

calls the descent to earth and attempt a simple, practicable program of teaching pupils ordinary literacy and the use of good simple English for informal occasions, we have some chance of accomplishing our purposes in a measure that we ourselves and our friendly critics outside the schools can recognize and applaud.

Moreover, if we do not try to do such highfalutin things, but work earnestly to accomplish a simple and practical purpose, our colleagues in the other departments, seeing that our accomplishment of these ends would be of real and immediate benefit to them, may turn to and help us teach pupils to read or study more efficiently and to speak and write more simply and clearly and with a reasonable amount of cultivation.

It is possible that our courses in literature are much too ambitious for the actual pupils we now have with us. In the public schools at least, these are not the same kind of pupils we had 25 years ago. Our high school population has more than doubled in places where there has been no actual increase in the local population. This means that people who never went to high school are sending their children, that our pupils are coming from homes where there are no books, no magazines, no cultural contacts. Very probably we cannot in four years fit most of these people for college entrance; but we can give them something of real value, and it is our business to find out what this is. The vocational schools are doing that job, I suspect, very much better than we have done it in the academic high school. We need to find out how they are working, perhaps to help them with their large and ungrateful task, certainly to get many useful suggestions from them.

If our teaching of English is to succeed, we have to begin by finding out what English is really of worth, not to the scholar and the specialist, not in particular to the literary artist, poet or novelist, or the Chautauqua orator, but to the ordinary, every-

day youngsters, the great majority in high schools who will never go to college and who will never have these specialized uses of English. As Wallace Rice has expressed it, "As literature is in comparison with the river of living speech in the mouths of everybody, merely a few drops of essence preciously distilled, we shall leave it for the extraordinary few who have a native gift for it, and revise every curriculum now established" to fit everybody's need. There will always be places in elective courses and in colleges for the special uses and users of English. But the English that is of most worth is the English of everyday speech and the informal writing and the simple, great pieces of literature. We need to teach our pupils to organize their ideas and to use their speech in the best manner possible. When we have cut our coat to fit our cloth, we may have a good deal more reason to be proud of our handiwork.

STERLING A. LEONARD

CREATIVE COMPOSITION: LITERATURE IN THE MAKING

DISTASTE and, in many cases, actual hatred for English composition is unnecessary. There is no subject so difficult to teach, nor one more stimulating and enjoyable. Emerson in "The Poet" wrote: "All men live by truth, and stand in need of expression. In love, in art, in avarice, in politics, in labor, in games, we study to utter our painful secrets. The man is only half himself; the other half is his expression." We English teachers are man's other half. What a joy, what a pleasure we should receive in bringing into existence that half! What a task we make it—unbearable to ourselves as well as to our pupils.

I read once that an author was asked how he wrote. The reply was, "I do not know. I just write." By assignment to this subject I judge I have been asked,

"How do you teach composition?" My answer is, "I don't know. I just teach." Really, if a careful analysis were required, I could not tell you how I teach. Yet there are certain things, certain methods, certain plans I do follow, and certain evils I stay away from. These things I intend to discuss and I believe that in them you will find a germ of an idea of how to produce in children a desire to write not simply words, but to write and create compositions that are literature in the making.

First, grammar (as grammar is so often defined), "the science which treats of the classes of words and their inflection, the study of the forms of speech, the rules of the use of language," has no place in my classroom—and should not have in any composition classroom. Neither is composition the study of unity, coherence, and emphasis, nor the study of narration, exposition, description, and argumentation. Grammar and composition are not skeletons, but are life—the breathing, pulsating life of soul and heart. They are expression. Never is my teaching the listing of rules of punctuation. That I always keep in mind, and urgently ask all teachers to keep in mind; for remember, as Stopford Brooke wrote, "Youth is but half itself if it gropes not blindly in a maze of thought, if it stretch not to grasp the moon; and it shall be my labor to discover in its unskilled utterance this world that is too tremendous to be tied within the logic of the apprenticed sentence. On such paragraphs, however loosely they ramble to an ineffective end, I shall not lay a sacrilegious finger, because I know that the glory of the sunrise lies unexpressed sometimes behind the mist of words." Our duty is to remove the mist and reveal the sunrise, but not by the cold, dissecting, grammar-rule, punctuation-rule method of teaching. Life, and not the skeleton, is what we want.

