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The Formal Written Book Report: An Investigation of Opinion about the Value of the Formal Written Book Report as Used in the Secondary School Language Arts Classes

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THE FORMAL WRITTEN BOOK REPORT: AN INVESTIGATION OF OPINION ABOUT THE VALUE OF THE FORMAL WRITTEN BOOK REPORT AS USED IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSES

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by

Don W. Hunt

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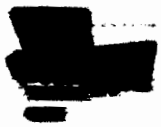

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The completion of this paper has depended upon the participation of many people. To begin with, some one hundred pupils at Franklin Junior High School in Yakima, Washington--unbeknown to them--were proving the need of this study. When formal book reports were assigned, their vocal complaints, their reluctant participation, their mediocre work indicated the need for study in this area. The willing cooperation of the Yakima junior high school English teachers who answered the questionnaire in Appendix B gave further proof of the need of examining available opinion on this subject. The help given to me by my advisor, Dr. Keith Rinehart, in clarifying my thinking and in maintaining my course to its final objective cannot be overemphasized. The complete knowledge the library staff at Central Washington State College has of their resources has been of inestimable value. Perhaps the greatest help has been that received from my wife and son who have frequently displayed greater patience with me than I have with them during this study. Their confidence has been most gratifying.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Statement of purpose. One of the pitfalls of the English teacher in secondary schools, especially the beginning teacher, is the handling of formal written book reports prepared by pupils as part of the usually required outside reading program. The professional literature on the value of formal written book report as a teaching-learning device has many generalizations and stated opinions, but the conclusions are based on limited observations. Documented findings based on extensive research have not been found during this study. It has been the purpose of this study to determine if there is a consensus among the writers on the subject of the required formal book report as to its value as a teaching-learning device. There is. The consensus found in the professional literature is that the formal required book report, as a teaching-learning technique, does not aid in achieving the goals desired in the outside reading programs in secondary school courses in English or language arts. The writers do not consider the formal book report as an aid in developing readers of discernment nor readers of lasting interests. Neither do they consider it of value as a device to be used in composition classes nor do they consider it a legitimate written exercise whereby such areas of grammar as paragraphing, sentence

structure, punctuation, spelling, and language usage may be checked. In short, the required formal written book report receives extremely limited approval. The writers on this subject heartily endorse an outside reading program and almost as heartily reject the formal required written book report as a useful device in this program. Some consider its use a liability to the success of the outside reading plan. Those who do give limited approval to the use of formal written book reports limit this approval to its use as part of a varied program where many methods of evaluation and stimulation of the reading program are practiced.

Book reports--long a perplexing problem. Throughout this study frequent reference has been made by the writers to the necessity of properly motivating a child before any task becomes useful. One of the most frequent condemnations of the required formal book report has been just that--it's only motivation has been that it must be done because it is one of the requirements to be fulfilled by a certain date. Plato recognized the futility of purely compulsory education when he wrote The Republic. When discussing the training of the young, Socrates stated to Glaucon:

> And, therefore, calculation and geometry and all other elements of instruction, which are a preparation for dialectic, should be presented to the mind in childhood; not, however, under any notion of forcing our system of education.

Why not?

> Because a freeman ought not to be a slave in the acquisition of knowledge of any kind. Bodily exercise, when compulsory, does no harm to the body; but knowledge which is acquired under compulsion obtains no hold on the mind (61:284-85).

The debate regarding the required book report is not new. In 1934 Woodring and Jewett in the opening section of their book Enriched Teaching of English in the Junior and Senior High School, discussed the problem of outside reading and book reports:

> Book reports are not considered here as an end in themselves but as a means of securing from the pupils thoughtful analyses of their reading and of stimulating others to read what the reviewer has enjoyed.
>
> The references in this section discuss the principles underlying the use of book reports as a means of evaluating pupils' reading; they also suggest many ways of varying procedures and of making the report enjoyable as well as profitable. Some of the articles suggest further uses of the book reports in providing records of individual and class reading and practice in oral and written composition (83:8) (Italics mine).

The titles of nineteen articles, with a summary annotation of each, are listed following the above quotation. These summary annotations are similar to the ones describing currently published articles. They state in part, "Suggestions for making outside reading voluntary"; "Book reports in the form of literary advertisements"; "Six methods to supplant the formal book report"; "Book report reaction should not be influenced by desire to win marks" and on in the same vein (83:8-11). Compare the above annotations with some from more recent articles.

Steve Dunning's article, "Everybody's Doing It But Why?" published in the January, 1958 English Journal has this caption, "Are book reports still with us? Should they still be with us?" (26:29). In the March, 1959 English Journal, an article entitled "A Varied Approach to Book Reports" written by Lucile Inhelder is introduced by the following statement, "There is nothing novel about an article about book reports. But there are some novel ideas for handling book reports in this account" (41:141). An article by Richard S. Alm in the November, 1957 issue of the English Journal is editorially introduced by the following statement: "By delineating the types of teachers and parents who impede the development of reading habits, this article . . . defines a role for a teacher" (2:470). The article, entitled "The Utmost Need," is a discussion of present reading habits of adults and the desirability of creating lasting reading interests in our school children.

