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ABSTRACT

Literature experts, educators, and a national cross-section of interested laymen were gathered by the National Assessment of Educational Progress to define major objectives in literature instruction, to suggest tasks to sample these objectives and exhibit the achievements, interests, and attitudes of those exposed to literature, and to describe behavior expected of 10, 50, and 90 percent of the age groups in the study. They arrived at objectives (differing for the age levels of 9, 13, and 17, and for adults) which they considered appropriate for a national assessment in literature: (1) Read literature of excellence (implying an acquaintance with a wide variety of literary works and an understanding of the basic metaphors and themes through which man has expressed his values and tensions in Western culture). (2) Become engaged in, find meanings in, and evaluate a work of literature. (3) Develop a continuing, independent intellectual and emotional interest, curiosity, and participation in literature and the literary experience. (Some detailed examples of these goals for the various age groupings are provided, as well as lists of committee participants.) (MF)

National Assessment of Educational Progress

Literature Objectives

National Assessment of Educational Progress

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PREFACE

After more than four years of effort in developing its plan and instruments, the National Assessment of Educational Progress began actual assessment in the spring of 1969 with the administration of exercises to a random sample of 17-year-old students in schools throughout the United States.

The educational objectives from which exercises were developed in literature are published here, together with an introduction to the project. The procedures followed by National Assessment staff and its contractors in developing the literature objectives are described in the second chapter, followed by the objectives themselves.

Although names of experts, lay panel chairmen, and some of the educational organizations deeply involved in developing the objectives appear in the appendices of this booklet, it is impossible to give proper recognition to all who contributed to the development of the objectives and their publication. However, we want to particularly acknowledge the contributions of William A. Mehrens, Jack C. Merwin, Dale C. Burklund, Mrs. Frances S. Berdie, Dale I. Foreman, Edward D. Roeber, and Mrs. Peggy A. Bagby to the preparation and publication of the objectives in their final form.

Eleanor L. Norris
John E. Bowes
Editors

National Assessment welcomes your comments on the objectives in this brochure or any other phase of National Assessment activity. We would also like to encourage your suggestions for new or revised objectives. Comments should be addressed to:

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. . . . . *the editors*

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The National Assessment is designed to furnish information to all those interested in American education regarding the educational achievements of our children, youth and young adults, indicating both the progress we are making and the problems we face. This kind of information is necessary if intelligent decisions are to be made regarding the allocation of resources for educational purposes.

In the summer of 1963 the idea of developing an educational census of this sort was proposed in a meeting of laymen and professional educators concerned with the strengthening of American education. The idea was discussed further in two conferences held in the winter of 1963-64, and a rough plan emerged. The Carnegie Corporation of New York, a private foundation, granted the funds to get started and appointed the Exploratory Committee on Assessing the Progress of Education (ECAPE). The Committee's assignment was to confer at greater length with teachers, administrators, school board members and other laymen deeply interested in education to get advice on ways in which such a project could be designed and conducted to be constructively helpful to the schools and to avoid possible injuries. The Committee was also charged with the responsibility for getting assessment instruments constructed and tried out and for developing a detailed plan for the conduct of the assessment. These tasks required four years to complete. On July 1, 1968 the Exploratory Committee issued its final report and turned over the assessment instruments and the plan that had been developed to the Committee on Assessing the Progress of Education (CAPE), which is responsible for the national assessment now under way.

In the early conferences, teachers, administrators and laymen all emphasized the need to assess the progress of children and youth in the several fields of instruction, not limiting the appraisal to the 3 R's alone. Hence, the first assessment includes ten areas: reading,

writing (written expression), science, mathematics, social studies, citizenship, vocational education (career and occupational development), literature, art, and music. Other areas will be included in the second round. The funds available were not sufficient to develop assessment instruments in all fields of American education. The ten chosen for the first round are quite varied and will furnish information about a considerable breadth of educational achievements.

Because the purpose of the assessment is to provide helpful information about the progress of education that can be understood and accepted by laymen as well as professional educators, some new procedures were followed in constructing the assessment instruments that are not commonly employed in test building.

