

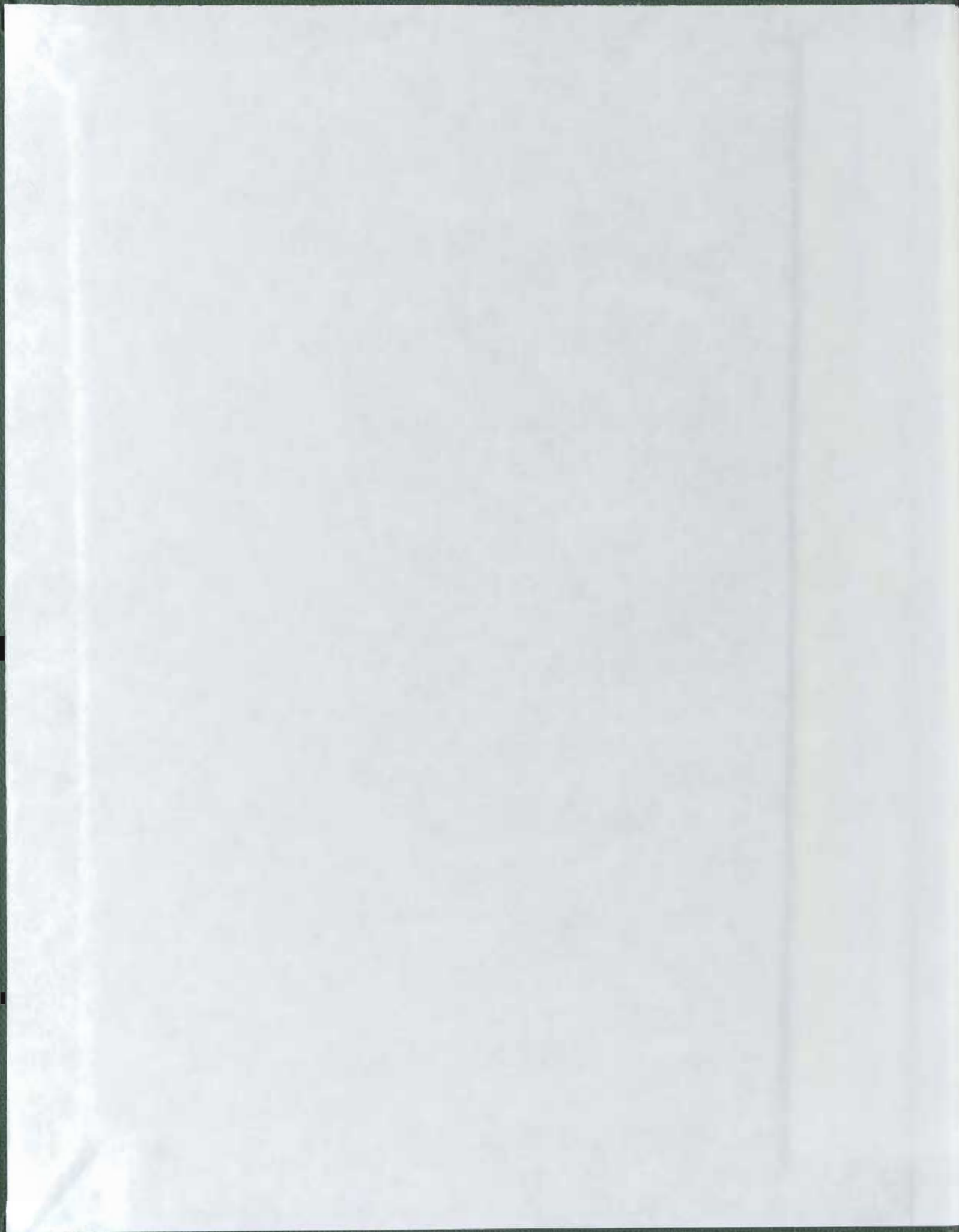
A THEMATIC APPROACH TO THE
TEACHING OF LITERATURE IN
THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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E. JAMES CAHILL



A THEMATIC APPROACH TO THE TEACHING
OF LITERATURE IN THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

by



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of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to propose a thematic organization of teaching literature to students in the junior high school. It is suggested that because of the nature of the 12 - 15 year old student, who is encountering literature for the first time as an academic subject, the thematic approach best utilizes his natural curiosity and encourages the enjoyment of literature for its own sake.

The nature and function of literature as it relates to the young reader is explored, and a definition of literature as an imaginative experience is suggested. An exposure of this type to the world of literature would enable the junior high school student to relate to the selections in a manner that is more motivational than are other traditional arrangements.

The traditional methods of teaching literature are compared to the thematic arrangement, and a means of implementing the thematic model is suggested. The development of a particular theme is also offered as a sample of how the thematic arrangement could be utilized within the classroom.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to present a method of teaching literature to junior high school students that provides motivation to read and an opportunity to explore various forms of writing under a common theme. The initial motivation for the project was prompted by the recent introduction of a literature anthology, entitled Thresholds, in the junior high literature programme. The course is divided into three distinct years of instruction, Grades 7, 8 and 9, with each grade having its own text and related materials. The co-authors of the anthology have compiled selections of traditional and contemporary literature, including a large percentage of Canadian content. The selections include works across various genres and are organized in a unit and genre arrangement.

Within the Teacher's Guide accompanying the Thresholds series an initial attempt is made to present "Themes" as an alternate approach to the programme. This consists mainly of presenting from each book approximately five to twenty broad themes that might be developed. This is merely a list of the selections in the text that could conceivably fit under a particular theme or topic. At this point no other development is conducted.

Teachers who are faced with the task of implementing this new programme should have the opportunity to examine methods of presenting the literature. By observing the advantages of various course arrangements, instructional strategies, and examples of how to implement a particular programme, the individual teacher could approach the new course with more confidence.

The writer suggests that for many high school students the experience of literature has not been rewarding or eventful. This is frequently the result of being exposed to a potpourri of literature experiences which do not provide him with a sense of relevance in his life. The end product is all too often a high school graduate who has little desire to read for pleasure.

It is suggested that there is a crucial point in the education of a child where the literature experiences encountered determine to a great extent the perceptions that will be formed for a lifetime. Physicians intimate that the first few years of childhood determine a child's perception of his self-esteem as a result of experiences with parents and family. In like manner, the writer feels that the first years of literature study, the junior high school years, also impress upon the mind of the child his lifelong perceptions of this experience. Therefore, the manner in which one approaches the task of presenting this first taste of the literary experience must be examined in a thoughtful way.

The writer feels that students in junior high school would benefit from a study of literature which emphasizes a Thematic approach. This is based upon the nature of the twelve- to fifteen-year-old who is being introduced to literature for the first time in his academic career. The method of presenting the course must consider his emotional response to the literature he encounters. It is suggested that a thematic approach to literature best uses the natural inquisitiveness and search for individual values that is prevalent among students in the junior high school. Identity with issues that can be arranged thematically in the literature programme is a natural point of entry to the study of literature. This interest can be fostered with the advantage of thematic topics that can be suited to the individual needs of each student. By arousing student interest in a theme, the motivation to pursue the issue may be instilled.

It can be argued legitimately that students also require exposure to literary heritage as well as literary criticism in their literature study; however, the writer believes that the first objective of the junior high school literature programme should be to arouse interest in and provide enjoyment of literature for its own sake. A perusal of The Reorganized High School Programme of studies also indicates that such critical study is provided later in the student's career. At this point, for the year 1983-84, courses are offered in the senior high school in Literary

Heritage, Canadian Literature, Folk Literature, as well as two courses in Thematic Literature. These courses provide the depth of study that will be needed, but not at the junior high school level.

