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ABSTRACT

A thematic literature unit on the generation gap utilizing a variety of materials and in-class activities helps students understand their generation and that of their parents, creates an awareness that parent-child conflict is not a new phenomenon, and emphasizes the inevitable cycle by which the younger generation becomes the older generation. The unit can utilize three approaches, each serving a different purpose: (1) to study literature about the generation gap which covers the entire span of literary history, expressing a wide range of viewpoints; (2) to present characters in a contemporary novel with whom the student can sympathize and identify; and (3) to promote an emotional response to literature through role playing. (Brief lists of supplementary reading suggestions and selected references are included as well as study guides on "Zooey" and "The Late George Apley.") (JMC)

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An Approach to Teaching Literature of the Generation Gap

BY MARILYN WILKER
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When I was a boy of fourteen my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.

Mark Twain

Hardly a day goes by when I fail to see or hear the phrase "generation gap." Chiffon margarine promises a product that will not only please young and old but will also serve as a stimulus to greater understanding. Bryant 9, a dress manufacturer, displays the "miniest" of dresses in its advertisements and proclaims, "Widen the generation gap." In smaller print it concedes, "the only thing 'establishment' about Bryant 9 is the fine stores you'll find them at."[1] And CBS in three one-hour specials has determined to explore the issue from every angle — promising mean-

This paper by MARILYN WILKER *was prepared as partial fulfillment of requirements for English 491 at the University of Illinois and was written under the direction of J. N. Hook. I think you will agree with Dr. Hook who says, in commenting on the paper, that the suggestions given are varied and appropriate and that the entire article is extremely timely.*

[1] *New York Times Magazine* (May 4, 1969), p. 63.

ingful analysis for both "protesting youth" and "perplexed parent."[2]

As an English teacher I see the potential for a meaningful thematic unit on the generation gap. The issue is current, relevant, and, I think, potentially exciting. The opportunities for relating in-class activities to outside ones are vast, and appropriate material is everywhere. Hence, the works of literature which I have selected are only a small fraction of those which are available. I chose some because I found them of interest to students in other contexts, some because the characters seemed particularly interesting, and some because the parent-child conflict was especially well-depicted. Others may prefer to use those works listed here as supplementary (p. 21) or an entirely different grouping of their own choice. I have also tried to employ a variety of methods in order to maintain student interest. These methods may be switched around or altered depending on the interests of particular classes.

The goals of the unit are straightforward: helping students to understand their own generation and the generation of their parents; creating an awareness that parent-child conflict is far from a new phenomenon; and aiding recognition that in an inevitable cycle the younger generation does become the older. Achieving these goals is more difficult. To bring the Pepsi generation closer to the over-thirties, the teacher must be flexible — must not only respond to student needs but must also incorporate their ability to plan and make responsible decisions.

The first day or two might be devoted to a twofold purpose: helping students to see that the generation gap is almost everywhere — in music, photographs, and films as well as in literature — and helping them to form a definition of the generation gap. Begin by asking them what the generation gap is. It is unlikely there will be unanimity of opinion. Suggest that they bring to class pictures, records, poems, and other things which they feel illustrate the generation gap. In class they can defend their choices.

The teacher might be prepared with a number of his own selections. Pictures from *The Family of Man* showing elderly people might be alternated on an opaque projector with photos of hippies and teen-agers at the Chicago Democratic Party convention. Or show them at the same time using two projectors. These photos might be followed by a sequence picturing small children. Gradually introduce older children and try to decide at just what age the generation gap begins. Show a number of pictures with

[2] *TV Guide* (May 31–June 6, 1969), p. A-38.

adults and teen-agers together. Try to decide when the gap is present and when it is not. What are possible reasons it occurs in some relationships but not in others?

For a really mod approach play music from *The Graduate* while showing the pictures. Most likely it will lead to a discussion of that film. Even if it does not, the class will begin to guess that there is something different about this unit. The lyrics from a few recordings can also be considered. Tom Jones's song "Never Say No" from the musical *The Fantasticks* is quite appropriate. Two fathers who want their son and daughter to marry employ "reverse psychology" to make them fall in love. The lyrics proclaim: "Your daughter brings a young man home/ says, 'Do you like him Pa?'/ Just say that he's a fool and then/ you've got a son-in-law."[3] The rest of the song describes more absurd examples of youthful rebellion. Why do the kids put beans in their ears? Why do they put strawberry jam on the cat? The answer is simple: "They did it cause we said 'No.'" Student opinion is certain to be strongly opposed to this stereotyped view of youth. Arlo Guthrie's protest against the establishment in *Alice's Restaurant* is also suitable for this opening lesson. The twenty-minute monologue depicts the complications which may occur when a well-meaning youth inadvertently breaks the law by depositing his trash in the wrong place. The confrontation with inflexible, unfeeling bureaucracy and the resulting frustration is certainly part of the generation gap. Guthrie also discusses his protest feelings in an article "As Arlo Guthrie Sees It . . . Kids Are Groovy. Adults Aren't."[4]

Conclude this lesson by explaining that this unit will explore literature about the generation gap from various periods and expressing diverse points of view. Invite their help in planning and thinking, for if the unit is to be successful, it must be personally relevant to them. Finally, pass out copies of E. E. Cummings's poem "old age sticks / up Keep / Off / signs) & / youth yanks them / down."[5] Ask them to read it several times during the course of the unit, but save discussion of it until the concluding lesson.

