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ABSTRACT

Students need proper guidelines in their summer programs of reading and writing. In this secondary school summer reading program, at the Holderness School for Boys in Plymouth, New Hampshire, teachers decided to assign 16 books--four books to be read by students in each of the 4 years of English. Two criteria were established for book selection: (1) each book must be capable of being handled by students without outside help; and (2) each book must be enjoyable and challenging. Teachers compiled a study guide for each book, containing an introduction, writing topics, and a list of recommended books dealing with the same subject covered in the book being read. One fourth of the student's grade for the Fall Term was based on the four essays which he wrote on his summer reading. The program resulted in improved class discussion during the early weeks of school and students' increased capacity to understand literature on their own. (A sample reading list and study guide are included.) (DD)

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"SUMMER IS ICUMEN IN . . ."

by JOHN CAMERON

"Let's abolish our summer reading program." This was the opinion of all the members of our English department three years ago as we sat in the faculty room after wading through reams of tepid prose written—in a hammock, no doubt—by our students during the summer.

Where had we gone wrong? Was all the blame for the failure of the summer reading program to be placed on our students? Why did we inaugurate a summer reading program in the first place? These were the questions we asked ourselves, and the answers we arrived at after hours of discussion and debate forced us to change our approach to this reading program.

We all agreed that summer reading could be beneficial to our students if it prevented them from returning to school in September completely rusty in the two disciplines of reading and writing. Also we realized that our students must have a richer reading background than is provided by the required books in each of our English classes. We remembered T. S. Eliot's words: "We read many books because we cannot know enough people." Therefore, we were convinced we could justify a summer reading and writing program at our school—but justification was not enough!

The next question we considered was WHY our particular program had failed. The answer, we discovered, was not a pleasant one to accept, for we were forced to acknowledge that we as teachers had not worked hard enough to make our summer reading program meaningful to our students. We had simply handed each boy a list of a hundred and fifty books (fiction and non-fiction) and told him to choose three books of fiction and three books of non-fiction to read during the vacation period. We also provided him with a list of very general questions that would supposedly be applicable to any book he read: "Explain a problem or obstacle that confronted one of the characters and tell how he solved or overcome it," or "Discuss the general scope of this book." Was there any reason, we asked ourselves, why the answers written by our students should be less vague than the questions themselves? Did we have the right to accuse our students of sheer laziness because their favorite books for summer reading, John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and Barry Goldwater's *The Conscience of a Conservative*, were less than 100 pages? It became clear that the blame rested not with our students but with our own failure to provide them with proper guidelines iin their independent

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reading and writing.

Once we had admitted our inadequacies in organizing this program, the problem of correcting our mistakes was relatively easy—at least in the talking stage. We decided to select four books to be read by all students in each of the four years of English. The basis for choosing these sixteen books was determined by (1) the fact that this was summer reading, and, therefore, each book should be capable of being handled by students without the aid of parents or teachers; and (2) that each book should provide students with enjoyment as well as with challenging ideas that would remain with them long after the summer was over. Whenever possible, we included books that would serve as both comparisons and contrasts to those literary works our pupils would be reading in their regular English classes the following year; for example, all juniors study Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* and so they read Huxley's *Brave New World* the summer before their junior year.

Once the fun of choosing these books was over, we now faced the work. It was necessary for each of the five members of our department to write at least three study guides to accompany those books our students would be reading. We agreed that each study guide should have (a) a helpful introduction, (b) writing topics, and (c) a list of recommended books dealing with the same subject or theme covered in the book being read. Occasionally we chose two books that would serve as an excellent contrast (e.g. Richard Kim's *The Martyred* and Albert Camus's *The Stranger*) and the student wrote only one essay rather than two. This type of question is used only in the junior and senior years, for we do not believe the lower grades are ready yet to handle comparison questions without the guidance of a teacher.

The mechanics of operating this program are quite simple. In April our boys receive a list of the books they will read for the summer, and they fill out an order for those books (all are available in paperback) they wish to buy. Our librarian then orders these books from our paperback distributor and by the end of May, each boy has the books and the study guides he needs for his summer reading and writing. Specific due dates are assigned for each report; approximately four weeks is allowed for the reading of each book and the writing of the essay. The English instructor who has prepared the study guide for the book reads all the reports even though he does not necessarily have the students in his regular classes. One fourth of the student's grade for the Fall Term is based on the average grade he receives on the four essays he has written during the summer.