Twenty-five years after the statement by Woodring and Jewett (83:8) quoted on page three of this study, Elizabeth Sloat stated in her article "Yes, Book Reports":

> I feel that book reports have a manyfold value in projecting our English program by giving direction to reading beyond class assignment in literature, teaching the student to read more purposefully, and broadening his outlook on life and at the same time improving his ability in oral and written expression (73:430).

The basic thought in both articles is the same; book reports are not a means in themselves. Neither writer had

in mind the isolated book report that is not an integral part of the class work. Each is referring to a program that is an integral part of the class's studies. They are referring to a learning experience that provides guidance towards the development of discernment in the choice of reading material. Later parts of this study show, unfortunately, this is not always the result when book reports are assigned.

The general use of book reports in outside reading programs in the secondary school courses in English or language arts. Before discussing the importance of the study, it is necessary to answer the question, "Are book reports in general use by English teachers as a teaching-learning or evaluating technique in connection with an outside reading program?" The answer according to statements in the professional literature is, "Yes, almost without exception." In a survey of the English teachers in the Yakima junior high schools, (See Appendix B.) every teacher who answered the questionnaire stated that he did require some form of written book reports in connection with his outside reading program. Clark and Eaton state in discussing the developing of reading interest, "The time-honored means of achieving this end has been the formal book report" (18:36-37).

Before describing her approach to book reports, Lucile Inhelder declared, "Book reports, still a prevailing requirement in high schools, are sadly in need of revision" (41:141).

Mersand, the head of the English department of Jamaica High School in New York City wrote:

> Let us take the bete noire of many an English class, the hallowed four book reports per term. Since 1920, at least, when the writer entered high school, the four book reports besides the regular class texts have been standard operating procedure (48:408).

The antecedent of the pronoun It in Dunning's "Everybody's Doing It--But Why?" is requiring book reports. He states:

> Within the past month, the writer has asked several groups of English teachers whether or not book reporting is a part of their courses. Without exception, the teachers have indicated that they do require, include, or encourage book reports. If book reporting is part of all our programs, it deserves serious attention (26:29).

That the book report is not a new experience to many junior high students is illustrated by Marentz' statement that book reports and the ever present problem in creating interest in reading are problems confronted by the sixth grade teacher (46:12). Brother John speaks of the widespread unpopularity of this device among teachers and students (11:304).

Beauchamp declares, "One would be hard pressed to locate a teacher who does not require book reports based on outside reading as a standard part of English instruction" (9:147).

Dorothy Dakin, in her discussion of the general practice, which she endorses, of encouraging wide reading at all levels says, "Closely akin to requiring the reading of a certain number of books is the formal, written reviews for which you give a grade" (21:380).

In his discussion of the reading program in the secondary schools for the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, Burton said in part, "The venerable tradition of book reporting is still very much with us . . ." (12:42).

In discussing the correlation of the outside reading program to other activities in the high school English class, Mirrielees stated as follows:

> Do you know how outside reading correlated with composition is conducted in many reputable schools? The teacher announces to a class of varying reading ability and varying mental ages that in three weeks' time a book report will be called for (49:319).

This statement is part of her discussion of the still prevalent use of the formal book report as part of a "literary judgement day."

Dora V. Smith says in her presentation in the Forty-Seventh Yearbook National Society for the Study of Education: Part II., Reading in High School and College on the topic "Guiding Individual Reading," that such guidance in English classes "is frequently reduced to stopping mechanically for so called 'book reports' every sixth week-- . . ." (75:203).

The editor of the English Journal commenting on Jerome Carlin's article published in the January, 1961 issue states, "Book reports, frequently discussed pro and con, remain an institution in the high school English program" (15:16).

No attempt has been made to indicate how the above writers feel regarding the use of book reports, but neither has any attempt been made to obscure their thoughts on this matter. All of the above twelve people have commented on the general use of book reports in connection with outside reading programs. This, coupled with the survey cited in Appendix B, establishes its widespread use in secondary English and language arts programs. The references by Woodring on page three indicate that the technique is not a recent innovation. If it has been used widely for a relatively long time, why is its use a problem?

The problem of evaluating book reports. When a son questioned his father as to the necessity of a whipping about to be administered, the father replied, "It's a necessary evil! I guess, because I don't know anything better to do" (8:2). How many teaching methods and techniques are followed for this same reason? No known survey answers this question.

This is a study of opinions about the value of required book reports. A review of research would probably be

more reliable, but no significant research has been done. In a survey of the literature relating to this subject, statements such as the following are frequently found: "After asking several teachers--"; "Most of the teachers in our system agree that--"; "Other teachers who have tried this method have reported--"; "After trying this method a few times, I have concluded--" and other similar statements. Since this report is a study of the opinions pertaining to the subject, little or no attempt will be made to validate or repudiate the value of the statements made. Some care has been exercised in the selection of the people who have been cited. The bibliography has been confined to people in education with an emphasis on the language arts field. It has been assumed that they have made statements, like those above, after careful consideration and that the motives for sharing their observations are a result of their desire to help improve the language arts programs.