The task of the writer is to present a method of implementing the new literature programme which is of most benefit to the young readers at the junior high school level. This includes a study of the other organizational arrangements presently utilized, arguing the advantages and disadvantages of each, as well as demonstrating how the thematic approach can be successfully implemented into the new literature program.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A. Definition of Literature

A true description of the term literature has remained elusive for centuries. Even in the present era, literary theorists, having the advantage of viewing the history of literary development, have not proposed a definition which satisfies all points of view. Webster defines literature as "writings in prose or verse, especially writing having excellence of form or expression, and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest." The Oxford Dictionary refers to literature as "writings whose value lies in beauty of form or emotional effect." Each of these sources suggests a definition of literature which, although generalizing the domain of literature, fails to provide a meaning which the teacher can utilize within the confines of the literature class.

The writer suggests that in order for any literature programme to be meaningful, the nature and function of the term literature must be delineated in a concrete, understandable manner. When one comes to grips with the knowledge of what literature is, and what it does, then the direction of the literature programme and its method of implementation can be more sensibly undertaken.

It is the hope of the writer to define literature in terms of its application to the literature class, and to suggest some of the functions that literature performs in our students' lives. From this knowledge it may be possible to perceive a means of implementing a programme which will most benefit the student of literature.

Historical Development

To understand what literature is today, one should probably study its derived meaning as it has evolved over the centuries. In the 1700's; literature emerged as literary culture, erudition, or simply knowledge of the classical languages (Wellek 1978:18). In the early 1800's "literature" referred to all the writings of a country or period (Pollack 1965:8). It included writings of erudite nature, history, theology, philosophy, and even natural sciences (Wellek 1978:19). In recent generations the term "literature" has been specialized to a new meaning, and suggests that many people have become conscious of an important division within the entire 'body of writings' (Pollack 1965:9). Very slowly, the term was narrowed down to what we call today 'imaginative literature': the poem, the tale, the play, in particular. This is a process intimately connected with the rise of aesthetics, of the whole system of arts which, in older times, was not clearly set off from the sciences on the one side and crafts on the other (Wellek 1978:19).

The Ability to Use Language

A modern definition of literature must be concerned with the ability to use language--the ability to transfer something of experience into symbols, and, through the symbolic medium, to share experience (Condon 1966). A literary work is one in which language, through using old words in established ways, functions as a unified verbal gesture, the occasion of an experience that can be repeated only by repeating the work verbatim, because the work as a whole, in its original unity, defines an experience (Sparshott 1978:7).

Literature is not a coded message which has to be deciphered, but rather it is a pleasing and satisfying structure or composition in which both reader and writer experience pleasure in each victory over the difficulties of exact expression, in each perception of truth about the human condition (Taylor 1981:6).

An Imaginative Act

Literature is essentially an imaginative act, that is, an act of the writer's imagination in selecting, ordering, and interpreting life experience (Taylor 1981:1). It is the unverifiable moment-by-moment statement of an event (Gray 1975:141). The quality or nature of the writer's conception and understanding of the experience is expressed by the complex structure of the words that he or she creates.

Literature also has to do with joy and creativity, pain and human growth (Barrett 1970:7). It expands our unique and personal lives by making our own the great variety of human responses to the cosmos in that never-ending personal and general struggle of free will against necessity (McMaster 1977:6). It reflects hopes, joys, desires, disappointments, and frustrations of people everywhere (Trump and Miller 1979: 88). Literary art is concrete, synthetical, and creative; it makes its primary appeal to the aesthetic sense and to the emotions (Sheran 1926:3). It embodies a distinct method of knowing that neither philosophy nor the empirical sciences can provide. Literature makes the quality of experience concrete for us and allows us to examine it within an aesthetic frame (Hillocks, McCabe, McCampbell 1971:167). It heightens our perceptions, takes us momentarily out of our own necessarily restricted sphere and permits us to see with the eyes of another. It breaks down the physiological and spiritual barriers among individuals and gives us some idea of how it feels to be another person (Hillocks et al., 1971:167).

The Function of Literature

It has been stated that some of the functions of literature are:

to expand vocabulary, to improve skills of expression, acquaint one with literary forms and the characteristics of literary periods.

It can widen knowledge of past and present, acquaint one with foreign lands, peoples, and customs. It can introduce one to the world of ideas, broaden the vision of life, help shape beliefs, clarify and define attitudes and ideals. It can enhance imaginative faculties. It can give a better understanding of the universe, society, fellow man, and oneself. It can give pleasure. (Knapton & Evans 1967:4)

Hopefully, students of literature derive many of these benefits from their experience with literature; however, for students first being exposed to the study of literature, it may be presumptuous to expect most of these results initially. Some theorists say that literature cannot be studied at all. We can only read, enjoy, and appreciate it (Wellek and Warren 1956:15). For the purposes of introducing students to the complexities of literature, this statement may have some integral meaning for us as teachers. The best thing a work of literature or any other work of art can do is to provide the experience of itself as a work of art (Knapton & Evans 1967:6). The more one reads literature, the more likely it is that one will be able to see his own inner life, attitudes, and emotions as normal, or at least duplicable in the lives of others, and acceptable in many contexts. By portraying human experience, most of the world's mimetic art reminds us of ourselves, and helps us to be human or at least to recognize our brotherhood with other people (Barrett 1970:12).

A work of literature does not necessarily give us accurate information about the way life is actually lived;

rather, it causes us to recognize truths about human existence through the direct presentation of selected experiences (Taylor 1981:2). Instead of telling us about the way people act and feel, it involves us in these actions and directs our response to them.

Like every human being, each work of literature has its individual characteristics; but it also shares some common properties with other works of art, just as every person shares traits with humanity (Wellek & Warren 1956:19). This may be the beauty and simplicity of literature's function, especially for the young, as well as being a means of motivation for the teacher. The greatest literature presents man wearing the two conventional masks, the grinning and the weeping face that decorate theatre prosceniums. Behind the double mask is just a face--a human face. This may be the irony of all great literature: it is all so ordinary (Rexroth 1968:ix). Of the vast number of books that have been written for over 500 years, a small number have survived because they share the most simply defined characteristics. It is usually said that they deal with the archetypes of human experience, with characters at once concrete and universal, with events and relationships that are invariant in the lives of all men (Rexroth 1968).

Literature as Experience

It is not the responsibility of the English teacher to impose ideas and values, but to help his students understand how language works; cognitively, affectively, and aesthetically, so that they can examine the values that are conveyed and shaped by literature, and can use language to formulate, synthesize, and evaluate their own values (Hillocks et al., 1971:11). The function of literature in this process is to provide the experience for the reader, so that he can acknowledge and respond to the essential truths that underlie the surface reality of the literature. The particular actions, characters, and settings which the author chooses constitute the subject of the work, the surface meaning, in fact (Taylor 1981:3). The theme of the work--that is, the abstract idea that the subject matter exemplifies--is also part of the meaning. A theme cannot exist in a work of literature without the vehicle of subject matter, and it is in the relationship of one to the other that we see the truth that the author aims at. The literature teacher attempts to fulfill this function of literature by involving students in the experience as frequently as possible, exposing them to the inventive imagination of others, so that they may learn to respond to the experience as unique individuals and as fellow human beings.

Selecting the Literature Arrangement

The manner in which a literature programme is structured and the method of presentation of such a programme has been, and continues to be, an area of considerable controversy. Each method of presentation has its advantages and disadvantages, depending upon the learning outcomes that one perceives to be important for the student. Since no one literature programme can achieve all the outcomes possible from a study of literature, one must weigh the benefits of each before the best method is chosen. The function of the particular literature programme, what one hopes to achieve, must also be identified prior to selecting the more suitable approach. The organization and presentation of the programme should recognize the impossibility of presenting all literature, or even most literature, to students. The answer to this dilemma rests with the selection of some literature, based upon the criteria which exposes the student to selections that will be of most benefit to his literary experiences.

✓ The choice of literature programme depends upon the kind of study with which one wishes to involve students. If literature is to be viewed as a means of understanding the social milieu, the emphasis of the programme may be on cultural study. If traditional themes and topics that occur again and again in all literature are to be the emphasis of the programme, then literature may be viewed as a humanistic study. Concern for matters of literary form, structure of

literary genre, methods of characterization, and imagery and symbols, could reflect a need for a course emphasis on literary study. Using literature as a means of reflecting on experience to provide opportunities for student writing may enable literature to become a stimulus for creative writing (Bailey 1981).