Literature about the generation gap covers the entire span of literary history and expresses a wide range of viewpoints. It is

[3] Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt, "Never Say No," *The Fantasticks* (MGM Recording # E38720c) 1960.
[4] Susan Braudy, *New York Times Magazine* (April 27, 1969), pp. 56-79.
[5] Poem 57 in E. E. Cummings, *95 Poems* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958).

the purpose of this portion of the unit to sweep across the centuries, from the second to the twentieth, to give the student some feeling that his problems are common to mankind of all times. The three works selected to accomplish this end — the myth of "Daedalus and Icarus," Clarence Day's short story "Father Opens My Mail," and the 1967 winner of the Vernon Rice Drama-Desk Award, *Summertree* — approach the generation issue from diverse viewpoints and reach different conclusions. Because the ideas they set forth are so divergent, the potential for critical comparison is strong. The student, by examining and discussing these three views, can formulate reasoned opinions and perhaps gain some new insights. One warning though: it is very tempting to try to establish a trend based on these works — to say for example that current writings are more sympathetic to the problems of youth than earlier ones. However, such a judgment based on just three writings would be fallacious, and indulging in this type of hypothetical guesswork is fruitless.

The myth of "Daedalus and Icarus," as recounted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, describes in sixty-one lines the downfall of Icarus, who disobeyed his father. The two, captives in Crete, were prevented from escaping by land or sea. Daedalus, hoping to find freedom in the air, fashioned wings from feathers and wax for himself and his son. He warned his son to fly a middle course so that the water would not weigh the wings down or the sun melt the wax; but Icarus, once he gained confidence, soared higher and higher until the wax melted and he plummeted into the sea. The obvious moral of the story is that young boys who disobey their fathers are doomed to death. Throughout, there is the hint that youth is evil by nature and that disaster is inevitable. While Daedalus works, Icarus is in his way, interfering, sticking his thumb into the yellow wax, "fooling around, the way a boy will always/Whenever a father tries to get some work done."[6] Daedalus has a premonition that his son will disobey and be killed, and consequently he is tearful as he kisses him "good-bye, if he had known it."[7]

The myth does not examine the parent-child relationship in depth: the characters never speak, and no real personalities emerge. Yet, given Ovid's account, the student can only conclude that one author at least believes and proves "father knows best." This idea is not very attractive to the teen-ager, who gives himself

[6] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 188.
[7] Ibid., p. 188.

credit for reasoning ability and common sense. To understand it at all, he needs an awareness of point of view. A simple exercise — looking at the details of an auto accident as given by the guilty party, innocent party, and an onlooker; or relating Odysseus' confrontation with the Sirens from his point of view, the Sirens', and the crew's (who have beeswax in their ears) — should give him some feeling for viewpoint. Then, with this basis established, he can proceed to Ron Cowen's drama *Summertree*, which is perhaps overly sympathetic to the younger generation.

Summertree is a memory play, which moves back and forth in time somewhat like *Our Town*. Its contemporary plot revolves around a young man who is dissatisfied with materialism and practicality. His burning interest is music, but his father disapproves and refuses to finance anything but a business education. The youth, never named, is trapped by his ideals. To pay for his own schooling, he would have to work part-time, but that would make him eligible for the draft and hence unable to go to school at all. Father cannot comprehend why son will not accept his money for a business education (after all, money is money), why he refuses to learn to play golf for the contacts it brings. At one point he says, "Look, buddy. I know what it's like, but you have to stop fooling yourself. You can't pretend that all you have to do is float around, doing what you feel like . . . having adventures. Look, I wanted to be a doctor. It was my big dream. But that's all I did about it. Dream. So I'm a salesman. But I'm the best salesman the firm has, and I make as much money as most doctors."[8] This failure to comprehend that the goals of one generation are not necessarily the goals of the next is the essence of the generation gap. All the frustrations of youth, its utter helplessness in the face of the establishment are conveyed. "My father wants me to be a man, and he'll do everything he can to prevent me from being one."[9]

In *Summertree* the pathos of the situation is intensified because the young man is forced into the army, and he dies. Because there is no linear arrangement of time, the reader or audience is aware from the beginning of the absolute seriousness of the father-son conflict.

The young man is characterized in such a way that the student will readily identify with him. His ambitions, his unhappiness about leaving his girl and the tree in his backyard, and his fears

[8] Ron Cowen, *Summertree*, Act II, p. 10. Rights may be obtained from American Playwrights Theatre, Columbus, Ohio.
[9] Ibid., p. 20.

about the army all make him believable and appealing. The play does not make any major attempt to present sympathetically the father's frustration at having a son who does not agree with or respect him; instead, a rather warm relationship between the boy and his mother is portrayed. This relationship should be examined in class discussion because it shows that the generation gap is not necessarily a generalized phenomenon. In the case of this play it extends to only one adult.