The subject of book reports is one of the most troublesome dilemmas faced by the secondary English teacher. Thirty-three of the teachers polled in the questionnaire cited in Appendix B confessed that it is one of their major difficulties. Why the other four did not, is discussed in the appendix.

Lack of documented studies relating to this subject is immediately apparent to the new English teacher when he attempts to establish objectives to achieve and criteria by

which progress may be measured. He finds it necessary to attempt to fit a multitude of generalizations to his specific situation. This report itself has some generalizations that it would be difficult to find documentary evidence to support: The origins of the required book report are lost in the mists of time, but book reports have been part of the English course for such a long time that they are accepted as the standard way of checking on the pupil's reading.

In my first year of teaching, I discovered in the syllabus for the English classes that six book reports per pupil were required each year. From one of the other English teachers, I received a set of book report directions, reproduced them, and gave them to the pupils. (See Appendix B.) When the pupils handed in their first set of book reports on the assigned date, I fully realized the major problem these papers presented. By what standards were they to be graded? I received very little specific help from the other teachers in the system as to what criteria they used in grading book reports. Examination of the teacher's handbook for the course, professional publications such as The English Journal, and methods books by such authors as Hook and Mirrielees provided little help. Nevertheless, I established standards against which each book report would be evaluated. Each paper was to be given two grades: one grade would evaluate the apparent understanding

by the pupil of what he read, and the second would rate the paper in such items as spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, and paragraph division. I soon concluded the reason so little help came from other teachers in establishing guides for the evaluation of book reports was what they probably discovered early in their teaching careers: to correct all book reports consumed too much time compared to the value of what was accomplished.

Weaknesses in my program were soon apparent. It was obvious that several reports were fabricated. (See Appendix B for the actual findings on this topic in the examination of 400 book reports from one junior high school.) Since I had read less than ten per cent of the books involved, it was also clear that the pupils' understanding of the books read, or claimed to have been read, could not be truly ascertained. Limiting pupils to a book list that would include only books I had read was suggested and considered. But writers on the subject either condemn book lists or give only qualified approval. A limiting list, as suggested, is considered one sure way to stultify an outside reading program.

The role of book lists. Blaisdell discussing the place of book lists in his text, Ways to Teach English, established a criteria that should be used for every book list prepared for student use: "Book lists should consider what will interest the children, not what we think

should interest them" (10:402). (Italics are mine).

Dora V. Smith (75:202-03) gives attention to book lists in her discussion of methods to use to acquaint children with information about books. The book lists she cites are not meant to restrict the reading of the pupil but are to be used as a means of guiding him to widening interests. When she speaks of book lists that are usable, she refers to lists such as the Standard Catalog, The National Council of Teachers of English reading lists, and the Lenrow Guide to Prose Fiction. These are booklets designed to help the teacher and the pupil make wise selections; their purpose is to widen the range of interest instead of restricting it.

According to the National Council of Teachers of English, prescribed lists rate quite highly as a hindrance to interaction between reader and book:

> Oppressive prescribed lists. The teaching of literature is not to be confined to the acquaintance with (or the horror of) a few titles of specific types of books, or acquaintance with exerpts through a so called survey of American, English, or world literature. . . . Such lists oppress students, administrators, and English teachers like the one who said she decided to leave Eppy in her coal hole while she went out into the world. She joined the Red Cross staff and did not regret her decision (52:376).

(Perhaps this partially explains the shortage of qualified English teachers.) The reading lists published by the National Council of Teachers of English are pamphlets of nearly one hundred pages each--or for junior high school and one for senior high school--and are revised periodically.

reading interests, not restrict them (25:24). In the same issue of the Bulletin, Burton discusses the stifling effect that over-emphasis on the academic has on our literature program. He suggests guidance based on the interests of the child as the only basis of any restriction (if it can be called such) in a campaign to get children to read (12:38).

In the chapter "Allowing Literature to Live" (from The Teaching of High School English) J. N. Hook suggests:

> FOR EXTENSIVE BOOK LISTS
>
> Purchase from the N. C. T. E. the extensive pamphlets 'Your Reading' and 'Books for You.' They contain annotated lists of hundreds of books suitable for junior and senior high schools (40:131).

In the same chapter, Hook discusses individual differences, classics, comics, and contemporary literature. He favors some restriction, but of a guidance nature to help develop more discerning consumers of literature. He does not in any sense endorse the use of a restrictive list that holds the pupil to some narrow field--a list such as the teacher has read.

Sister M. Celine, O. S. F. discusses book lists in her article "Books to Meet Many Adolescent Needs." Her thoughts and observations on the subject are that book lists are recommended, not as a limitation, but as an aid in book selections that will develop wider interests. Such lengthy lists as The Standard Catalog for High School Libraries, by H. W. Wilson and Company, are recommended. She

believes the limited list frequently used is a dead, inanimate thing. It does not aid the program (70:58-62).

