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# PROMOTING APPRECIATION FOR LITERATURE

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To accept the notion "A love of good reading is more likely to be caught than taught,"<sup>1</sup> is to contradict the claim "good books must be introduced to pupils in ways which help them to read with increasing ability to analyze and interpret and evaluate." Such a notion is also contrary to the statement, "The only ceiling on effective ways of bringing books and people together is the creative imagination of the adult who is the guide." Yet, these three quotes are taken from the same article—the first and third quotes having been juxtaposed and classified as a summary of "many books describing many techniques for reading guidance."

A further contradiction of the "caught" theory is the accepted attitude stated succinctly in a popular text on reading. "Interests are acquired and, like other acquired traits, are amenable to training or teaching."<sup>2</sup>

In addition to influencing interest directly, teaching affects interest through increasing the ability to analyze, interpret, and evaluate—mentioned by Dr. Schmitt. These abilities are pre-requisites to a love of good reading.

Since training a student to read literature involves enjoyment, study or analysis, on the one hand, and appreciation, on the other, become dual objectives to be pursued simultaneously. It is logical therefore to conclude that taste in literature can be nurtured by appropriate instruction. In fact, Broening<sup>3</sup> in a summary of her research states, "There is a relationship between the development of literary taste and direct teaching of interpretive reading skills."

Gunn<sup>4</sup> suggests that the three clusters of interpretive abilities which comprise the hierarchy of skills to be *taught* include (1) abilities

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1. Schmitt, Fanny. "Books Are for Reading," *Reading Horizons*, (Winter 1968), p. 71.
  2. DeBoer and Dallman. *The Teaching of Reading*, Holt, Rinehart, Winston Inc. 1960, p. 243.
  3. Broening, Angela M. "Development of Taste in Literature in the Senior High" *Development of Taste in Literature*. Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1963.
  4. Gunn, Agnella. "Promoting a Love Affair with Books," *Combining Research Results and Good Practice* Vol. 11, Part 2, I.R.A. Proceedings 1966.

needed for imaginative entry into a work of literature (2) abilities needed for perception of meaning or central purpose (3) abilities for perception of artistic unity and significance. A teacher concerned with these basic skills of interpretation is at once aware of the positive correlation between the development of skills and the love of good reading. Dr. Gunn states in the summary of her article "Continuing satisfactory interaction between a pupil and books is based on: (1) developing his reading power, (2) disciplining his tastes, and (3) deepening his view of the work." (I am caused to marvel at the vast difference between this summary and Dr. Schmitt's alleged summary.)

The teacher's role is stressed in the several thought-provoking discussions contained in the December 1961 issue of *The Reading Teacher*. The value of planned instruction in the sequential skills of a literature program is the underlying theme of the articles epitomized in Gainsburg's summary statement: "A dependence on the magic of the books themselves is inadequate to teach children the subtle mental processes involved in creative reading and the finer levels of appreciation." Gainsburg's insights are also reflected in a curriculum guide<sup>5</sup> produced by a committee he directed. More than half of the 253 pages are devoted to the theme, appreciation is taught not caught. The two chapters in the section on appreciation are titled, "Scope and Sequence of Skills," and "Methods of Teaching Appreciative Reading." Teachers who read this guide are forced to recognize the distinctions between (a) learning the *content* of literature, and the more worthy objective of learning the *appreciation* of it (b) *reading* with appreciation, and *learning how* to read with appreciation.

As suggested by Gunn, above, attention must be given to perceiving the central thought or purpose, and young readers must be taught to recognize the author's "sign posts." Headings and subheadings must be noticed and evaluated. Topic sentences must be understood in relation to how the author's thought is being carried forward from the previous paragraph and how what is to follow is introduced. The reader should be taught to recognize the conclusion of one unit of the author's thought and the beginning of another. Recognition must be slighted. Extra comments must be ignored.

Another skill closely related to the recognition of topic ideas is that of sifting ideas. A reader must learn to distinguish between what

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5. *Reading Grades 7, 8, 9*. Board of Education, City of New York, 1959.

is significant and what is not. The unimportant facts and details offered only as additional reinforcement of an idea already presented must be slighted. Extra comments must be ignored.

Relationships between generalizations, facts, and illustrations must be grasped. Good readers are trained to perceive relationships between main ideas and details. Failing to find these relationships, poor readers misinterpret the author's meaning and carry away wrong ideas and misconceptions.

Appreciation, then, is preceded by a searching out of meaning. A sifting, selecting, and evaluating of the ideas on a page is necessary. The reader must judge what is most relevant and discard what is unneeded. Further analysis is required if perception of artistic unity and significance, mentioned by Dr. Gunn, is to be achieved. There is no other way to find the essential qualities of a good work of art than by examining it. To understand and appreciate a piece of literature, a reader should attempt to discover what its parts are, how they relate to each other, and what binds them into one unified whole. An effective analysis seeks to discover purpose, style, tone, mood, and the logical, chronological, and spacial organization. For example, consider the Gettysburg Address. What percentage of those who have read or heard it appreciate the purpose, style, tone, and organization of this famous discourse? An impression of how an analysis adds to the appreciation of a selection may be gained from the following.

#### The Gettysburg Address

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather

for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave their last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

#### Facts to be Appreciated

##### Purpose:

In the first and last sentence Lincoln defines the American democratic philosophy.

The middle of the speech is devoted to dedicating a cemetery.

##### Style:

Powerful (abundant use of active verbs)

Metaphorical “our fathers brought forth a new nation, conceived in liberty” (birth); “and dedicated” (baptism); “long endure” (life); “final resting place” (death); “new birth of freedom” (rebirth).

##### Tone:

Biblical “Fourscore and seven,” “our fathers,” “dedicated,” “consecrate,” “hallow.”

##### Mood:

Dignity  
Sincerity

##### Logical Organization:

- A. This ceremony is appropriate.
- B. But the living cannot dedicate this ground.
- C. Instead, the living should themselves be dedicated.

##### Chronological Organization:

- A. Past
- B. Present
- C. Future

##### Spacial Organization:

- A. Continent
- B. Nation
- C. Battlefield
- D. Nation
- E. World