Enough of what I attempt not to do.

Every day we hear pupils and teachers say, "I can't write. Now Jim can, but it

just comes naturally to him." What a falsity this is. That seems to be a very common belief today; yet a painter learns, a musician learns, a banker learns. Maybe it is true that some are born with more ability and produce greater work and more lasting fame; but every one of you here can learn to paint a picture, can learn to play a piano, can learn banking. Corot, Paderewski, and Mellon will be greater; but you will show skill, ability, and originality. Writing can be learned. There are no accidents in life, I believe. Every poet's life tells of hours and days of long, hard labor. Poems and stories come as a result of that labor, not because of genius. But you say, as many do, "He sees and feels things that I do not." Of course he does, but that raw material he uses is here. The price you pay in tears and toil will gain that material. It is gained through the development of those senses which we leave undeveloped. How many pupils have you taught to see, feel, think, smell? Until you have done that, you have not begun to teach composition.

Your first task, or joy—depending on your outlook—is the development of those senses. How? One way is to teach the master. "The love of the elder singer," as Miss Wilkinson writes, "is the best preparation for the young choir, although the new choristers do not sing the old songs in the old way." In terms of composition—the love of the older writers is the best preparation for the new writers, although the new do not write the old stories in the old way. That love is gained in teaching the books and poems—not, as C. Alphonso Smith says, through the teaching of the mechanism of the book, but the book itself. Show the pupil how the story expresses just what the pupil had felt and thought. If you will read Max Eastman's *Enjoyment of Poetry* and Fairchild's *Teaching of Poetry*, and Smith's *What Literature Can Do for Me*, you will understand the method. Your preparation—and how pitiful is the preparation of our teachers—your preparation

will determine whether you can follow the idea.

After you have developed to some degree those senses, and during the time of development, always remember as Leonard says the impulses that urge children to expression are story telling, or books, the teacher, community work, and experience. That last, experience, is to be stressed above all. Develop these through conferences, and—Sidney Cox adds—friendship. Draw them out. Find the pupil's self—and let the pupils find it. Again repeating Cox, "There is no other true and worthy composition except self-expression. That is why exercises are damaging and assignments of topics so frequently produce themes that are torture to read."

How does one find the pupil's self and draw out experiences? Here is a concrete method that I have used. It will vary with groups, schools, and ages, but the principle it is based on will do at all times.

First, I won the pupil's confidence. I treated him as a friend and companion. I let him know that while I was a teacher I was first of all a man with the same thoughts, senses, emotions, and physical construction as he. When the pupil knows this, he will come to you with any and all of his problems. If you can't do this, get out of the teaching game. In this relationship I helped to teach them to think, ponder, and look for things not in the little realm of their short life, and yet stressed the importance of that little realm. It is this curiosity and desire to explore that will develop civilization from their standpoint and increase their own intelligence. I found all this joy and play, not a disagreeable task.

During this time, covering approximately one month, there were no assignments for composition. I held conferences. I made discoveries of individual interests of boys and girls. Finally one day, through a seemingly casual meeting, I talked to ten of the pupils. By various means each conversation was brought around to a topic the in-

dividual was interested in and then I suggested that since he was interested, and I was, that the class might be. The talk in each case ended with the agreement that he would read a paper on the subject next day. Here are a few subjects I recall—"Caddying for Fat and Thin People" (this shows you the turn of that youngster's mind), "Collecting School Funds," "Our Reading Circle," "Wildflowers I Have Collected," "Things of Interest at Blue Licks," "Buffalo Trace," "What I Did With My Hairpins." This plan was followed until every boy and girl had written something. There were many other subjects, but these titles will show that they were writing of what interested them.

There were some pupils that this method did not appeal to; it excited in them not the slightest desire for self-expression. These I reached in two ways. One was to read some poetic or prose selection that I thought ought to appeal to them and thereby make them relive an experience of their own. Another method I owe to Slosson and Downey's *Plots and Personalities*. I gave one pupil the following notice that appeared on different days in *The London Times*—

- (1) Piccadilly—You run? Plenty soon catch up—Beach-Comber.
- (2) Cap—I have heard the drum in the distance; you know what it portends.—Beach-Comber.
- (3) Alright Cap.—Beach-Comber.
- (4) Cap—One of these days I shall get my share, and then.—Beach-Comber.