Rosenblatt stresses the involvement of the reader as being essential to the development of a reading interest. Consideration must be had for individual differences (63: 304-11). It hardly seems possible that this program could be carried on successfully by confining a high school English class to a restricted list of books that would be made up of the selections the teacher had read. Probably nothing, in most cases, could so completely kill the program. Limited lists that confine the pupils to books that it is thought they should read have proven to be a liability to the outside reading program. Guidance in selection from large, expanding annotated lists is supported by those authors I have read; the narrow, restrictive list receives no sanction. Although a few of the professional writers believe in some selections being worthy of being read by all, the primary guide in establishing any reading list should be that which will interest the pupil and help develop him into a reader discerning tastes and wide interests. To do so, his tastes, not the teacher's, will have to form the basis of choice.

Evaluating the composition of the book report. In my first year's teaching experience, the evaluation of the grammar in the written book reports was not difficult,

but it was very time consuming. This too frequently resulted in wasted effort because of the number of fabricated book reports. I was reasonably certain that too large a portion of my time was being taken to evaluate the advertising blurbs of professional writers that were being copied and submitted as book reports. More than ten minutes were required to examine each report. Before all of the first set had been graded, the second due date with its set of reports had come. This procedure took place six times in one year. By using a disproportionate share of my evenings, I corrected all the book reports. The fact that it was not uncommon for me to spend an hour or more two or three evenings per week checking these reports lead my wife to remark in disgust in the middle of the fifth set, "Now I know why so many English teachers never get married; they don't have time to."

When the book reports were returned to the pupils, it was reasonably certain that many of the reports passing as original were fabrications designed to achieve the assigned ends of handing in a book report on a certain date. They did not prove the book had been read. Since several were copies of book cover blurbs and many more were suspected of being so, I felt certain that there must be a better written exercise for teaching correct English usage than book reports. Even if all had been authentic, rather than several the copies of experts' work, the cursory

examination in the time used to correct and grade the reports made it a poor instrument in this respect. I had spent more time grading book reports than planning daily classes. Dunning states that use of the FBI approach in which the book report is used as a device to detect whether the book has been read frequently reveals nothing more than the ingenuity of the students in circumventing the assigned reading (26:30). I agree. Requiring a book report does not necessarily motivate the child to read a book.

Paul Petrich, Lecturer in Education at Dartmouth College, Manover, New Hampshire, states that the national average of assigned English papers in secondary schools is about five to seven per year. He bases this statement on a report by Arno Jewett, Specialist in the English Language Arts, U. S. Office of Education (60:113-18). A teacher required to evaluate six book reports per year would thus equal the national average number of assigned English papers. Any additional assignments, such as letters, essays, and compositions, would be in addition to the number the average English teacher feels he can properly evaluate.

Late in the year, when she discovered what I was doing, one of the English teachers with several years' experience showed me her method of handling book reports. When a book report was handed in, she entered a check mark in the grade book showing that the work had been done.

Occasionally, once or twice a year, she would evaluate a set of book reports and return them to the pupils. She believed that this was all she had time to do, and since she graded some of the written reports, the pupils would look upon the activity as one that might be graded since she never let them know in advance which set would be examined and which one would not. The results of the questionnaire described in Appendix B indicate that the procedure described by this teacher is used by a large percentage of the junior high school English teachers in the system covered.

The grading of book reports. Whether or not the above procedure can be successfully defended or condemned is a moot question. That a similar procedure is used elsewhere is evident in the survey conducted by Mercantante. Concerned about the apathy toward book reports at Queens Junior High School in New York City, he polled 500 pupils to find out why they were so careless in completing these papers. One of the three points the pupils stressed was the lack of follow-through after the report was completed and handed in. Under this they mentioned:

1. Resentment of the superficial marking so characteristic of reports; and
2. Not knowing where the report went wrong so similar mistakes would not recur (47:54).

The National Association of Secondary School Principals' Committee on Planning and Development in a report on its study of the English language arts, reports in part:

WRITING MUST TAUGHT

> Practice of writing and guided correction are necessary. Therefore, the English teacher should have a teaching load which will permit assigning and evaluating an adequate number of themes and other papers. . . .
> Students learn to write by writing under careful guidance and by having their written work evaluated carefully and thoughtfully (50:49).

In this statement, the principals' association indicated its cognizance of the problem. It realizes a child's growth in written expression is dependent to a large degree on guided, careful, thoughtful correction of his written work by his teacher. It also recognizes that a problem of class load may be a factor in accomplishing or not accomplishing this guidance work.

Paul Petrich, writing in the same issue of The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, gives further recognition to this problem of correcting the written work of secondary English pupils. In studying a program where lay readers were used, he stated that without lay readers, even after reducing the class load to 100 pupils per day, it was found impossible to approach the theme a week recommendation of the Conant study because the teacher could not find time to evaluate the papers properly (60:113-19).

Disregarding the time element involved, how valuable is the grading of these book reports in comparison to the time spent, or that could be spent, on other activities? Dorothy Dakin questions the value of this procedure:

> Closely akin to requiring the reading of certain number of books is the making of formal written book reviews, for which you give a grade. All experienced teachers agree that pupils cheat readily in writing such reports and that they are not above reporting on the same book year after year. Such facts lead me to suggest that you lend your energies to encouraging reading rather than dissapating them by reading and grading long reports written outside of class (21:380).