Each of the foregoing perspectives views literature in a unique manner. No single literature course can achieve all the aims of literature, and it is the curriculum planner who must strive to select that programme which is best suited to the needs of a particular group of students.

It should be acknowledged that the ability to perceive literary value does vary greatly, both in historical time, and among readers in any particular epoch; in fact, it varies from day to day in the experiences of any reader (McFadden 1978:55). What one wishes for the student must take into account the nature of the student at this particular time in his or her life. Traditional methods of approaching the teaching of literature attempt to provide the best of some aspect of literature, be it appreciation of one's cultural heritage, an understanding of the historical implications of literature, or the aesthetic implications. It has been said that one reads literature for three interrelated and overlapping reasons: (1) for pleasure; (2) for information of a kind not available in an encyclopedia, and (3) for a means of sharing our cultural heritage (Hook & Evans 1982:126). These

motivations are part of the rationale for presenting literature programmes which emphasize different aspects of the study of literature.

Whatever the method of organization, the literature course should expose the student to "literature", as opposed to mere reading. Literature is always affective, gives an author's personalized interpretation of life, is clearly and strikingly written, is in a form of lasting interest, and invites aesthetic reading (Hook & Evans 1982:184). Mere reading, on the other hand, may be utilitarian or affective. If it is utilitarian, it has the primary purpose of providing information. If the reading is affective, it will lack one or more of the qualities which pertain to the definition of literature (Hook & Evans 1982:134).

The spectrum of literature is a vast and myriad area of study. What to include and what to exclude from a literature course provokes considerable thought. It has been argued that nothing in print can be excluded from literary study (Wellek 1978:16). Literary history is identified with the history of civilization, for which, of course, pictorial or other material records unearthed by archaeologists serve as legitimate documentation. This broad definition poses a dilemma for the literature teacher, who must decide what literature students are to be exposed to. The time restraints alone restrict the study to what is often referred to universally as "great" literature. One certainly cannot

prove that great literature makes its readers better, more civilized human beings, but one can claim that by broadening pupils' horizons, one can hope to make them more enlightened, discerning, and tolerant (Evans 1982:66). Literature, whether great or not, can reveal alternatives, not simply in the use and interpretation of language, but in possible outcomes of action. Conversely, it can provide support, confirmation and reassurance. The reader can confront problems at once removed and in relative safety. While refusing to make unrealistic claims for literature, one can still agree that its significance for personal values, for the width and depth of an individual's mind, and for his growth as a thoughtful member of society, is self-evident.

Literature has long been held to instruct and entertain, but the instruction has never been in the form of tidy little object lessons which can be summed up in a period (Taylor 1981:5). If works of literature continue to instruct through various ages, it is because living experience and not abstract information is communicated. Literature suggests a spectrum of values, even of attitudes, but it rarely hands down formulated judgements and conclusions. The reader not only enters into the experience of the action and characters as it unfolds, but he is also left to his own conclusions and evaluation of that experience, of its truthfulness and relevance to real life.

Literature has the power to shape thought and understanding. The vicarious experience it offers is a

subtle and powerful force in building the character of a nation and its people (Curriculum Guide for Intermediate Division: English 1977:3). As a record of life and experience, literature represents the best expression of what men and women have enjoyed or endured, have done and have dreamed of doing.

To present these facets of literature, and to expose young readers to the experience of literature, various organizational methods of studying the literature have traditionally been utilized. Each of the methods attempts to portray a rich instructional and aesthetic exposure to the literature selected. Each encourages the student to respond to, and value, the literature. Nonetheless, each method only emphasizes some, but not all, of the richness of the literary experience. For this reason, none of the methods of presenting literature will fulfill all the functions of literature study. Their unique characteristics employ advantages for certain aspects of literary study, but, by their very nature, methods impose restrictions on what each can accomplish. They are best utilized when consideration is given to the particular needs of the student and to a knowledge of the emphasis that is to be placed upon the course of study.

Several of the more common ways of organizing literature for study are:

1. Organization by genre.
2. Organization by chronology.
3. Organization by topic.
4. Organization by rhetorical awareness.
5. Study of a single text, or author, in depth.
6. Organization by correlation.
7. Organization by theme.

(Rodrigues & Badaczewski 1978:5)

Organization by Genre

The mold into which a writer pours his ideas and experience is a genre approach to literature, with each differing genre--short story, novel, play, poem--having a unique structure composed of those elements common to that particular genre (Hipple 1973:877). The teacher of English who employs this definition of structure as the foundation of an approach to literature-teaching first concentrates with his students on the identification and classification of elements within a work, with the eventual outcome to be the correct categorization of the work into one of the types mentioned above. The very fact that a course is limited by generic boundaries imposes certain goals on the course; otherwise, why would restrictions to genre be imposed? A course limited to the short story must be concerned with the study of literary form (Hillocks 1972). Many twentieth century critics seem convinced that the study of genres is mainly useful as an aid for understanding how particular works came to be written, and tends to be read by particular

writers and readers (Hernadi 1978:192). However, no one is likely to take seriously the notion that the mere possession of the traits by which "genre" is defined is sufficient to guarantee the goodness or value of a work, except in those cases where the defining traits are themselves evaluative, or in the weak sense in which a work may then be said to be a good example of its kind (Reichert 1978:74).

There are many advantages in approaching the study of literature with the purpose of examining its form. Perhaps chief among them is its relative concreteness, (Hipple 1973:77), an important ingredient in a field whose students often seem prone to become lost in what they regard as its abstractness. A second useful purpose served by this approach to the structure of literature lies in its facilitating the process of literary analysis in that the same criteria can be applied to all works within the genre (Rodrigues & Badaczewski 1978:6). This enables a comparison of works of different authors who use the same medium (Hook 1972:139), as well as improvement of evaluative judgments by comparing and contrasting genre (Rodrigues & Badaczewski 1978:6).

Another advantage of the genre approach rests with the possibilities of historical examination of literature as students trace the development of literary form (Hipple 1973:77). The teacher can also increase students' motivation to read literature by substituting genres that happen to be less appealing to students at the moment with other genres that can sustain their interest.

The disadvantages of teaching literature using a genre approach must also be weighed in order to measure its acceptability as a method for a particular programme. It should be remembered that very few students are vitally interested in the study of form per se, and when a teacher attempts to sustain this approach over an entire year, interest levels can be dangerously low (Simmons, Shafer, & West 1976:75). Students may begin to view literature as the study of literary characteristics rather than of the consideration of ideas, aesthetic enjoyment, or ways of gaining greater insight into oneself and others (Rodrigues & Badaczewski 1978:6).

In pursuing a genre approach, students may not acquire any idea of the whole pattern of development of literature (Hook 1972:139), and the special insight a poem may give as a result of metamorphic manipulation of language may never be revealed if the student concentrates upon prose alone (Rodrigues & Badaczewski 1978:6). The same may be said about all the genres. Topics and themes of identical nature are to be found in all genres. Teachers should enable students to realize how each particular genre adds a special dimension to the perception of a subject or theme.

If the teacher's purpose is to teach the unique characteristics of a given genre in order to encourage students to read more within the genre or to develop the students' abilities to evaluate aspects of that genre, then the development of genre studies may be justified.

becomes rather mundane and monotonous unless taught by a distinctly dynamic individual" (Simmons, Shafer, West 1976: 74). A more serious problem lies in the level of language of works typically taught early in the year. Particularly in British and American surveys, this language is the most remote from the understandings and experiences of the students who must wade through it. Thus, there is a danger that some of the reading that is predictably the most difficult must be done early in the year and possibly without adequate readiness (Simmons et al., 1976:74).