These procedures are perhaps most evident and important in the formulation of the educational objectives which govern the direction of the assessment in a given subject matter area. Objectives define a set of goals which are agreed upon as desirable directions in the education of children. For National Assessment, goals must be acceptable to three important groups of people. First, they must be considered important by scholars in the discipline of a given subject area. Scientists, for example, should generally agree that the science objectives are worthwhile. Second, objectives should be acceptable to most educators and be considered desirable teaching goals in most schools. Finally, and perhaps most uniquely, National Assessment objectives must be considered desirable by thoughtful lay citizens. Parents and others interested in education should agree that an objective is important for youth of the country to know and that it is of value in modern life.

This careful attention to the identification of objectives should help to minimize the criticism frequently encountered with current tests in which some item is attacked by the scholar as representing shoddy scholarship, or criticized by school people as something not in the curriculum, or challenged by laymen as being unimportant or technical trivia.

National Assessment objectives must also be a clear guide to the actual development of assessment exercises. Thus, most assessment objectives are stated in such a way that an observable behavior is described. For example, one citizenship objective for 17-year-olds is that the individual will recognize instances of the proper exercise or denial of constitutional rights and liberties, including the due process of law. Translated into exercise form, this objective could be presented as an account of press censorship or

police interference with a peaceful public protest. Ideally, then, the individual completing the exercise would correctly recognize these examples as denials of constitutional rights. It should be noted, however, that exercises are not intended to describe standards which all children are or should be achieving; rather, they are offered simply as a means to estimate what proportion of our population exhibit the generally desirable behaviors implicit in the objectives.

The responsibility for bringing together scholars, teachers, and curriculum specialists to formulate statements of objectives and to construct prototype exercises was undertaken through contracts by four organizations experienced in test construction, each responsible for one or more subject areas. In several areas the formulation of objectives was particularly difficult because of the breadth and variety of emphases in these fields. Hence, two contractors were employed to work on each of these areas, independently, in the hope that this would furnish alternative objectives from which panels composed of lay persons could choose.

This brief description of the process employed in identifying objectives for the first assessment should furnish a background for examining the sections that follow in which the objectives and prototype exercises are presented. The instruments actually used in the assessment provide samples of exercises appropriate for the four age groups–9, 13, 17, and young adults from 26-35–whose achievements are appraised, and for the wide range of achievement at each age.

Chapter II

LITERATURE OBJECTIVES

A committee of literature experts[1] together with staff members of The Educational Testing Service of Princeton, New Jersey, met in the summer of 1965 to define the nature and scope of Literature objectives. In addition to the general criteria of ECAPE listed in the introduction, the literature committee was charged with three guidelines:

(1) To define the major objectives of instruction in literature.

(2) To suggest tasks which sample the major objectives and exhibit the achievements, interests, and attitudes of those exposed to literature.

(3) To describe the kinds of behavior expected of 10, 50, and 90 percent of the several age groups in the study.

It was made clear to the panel that, although they should consider literature goals from the standpoint of the schools, they should also recognize that the entire community is involved, that school and community deeply influence each other. Because National Assessment wanted to make itself understood by most members of the community, objectives were to be expressed as generalities understandable to an informed lay public.

The panel began their work with a discussion on the importance of literary tradition to cultural inheritance, commenting that students should understand the basic metaphors and allusions through which man has expressed his values and tensions in Western culture. It was emphasized that understanding is not merely the ability to recite stories and myths, but rather the result of "reading in depth" based on knowledge of fundamental metaphors and the individual's ability to interrelate what he has read with other works. In short, the committee agreed that the student should *experience* literary forms as well as recognize them.

Committee members also agreed that mechanical skills should

[1] The names of the ETS literature panel experts are given in Appendix A.

not be emphasized; rather, interpretive reading is to be preferred. Interpretive reading assumes knowledge of literary forms and an understanding of how and why certain literary techniques are used. Moreover, the committee considered it important to assess the student's ability to question what he reads: to read with discrimination and make value judgments on content, to avoid clichés, and to appreciate the variety of literary expression and the feelings it can evoke.