We are quite aware that our students are not wholly enthusiastic

about relinquishing the two *S's* (Swimming and Surfing) for the two *R's* (Reading and 'Riting), but at the same time they are honest enough to acknowledge that a summer program providing them with guidelines is far more meaningful to them than one that merely asks them to read and to write in a rather haphazard fashion. As English teachers we have found that class discussions during the early weeks of school are much livelier because the students have in common the four books they have read during the summer. Each year we have spent at least two class periods discussing our summer program with our students and listening to their suggestions about books that should be dropped from the list and new ones that should be added. Six books from our first list were replaced during the second year because of faculty and student suggestions. All the study guides are revised each year. The English Department at Holderness School realizes that if our program is to remain successful, it must be open to constant criticism and revision.

In the past two years none of the English teachers have voiced the opinion that our summer reading and writing program should be eliminated; rather we are exhilarated that many of our students can display so much insight into literature on their own—once we have taken the initiative to provide them with the proper guidelines.

* * *

Below is the list of books that comprise our summer program, followed by a sample study guide.

[REQUIRED READING (SUMMER OF 1968)]

NINTH GRADE

The Bull From the Sea, Mary Renault (Pocket Books)
Great Tales of Action and Adventure, George Bennett, ed. (Dell)
John Ransom's Civil War Diary, John Ransom (Dell)
Inherit the Wind, Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee (Bantam)

TENTH GRADE

When the Legends Die, Hal Borland (Bantam)
The Cruel Sea, Nicholas Monsarrat (Pocket Books)
The Best of Damon Runyon, Damon Runyon (Hart)
Flowers for Algernon, Daniel Keyes (Bantam)

ELEVENTH GRADE

Brave New World, Aldous Huxley (Bantam)
The Long March, William Styron (Vintage)
The Greatest Thing Since Sliced Bread, Don Robertson (Crest)
The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, Alan Sillitoe (New American Library)

TWELFTH GRADE

The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck (Bantam)
The Jungle, Upton Sinclair (New American Library)
The Stranger, Albert Camus (Vintage)
The Martyred, Richard Kim (Pocket Books)

[STUDY GUIDE: *Brave New World*]
(Incoming Juniors)

INTRODUCTION Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) is important for its social concern and its timely warning, like its brother novel *1984* (which you will read next year as juniors). A careful reader of Huxley's novel will certainly understand that this book is not science-fiction, but rather social commentary; the dangers of scientific materialism, blind faith in progress, and hedonism are the major concerns of Mr. Huxley in writing this novel.

A WORD OF CAUTION I would suggest that you do *not* read Huxley's introduction to the novel until *after* you have completed *Brave New World* since it discusses aspects of the plot that would spoil your reading of the story.

SUGGESTIONS for reading *Brave New World* This novel serves as a good example of what is meant by the *satirical novel.* Before reading Huxley's book, you should become acquainted with the literary term, SATIRE. Briefly stated, satire is defined as a literary work ridiculing aspects of human behavior and seeking to arouse in the reader contempt for its object. Satirists almost always justify their attacks by claiming that the major purpose of satire is to help the public by giving them valuable advice and warning which they need so that they might cure themselves of their ignorance. Alexander Pope, a satirist of the eighteenth century, commented that satire "heals with Morals what it hurts with wit." The satirist feels he has been successful if his satire makes people see the truth or at least that part which they habiutally ignore. "At its sanest and most penetrating, satire focuses our gaze sharply upon the contrast between things as they should be and as they are."

WRITING TOPICS All three answers are to be expressed in complete sentences, supported by specific references to the text (concrete examples and relevant quotations).

1. Why do you think Huxley chose "brave new world" as the title for this novel?

2. *"Brave New World* is primarily concerned not with what will happen in the future but what is happening to mankind now." Comment on this statement in an essay of not less than two hundred words.

3. In the characters of John Savage, Bernard Marx, and Mustapha

Mond, the novel achieves dramatic tension through the direct confrontation of equally powerful, conflicting philosophies. In a well organized essay (not less than five hundred words) discuss the three philosophies represented by Savage, Marx, and Mond. Your answer will have no value unless you make specific references to the speeches and thoughts of these three men.

RECOMMENDED READING If you enjoyed this novel and the ideas presented, then you might find some of the literature listed below interesting.

Capek, Karel. *War with the Newts* (A novel of political satire aimed particularly at man's penchant for exploiting the bounties of nature.)

Krutch, Joseph W. "Danger: Utopia Ahead" in *Saturday Review* August 20, 1966. (Try to read this essay as it is an excellent supplement to *Brave New World*. Any good library will have this copy of *Review*.)

Miller, Walter. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (An examination of what our future might be like.)

Orwell, George. *Animal Farm* (An allegory about the establishment of totalitarian government.)

Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest* (*Brave New World* rings constant variations upon the characters and themes of Shakespeare's last play.)

Wells, H. G. *The Invisible Man* (An allegory of science outlawing itself from humanity.)

"In Pursuit of Hedonism" in *Time*, March 3, 1967.