In chronological methodologies teachers often feel a compulsion to "get through" the literature. As a result, they rush through the selections with little consideration for the value of studying a work in depth or branching out on tangents that may excite and involve the students (Rodrigues & Badaczewski 1978:7). This danger may result in the literature course being reduced to a course in literary history (Hook 1972; Knapton & Evans 1967).

Often in chronological grouping the literature that is selected ignores the input of minority groups to the nation as a whole (Rodrigues & Badaczewski 1978:7). Because the work of minorities was often ignored in the past, only the literature and viewpoints of the dominant groups are available to us.

If the teacher wants students to develop a sense of literary history and thus be more aware of the heritage, and if the teacher realizes that the students' sense of literary

Organization by Chronology

One of the basic reasons given for education in any society is that it preserves and passes on culture (Rodrigues & Badaczewski 1978:6). In that respect, the study of literature based upon a chronological pattern is essential at sometime during the education of an individual. Through his studying literature chronologically, the student can become more aware of the heritage which has brought us to the point where we are today.

For the teacher, the advantages of teaching literature chronologically include the following: Chronology, since it follows the inexorable calendar, affords the most orderly plan of procedure (Hook 1972:139). There is no denying that the orderly commends itself to the student and there is no surer way to be orderly than to proceed chronologically (Knapton & Evans 1967:30). The influences of history--including the history of language as well as the history of politics--can be related to the literature of the time, and vice-versa, using a chronological approach, and the potential for involving all the humanities exists, for music and other art forms can be correlated with the literature (Rodrigues & Badaczewski 1978:6).

Chronological organization, although a time honoured approach, has some obvious drawbacks. It is not too popular with classes of adolescents. The era-by-era approach "typically features a group of old standby selections, and

history may be skewed by the circumstances of both class time and historical selections, then the chronological approach could be of potential worth.

Organization by Topic

Topical organization is similar to thematic organization in that a great many diverse selections can be gathered under one heading. The topical organization differs from the thematic organization in its breadth of coverage. A topic is broader than a theme, encompassing many selections in a format that may be looser than the thematic approach. The crucial distinction is that "topic" as a device for classifying seems only to identify a category in impersonal, non-committal terms, whereas "theme" seems regularly to involve personal attitudes, emotions, and qualities (Knapton & Evans 1967:61).

There are advantages in arranging a literature course around topical headings. Rather than having to be certain that the selections relate closely, as one would have to do in the thematic organization, the teacher can select particular works simply because they illustrate the topic, and not because they are necessarily compatible. For instance, a topic could deal with war or satire or even with something so vague as "ways of communicating". In essence, a topic is a label that is broad enough to encompass much literature.

Topics can be adjusted fairly easily and rapidly to match the sometimes ephemeral interests of students. Current events may spark a particular interest in students and thus eliminate the need to motivate interest in a subject. Fads may also lend themselves to such self-motivation.

The disadvantages of such a loosely-structured approach to literature should be obvious. The structure is often so loose that comparisons of the works for the purposes of studying authors' crafts or the relationships of ideas may not be easy to make. The unique value of a given selection may be subverted in an attempt to consider it as another element of the topic. Teachers must not lose sight of the intrinsic value of any selection.

In general, the topical arrangement may not be so appealing to teachers that they select it without any further consideration of the reasons for teaching literature. In an attempt to find material that will motivate students, teachers may be willing to ignore more important, long-range reasons for studying literature. Nevertheless, having a group of students highly motivated by exposure to a topic of current interest may be the first step toward involving them more deeply with literature.

The foregoing are three of the more popular methods by which literature programmes have traditionally been presented. Other groupings of literature have included the

study of a single text in depth, organization for rhetorical awareness, organization by correlation, and organization by mode, as well as combinations of some or all of the various methods. Each method has advantages which enhance its desirability for use in the classroom. Equally important, each also possesses disadvantages which restrict its scope for classroom value.

CHAPTER LII

THEMATIC ORGANIZATION OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The writer suggests that of all these approaches, the thematic presentation of literature possesses the most desirable characteristics essential to a programme of introductory literature for students in the junior high school. Like each of the other methods, the thematic approach has restrictions imposed by the nature of its presentation; for example, the extremely broad focus of some courses (The Nature of Man) suggests profundity but actually promises superficiality (Hillocks 1972:63). While this accusation does certainly pertain to the topical approach to literature, a sequentially ordered theme would arrange the focus more pointedly to allay the charge of superficiality.

One of the central weaknesses of thematic organization is the choice of good books for the wrong reasons and the attempt to squeeze them into an inappropriate theme (Brotten & Donald 1976:29). Sometimes selections are chosen not because of their quality, but because they pertain to a certain theme (Hook & Evans 1982). In answer to the charge that in a thematically arranged approach the student misses some of the classics and is exposed to "inferior" literature

(or non-literature) simply because it fits the theme, one might say that no single book will save a student, help him grow up, or teach him the valuable lessons of life; the habit of careful and thoughtful reception and transmission of communication concerning values is possibly the most valuable skill our students will need (Spann & Culp 1975).

An argument against theme teaching has been that it tends to distort the meaning of individual works by emphasizing certain aspects while neglecting others (Hillocks, McCabe, McCampbell 1971:226). A theme should be so designed that it enables students to get at the central significance and the organizational principles of the works it contains. This objection implies that the reader should get everything possible from what he reads. To do that he would have to understand everything about reading before he reads anything. The idea also results in practical failure. When a teacher tries to squeeze every bit out of a work, the work and the students "die" a slow, agonizing death. One way of giving coherence and order to the vast array of student personal experience is to take a theme and, dependent upon its complexity and the pupils' interest, to base lessons on it, exploring by a variety of approaches many of the facets over a period of days (Stratta 1970:250). But in order to give some opportunity for this coherence and order to emerge, the teacher will need to have considered beforehand the complexity of the theme, then to decide which aspects it

might be fruitful to explore, so that some of the central issues of the theme are raised for discussion.

If students are constantly exposed to thematic studies of literature, it is argued that they may not develop evaluative criteria for any particular genre or have a historical awareness of their literary heritage (Rodrigues & Badaczewski 1978:8). It is suggested here that at the introductory level of the junior high school literature should be studied for its own sake. The Reorganized Senior High School Programme does offer courses in the exploration of genres and literary heritage, and the writer feels that senior high school is the time when this approach to literature should be utilized. At the junior high level the major concern should be with the experience of literature through the arrangement of themes.

Advantages of Thematic Arrangement

The advantages of a thematically centered approach to teaching literature are viewed most clearly when one considers the student's needs during this important phase in his life. The student from twelve to sixteen years old is becoming aware of who he is. He is learning how he differs from others. He is feeling the first pressures of adult responsibilities. As he matures, the student accumulates ideas, fears, questions, hopes. He admires heroes. He craves action. He dreams of how he will react in a crisis.

In this welter of thoughts the teacher recognizes age-old themes--the concern for man's relationship to other man, the response to crisis, the need for a code of living, the love of adventure and laughter, the drive toward progress, the search for ideas and success, and the quest to know one's own self (Dunning 1965).

When these themes are the acknowledged subject matter of the course, the student must almost certainly be interested, for these are his own deepest concerns. He finds that in the context of these themes, reading, writing, speaking, and listening have a purpose: to extend one's knowledge of the theme, and therefore, to widen the student's view of himself and the world.

Among other things, the literature lesson is the meeting point of all students' experiences, the point of integration that makes them meaningful (Britton, Martin, Rosen, 1970). If this is true, then an important role of the literature teacher is to provide opportunities for the exploration of experience, so that the pupils can begin to evaluate and order them, in order to understand them. If an important part of our work as teachers is concerned with helping our students to a deeper understanding of themselves, with developing in them a sensitivity to other people as individuals, with helping them to an understanding of, and coming to terms with, their environment and the times they live in, then the thematic approach to literature is to be welcomed, even encouraged.