Dora V. Smith takes the same line of reasoning when she states that the many teachers who spend six to eight times as long finding out whether or not the book has been read than they do in guiding the pupil in his reading, should reverse the procedure. The guidance will pay far greater dividends (75:203-04).

The National Council of Teachers of English make the following two statements regarding this problem of grading papers:

> It is obvious, as has already been said, that many of the most significant and personal outcomes of the teaching of literature are imponderables and cannot be measured by any known statistical procedures (53:152).

Also:

> With large classes and many of them, teachers have become thoroughly discouraged. Committees . . . are seeking reduced loads for English teachers. The outlook is not promising. With teacher shortage and mounting enrollments, such an approach is all but futile. Moreover, research has not been able to prove that meticulous corrections of papers pays dividends. More research comparing different methods of securing results in writing is urgently needed (53:348-49).

The last four authorities cited, question the value of book reports, especially under the workload secondary English teachers are carrying at present. If the teacher corrects all the assigned work, the possibility exists that he will become nothing more than a grading machine. Other than book reports, the English teacher must see that a certain amount of growth is accomplished in spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and paragraphing. Some of this may be done by filling the blanks in workbook exercises, but if the pupil spends all his effort in grammar on filling blanks, he will not learn to write a sentence. It takes time to properly prepare for these phases of the English class. Because of the necessity to do this planning, the English teacher cannot allow paper correcting to take too large a part of his time. If the teacher's workload is such that he must forego correcting some of the papers, he will have to decide which he thinks are of the least significance and skip them. Apparently many teachers consider correcting book reports not as vital as keeping close check on the work pertaining directly to basic mechanics of the English language. Perhaps they think there is a better method of motivation reading and of evaluating the pupils' progress in this area.

The workload of the English teacher. The National Council of Teachers of English in its publication The

National Interest and the Teaching of English summarizes the survey conducted by William J. Dusel, "Determining an Efficient Teaching Load in English" published in the Illinois English Bulletin, March, 1956. The results of this survey showed that an English teacher who had to correct one paper of 250 words per week for 150 pupils and then re-check these papers after the pupils had corrected their errors would require 28.5 hours each week for this activity alone. This plus the twenty-five hours of actual teaching time totals 53.5 hours per week. The teachers questioned in the survey indicated they were able, on the average, to correct papers 2.7 hours per week in class, thus reducing the total hours required for these two activities to 50.8 hours per week. This does not take into account the hours spent on lesson planning, checking tests, preparing tests, clerical tasks, meetings and other duties.

In the same publication, the Council then quotes from a survey by E. M. Bowers and R. L. Norris, Study of Teacher Load of Teachers of English in Virginia, 1958-59, Bulletin, Virginia Association of Teachers of English, pp. 22-26. By combining the statistics of the survey by Dusel with those of the survey by Bowers and Norris to make a more complete picture than either survey presents by itself, they arrive at a teaching workweek of 69.2 hours. Neither survey makes any allowance for correcting book reports nor such incidentals as correcting spelling papers once a week (55:93-95).

The Council continues:

> Even then it appears that three major activities expected of the English teacher have not been included: (1) miscellaneous school system obligations expected of all teachers in all subjects, like attending PTA meetings or contributing to general curriculum planning on both a school and a system-wide basis; (2) coaching and directing students' activities like plays and speech contests, responsibilities for which the English teacher can be uniquely, and sometimes solely qualified; and (3) what is generally thought of as "keeping up" in one's field, like reading new books by authors at both the adult and the student level of interest, becoming acquainted with basic research in the teaching of English, and participating in various professional activities (55:95).

If we allow another eleven hours for these various and sundry activities not included in either of the surveys cited by the Council, we arrive at the figure of eighty hours a week to take care of the basic essentials in teaching 150 English pupils per week. Divide the figure by seven and the teacher has a seven day week with eleven and one-half hours per day. It is a safe assumption that many English teachers do not put in such a week. They should not have to. Some of the work that should be done is never done. To try to do all expected would hasten Slovay's prediction:

> Here sleeps a teacher--now his anquish passes;
> His visions were no alcoholic vapors.
> He gave his pencilled passion to his classes,
> And died of marking papers.
> (74:262)

According to Dusel, the English teacher could be freed from being "a lonely grading machine" by becoming the supervisor of the English evaluations carried out by

all (27:268). That English is being studied by many secondary school students merely to get a grade in English is born out by the frequency one hears the pupils complain when checked for grammatical errors in some other class, "Aw, this ain't English class; spellin' don't count nothin' here."

The teachers contacted in the survey described in Appendix B generally expressed the belief that they were doing the best they could under the existing circumstances. They seemed sincere in their efforts. They were critical of their workload but believed the administrators were doing the best they could under the limitations imposed on them by the available funds. They expressed the belief that the public is getting all it can possibly expect from the amount of money it is willing to spend on education.