The panel agreed that it is not the function of the schools to impose specific literary preferences, but that the school should instead promote literary evaluation based on such criteria as the importance of the idea expressed, its universality, and the appropriateness of expression to that idea.

The literature committee concluded that assessment should not be confined to a specific set of works. However, certain authors and works were recommended with the caution that students should not be required to identify them specifically. Any selection of basic works must include many authors, all genres, many cultures, and many historical periods. It is important to find out what, in fact, students are reading rather than confining them and the assessment to a rigid list of works.

During their discussions, the panel proposed five tentative goals that a student should strive for in literature: (1) understand the meaning of the work, (2) relate parts of the work to the whole, (3) make and defend an evalutaion of the work, (4) respond at a personal level to a literary work, and (5) understand the basic metaphors through which man has expressed his values and tensions in Western culture.

In addition, the panel members considered it important that a student attain a satisfaction in reading literature which would motivate him to independently seek out new and varied authors, discuss literature informally, and keep up with changing trends in literature. Ideally, the student also would be able to relate his literary experience to his on-going life as perhaps a means of developing a point of view, as escape, or as a guide to problem-solving.

At the conclusion of this two day meeting in Princeton, ETS prepared the list of objectives representing the consensus of the literature committee and the ETS staff. This list was then sent to the Exploratory Committee (ECAPE) for its consideration.

Throughout the planning and execution of the National Assessment, the NAEP staff has been well aware of the desirability and importance of involving the general public in the development of objectives and exercises. While it is not unusual for profession-

als to interact on such things as objectives and tasks, it is perhaps unusual to include non-professionals in these discussions. Thoughtful lay people actively interested in education were identified by asking for nominations from various national and state organizations interested in education (see Appendix B).

From these nominations, persons living in large cities, suburban communities, and rural, small town areas throughout the United States were selected to attend conferences to review the objectives that had been developed. Twelve lay review panels were to have been established representing the four major geographical areas of the country and the three different community sizes. However, in one region of the country, so few suburban communities existed, that only two committees were set up for that area. Each one of the 11 remaining committees was chaired by one of the lay panelists and met at a convenient place in their area to discuss the objectives with a member of the ECAPE staff. Each panel reviewed the objectives, providing 11 independent reviews of all 10 subject matter areas. Following lay panel meetings in each area, the 11 chairmen were brought together for a meeting in New York City in December, 1965, to make recommendations to National Assessment's Exploratory Committee.

Their major suggestion to the ECAPE staff was that assessment in literature should extend beyond a restricted list of "literary" classics to assess the student's familiarity with a wide range of "good literature." The lay groups were concerned with the breadth of reading and wanted to include non-European as well as Western literature, and contemporary as well as literature of the past. The assessment should, in their opinion, measure an individual's growth in terms of the increasing quality of the material read: an older student would ideally read a greater amount and a better quality than a younger one. These suggestions were considered in later versions of Literature objectives.

After objectives for all 10 subject areas were developed, a comparison was made of their relationship to other statements of objectives in these areas which had appeared in the literature during the past 25 years preceding this project. Since the National Assessment objectives were developed for a specific purpose, their wording, phrasing, and organization were somewhat more uniform than one would find in previous statements. However, it was possible to classify these older objective lists in terms of their correspondence to National Assessment objectives. When this procedure was finished, it was obvious that National Assessment had not produced a set of new objectives in any subject area. Rather, these objectives were restatements and summarizations of

objectives which had appeared in print over the last quarter of a century. This was a desired and expected outcome in that one criterion for National Assessment objectives was that they be central to the teaching efforts of educators.

The objectives presented in the next chapter of this monograph have survived the consideration of both experts and lay people and serve as the basis for exercises which are being presented to four age groups in this first year of National Assessment. The job of developing objectives has not, however, ended, for as the goals of the educational system evolve and change, so must the objectives used by National Assessment. This means that there must be continual re-evaluation of objectives in each National Assessment subject area.