This caused a good detective and mystery yarn, and this from a column for love-lorn—

"Would you kindly tell me why girls and boys close their eyes when they are being kissed? Thank you ever so much"—brought forth a really delightful student essay on "Kissing—An Unseen Art."

Embarrassing moments are fine materials for topics. This one—

My most embarrassing moment occurred while attending a theatre with my friend.

It was a pathetic scene which was being shown as we came in, and the audience was so attentive that the slightest noise could be heard throughout the theatre.

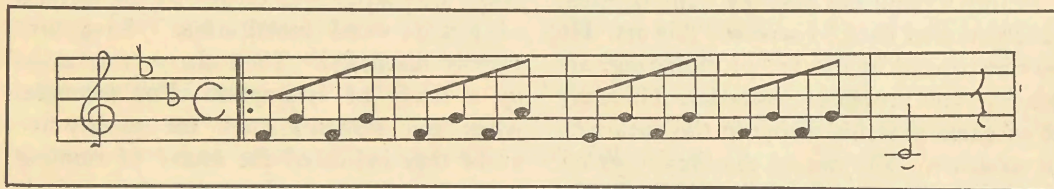
We had just been seated when my friend screamed. As quick as a flash all eyes turned on me as I turned all colors of the rainbow.

While taking off my hat I had absent-mindedly stuck my hat-pin in my friend's leg. Do you wonder she screamed?

This little story brought forth another well written story of an embarrassing moment and after result.

Methods of arousing interest are so numerous that I fail to find reason why any teacher should be at loss how to do so, but I want to give two more examples, for I think these are the most interesting of all. They are two concerning music for which I am also indebted to *Plots and Personalities* of Slosson and Downey. Play one of Schubert's marches. Probably one of your pupils will have "visions of ancient Seville, with ladies and dons in high heels, with jewelled daggers, stepping in stiff, stately wise through the sunlit Spanish streets." My pupil's vision differed slightly, but it was near enough to use the example of the book. A poem was the result.

Another and the last example from the same text is this. Hum or strike the following bars on the piano:



What does it remind you of—a talkative old woman, hoarse, who wonders why and yet wants to keep on talking. Appeal to all the senses—sight, feeling, odor, and it will be wonderful what the result will be.

You say—"Fine. You have stimulated ideas, but have the pupils actually done good written work?" Yes, and here is a method I used in getting that:

During the entire year I gave intensive drills on summarizing and precis writing. My method for word choice and phrase-

ology was very interesting and met with such success that I believe it worth passing to you. Let me say that it is not original with me, but came from Farrington's *Narrative and Descriptive Projects*. The student scratches out of the original theme every word without a picture value, and in the revision, a synonym, verb, or adjective, is substituted. Of course their choice of words was limited. This was changed to some degree by a few exercises such as this (1) Bring to class twenty-five verbs that indicate the sound and motion of running water and use each in a sentence, and (2) the same for a person's gait. The same plan can be used for adjectives. Every effort was made to create cadence and let the arrangement of words create a musical effect which is just as essential in prose as in poetry. This last I can hardly explain; each attempt depends upon the individuals, and yet real progress was made, for the love of rhythm was soon aroused. -All life is rhythm; rhythm is one of the first things a child learns. We often destroy it, but it can be restored. At the same time I increased their interest in words by giving a little of their history. I gave for example the history of "grammar" and "glamour,"

showing how they were once practically synonymous, and such a story as the humorous one of our slang "jitney." Interest was aroused, and in a few days I had to admit a vast amount of ignorance in not being able to explain the history of the numerous words the children were asking about. This was the hardest work I have ever done, but the reward was well worth it.