Summary of Chapter I. In this chapter it has been established that book reports are, and have been for many years, in general use as an evaluative technique in secondary school English classes. It has been established that there is a problem regarding the worth of the book report as an evaluative device in this program. Since the teacher cannot possibly have read all the books available to the pupil, the question of the use of book lists has been raised. Those who write on this topic commend a reading list only when it aids in expanding the pupil's reading interests; the reading list that restricts is condemned.

It had been established from statistics taken from publications cited by the National Council of Teachers of English that the present workload for the English teacher calls for a work week far out of proportion to the forty hour work week prevalent in many other lines of endeavor. (Teachers in other areas have a plaint similar, in this respect, to ours.) It has been established that, because of the time limiting factor, the grading of book reports is often cursory, superficial, inconsistent, and at times non-existent. This causes teacher frustration and pupil resentment and apathy. The National Council of Teachers of English has questioned the possibility of evaluating the imponderables of a reading experience. As a result, the following questions have been raised: Could time spent by the teacher correcting book reports be spent to better advantage some other way to encourage reading? Is the written book report as it is being used in secondary English an effective device in evaluating pupil progress and promoting pupil growth in outside reading? Before these questions can be answered according to the opinions expressed in the professional literature, the goals of an outside reading program must be determined.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND, LIMITATIONS, AND METHODS OF STUDY AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This study of the opinion of the writers of professional literature pertaining to book reports as used in secondary language arts classes has been the outgrowth of two preceding efforts to develop a thesis on the same topic. The first was an examination of 400 book reports submitted by junior high pupils in an effort to prove that these actual book reports did not accomplish the purposes they were supposed to achieve. Through a study of the literature related to the subject, it was determined that many of the writers felt that teachers hoped, through the use of book reports, to develop lasting reading interests, deepen understanding of material read, improve self expression by book reports achieving the goals of composition, and bring about growth in the skills of grammar and spelling. It was noted that the people writing on this subject quite consistently stated that such was not being achieved: the book report was a failure in this respect. The reports examined by no means conclusively proved nor disproved the above.

The examination of the reports did definitely indicate that junior high school pupils fabricated a large number of the book reports. The results tabulated in Appendix B illustrate this, but nothing else of import was conclusive enough to even be usable as demonstrative material in this present study.

The examined reports did indicate that under the particular circumstances which they were handled, many of the formal book reports did not achieve the goals teachers frequently believe they do. The results were limited in scope and could definitely be applied to one location--the Yakima school system. This is similar to what the authors of the professional literature have done; they have studied their local problems and passed on their observations in hopes this information will be helpful to others. They do not claim their limited observations to be indicative of a general situation.

Although the papers examined had a high percentage of book reports that were not accomplishing the objectives of an outside reading program, criteria could not be found to establish these as representative of anything but of the work of the classes that submitted them. It is believed, however, that they are good illustrative material of what was found in a certain situation. Wherever similar circumstances exist, it is possible that similar results would be found.

Next, an attempt was made to demonstrate that the results of the examination of the book reports examined cited in Appendix B were prevalent at the junior high level throughout the system from which the book reports were taken. The results of this survey are summarized in Appendix B. Again certain points of vagueness developed. The methods used by the teachers in checking pupil completion of book reports within the system were conclusively established. Also, it was established that all the teachers in the system used the book report as an evaluative technique in their outside reading program. The survey also established that, in this particular system, some of the teachers graded the book reports and some of them did not. This survey also failed to prove whether or not the book report achieved the goals many teachers establish for it.

Efforts were made to strengthen either or both of the above surveys into a thesis by finding supportive studies made by other writers on the subject. As the bibliography shows, many articles have been written on the subject, but the articles are similar to the two studies I made: each one alone was too limited in scope or too general in conclusions upon which to base definite conclusions. In most cases, the writer limited his article to a specific situation at a specific locale.

Frequently the writers expressed opinions as to the aims of an outside reading program, the role of book

reports as a teaching-learning device, the difficulty of grading book reports, and various other aspects of the program. Further reading on the subject indicated certain ideas were quite generally held on the subject of book reports. It was noted that writers consistently commented on the desirability of creating a lasting reading interest; that an outside reading program was considered an essential part of the secondary language arts program as an aid in developing lasting reading interests; that the formal required book report is in general use as an evaluative technique of pupil progress in this program. Also, many authors stated their belief that the formal written book report is not achieving the goals many teachers seem to hold it will achieve in this program. Here, it seemed, existed a problem! The book report is in almost universal use by language arts teachers in our secondary schools, yet writers of the professional literature repeatedly indicated they did not believe it was an aid in the outside reading program. I went about finding if a consensus existed among the professional writers as to the value of book reports as an aid to the reading in language arts programs.

II. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The nature of the literature being surveyed limited the study to a survey of opinion. Factual statistics from controlled studies on the subject have not been found. As

cited on pages seven and eight, no significant research on the subject has been found. Opinions used have been confined primarily to those writers in the field of education.