Another approach, perhaps the middle point between "Daedalus and Icarus" and *Summertree*, can be seen in "Father Opens My Mail." Here the tone is neither that of Ovid's authoritarian pronouncement or of Cowen's overly sympathetic suggestion. The story takes a humorous look at human foibles and as such provides an ideal balance for the other works. Clarence Jr. recounts some of his problems which have resulted from having the same name as his father. Not only does he find the name offensive (all kinds of sissies had it), but his correspondence is continually being opened by his father. Even worse, Father takes it upon himself to discard that which he finds useless without even informing Junior of its arrival, and to read parts of love letters aloud at the table. Young Clarence is duly annoyed by these incidents, but he does not expand them to form a dislike for the man. "Although Father couldn't have been kinder hearted or had any better intentions, when he saw his name on a package or envelope it never dawned on him that it might not be for him."[10] This story presents a good-natured attempt to understand the ways of the older generation and as such is a valuable contrast to the other works. There is something refreshing about a character who tries to understand more than himself and his own destiny. There is a breadth of perspective, and if the student can read and believe Clarence Jr.'s closing statement, he is well on the way to bridging the generation gap. "The good part of all these experiences, as I realize now, was that in the end they drew Father and me closer together. My brother had only chance battles with him. I had a war. Neither he nor I relished its clashes, but they made us surprisingly intimate."[11]

These particular works have been grouped together because of their varying points of view and differing degrees of penetration into human relationships. To gain maximum understanding of these points, I would recommend a brief explanation by the

[10] Clarence Day, *Life with Father* and *Life with Mother* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967), p. 97.
[11] Ibid., p. 99.

teacher on point of view, on trying to examine various sides of a controversial issue. After reading the three works, I would divide the class into three groups, the aim of each to come to an understanding of the generational problem, to see the limitations of perspective in its selection. Each group could then, in panel form, report to the class on its findings. Questions from the class would follow and then a general discussion of which point of view is most realistic, which most valid.

Because there may be a number of students in any given class who will require an additional intellectual challenge, it might be of value to include at this point an optional novel, *Old Goriot*. This particular work is rather difficult reading, and its characters do not have the popular appeal of a Zooey or a P. S. (who will be studied later in the unit) — hence it is not recommended for all. However, those students who accept the challenge will find in *Old Goriot* a convincing picture of the ingratitude of youth. They will also gain some feeling for the workings of nineteenth century French society and be entertained as a master craftsman describes the scheming of Vautrin and the "rite of passage" of Eugene de Rastignac.

Balzac's novel "owes something in point of suggestion" to Shakespeare's *King Lear*, but as Saintsbury suggests, the circumstances and treatment are entirely different.[12] Goriot is not a king and can hardly be considered heroic. He is a vermicelli maker who even before the novel begins has lost his fortune. The tenants at Mme. Vauquer's boarding house make fun of him: he is the butt of their jokes, and none believe that the beautiful women who occasionally visit him are his daughters. He gains stature only as the reader becomes aware of his tremendous capacity for love and selflessness. He has given away his earnings and savings so that his daughters might marry well, but his generosity does not stop when one marries a count and the other a baron. He blames his sons-in-law for failing to give their wives enough money and freedom and continues to deplete his savings. The daughters treat him with scorn, and in fact, often the only way he can see them is by sitting in the park and waiting for their carriages to pass by. Pathetic images are heaped one upon the other throughout the novel. Goriot sells his favorite possession, a silver dish his wife gave him, to supply his daughter with money. He denies himself even the luxury of fire in his room so that

[12] George Saintsbury, Preface to *Old Goriot* by Honore de Balzac, trans. Ellen Marriage (London: Everyman's Library, 1941), p. xii.

they may have some additional trinket. And yet his poverty does not distress him. As long as he knows his daughters are happy, he is content. One cannot help but be moved by the final pages in which Goriot, after being overexcited from hearing about some new financial difficulties confronting his children and knowing he has nothing to give them, suffers a stroke which causes his death. In these last hours of his life he confesses that his physical pain is nothing "compared with the pain I endured when Anastasie made me feel, for the first time, that I had said something stupid."[18] They refuse to see him even in his dying moments — one because of a domestic quarrel with her husband, the other because she is afraid of catching cold. (One does finally come but by that time he is in a coma.) Even worse, they will contribute nothing for his funeral. Hence, he is buried as a pauper by two young students. The two daughters do not attend, but each sends her empty carriage.