When a literature programme begins with people and ideas rather than literary patterns, types, or histories, the teacher can more effectively involve students' experiences in the reading process (Judy 1974:137). By presenting literature to students first of all as an interpretation of life--as a record of youth and age, hope and disappointment, effort and defeat, love and hate--one places a strong emphasis on theme, on the human and social meaning of literature, rather than on a technical pre-occupation with form (Guth 1973).

Objectives of Literature Programme

It has been stated that the wide and varied sources of literature must be taught primarily for the following reasons:

- (1) Students need to read literature for pleasure and personal involvement; to help them find their identity.
 - (2) Students should read literature to extend their ability to comprehend and manipulate new concepts and thought relationships.
 - (3) Students read literature to transcend the 'here and now'.
- (Palmer 1981:61)

Specific objectives of a literature programme should include the following:

- (1) Students should experience literature.
- (2) Students should be encouraged to respond to literature.

- (3) Students should be encouraged to value literature.

(Curriculum Guide for the Intermediate Division:
English, Ontario, 1977:82)

Further, the goals of a literature teacher should include some or all of the following to a degree:

- (1) To enable the student to have faith in reading as a means of solving some of his problems with life and leisure (Lee 1973:95).
- (2) To help young people understand themselves through the language and literature activities that we present to them...through literature young people may gain these flashes of insight when they see that others have faced the same problems and have felt the same way about them (Stafford 1967:6).
- (3) To enable students to examine constantly the interaction between people to see how they live harmoniously, or why they come into conflict with each other,...so that they themselves will not be confined always or completely within themselves (Stafford 1967:6).

A common thread exists throughout each of these objectives for literature, a consistency in what each would see students derive from a study of literature; that is, a desire to expose students to literature for enjoyment and the experience it portrays. For the junior high school student specifically, a concern for values has been one of the most successful ways of getting students involved in literature the way they are involved in life--questioning,

reflecting, probing, wondering, and sometimes rebelling. A literature programme which uses language as a vehicle for exploring the problems and questions inherent in the human condition appears to be one of the most valid as well as the most practical approaches (Spann & Culp 1975). A perceptive teacher observes that adolescents are attempting to develop values in a confusing world. A thematic approach to literature gives them an opportunity to integrate all of the language arts in relation to a theme, as they do in real life.

The study of literature plays a central role in the thematic approach to literature. By design, the theme approach fosters student involvement by emphasizing the literary work itself (Trump & Miller 1979:87). When the students investigate the work and its relationship to the theme, they are in fact identifying its relationship to themselves. Thus, the major emphasis of the thematic unit lies in the personal response of each student to his or her own work. It provides a direct opportunity for the student to explore the complex relationships between art and experience, and to see in literature values and insights that not only validate and make real his immediate experience as an individual, but also places that experience within the tradition of his own common birthright as a human being (Cameron 1980:60). The thematic approach can link the literature with the society that fostered it.

It can help to foster a sense of place in students (McMullin 1971:70).

A thematic unit is dominated by neither historical nor formal characteristics, for "although these characteristics are important to the study of literature, they are not of primary importance" (Trump & Miller 1980:87).

Students do not work to find how a particular literary piece fits into an overall historical survey, nor do they try to determine the formal aspects of the work. Attention is focussed on the work itself, and what the author has to say (Hillocks 1972; Trump & Miller 1979).

Thematic arrangements of literature provide the stimulus for motivating students to read more, thereby enhancing the quality of the response they make to literature (Experiments with Themes 1972). There is also provided opportunities for teachers to make adjustments for individual differences in their classrooms (Senior High Language Arts Curriculum Guide 1982, Alberta: 66). By its very nature, a theme allows the teacher to group classes in a variety of ways (Karpinka, Spavour, Westbury 1972). No reason inherent in the approach demands that students all read the same work; rather, they can come together in the common study of one theme as it is expressed in several works (Hipple 1973:82). The theme at its best achieves a balance between the looseness of topically-arranged courses and the rigidity of genre-based approaches, providing a sense of purpose, a circumference, and

Yet allowing a variety of interpretations of, and responses to, the subject (Evans 1982:193).

A thematic programme can also make the students familiar with, and aware of, the different forms of literature, deepening their perceptions of the significance of different structures (Experiments with Themes 1972:2). It catches and sustains the pupils' interests; it motivates them in their critical reading; it gives the pupils exposure to different kinds of literature and can be so designed as to give them also a knowledge of the differences that can be perceived between writings of different periods and different authors; "above all it contributes perhaps more than any other method of teaching can do, to the personal development of the pupils" (Experiments with Themes 1972:3).

Frequently, themes are explored initially at a level which is too abstract, consequently inhibiting the pupil from engaging in the experience (Stratta 1970:250). Often it is better to delay introducing a written text until interest in the theme has been quickened. Once this has been done, literature can then provide its own special way of extending the pupils' exploration. Thematic organization is a valid means of bringing students to recognize that their only avenue to the unique experience each work offers is a discriminating response to the rendering itself (Murphy 1968:179). All students are capable of imaginative entry into the experience merely because they "are" human, and because they have had many experiences (Burton & Simmons, ed.

1970:94). The problem is to relate the experience recreated in the work to their own experience. Just as the literary artist expresses emotion indirectly through the work, so the reader must conjure up experiences in the general field of emotion represented, for it is only occasionally that the reader's actual experience closely matches that reproduced in the work. The teacher who can generate interest in the theme by motivating the students through their own experience will permit this imaginative entry to literature to occur. The teacher may not be able to teach imaginative entry, but he can certainly promote it. The thematic selection of works which offers a legitimate chance for the student to use his experience as the touchstone for imaginative entry, and helps the student think about his experience in connection with those recreated in the work, fosters that motivation to pursue literature. The thematic approach to literature furnishes the framework of meaning within which the student can explore the ideas of others, try on and try out these ideas, and accept or reject them (Barr & Theodore 1974:49). Such a framework unifies and orders the study of ideas so that questions can be generated and meaning thereby created.

Rationale for Theme Teaching

Given the argument for the advantages of a thematic arrangement of literature, a rationale for thematic teaching is necessary, based upon one's perception of literature in general and the junior high school student in particular.

- (1) Literature is important chiefly in that it reveals truths about human experiences.
- (2) In order for students, particularly younger ones, to understand "meaning" in literature, the experiences described must be within the realm of their comprehension.
- (3) The closer the relationships the teacher can establish between that which has been presented in literature and that which can be experienced by the students, the better chance there is of giving emphatic meaning to the selection studied. Conversely, the work that describes experiences remote from the lives of the readers may cause difficulties in perception of meaning equal to the difficulties caused by complexity of structure.

(Simmons, Shafer, West 1976:75)

If one accepts this rationale for the teaching of literature, and where the thematic approach is accepted as a means of accomplishing the objectives of the programme, the individual teacher may, by asking the following questions, determine the suitability of particular themes.

- (1) Will this theme provide a suitable vehicle for achieving the aims and objectives of the programme?
- (2) It is likely to stimulate and interest as many pupils as possible?

- (3) Is it neither so broad as to be meaningless (i.e., "Mankind"), nor so narrow as to be unnecessarily limiting, (i.e., "Dragons")?
- (4) Can teacher and pupils compile a selection of material that is adequate?
- (5) Does this theme have a particular significance for pupils in this locality?

(Evans 1982:193)

Selecting a Theme

With these aspects in mind, teachers using the thematic approach might well begin with a theme of general and continuing significance. This they should do at the outset of instruction, before any works are read. A close observation of the themes available indicates that study and discussion of the literature which deals with man's inner nature, his environment, and his relationships with other human beings, must help the growing student to be made aware of himself as a person, and one more capable of adapting to the real adult world with all its difficulties and prejudices (Experiments with Themes 1972).

Themes may be suggested either by a piece of literature or by a consideration of one of the serious problems confronting contemporary society. Each should be an issue in human experience with which men have concerned themselves through the ages, that is still of

concern today, that hopefully holds some meaning for all members of the class, and that is capable of being understood, in varying degrees of depth, by all members of the class. The teacher's premise should be that:

- (1) It is of general interest.
- (2) All students have some notions concerning it; and
- (3) further knowledge about it, through reading and study, should be a worthwhile venture.