During the summer of 1969, National Assessment began reviewing objectives for the areas assessed in the spring of 1969: Science, Writing, and Citizenship. Again the assistance of both experts and lay people was requested to determine whether the objectives needed modification. When the first year's assessment in Literature is completed, a similar review process will take place. By providing this continuing process of re-evaluation, the National Assessment Program hopes that it can attain its own goal of providing information about the degree of agreement between what our educational system is attempting to achieve and what, in fact, it is achieving.

Chapter III

LITERATURE OBJECTIVES

Literature is defined as the verbal expression of man's imagination, regardless of medium or mode of presentation. When, therefore, the word "work" is used, it refers to a printed text, recording, or film, as well as to a poem, play, short story, or essay.

The objectives and subobjectives considered appropriate for a national assessment in literature are listed below.

I. READ LITERATURE OF EXCELLENCE.

A. *Be acquainted with a wide variety of literary works:* by many authors, in all genres, from diverse cultures, from diverse periods.

Generally speaking, this goal demands of an individual a broad reading background and the ability to use that background in dealing with works new to him.

Age 9 Recognize children's "classics" (*Mother Goose, Winnie-the-Pooh, Child's Garden of Verses, Mary Poppins,* Dr. Seuss).

Age 13 (in addition to Age 9)

Recognize certain authors and works (Aesop or LaFontaine, Andersen or the Brothers Grimm, *The Jungle Book, Tom Sawyer, Charlotte's Web,* Benet's *Book of Americans,* Robert Frost, Alfred Noyes, Carl Sandburg, Walter de la Mare).

Age 17 (in addition to Age 13)

Recognize typical passages of Shakespeare, major nineteenth-century novelists (English and American), Pope, Swift, Whitman, Frost, E. E. Cummings, Keats, and others.

Adult Given a similar division on the basis of years of formal education, the definition of goals is approximately the same as that for Age 17, if one grants the balance of attrition from memory and addition from experience.

B. *Understand the basic metaphors and themes through which man has expressed his values and tensions in Western culture.*

Not unlike IA, this goal calls for an individual's knowledge of the major texts and literary or cultural figures and themes of Western culture. This knowledge constitutes a cultural shorthand, by which one may recognize similarities between the past and present, by which one may recognize certain universals, be they prototypes like Oedipus, symbols like the blind seer, or themes like the struggle of Job to understand the nature of divinity. The end of this goal, again like the end of goal IA, is the ability to use this knowledge when confronting a new situation, either in literature or in life.

Age 9 Know some of the common Biblical figures. (This goal is assigned to this age group, although it is hard to predict when, where, or if this knowledge is acquired.)

Know about the Arthurian legends, a few of the Greek myths, American folk figures (Paul Bunyan, Pocahantas).

Be able to recognize the use of these figures in a modern context (a work of literature, a sentence, a slogan, or a trade name). *NB*: This goal is applicable at all age levels.

Age 13 (in addition to Age 9)

Know most of the common Biblical figures.

Know most of the Greek pantheon and such legends as those of Jason and Odysseus.

Know the Arthurian legends, Robin Hood, several American figures (Tom Sawyer, Ichabod Crane, Rip Van Winkle).

Age 17 (in addition to Age 13)

Know certain of the major characters of European, English, and American literature (Hamlet, Captain Ahab, Don Quixote, Gargantua).

Know the themes of certain Greek works (*The Odyssey*).

Know certain post-Christian themes (Faust, Arcadia, Utopia and ideals).

Know certain American themes (*Huckleberry Finn, Moby Dick*).

Adult As for Age 17, but with somewhat more sophistication, and, at the upper levels, more knowledge. The college-educated adult might be better able to understand Job, Oedipus, or Antigone, or any of the archetypal stories, simply because he is older (see the introduction to II).