The story of Goriot is intertwined with that of the young law student, Eugene de Rastignac, who is also a boarder at Mme. Vauquer's. He is the son of extremely poor parents who have lived frugally so that he might go to Paris to study law. He becomes caught up in the expensive, high life of Paris society, neglecting law for women and financial prudence for extravagance. He writes home for more money to satisfy his selfish desires — pretending that it is more books which he needs. He differs from Goriot's daughters, though. He at least is aware of the pain he is causing; Anastasie and Delphine are not. He becomes infatuated with one of Goriot's daughters and comes to know the old man as well. His sympathy for Goriot stands in sharp contrast to the callousness of the daughters.

The novel provides still a third example of unnatural parent-child relationships. Mlle. Victorine Taillefer, another boarder at the Vauquer house, lives in misery because her father will not recognize her as his daughter. Not until the only other heir, her brother, is killed in a duel arranged by Vautrin does she gain acceptance. Vautrin's scheme was devised with the intention that Eugene would then marry her and become wealthy, but the plan, as devised, never works out.

In general, *Old Goriot* is of value for this unit because it depicts the effects on the parent of a lack of parent-child understanding. True, Goriot's case is rather extreme, but at least it will stimulate thinking with regard to what the generation gap

[18] Ibid., p. 222.

means to those over thirty. The book is extremely sympathetic to Goriot, and the students might consider why Balzac never chided him for his excessive love. After all, it did exceed the limits of prudence — financial and emotional. Why, also, does Goriot love his unkind daughters so much? Could the students love someone who was ashamed of them? Who continually scorned them? What does Goriot's persistence in loving reveal about him? Do they personally like him for it? How about Eugene? How can he be so sympathetic toward Goriot and at the same time continue to squander his family's savings? The answers to these and other questions might provide a more rounded understanding of the generation gap. Hopefully those students who read *Old Goriot* will have the opportunity to discuss their ideas in the classroom and share them with those students who do not read the book.

J. D. Salinger's novella *Zooey* is also appropriate for a unit on the generation gap. The relationship between Bessie and Zooey shown in the bathroom sequence, when contrasted with that of Franny and Zooey, provides a sound basis for discussion. What, for example, is the essential difference between Zooey's response to Franny's breakdown and Bessie's response? Bessie's earthy remedy, chicken soup, stands in bold opposition to Zooey's spiritual succor, an explanation of Seymour's Fat Lady as Christ. Salinger depicts the younger Glasses as capable of perceiving those who "have nasty egotistical urges";[14] those who are "piling up treasure"[15] of all sorts; those who have "unlearned the illusory differences between boys and girls, animals and stones, day and night, heat and cold."[16] The only real mention of Mr. Glass is in reference to a tangerine, which he feels will cure Franny. And Bessie's interests are equally practical — perspiration, painters, tooth enamel.

To the high school student who often feels nobody understands him, Salinger presents characters he can symphathize and identify with. Although critics have suggested that the Glass progeny are too "cute"[17] and too "self-congratulating,"[18] and that Salinger loves them too much to really control them, their impact remains.

[14] J. D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961), p. 166.
[15] Ibid., p. 145.
[16] Ibid., p. 67.
[17] Henry A. Grunwald, ed., *Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait* (New York: Harper, 1962), p. 81.
[18] John Updike, "*Franny and Zooey*," in Grunwald, p. 55.

Zooey's language, with its dry wit and sarcastic tone, is appealing. In reply to a tirade by Bessie on Franny's cheeseburger and coke diet and a resolution to substitute chicken broth, Zooey retorts: "That's the spirit! Make it chicken broth or nothing. That's putting the ole foot down. If she's determined to have a nervous breakdown, the least we can do is see that she doesn't have it in peace."[19]

The novella invites discussion about Bessie as well. It is evident that despite his bullying attitude, Zooey does have tender feelings for Bessie. And Bessie, although she fails to comprehend Franny's spiritual crisis, occasionally surprises Zooey with a touch of wisdom. "You either take to somebody or you don't. If you do, then you do all the talking and nobody can even get a word in edgewise. If you *don't* like somebody — which is most of the time — then you just sit around like death it*self* and let the person talk themself into a hole."[20] To this Zooey reacts "not just with objective wonder at the rising of a truth, fragmentary or not, up through what often seemed to be an impenetrable mass of prejudices, clichés, and bromides. But with admiration, affection, and, not least, gratitude."[21] Hence, the reader is invited to examine more than a stereotyped, one-sided account of misunderstood youth. Buddy advises Zooey, in his four-year-old letter: "Be kinder to Bessie, Zooey, when you can. I don't think I mean because she's our mother, but because she's weary. You will after you're thirty or so, when everybody slows down a little (even you, maybe), but try harder now."[22] The student might benefit from considering this statement.

Zooey is replete with ideas for study. Many of them are not directly applicable to this unit, but to avoid violating the artistic integrity of the work, the teacher might consider some of them peripherally. Certainly, the religious ideals, the work's "positive gospel"[23] aspects which Kenneth Hamilton discusses, might be considered. Likewise, questions of ego and of tolerating people who bore you could be included.