There was also an attempt to show the importance of being able to express what one sees and knows. In other words I at-

tempted to show the cause and reason back of writing. This knowledge will broaden the world of the individual, and make possible the accomplishment of things the pupil later undertakes. The cause is the foundation. This was done through examples of literature, newspapers, and student contributions. Why should one learn to write? Grant a teacher, lawyer, or any one who has knowledge, what good is his information if not passed on? I instilled the same idea in the pupils. Not only must the reason for expression be shown but also the value of a clear, concise, and coherent expression. Theory without practice is useless. A knowledge that is not brought into achievement is a dead thing, so from now on all of the assignments were practical and not mere theory. In this work we examined various letters from "A Book of Letters" by Center and Saul and some I had collected from the business men in our town. These were contrasted with some others, friendly and business in nature, that were poorly written and expressed. The value of good expression was easily shown. Throughout the lesson an emphasis was placed on the writing by the commercial students of business letters.

Before a pupil can possibly write he must have gathered data. I stressed this art. He was instructed in the art of gathering, arranging, and presenting material. This may be of great practical value in the future to all students. The use of the library in research work was stressed. Assignments were made in the criticism of literature they had studied and their relation to that then being studied. The relation of history and economics was a phase of assignments. These required research, and reports were written, not oral.

For a time I gave lessons in how one sees. This was not done through a study of the fundamental image. I should like to ask here, what *is* a fundamental image? I endeavored to show how one sees through the various senses and the many physical,

mental, and accidental factors that condition seeing. How does one see Broadway or Main Street? Is it just the same when Lindbergh or a circus comes to town as on Sunday? The sense of odor or sound plays just as large a part as pure sight. As an example, one of my pupils wrote a description of Saturday in a department store. The idea was to show the turmoil and confusion, and not the physical aspects. Here the student introduced conversation of the "bargain-counter type," body odors of a massed group, and colors. By means of these she portrayed the character of the business and of the customers. A vastly different picture would have been drawn if the purely physical aspects had been stressed.

Description is the creation of a picture. The value and the artistry of the picture depend upon the materials that go into its make-up. For several days I dealt with the selection and choice of materials based upon the assignments. Here I stressed the difference between scientific description and artistic. The question of structure, length and physical form, was dealt with, and lessons in artistry, coherence, emphasis, unity, and word selection also received attention. The latter was taught by the method of picture-word substitution I have previously discussed. Then also it was aided by a study of synonyms. For example, when the students gave me twenty-five verbs that indicated the sound of running water, such as *gush, pour, drip, splash, trickle, murmur, bubble, swash, gurgle, and babble*, they were also taught to use each word in a sentence and study different shades of meaning. Again drill was given in precis writing which we had to a slight extent been using all year.

My next step, on which I spent many days, was the study of introducing action to their written work. A definite example was the comparison and contrast of selections of literature like the "DeCoverly Papers" and a story like "Rappaccini's Daughter" or

one from a magazine like "The Golden Book" which was a favorite with the class. Various news articles, short stories, anecdotes, and essays were studied during this period and a very large amount of written work given to the class.

My last definite lesson was a summarization of the material studied.

The remainder of the term was devoted to creative work on the part of the pupils interested in that phase of writing and practical assignments for those interested in other fields. For example, the pupil whose interest called for it could write poetry, another personal essays, another a more serious literary essay, or others letters, papers on science, sales talks, editorials, book reviews, and criticisms.

One might here inquire what my aim in this work has been. In general, it is, first, to give experience in the collecting and systematic organizing of materials for themes, with such materials drawn from experience in life and literature; second, to develop a clear, logical thinking process and then express those thoughts in a clear and forceful manner.

From the standpoint of specific aims my first and foremost idea was to develop creative expression that was worthy of publication. This was done through the study and writing of dramas, short stories, and poetry primarily based on the rich field of local material. A second specific aim was the development of letter writing and other fields of expression such as advertising that would be valuable in that particular field of work in which the student would likely enter.

May I now devote a little space to the English teacher, his preparation, background, and other qualities that will either place him as a leader in his field or a follower? To begin with, I know that I do not equal the requirements I make for a good teacher, but nevertheless I should, and so should all teachers.