II. BECOME ENGAGED IN, FIND MEANINGS IN, AND EVALUATE A WORK OF LITERATURE.

This goal demands of the individual imaginative, perceptual, interpretive, and discriminatory powers in confronting a solitary work of literature. In part the goal depends upon the attainment of literary knowledge (I), but it has been well argued that such knowledge is not mandatory.

Because of the nature of literature, the nature of man, and the nature of critical theory, this goal and its subgoals are not susceptible to *a priori* definition.

(1) Literature, more than most of the arts, demands equal attention to content and form, to subject matter and artist. In certain works--*Areopagitica,* Emerson's *Essays, Robinson Crusoe, 1984*, for example--the author seeks not approbation for his technique, but conviction that his point is valid. Other works demand of the reader intellectual pleasure in their artistry and awe of the artist; *The Importance of Being Earnest* or a Shakespearean sonnet is a work of this sort. Thus, when one poses as a goal, undeniably an important one, "Become engaged in . . . a work of literature," one cannot say in what sort of engagement or with what aspect of the work that engagement should take place.

(2) Men grow more mature, and more aware of the complexities of life. Since literature is a heterocosm (a distillation or a criticism of life), the appreciation, even the perception of a literary work, changes within the individual as he matures. And since man's maturation depends on more than intelligence, schooling, or even age, one cannot reliably predict what work will engage him at what age in what way, or what work he will perceive at what age in what way.

(3) Even were literature and man completely predictable, the state of literary criticism precludes any but the most general *a priori* statements about critical goals. Some argue that emotional response is unimportant, some that it is the purpose of literature. Some argue that a work should be seen as a cultural or thematic document, some that it would be seen only as an artifact. Critics argue over the moral function of literature, over the best criteria for judging a literary work, over whether a work should be viewed in a literary context, a cultural context, or in isolation. The argument for each of these points of view is cogent, and while the best critics, in fact, view a work from many points, the average reader or student is likely to become bound in and to only one.

In regard to this general goal, then, any assessment would be foolhardy if it had any *a priori* goals. There are, nevertheless, some questions which this assessment would do well to ask.

A. *Respond to a work of literature.*

By what sorts of works do most readers become engaged? With what aspect of the work does the engagement take place: subject matter, style, theme, genre?

Are readers capable of becoming engaged in and yet withdrawing from the work; i.e., do readers enter into the world of a work and at the same time recognize the "radical otherness" of the work (do they laugh at jokes, do they simultaneously cry at and criticize a "tear-jerker")?

Do readers generally seek to relate works (e.g., realistic works, fanciful works) to their own experience?

B. *Find meanings in a work of literature.*

Do readers tend to look for surface or "symbolic" meanings? Do readers acknowledge a multiplicity of meanings? Do readers support their interpretation from intrinsic or extrinsic evidence? Do they tend to use an analytic or classifying approach to a work?

What aspects of a work do readers tend to look at: language, literary devices, content, etc.?

Age 9 Recognize the sequence of a narration.
Summarize the content of a work.
Translate metaphoric into "algebraic" language (be able to paraphrase).
Recognize gross stylistic similarities and differences.

Age 13 (as for Age 9)

Age 17 (in addition to Age 9)
Show what aspect of a work supports a given interpretation.
Identify literary devices.
Recognize more minute stylistic similarities and differences than can the 13-year-old.
Generalize an interpretation of a work.

Adult (as for Age 17)

1. Read a work with literary comprehension.

Do readers recognize stylistic or formal similarities between works? Are they able to perceive puns? Can readers identify a work through its parody? Are readers able to perceive the correct paraphrasing of a poem? Are readers able to comprehend the sense and tenor of metaphors?

Age 9 Distinguish verse from prose, realistic fiction from whimsey.
Recognize subgenres (story-poems, beast fables, fairy stories, biography).

Distinguish between works written recently and "long ago" (i.e., with somewhat archaic diction).

Age 13 (in addition to Age 9)

Recognize folk tales, free verse, limerick, dramatic forms, first-person narratives, myths and legends, nonsense.

Recognize national characteristics in a work (broadly indicated by place names, italicized words, local color).