(Simmons, Shafer, West, 1976:76)

Once a theme has been established, it must be adequately supported by literary selections that are readily available. The teacher can mix poems, short stories, novels, plays, essays, and all the other genres in a way that stresses that basic concern of many different authors for the same theme (Rodriguez & Badaczewski 1978:3). Also, the teacher should anticipate the kind of discussion which is likely to take place when the class embarks on the theme study; he should also prepare the kind of writing assignments which will fairly represent and encourage the natural development and exploration of the theme (Experiments with Themes 1972:1).

When properly used, the thematic approach can help to solve the vexing problems of difference in student ability and can build on the interests previously established (Simmons, Shafer, West 1976:76). More importantly, it can assist the student to think independently and critically about his task of extracting inferred meaning from the works he reads. Fully aware that the works have been chosen

because of their relevance, he is then faced with the necessity of ascertaining, by comparison or contrast, ways in which the central issue (in the work pertains to the idea already discussed. Thus, the literary selection can be seen in the light of past considerations and is no longer remote from the student's interests and understanding. His search for related ideas becomes more meaningful--less remote and sterile. Furthermore, it will be easier for him to compare works by different writers and in different genres when it has been clearly established that the selections relate, in some manner, to a common theme. The more the younger reader pursues this method of study, the more he can relate past experience and discussion to present reading, and the more aware he becomes of some of the great abstract concepts in the human situation.

Common Themes

A perusal of the related literature reveals that of the many themes utilized in literature programmes, most can be classified according to type under several headings. The themes that follow are not exhaustive but do provide an indication of the trends that seem to affect the selection of literary themes for study in literature classes throughout the world. They are chosen primarily for the student in the junior high school, but each can certainly apply to all secondary school students.

Classification of Themes

Family/Childhood

- Childhood Revisited
- Search for Identity
- School Life
- Coming of Age in Canada
- Initiation
- Memories
- Search for Meaning
- Turning Points
- Tales for Teens
- Childhood
- The Generation Gap
- Marriage/Divorce
- Poverty and Riches
- Tradition vs. Change

Adventure/Nature

- World of the Future
- Heroes
- Frontier Adventure
- Science Fiction
- Creatures
- Myths and Legends
- The Supernatural
- The Unknown
- Life of other Planets
- Historical Adventures
- Folktales
- Unsolved Mysteries
- Survival
- Mystery and Suspense
- Escapes
- Animals
- Human Nature
- Northern and Native Peoples
- Hostile Environments
- Winter Brutality
- Small World of Animals
- Hot and Cold (extremes in climate)

Human Characteristics

- Loyalty
- Friendship
- Myself
- Knowing vs. Feeling
- Human Values
- Challenges
- Points of View
- Reflections
- Emotion vs. Reason
- Attitudes
- Courage
- Mirrors (of the mind)
- Personal Codes
- Outsiders
- Wisdom
- Beauty
- Love

Society

- The Class System
- The Black Experience
- Individual vs. Conformity
- Minority Literature
- World Literature
- The 'Exodus' Theme in Black Literature
- Urban vs. Rural
- Black Search for Identity
- Women's Search for Identity
- Patterns of Social Class
- Women in Canadian Literature
- Crime and Punishment
- Independence vs. Conformity
- Pluralism vs. Melting Pot
- The Media
- Quebec Literature in Transition
- Images of Biculturalism
- Social Problems
- Games People Play
- The Street
- Advertising
- The Poor; Dispossessed; the Immigrant in...

Themes that can be applied to several headings

- War (and its aftermath)
- Work
- Alienation
- Literature and War
- Humour
- Death
- Good and Evil
- Sounds
- The Five Senses
- The 'God is Dead' Concern
- Struggles
- Conflict
 - * Man vs. Deity
 - * Man vs. Nature
 - * Man vs. Man
 - * Man vs. Himself
- Isolation
- Journeys
- Success
- The Immigrant Experience
- New Land; New Language
- Patriotism
- The Sacredness of Life
- Nonsense
- Prejudice
- Moments of Decision
- Machines

The writer suggests that each of these classifications is subjective in nature and could, of course, be grouped differently in any number of ways. The point, however, is not how they are classified precisely; rather, it is merely to highlight the obvious fact that thematic arrangements of literature concern themselves with the human experience in its many and varied forms. The student exposed to this form of arrangement must almost certainly gain insight into the

complexity of human relationships, and, through his reading and discussion of the selections, become more aware of himself as a human being.

The four classifications selected can be utilized by the concerned teacher to expose students to the world of human values by developing the curiosity that is already present in the junior high school student. The need to know oneself in relation to others, the conflicts posed by family relationships, the need to dream and to fantasize about the future, as well as the desire to know how others in society feel and think, are necessary aspects of the growing-up process. Both internal dilemmas and external conflicts can be experienced and discussed in the privacy of the classroom. The student can be guided toward a realization of the differences and the similarities that exist among all humans regardless of time and place.

Developmental Relationship

If one examines closely the four categories chosen, a developmental relationship can be observed among them. Beginning with those concerns that are most personal for the student, namely, himself and his family, the thematic literature programme can free him to examine himself in the light of characters presented in the literature. Personal fears and conflicts can enable the student to discover more about himself and his fears and conflicts. This initial

literature experience motivates the student to learn more about himself in relation to others.

From the exposure of individual ideas the programme then leads the student to an examination of the world outside the walls of his own home. New, and sometimes, startling ideas are presented, but through the privacy of the mind, the student can experience in safety, ideas that may need to be discussed, meditated upon, and internalized over and over. His peers undoubtedly will have experienced similar fears; the advantage of discussing the ideas within the confines of the classroom is one of shared emotions. He discovers that others have similar problems and questions, and he may be motivated to express these feelings more candidly.

CHAPTER IV

DEVELOPING A THEME

Introduction

At this point the writer offers one theme which is developed and presented for use in the junior high school literature programme. The intent of this thesis is not to develop the themes completely for the classroom teacher; rather, it endeavors to demonstrate how a theme may be compiled using the content initially provided by the Thresholds anthology and other available material.

Each literature teacher possesses the vital aspect needed for any successful theme--the personal knowledge of his own individual students. To presume that one can prepare themes for all students at the Grade 7, 8 or 9 level is to do injustice to the principle that thematic arrangements make literature relevant to students.

The writer offers one theme merely as a sample of how the content available may be implemented along thematic guidelines. It is intended to assist teachers in planning their own students' themes, rather than to impose a set programme.

By observing the manner in which this particular theme is arranged, with a rationale, core materials, commentary of Socratic questions for the teacher, as well

as sample assignments and evaluation, it is hoped that teachers can base their own thematic arrangement on the model presented. Developing their own themes in this manner could enable teachers to guide students toward those concepts and ideas which will be of benefit to their literature experience.

Theme: Making Choices (suitable for Grade 7 students)

Rationale: Students entering junior high school invariably must face the transition from the security of childhood to the uncertainty of the adult world. They have many fears and concerns about this phase in their lives. This theme will expose the students to selections which focus attention on the dilemmas of decision-making.

Objectives: (1) Given that the student has completed the theme "Making Choices," he will present in written form his knowledge and understanding of the decision-making process. His answer will include the following points:

- a. decisions are personal acts.
- b. they are generally difficult to make.
- c. many factors are involved in the decision-making process.
- d. decisions frequently involve other people.

e. decisions should be made considering the consequences.

f. many decisions are made because of sense of duty, or responsibility.

For each of the points concerning decisions, the student will make reference to a selection from the theme's core material to support his statements. This will be accomplished with 80% accuracy.

(2) Given a list of 10 literary terms studied from the theme's "Core Concepts and Skills," the student will write a definition for each with 80% accuracy.

(3) Given the name of 4 literary terms (i.e., conflict, setting, climax, and plot), and a previously unseen selection, the student will read the selection silently and identify the use of the literary term in the passage.

