (England), Alan Sillitoe (NAL, 60¢)
THE GOOD EARTH (China), Pearl Buck (Pocketbooks, 50¢)
BORN FREE (Africa), Joy Adamson (Bantam, 75¢)
CRY THE BELOVED COUNTRY (Africa), Alan Paton (Scribner, \$1.65)
ANNA, THE KING OF SIAM (S. E. Asia), Margaret Landon (Pocketbooks, 50¢)
EXODUS (Israel), Leon Uris (Bantam, 95¢)