Distinguish between fiction and nonfiction.

Age 17 (in addition to Age 13)

Most of the goals of Age 13 may be applicable here (save that of specific recognitions). A general acquaintance with the motion picture, television, and comic strips may enable the individual to make some of the following gross distinctions:

Distinguish between degrees of distortion of reality (realism, verisimilitude, fantasy).

Recognize similar content in different genres or media.

Recognize the major literary genres, subgenres, and types (novel, poem, short story, drama; lyric, ballad, sonnet, comedy, tragedy; personal essay, autobiography).

Make analogies of literary types between media (e.g., recognize the satirical element in a motion picture and a story).

Make analogies on the basis of theme or style between works of different countries or genres.

Adult (in addition to Age 17)

Distinguish between works of different literary periods on the basis of style and theme.

C. *Evaluate a work of literature.*

Do readers have a criterion of evaluation? What is it? Is it consistent? Do readers recognize a multiplicity of criteria? Do readers distinguish between objective and subjective criteria?

Age 9 Support an evaluation of a work.

Compare two works by the same criterion. (The possible criteria are those of affect, form, rhetoric, genre, tradition, intention, mimetic plausibility, thematic plausibility, symbolic plausibility, moral acceptability, and multifariousness in interpretation.)

Age 13 (in addition to Age 9)

Distinguish between objective and subjective evaluations.

Age 17 (in addition to Age 13)
Recognize the possibilities of other criteria.
Apply different criteria to the same work.
Apply different criteria in the comparison of two works.

Adult (as for Age 17)

III. DEVELOP A CONTINUING INTEREST AND PARTICIPATION IN LITERATURE AND THE LITERARY EXPERIENCE.

This goal is directed at assessing the interests and attitudes; for the most part the goal is relevant to Age 17 and Adult.

A. *Be intellectually oriented to literature.*
This goal asks of the individual a recognition of the importance of literature to the individual and society, and a recognition that literary expression requires a number of forms to enable it to become an art.

All ages Recognize the importance of literature to an understanding of cultures distant in time or distinct in history.
Recognize the importance of literature to a comprehension of the diversity and homogeneity of man.
Recognize that participating in the literary experience is a prime form of enjoyment.

Age 17 & Adult Recognize the necessity of a free literature in a free society.
Recognize that the art of literature involves a close connection between form and content.

B. *Be affectively oriented to literature.*

This goal demands primarily the ability to respond to literary works, and thus repeats IIA; it demands secondarily the willingness to respond to literary works and thus anticipates IIIC.

C. *Be independently active and curious about literature.*

Age 9 Use a library independently.
Dramatize works of literature independently.
Read new works independently.

Age 13 (in addition to Age 9)
Write stories, poems, playlets, etc., independently.
Participate in dramatic groups.

Age 17 Use a library independently.

Read reviews of literary works.
Read new works independently.
Discuss literary works with friends.
Participate in extracurricular literary activities (drama groups, magazines, newspapers).

Adult Read reviews of literary works.
Read new works independently.
Discuss literary works with friends.
Belong to book clubs, discussion groups, theatrical groups.

D. *Relate literary xperience to one's life.*

The individual is asked to articulate the reasons for his participating in literature. It would probably not be applicable or fruitful to inquire about this goal below Age 17.

Appendix A

MEMBERS OF THE ETS LITERATURE COMMITTEE*

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* Members' affiliation at the time they served on the committees are indicated here.

Appendix B

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League of Women Voters
Local Boards of Education
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Citizens Committee for Support of Public Schools
National Conference of Christians and Jews
National Congress of Parents and Teachers
National School Boards Association
Parochial Educational Organizations
State and Local Governmental Committees on Education
State Boards of Education
State Parents and Teachers Associations
State School Board Associations
U. S. Chamber of Commerce

More than 3,000 scholars, teachers, subject matter experts, curriculum specialists, laymen, including members of school boards, and test specialists have been involved at various stages of formulating and reviewing objectives and prototype assessment exercises.

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