Interest must be aroused in the class and I do not believe that, except in extraordi-

nary instances, such a thing can be done unless the teacher has a broad background of training in his particular field. A general or a specific knowledge of methods and procedure is of little value unless that knowledge has as companion a broad cultural background. Too often our teachers are those who have majored in English, but in a useless, impractical phase. Or if that majoring has been practical and useful, it is quite often relegated to second place by an unnecessary and overdone study of educational theories. The good English teacher may sometimes scrap all the theories, but he can never afford to be without an understanding of his subject-matter. Enthusiasm must radiate from him. He must be able to furnish a background for the answer of every question; he must inspire, through his knowledge, the mind of the pupil with the romance of the English language. He must not only have read but have read wisely and well, and then having absorbed this be able to pass along the beauty of thought and images, and interpret it in the everyday language of the pupil. Such a man is trained through a study of life, and life and literature are in many ways synonymous.

The teacher must always think of language as a means of expression of thought that is not bound in by rules of construction but is instead plastic and everchanging. This thought and feeling must then be transplanted.

An instructor must realize that compulsion is not to be resorted to if creation is desired. Let the pupil practice self-coercion. Self-compulsion is not harmful, for the genuine creator recognizes no master but self.

When such a method as I have suggested is followed, and there is the directing and leading hand of such a teacher as I have portrayed, the pupil will benefit. Probably he will never be a world-acclaimed artist, very likely he will not, but he will benefit. He will gain because his enthusiasm has been awakened. The usual has been dis-

carded by the unusual. He knows now what he is doing and why. No longer does he merely work by rule but by inspiration and as a result his personal satisfaction has increased. When one becomes satisfied, or even approaches that state, one no longer will accept, even in his own work, the poorly and ill-done task.

E. P. BROWNING, JR.

ENGLISH COMPOSITION: A BURDEN OR A JOY?

THE THREE objectives in teaching English composition, I presume, are that the pupils may learn to write with accuracy, with smoothness and grace, and with interest. The first, "with accuracy," is concerned with the mechanics of writing: grammar, punctuation, and the like. This aim should be attained by all. The second, "with smoothness and grace," is concerned with style, with transition from one sentence to another and from one paragraph to the next, with varying sentence structure, and with the plan of the composition as a whole. This aim will probably be reached by only a few. The third, "with interest," is concerned with the spirit and vitality of the writing and with the appeal which it makes to the reader. Every pupil should attain to some degree this aim of writing with interest. If accuracy is largely a matter of drill and care, if smoothness and grace are matters of constant practice, imitation, and skill, may I venture to suggest that writing with interest is largely a matter of motivation for which the teacher is responsible? This paper will attempt to discuss briefly two or three considerations for the motivation of composition in order that interest may develop both for writer and reader. Because different types of writing need different kinds of motivation, let us, for convenience' sake, divide composition into two classes: the first, the short theme in which pupils write about small objects or topics of interest in their environ-

ment and, the second, the longer theme which involves a larger preparation through study of books, through visits, and through class recitations.

To motivate the short themes which require observation of one's environment, the teacher needs to impart the spirit of adventure in the search for bits of interest. What fun to catch the expression on a freshman girl's face as she is shut out for the first time from the dining room! How lucky to see Sallie at the Post Office just receiving into her arms a long box marked "Fragile—Roses!" Never-to-be-forgotten that winter day which changed the wire fence around the tennis courts to feathery lace quilts of beauty! Luckily, the eagerness to find beauty is always rewarded. The teacher need be neither doubtful nor uncertain in her urge for the search, for beauty is always present in both people and nature. Aside from its use in composition, the value of acquiring this attitude of interest in looking and in finding lies in an enriched life. As an anonymous writer says in a widely known essay called "The Daily Theme Eye," "By training . . . the eye, we watched for and found in the surroundings of our life, as it passed, a heightened picturesqueness, a constant wonder, and added significance."¹

Once pupils are finding joy in discovering beauties, a teacher will never let them get away from the idea that finding something interesting to write about is the most important part of composition, without which nothing of value can be done.

In this observation type of writing the teacher must consider the length of the composition he asks the students to write. It seems that the movement for the four or five sentence composition in the grades is resulting in a tendency towards a one page composition in both high school and college. The advantage to the teacher in having one page to correct, instead of three or

¹Tanner: *Essays and Essay Writing*, p. 24.