Because the characters in *Zooey* are exciting and real, I believe students will want to talk about them. Hence, I would suggest class discussion of the book to bring forth and test as

[19] Salinger, p. 85.
[20] Ibid., p. 98.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., p. 57.
[23] Kenneth Hamilton, *J. D. Salinger: A Critical Essay* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 39.

many ideas as possible. To insure a commitment from each student, the class might be assigned a theme discussing why Zooey rather than Bessie is able to help Franny.

The book is brief (150 pages) and can easily be read in three nights. The following study guide is designed to aid student comprehension. Many of the questions can also serve as springboards for class discussion.

Part I.[24] Narrator's introduction (pp. 47–50)

1. Who is the narrator?
2. What differences are there between a short story and a "prose home movie"? What should this distinction lead you to expect from *Zooey*?
3. What is the tone of these opening pages?
4. The narrator says, "My current offering isn't a mystical story, or a religiously mystifying story, at all. *I* say it's a compound, or multiple, love story, pure and complicated." (p. 49) After you finish reading the novella think about this statement. Do you feel it is a love story? Is it like other love stories you have read?
5. Remember that this family's last name is Glass. Is this appropriate? In what ways?

Part II. Introduction to Zooey (pp. 50–55)

1. What is your first impression of Zooey? Include impressions of looks and personality. Do you like him?

Part III. Buddy's letter (pp. 56–69)

1. Why do you think Zooey is reading a four-year-old letter? What is significant about its contents?
2. What is Buddy's attitude toward his mother as illustrated by the letter?

   [e.g. "Dear Bessie. I get five hundred words of copy from her like clockwork every three months on the subject of my poor old private phone and how *stupid* it is to pay Good Money every month for something nobody's ever even around to *use* any more." (pp. 56–57) In the same letter he also tells Zooey to be kind to her.]
3. What is the ostensible purpose of Buddy's letter? The real purpose?

[24] This division into eight parts is based on Grunwald, p. 112.

4. What does Buddy mean to imply in the distinction he makes between grief over Seymour's death and the "hilarious pint of pus?"
5. Why does Buddy run from the grocery store when the little girl tells him the names of her boyfriends?
6. What do you think the haiku from Seymour's blotter means?

Part IV. Zooey and Bessie in the bathroom (pp. 71–118)

1. What is Bessie's excuse for coming into the bathroom?
2. What is your impression of Mrs. Glass? Do you like her?
3. What do her first words upon entering the bathroom reveal about her personality? (p. 72 "I don't know how you can stay in the tub the way you do.") What can you surmise with regard to her relationship with Zooey?
4. What is Zooey's attitude toward his mother? What is the tone of his conversation with her?
5. What kinds of things seem to be worrying Bessie? In general, and specifically, with regard to Franny?
6. Why does Bessie want to get in touch with Buddy?
7. Why is Bessie's suggestion of a psychiatrist for Franny the wrong solution?
8. What are Zooey's objections to Lane? Are they legitimate? What do they tell you about Zooey?
9. Why does Zooey call himself and Franny freaks?
10. How would you describe Zooey's religion? What is the importance of the Four Great Vows?

Part V. Franny and Zooey (pp. 118–146)

1. What is your impression of Franny? What do you make of her dream?
2. What does the relationship between Franny and Zooey seem to be? Compare this with Zooey's relationship with Bessie.
3. How do you account for Zooey's attitude toward Dick Hess? Toward Le Sage (note the name)?
4. What faults does Zooey see in himself?
5. What are Zooey's objections to Franny's dislike of Lane, Professor Tupper, etc.?

Part VI. Zooey's lecture to Franny (pp. 146–172)

1. Why does Zooey consider Franny's saying of the Jesus

prayer just as acquisitive as piling up other kinds of treasure?

2. What is Franny's point of view with regard to the prayer?
3. Why does Zooey say that Franny is not even saying the prayer to Jesus?
4. Consider Zooey's statement about Franny's childhood objection to Jesus. "And don't tell me again that you were ten years old. Your age has nothing to do with what I'm talking about. There are no big *changes* between ten and twenty — or ten and eighty, for that matter." (p. 164)
5. How do you interpret the discussion about ego?

Part VII. Seymour's room (pp. 172–182)

1. Why does Zooey go into his brother's room to make his call?
2. What is the atmosphere in the room?
3. Why does it take him so long to make the call? Why does he call?

Part VIII. The phone call (pp. 182–201)

1. How does Franny discover it is not Buddy on the phone?
2. What are Franny's complaints to "Buddy" about Zooey?
3. Why does Zooey tell Franny about having seen her act?
4. What is the significance of "shining your shoes for the Fat Lady?" What effect does Zooey's explanation have on Franny? What effect does it have on him? What can you surmise about the permanence of the effect?
5. What kind of feeling does the ending of the book leave with you? What is your reaction to the book as a whole? To the characters? Do you like them? Do you understand and sympathize with them? Are they real to you?