(4) Given a topic for discussion which is generated in class, the student will act as chairperson for a discussion group of 3-4 students. He will record the points made by his group, and report orally to the class in a 1-2 minute summary of his group's discussion.

- (5) Given a topic for research, the student will use the resources available in the school library to compile a factual written report. The report will consist of a title page, a table of contents, an introduction, information, and summary. A bibliography will be provided. The student will achieve a grade of 80% on this report.

Introduction: The role of the teacher in this theme is of major importance. His task is to guide the students toward the key concepts which will be encountered during the unit. He attempts to provide a literary atmosphere in which the process of decision-making is examined from the following points of view:

- A decision is ultimately a personal act.
- The decision made may be easy, but more often than not it is a difficult one.
- The making of a decision involves many factors which can influence the individual.
- Decisions frequently involve others.
- The consequences of a decision must be considered.
- Decisions are often made from a sense of duty or responsibility toward someone else.

It's Your Move: Decisions for Discussion,
10 min., colour, 1972.

Trial By Fire: 28 min., colour, 1971.

The Right to Live: Who Decides? 17 min.,
colour, 1973.

Core Concepts and Skills:

The following concepts will be encountered during the unit. As this will be the first introduction for most of the students, teachers should ensure that pertinent concepts are discussed freely and thoroughly as they arise in the course of study.

setting	essay	climax	poetry
biography	plot	fiction	main character
rhyme	conflict	non-fiction	folktale
narrator	prose	short story	mood

Core Skills: (As described in Cheek & Cheek, 1980).

I. Reading Skills

A. Comprehension Skills

1. Identify stated main idea.
2. Remember sequence of events.
3. Identify character traits and actions.
4. Draw conclusions.
5. Summarize information.

Overview

Time: 4-5 weeks

Core Materials: Thresholds 1: Out and About. (King, LeDrew and Porter, 1982).

Poetry: The Road Not Taken. (p. 3)
The Mouse that Gnawed the Oak Tree Down. (p. 183)
Cook's Brook. (p. 281)

Short Story: Courage and Farewell. (p. 409)
A Sunrise on the Veld. (p. 376)
The Red Sweater. (p. 276)

Essay: Hans Hagger's Ride with Death. (p. 335)
The Sea was Calling Me. (p. 320)

Folktale: How Finn Won His Father's Place. (p. 226)
Openings: Literature of Newfoundland and
Labrador Book 1 (Norman, E.,
Warr, J., and Goulding, R., 1980).

Short Story: Sea Fever. (p. 17)
Quick Nurse! He's Cut Off His Foot. (p. 19)

Essay: To Mark the Occasion. (p. 11)
Doryloads: (Major, K., 1974).

Short Story: The Boat Builder. (p. 188)
Films: (Government of Newfoundland and
Labrador, Division of Instruction)

B. Reference Skills

1. Use dictionary.
2. Use encyclopedia.
3. Use library card catalogue.

C. Organizational Skills

1. Develop outlines.
2. Take notes during reading.

D. Specialized Study Skills

1. Use table of contents, glossary and index.
2. Preview, skim or scan materials.
3. Adjust rate according to material and purpose.
4. Use appropriate study techniques such as SQ3R.

II. Oral Communication Skills

A. Group Discussion

1. Act as chairman of a group discussion.
2. Act as recorder of a group discussion.
3. Present orally the findings of a group.
4. Use notes to summarize main points of discussion.

B. Individual Presentation

1. Prepare an oral presentation.
2. Answer questions raised by class.

III. Listening Skills

1. State the main idea of a selection.
2. Listen to a tape/record for mood.
3. Summarize the sequence of information presented in a selection.

IV. Writing Skills

1. Compile a written report that includes the following: title page, table of contents, introduction, information, summary and bibliography.
2. Summarize information in own words.

Additional Resources:

Junior High Novels -

The Sawtooth Harbour Boy.

Banner in the Sky.

Lost in the Barrens.

Presentation

Making Choices

MATERIALS

The Road Not Taken
Chalkboard/Overhead

PERIOD I

Have class read poem independently. Teacher then reads the poem aloud. Discuss poem as a possible decision that was made. What is a "decision"? What is the nature

of choices? (The pros/cons, the consequences, experience, hindsight.) Let the class discuss some of the decisions they have made, how they decided upon these choices, as well as some important decisions they will eventually be making in their own lives.

Note: The purpose of this class is to introduce the focal point of the theme--the difficulty of decision-making.

Divide the class into small groups. Have them discuss and report on the ways in which decisions are usually made. Include possible sequences that are followed--seeking advice, weighing the consequences, determining what is right for you, and so on. Point out that ultimately the final decision must rest with the individual, and that "that" makes all the difference.

End class with a discussion on the important 'ingredients'

of a good decision; logic, courage, the ability to see two points of view, weighing the consequences, deciding what is right rather than simply what you want.

MATERIALS

Chalkboard/Overhead.

PERIODS 2-4

Review last class and summarize why decisions can be difficult. Point out that many decisions are difficult because of internal conflict. Introduce the term.

Conflict: basically, the struggle between opposing forces. Without conflict, stories would not exist. Plot, after all, must be concerned with the way in which characters deal with conflict. The simplest form of conflict is external conflict--a character struggling against something in the outside world. In interpersonal conflict the character's struggle is with another person. And in internal conflict the character must deal with his or her own feelings. It is with this latter form of conflict that the theme is attempting to grapple.

The Red Sweater

Assign independent reading of the short story. Have students describe what they feel is the internal conflict made evident. Bring into the discussion the fact that, in this conflict, sacrifice is present. What prompted the boy's decision to sacrifice what he wanted for another? The idea of "compassion" should evolve from the discussion.

Have the class describe the boy's character from their reading. Why do they feel this way about him? Introduce briefly the fact that a character's personality may be presented by the way that he acts within a selection. Assign a character analysis of the main character for the next class.

Have class relate experiences of decisions which involve sacrifice (mother or father sacrifice themselves for their children). What does the willingness to sacrifice say

about a person? Must sacrifice
always be a factor in decisions?

MATERIALS

Cook's Brook

How Finn Won His Father's
Place

The Sea was Calling Me

PERIODS 5-6

Use this poem to point out how other people, particularly our peers, often influence our decisions. Is it braver to do something dangerous in front of our friends, or to refuse to do it? Discuss current issues in students' lives (drugs, study, curfews). Have students write a journal entry about 'secret fears'.

Discuss how an individual's background influences his making decisions. Do we often make choices based upon a sense of duty or responsibility? Assign reading of the short essay/folk-tale in light of this discussion. Have the class find similarities between both selections. (With both the characters, background dictates to some extent how they have acted).

MATERIALSPERIODS 8-10

Note: At this point the theme should be well established. Students should now understand that making choices demands much of the individual. Decisions can be very difficult, and are the result of many related factors. It is now time to expand the theme and explore how the consequences of decisions are also important and how they affect the lives of characters.

A Sunrise on the Veld

In this short story we see a young boy who goes hunting every morning, a carefree child who sees the activity as an adventure which makes him strong and independent. When he encounters death in its harsh and brutal form, he becomes aware of life without the innocence of youth.

Contrast the boy's mood at the beginning and at the end of the story. What accounts for this change? How is he now different? Discuss the effect of discovering the frailty of life on the boy's hunting in the future.

The boy decides to go off by himself to think about what happened. Why does he go by himself? What decisions might he make? What might influence these decisions?

Discuss the effect upon our decisions of discovering some harsh realities of the adult world (money problems, divorce, handicaps). Does this knowledge make us stronger, and capable of making better decisions in the future? What about the consequences of making decisions without taking thought?

MATERIALS

The Mouse that Gnawed the
Oak Tree Down
Hans Hugger's Ride with
Death
Courage and Farewell
Sea Fever
Quick Nurse! He's Cut
Off His Hand
To Mark the Occasion
The Boat Builder

PERIODS 11-14

Films:

Present the films selected for the theme. (Each film dramatizes different aspects of the decision-making process.) Use these films to generate discussion about the difficulties of making choices, the consequences of decisions, and why certain decisions are dependent upon many factors.