Citations in Chapter I show the problem of book reports has been a perplexing one for many years. Before proceeding further, the scope of the study was limited. It was arbitrarily decided to examine all the articles carried in The Education Index since 1950 under the heading, "Book Reports". Since each volume has several entries on this topic, it was believed a large enough bibliography could be built to establish the consensus of the writers on the subject. Also, it was believed recent opinion was of more import than that expressed several years ago. The bibliography was expanded to include some books that had been used as references in English, composition, and literature methods courses in college and to include articles that had been cited in the footnotes of those listed in The Education Index. For these reasons, several selections written before 1950 are included in the bibliography. Further, some of the articles catalogued in The Education Index pertained to elementary school activities or to the place of book reports in classes other than language arts. These, unless a significant point was found, were deleted. Since The Education Index covers all the significant sources on educational literature, it is believed no work of importance published in periodicals since 1950 has been overlooked.

III. METHOD OF STUDY

After the problem to be investigated had been definitely established, to determine if there is a consensus as to the value of the required formal written book report in secondary English classes, the first step taken was to build a bibliography of the current periodical literature on the subject. Since the topic has long been under discussion, to keep the bibliography from becoming too cumbersome, all articles published before 1950 were originally excluded. Later, some articles published before that date were included for illustrative purposes. The bibliography was further enlarged by including many articles and books that were footnoted in the titles taken from The Education Index.

The bibliography also includes several titles that were either used as texts or references in college language arts methods courses. The principal purpose these texts serve was to aid in establishing such items as the general belief in the value of an outside reading program, the general use of book reports, and as a supplement to the opinions in the periodical literature as to the results book reports achieve.

IV. DEFINITIONS OF THE TERMS USED

Book report. This includes any type of activity where the pupil is required to explain, tell, or describe

to some other person or persons about a book he has read. This activity may be done orally to the teacher in a private or a semi-private session, it may be done as an oral report to the class, or it may be part of a discussion where all the pupils talk as a group about the reading they are doing. It may be a written activity from the very simplest to the most complex. It may also include artistic activities such as the preparation of bulletin boards or the making of posters illustrating a book read.

Required written book report. This term is used to include any type of formal book report the pupils write as a requirement of the assigned work of the English course. By being required, it is understood that failure to complete the specified number of reports means that the pupil has not fulfilled his obligation for the school year in the English class.

Outside reading. Throughout this report, the term outside reading is used to mean the reading of a more or less recreational nature the pupils in secondary English classes are expected to do. Within this study, concern will be with those books on which the pupil, after reading them, is expected to make some type of report as a class activity. It is expected the assigned reading will be recreational with the establishment of lasting reading interests, but if the difficulty sometimes experienced in

getting the completed report on the material read is any indication, there are times when it obviously is not as enthusiastically pursued as other recreational activities. Some of the literature studied uses the term free reading, home reading, or supplemental reading. Wherever these terms are used in direct quotes, they carry the same meaning as the definition of outside reading above.

Reading level. Reading level refers to the grade level it would be expected of a child of average accomplishment to have attained, as determined by a recognized test.

Book cover. The book cover is the paper cover or jacket over the regular binding of most new books. This cover serves two purposes:

1. It protects the book.
2. It advertises the book with a short introductory blurb that tells enough of the story to arouse the curiosity of the reader. This usually tells a few of the incidents leading up to the climax but only suggests what the outcome may be by asking a leading question. Since the objective of this blurb is to get the examiner to read the entire book, it is an advertising gimmick rather than a true review of the book.

The cover also frequently has a brief biography of the author.

Book review. A book review is a more complete summation of a book than the one on the book cover. It is also more professional and less biased. Since ulterior motives are not usually involved, the review can be looked upon as one person's true opinion of the worth of the book. These are found in many current popular magazines, such as Time, Clearing House, and Saturday Review.

Fabrication. This term will be used to refer to any method the pupil uses to circumvent the necessary work required to complete an original book report on an appropriate book. It will refer to copying from the book cover whether it be verbatim or re-worded, copying a report from a friend, re-using a report that had been previously used, revising or copying a book review, making a book report on a book that is primarily a picture book, reporting on only part of a book such as the first and last chapter, submitting a report on a short story as a book report, submitting a review of an article from a reference book as a book report, or copying a few lines or paragraphs from various points in the book and submitting them as a book report.

Individual differences. The individual differences will, in most cases, be used to denote differences in natural ability. Since there are other important differences in people, such as differences in interests, cultural background, and ambition, the term cannot be limited to

differences in mental ability. Care has been used to be certain that when the term is used, the reader can readily determine the trait described.

CHAPTER III

THE ROLE OF AN OUTSIDE READING PROGRAM IN SECONDARY ENGLISH

Thus far this study has been centered on book reports, but book reports as ends in themselves cannot be justified. They are considered as means toward an end. The end of this activity is to aid in the development in the pupils of genuine and lasting interests in books. This is the objective of the outside reading program in secondary English classes. This chapter will show that it is generally held lasting interests in books should be developed and why it is believed that it is good to read widely.