At this point in the unit the students will probably be ready for an entirely new approach. Hence, the last two works stress a different method — role playing. Paul McCalib, in his article "Intensifying the Literary Experience Through Role Playing" suggests that acting out literature, a dynamic process, produces an emotional response on the part of the students.[8] It would seem that this method is particularly appropriate for a unit on the generation gap.

[8] Paul T. McCalib, "Intensifying the Literary Experience Through Role Playing," *English Journal*, 57 (January 1968), p. 41.

By assuming an adult role, by actually confronting a real problem and having to arrive at a conclusion about it, the student can come closer to understanding generation problems. At the level of discussion there is always the possibility that rhetoric will differ markedly from what the individual himself would do in practice. With role playing, at least the opportunity is present for trying out an approach in action, for seeing how another will react to it. Hopefully insights gained from this method will remain with the student once he removes his dramatic mask. But even if the results are not permanent, at least he will have had the opportunity to be an adult temporarily.

Two works, C. D. B. Bryan's short story, "So Much Unfairness of Things," and John Marquand's novel, *The Late George Apley*, seem to be suitable vehicles for this method. In both the generation conflict is the result of the older generation's wish that the younger follow its established modes of behavior and its values. And in both the endings permit a further playing out of relationships.

Bryan's story, which concerns a fourteen-year-old's academic difficulties at a preparatory school and his fears about disappointing his father, is so constructed that it is possible to stop the reading at three places and allow the students to role play the next scene. Such intermediary activity can provide practice for a final dramatic exercise.

P. S. Wilkinson is the fifteenth member of his family to attend the Virginia Preparatory School. Family tradition is so tied to the school that there are even two buildings bearing the family name. P. S., however, is not a shining example of family tradition. He is only a mediocre student, and much to his father's amazement, does not even know all the words to the school's song. What was right for P. S.'s father and grandfather is just not right for him.

> When P. S. was packing to begin his first year at the school his father had said, "Son, when your great grandfather went off to V.P.S. his father gave him a dozen silk handkerchiefs and a pair of warm gloves. When I went off to V.P.S. your grandfather gave me a dozen silk handkerchiefs and a pair of warm gloves. And now here are a dozen silk handkerchiefs and a pair of warm gloves for you. . . . P. S. left the red mittens behind when he went away to V.P.S. He used two of the silk handkerchiefs to cover the top of his bureau and his book-case, gave another away to a girl, and hid the rest beneath his underwear on the second shelf of his bureau."[3]

[3] C.D.B. Bryan, "So Much Unfairness of Things," in *Ten Top Stories*, ed. David A. Sohn (New York: Bantam Books, 1964), pp. 43-45.

For P. S. a crisis occurs when he realizes that he is about to flunk Latin for the second time. When he first failed, his father told him that no Wilkinson had ever flunked at V.P.S. before, and P. S. knew he had disappointed his father: that he was just not the son Mr. Wilkinson wanted. Because of his fear of his father, P. S. cheats on his exam. (He never planned to, but when he realizes the translation he is unable to do is in his desk, temptation overrules judgment.) He is turned in by a friend in accordance with the rules of the school's honor code, and he is expelled. The final scene depicts father and son in an awkward confrontation. Mr. Wilkinson recognizes that he has been partially responsible for P. S.'s expulsion, but the two have never really learned to communicate. P. S. is unhappy and lonely. He has learned a difficult lesson of life. But the father he needs for comfort has always been "Sir" to him.

The ending leaves many questions unanswered. Will the relationship between P. S. and his father change because of this crisis? What alterations of attitude must take place on both sides? What will happen when P. S. confronts all his distinguished relatives with his disgrace, as his father insists that he do? What effect will this experience have on the kind of person P. S. will be in the future? Role playing can answer these questions. If the class is divided into groups so that a number of interpretations can be played out and then discussed, the process will be even more valuable.

But before this final scene is enacted, preliminary ones may be tried. Have the class stop reading when they reach the point in the story when P. S. realizes the translation is in his desk. Based on the knowledge of the type of person he is and the code of behavior the school has taught, what do they think he will do in this situation and why? After they have role played their interpretation, have them read what happens and discuss why the author chose his particular alternative. Do they agree or disagree with Bryan's handling of the scene? Because they have already committed themselves to an interpretation, this discussion should be worthwhile. Then let them read to the point where P. S. is debating with his conscience about whether or not to turn himself in; let them role play what they think he will do. Finally have them read to where the administration is deciding whether or not to expel him. What do they think the decision will be? After these trial attempts at role playing short scenes, the class should be prepared to deal competently with what might happen after the story ends.