The class discussion should serve to motivate students to explore the next selections with greater insight concerning choices.

Note: Allow the next few periods for student exploration in small groups or independent study. Assign the selections and structure an assignment to be written or presented orally.

Sample Assignment Questions for Independent Study

(1) In "Hans Hagger's Ride with Death" an individual risks his own life for the safety of others who are strangers to him. From your own experience relate such an incident, or find one similar from your reading during this unit, and discuss the characteristics of such a person. What prompts him to act as he does for complete strangers?

(2) In "The Boat Builder" an old man deliberately decides to end his life. What are the reasons that prompted this choice? What effects will his decision have upon his son; his grandson? Is suicide ever a reasonable alternative?

(3) In "Courage and Farewell" discuss the factors that made the mother act as she did. Decide whether you agree with her decision and be prepared to defend your view. Is it correct to hide the truth from people you love, for fear of hurting them?

(4) In "To Mark the Occasion" a man chops down a tree at the end of the story. What does the tree represent to him, and why does he resort to this act of destruction? Can you explain his actions in terms of a 'symbolic gesture'?

Teaching Ideas for Enrichment

- (1) Have a group prepare a slide presentation for the school on their experiences with decisions as applied to some current issue (i.e., drugs and alcohol). They would be responsible for research, contacting the appropriate authorities (R.C.M.P., Drug and Alcohol Foundation) and presenting the pros and cons of the issue.
- (2) Have a group research 'Famous Decisions in History'. Present them and discuss their effect on the world today. (John F. Kennedy's assassination, Hitler's "Final Solution," Newfoundland Confederation.)
- (3) Research a famous person who made a sacrifice for others. Present a biography of his or her life, discussing the person's character. (Pioneers of Canada, Captain Jackman, The Jesuit Missionaries.)

- (4) Prepare a "Career Day" for your Junior High School. Have students invite representatives of various professional and trade organizations to come to the school on a particular day to discuss the decisions they may soon be making regarding careers.
- (5) Conduct a debate: Resolved: That decisions facing young people today are more difficult than those of their parents.

Evaluation

The majority of the evaluation procedures in this unit would consist of the formative evaluation of student progress. The nature of the instructional method, mainly discussion in small and large groups, would permit the teacher to assess students on a regular basis. Oral questioning of small groups, reports from groups on discussion topics, demonstrating written or oral understanding of the core concepts, would constitute the formative methods of evaluating students.

Formal summative evaluation would consist of one or more of the following:

- (1) Using a selection that has not been read during the unit, examine students' understanding of core concepts and skills. Have them define what they understand a certain term to mean (i.e., "internal conflict"), and, using the new selection, identify and discuss that

literary term.

- (2) Select a character from one of the selections, and have students compose a character analysis, substantiating their statements with evidence from the story. The character selected would be one from a novel, or other work, where the character's personality has been developed in some depth.
- (3) In either written, or oral form, present a book review of one of the novels from the reading list. The book review would include summary of the main events, a discussion of the main character, and a personal response to the book.
- (4) Assign a research paper to be completed during the course of the unit.

This list of evaluation procedures is not intended to be exhaustive or inflexible. The manner in which the unit is taught would provide the individual teacher with insight into the most suitable evaluation procedure for his particular class. What he deems most valid for his group of students, based upon the experience of presenting the theme, would be the best form of evaluation.

Conclusion

Prior to suggesting recommendations to various educational organizations relating to the teaching of literature at the junior high school level, it is felt that

some conclusions may be drawn concerning the nature of literature and its desired outcomes.

With the many options open to teachers regarding the arrangement of course content, the literature programme may become a random sampling of the various approaches unless sequential order is imposed. As a result, students may be thrust into the very heart of critical analysis and literary study before they have had an opportunity to view literature as an enjoyable experience. The obvious drawback to such an exposure to literature is the bored and reluctant reader that it frequently produces.

It is suggested that during the three years spent at the junior high school level, the student should be guided toward the enjoyment of literature for its own sake. Since the formative years of junior high help to develop the attitude one has for literature, it is necessary to foster positive feelings within the student at this crucial stage in his education. By establishing an attitude of interest and concern at the junior high level, the student would be better prepared to pursue the more demanding nature of critical analysis at the senior level of high school.

The writer does not suggest that literature at the junior high school level be restricted to reading solely for enjoyment. Obviously, certain formal aspects of literary study will be introduced and studied; however, the prime consideration should be to encourage the student to relate

to the literature experience and to discuss it uninhibitedly with his teacher and peers. The writer suggests that the most suitable method of accomplishing this exposure to literature is through the arrangement of a thematic guideline.

In order to promote successful positive literature experiences, and, at the same time, to prepare students for more in-depth literary study, the writer suggests several recommendations to be considered. Of the many recommendations that could be made, only three are proposed. The writer believes that the reorganization of the literature programme at the junior high level requires the cooperation of three educational administrations over a period of several years. There are no short-term solutions to the problems inherent in the junior high schools. Planning suitable programmes is a process that takes time, effort and cooperation among the separate organizations involved. Communication among the three levels is also crucial, if the needs of our students are to be served.

Once it is perceived that the thematic arrangement of literature is the most suitable for the needs of junior high school students, the establishment of the following recommendations may be commenced.

- (1) A sequential structuring of the literature programmes throughout the province should be undertaken to ensure that a balance is maintained between the methods of course arrangements. This sequence would establish a

thematic organization of literature at the junior high school level to foster a positive literature experience for students being exposed to literature for the first time. At the senior high school level, the chronological and genre arrangements could be utilized more strenuously. This method of implementation would structure the literature experiences of the student more positively, and encourage students to view literature more as a means of experiencing life and its complex nature, and less as an abstract subject that does not relate to one's personal life.

This structure would have to be implemented at the governmental level, through the cooperation of the Department of Education, with the Minister of Education providing the initial momentum necessary. Liaison would be required among the representatives of government, the Faculty of Education, and representatives of the Newfoundland Teachers' Association.

(2) The various school boards within the province should promote and organize in-service seminars for teachers at the junior high school level. With the coordination of the schoolboard consultant, methods of designing appropriate themes should be demonstrated to teachers, with the goal that all teachers become familiar with the learning outcomes expected of the students, and with a knowledge of how to implement theme instruction in their classes.

(3) At the school level, teachers involved with the junior high literature programmes should conduct their own

curriculum development course. This would consist of planning those themes that they perceive to be important for their particular students, and, over a period of two or three years, developing appropriate themes for their literature programme. The development of several well-organized themes a year would serve to ensure that the individual needs of the students are met. Compiling resource materials to enrich the themes and discussing successful techniques of instruction would inevitably lead to better instruction for their students. This cooperative sharing of ideas among staff members would do much to foster a positive learning atmosphere within the school.

The writer suggests that the teaching of literature at the junior high level must encourage the enjoyment of the literary experience before the critical analysis of any work is undertaken. For this reason the entire scope of the high school programme should be viewed as a sequential curriculum in which the first and foremost objective is the exposure to positive literature experiences.

It has been argued that the thematic arrangement is the most satisfactory method of achieving this goal. Therefore, it is necessary that the junior high programme be restructured to accommodate this method of implementation. Any major reorganization requires long term planning and cooperative administration. The three recommendations contained within this thesis attempt to limit the difficulties

that are inherent to such a task. With three levels of administration involved, the focus of reorganizing may be carefully narrowed to the point where individual teacher input becomes imperative. This enables themes to be developed that are pertinent to individuals rather than to populations. It is felt that this emphasis on the individual enhances the aim of structuring relevant literature experiences for the student.

These recommendations, when implemented, would maintain the balanced curriculum that is desirable for any literature programme. By structuring a thematic organization around the three crucial years of junior high school the literary experiences of the student in this time period may well be the starting point of a rewarding lifetime relationship with literature.

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