After the experience of role playing in connection with a short story, the class might proceed profitably to a longer work — in this case, *The Late George Apley*. The characters in Marquand's novel are so wonderfully pretentious and outdated that the class may very well dislike all of them. Such an emotional response might prove valuable initially — if the students are aware that Marquand is indeed satirizing a way of life, that the world he creates is defining, despite its snobbish appearance, "a moral and spiritual emptiness, a sense of loneliness and quiet despair."[17] The student may well be frustrated by this book. Just when he likes a character, thinks he has some will and individuality, that character retreats to the position society expects of him. George Apley, when young, fell in love with Mary Moynihan. He swore he would not leave her, but family disapproval — because she was Irish and poor — caused him to back down. After a trip to Europe to help him forget, he eventually marries the woman his family had hoped he would. George's son goes a little farther in his attempt to rebel. He actually marries a divorcée — much to his father's shock — and accepts a law position in New York. But ultimately, he retreats to Boston and his father's firm and accepts his role as the new head of the Apleys.

Throughout, there is a pattern students may enjoy uncovering. Incidents are repeated verbatim between different generations of characters. As a young man George was told by his father just how to respond to liquor and women while at Harvard. George was unimpressed, but a generation later sends a similar letter to his son. Likewise, George was puzzled by the commotion caused by parents and in-laws concerning the naming of his son. However, when his grandson is born, he is quite adament that the child bear an Apley name.

The book provides an almost suffocating impression of what it is like to be totally bound by tradition, environment, and petty concerns. George collects Chinese porcelains because it is an unostentatious way to tie up a lot of money. He suggests that his son collect tapestries for the same reason. A trip to Europe becomes nothing more than an opportunity for comparing various locales with portions of Boston. And, a letter is sent to Apley's son in the army to advise him of a family crisis: "One very shocking thing has happened since you have been away. The two

[17] C. Hugh Holman, *John P. Marquand*, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, no. 46 (St. Paul, 1965), p. 8.

great elms on the driveway circle are turning yellow."[28] Amidst all this trivia are social and moral ideas whose obsolescence is certain to cause a reaction amongst students. In response to having seen people dancing in New York, George writes to a friend, "I flatter myself that I am considered a rather tolerable waltzer, but the steps here are surprising and frequently suggestive. . . . I wonder what you would have said to behold men and women with their arms about each other."[29] Later he writes to his son:

> Is it true in New York and in other cities farther south such as Philadelphia and Baltimore that young debutantes practice promiscuously what is known as "petting" or "necking"? Eleanor is evasive on the subject. I should like to know what "necking" and "petting" mean. I have also heard it said that boys and girls sit alone in automobiles and drink from pocket flasks. . . . These practices surely cannot be prevalent among people whom you and I know.[30]

The book raises several important questions about the generation gap. Is the pattern shown — that youth rebels but ultimately conforms to the adult standards of the previous generation — accurate? If so, what are the implications? How will the next generation behave? Is there a degree of progress? What are the feelings between generations? Do these change at all from generation to generation, or is the same process repeated time after time? Where does the reader stand in relation to these people? Can he imagine himself as the grandson of the youngest Apley (John's son)? What would it be like? Role playing the generation after the book ends and the one in which the student might chronologically fit could prove to be a worthwhile means for examining these questions.

The book is rather easy to read. This fact, combined with the archaic style of life depicted, makes it advisable to have students finish the book as quickly as possible. The following study guide therefore makes no attempt to account for the book in detail; it is intended rather to alert the student to specific incidents and conversations which are typical of the Apleys.

Chapter 1

1. What is a memoir? Why is this particular one written?
2. What is your opinion of Willing, the narrator? Do you

[28] John P. Marquand, *The Late George Apley* (New York: Modern Library, 1940), p. 244.
[29] Ibid., p. 213.
[30] Ibid., p. 287.

agree with his objection that John's use of the word "guts" in a letter shows "the perpetual revolt of youth from tradition"? (p. 7) Remember that as Willing describes the Apleys he is also defining himself.

["Willing's attempts to explain these events in Apley's life and certain of Apley's attitudes join with his own pedantry and pompous diction and his long imprecise sentences to make Willing himself the chief target of Marquand's satire and thus to create for him a role as a satiric overstatement of his society, a comic caricature. . . ." (Holman, p. 30)]

Chapters 2–4

1. What is the purpose of tracing family lineage to the first relative who came to this country?
2. What does Aunt Amelia's remark, "When I am depressed I remember I am an Apley," (p. 26) tell you about the family?
3. Consider George's description in one of his letters of disliking church as a child and the narrator's attempt to whitewash it. Why does Willing do this?

Chapters 5–7

1. What is your opinion of Hobson's school? Would you like to attend a school which "had a few playgrounds and not much fresh air, but these were replaced by wholesome, undeviating discipline"? (p. 49)
2. What does the scene in which Mr. Treete, George's teacher, is fired for boxing George's ears tell you about the family? Whose side is George on?

   ["I did not see why Mr. Treete had been obliged to leave. And I told Father so. His anger was characteristic of the older generation to the younger. 'You are too young to understand,' he said, 'and that was all.' I can still only conjecture, and I still do not understand." (p. 49)]
3. What does the elder Apley's response to George's capsizing a sailboat tell you about the relationship?

   [He is concerned only that it gave his wife a headache and made her unable to attend the meeting of her sewing circle.]
4. Do you agree with the advice to avoid worldly beauty? "Some day you will know that there is a beauty of the soul that is more important than worldly beauty. Remember this when you see worldly beauty." (p. 75)

Chapters 8–10

1. What does George's love for Mary Moynihan reveal about him? What does his ultimate compliance with his family's wishes tell?
2. How does George view Europe?
3. Why does George make such a bad business deal for his Uncle William's cotton mill?

Chapters 11–13

1. Do you think George's marriage is a good match? What is your opinion of his in-laws (who come along for the honeymoon)?
2. Are you as impressed by the paper on "Cow Corner" as the members of the club seem to be?
3. What do you think of George's reaction to the birth of his son? "Between me and my son there is already the same formality, the same restraint, and the same unnaturalness which I believe have always existed between my father and myself." (p. 142)
4. Consider this statement of George's: "Most of us have obliged the older generation so implicitly that now they are gone there is nothing left but to continue in the pattern they have laid down for us. Or is it that we have not the originality to change that pattern?"

Chapters 14–15

1. What effect does his father's death have on George?
2. Do you agree with George's objection to his son's desire not to spend his vacation on the family island? "As time goes on it will become more and more evident to you that you are a part of society whose dictates you must obey within certain prescribed limits and in every walk of life we must give away to the common will. Yes, there are certain things one does and others one does not do. One of the things which you and I must not do is to neglect our duties at Pequod Island." (p. 177)

Chapters 16–17 — no questions

Chapters 18–20

1. How does George respond to his mother's death?
2. Compare George's letter to John upon his entrance to Harvard with the letter he received from his own father.

3. How does George respond to a distant cousin's attempt to divorce his wife? What does this reveal about him?

Chapters 21–23

1. Why does George want his son to marry as soon as he finds he must go to war?
2. Do you think an uncle's advice to George in response to his anger about a distant relative's being buried in his section of the family plot is good? "Most people in the world don't know who the Apleys are, and they don't give a damn. I don't intend this as rudeness but as a sort of comfort. . . . When you remember it you won't feel the necessity of taking the Apleys so seriously." (p. 241)
3. Why does the family stick together and tell everyone they are delighted when eighty-year-old Uncle William marries his nurse?
4. John Apley says to his sister, "El, we have to get out of this before it gets to us." (p. 261) After you finish the book decide whether they ever get out.

Chapters 24–25

1. George is proud when his son is wounded in battle and wants him to show off because of it. Do you agree?
2. Why wouldn't John take a job in his father's firm? What does this tell about him?

Chapter 26 — no questions

Chapters 27–28

1. How does George respond to his son's marriage to a divorcée? What caused him to approve finally?
2. What is the importance of the O'Reilly affair? Why does George finally back down?

Chapters 29–31

1. Compare the fuss over the naming of John's baby with that when John was born.
2. Compare Eleanor's trip to Europe to forget her love for a man the family dislikes with George's trip to forget Mary Moynihan. What is the one big difference?
3. Why does John finally return to Boston just before his father's death?

With the conclusion of *The Late George Apley* the students

will be ready to return to Cummings's poem with greater sensitivity and understanding. Not only will they appreciate the cyclical pattern of generations, but they will also be able to see it in terms of numerous other works. And ultimately, if the unit is to succeed, it must do so as a whole. Each selection is devised to confront only a small portion of the issues concerning the generation gap. For the students to possess a meaningful understanding, they must be able to understand and respect varying points of view — they must see the generation gap in broader terms than their own lives.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING SUGGESTIONS

Bryan, C.D.B., "Why the Generation Gap Begins at 30." This essay from the *New York Times Magazine* (July 2, 1967) brings together interviews in which a number of people under thirty discuss their objections to the older generation.

Butler, Samuel, *The Way of All Flesh.* This novel about the Pontifex family depicts the ways the father in each succeeding generation tries to shape the lives of his children.

Holmes, Oliver Wendell, "The Last Leaf." A young man looks at the last survivor of an older generation, jokes about his old-fashioned appearance, and then concludes: "And if I should live to be/The last leaf upon the tree/In the spring,/Let them smile as I do now. . . ."

Rogers, Richard, Oscar Hammerstein II, and Joseph Field, *Flower Drum Song.* This Chinese "Life With Father" musical describes the conflict between old world parents and the new world younger generation.

Shakespeare, William, *King Lear.* The ingratitude of youth is dramatically portrayed as Goneril and Regan deny Lear hospitality and love and as Edmund deceives Gloucester.

Shakespeare, William, *Romeo and Juliet.* The conflict between the Capulets and the Montagues makes marriage between their children impossible. Tragedy results when the young lovers try to take their future into their own hands.

Turgenev, Ivan, *Fathers and Sons.* A college student and his nihilist roommate return home for vacation in this Russian novel and discover there is absolutely no understanding between them and the agrarian older generation.

Williams, Tennessee, *The Glass Menagerie.* The scenes between

Tom and Amanda provide fine examples of a mother's failure to understand her son's personal ambitions. A Cadmaeon recording of the play is available.

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