A book defined. Many things that pass as books are considered as desirable reading material, and conversely, much unworthy material passes under the same name. Hechscher, in the discussion of reading interests, gives his opinion as to what he thinks are the requirements a publication should have to merit being called a book:

> A book in the sense I am using it can be defined as a creation, rather than a concoction; it holds the mirror to events, either true or imagined, but it makes sure these events have passed through an ordering and seeing mind. It is designed to have life beyond the season or year in which it is published, and it is aimed at some part of man that is general and basic, so that its potential audience is wider than any particular group in society. I am not arguing that it must necessarily be a good book, or succeed in all its aims. 'We owe a great deal to bad books,' says so discerning a critic as Virginia Woolf; 'indeed we come

> to count their authors and their heroes among those figures who play a large part in our silent life.' A detective story or a western can, I suppose, figure more vitally in the imagination of a growing boy than many a classic read under compulsion, and it may provide for his elders a more somnolent influence than pursuing Tennyson's Lotus Eaters. But even in these lesser works some elements must appear, some gift of transfiguration and harmony which the do-it-yourself manual or text book does not possess (39:41-42).

The wise English teacher will not condemn too severely, perhaps not at all, what the students are reading. He will try to move the pupil from where he is to at least within the confines of the above definition. If the pupil is already within, he will, through careful guidance, work toward a little higher level of discernment.

Reading defined. Hechscher also places a particular meaning on reading:

> To show how paradoxical are these seemingly simple terms, we might begin by saying that reading is not necessarily done with the eye. To be read aloud to is certainly on the way to being made (in Bacon's phrase) a 'full man,' or perhaps, more significantly, a 'full child.' . . . Having said that reading may be by ear, we must now say that not everything is reading that is taken in by the eye. We learn many things, we analyze them, we consult and disect printed materials. But when we read them we apply a kind of reflection and judgment, a detached and critical spirit, which gives the experience a quality of its own. What has been called 'the humane passion for disinterested reading' is something we recognize instinctively when it flowers in ourselves or others; it is the factor without which books cannot exist, or exist merely as dead things (39:42).

That there is more to reading than the transfer of the printed symbols into words is an accepted fact. As Hechscher points out, reflection and judgment applied to the printed word is a necessity if a person is to gain any experience from reading.

Approval of development of wide and lasting reading interests. Is the development of wide and lasting reading interests important enough in the growth of the pupil to warrant the time spent on outside reading in English classes: The answer is a new unequivocal, "Yes". There is no argument with the ends. The problem is the value of one of the means--the formal written book report as a required part of the program. The wide endorsement of the outside reading program is indicated by the following quotations:

Gertrude Stearns states in her book English in the Small High School, "The kind of reading usually known as 'outside reading' or 'home reading' is a really vital area from the point of its effect on the pupils' future habits' (79:243).

Louise M. Rosenblatt in her report of the Commission on Human Relations, Progressive Education Association, states, "Literature offers not merely information but experiences" (62:294). The vicarious experiences gained from a good book can greatly influence a person's actions throughout his life.

William S. Gray states in his article "Social Effects of Reading" published in School Review, "The wide use of reading, both in school and adult life, reflects confidence on the part of educators that reading can and does contribute to personal development and influence social attitudes and behavior" (35:269). He concludes that

reading does definitely affect one's attitudes, morals, beliefs, judgments, and actions (35:275).

Arthur H. Parsons' article "Teachers Need to Read", was printed in the National Education Association Journal in March, 1957. In it he states:

> Teachers--and all other adults--should read for the pleasure that comes from reading and for the satisfying of emotional needs: fun and laughter, romance, sympathy, awareness of nature, and the touch on the heartstrings.
>
> Teachers--and all other adults--should read for self development and intellectual growth that are the natural by-products of reading. Minds should not stand still, developing in quietude a hard crust that admits no new facts, tolerates no new thoughts. They should move forward, meeting, testing, and challenging novel ideas.
>
> Teachers--and all other adults--should read that they may become better informed citizens (58:168).

In the same article, Parsons quotes from Walter B. Pitkin's Life Begins at Forty: "Don't sell your books and keep your diploma. Sell your diplomas, if you can get anyone to buy them, and keep your books" (58:169).

Frequently editors of magazines make comments as introductory statements to articles they include in their magazines. The editor of School Activities comments on Dorothy Leggitt's article "Book Reporting Sponsored through the Library":

> It would be fine if everyone could develop and practice a good reading habit. Any plan that will promote such an activity among students is admirable (45:217).

The editor of The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals adds this remark to Burton's

"Campaigning to Get Students to Read": "A desire to read for personal pleasure and profit: a worthy and feasible objective for the secondary school program" (12:43).

The editor of Clearing House comments on Elizabeth Sloat's article "Yes, Book Reports" as follows: "After all, it is essential to encourage the reading of books" (73:547).

Greer and Heller comment on the role of the library and the reading program in the secondary school:

> In spite of what has been said about the importance of service to groups and classrooms, the individual guidance of a student's reading is of the first importance and should be recognized as a major responsibility of the librarian. It is an individual matter, dependent upon thorough knowledge of both students and books (36:211).

Asheim commenting on librarians and their attitude toward the number of college students that do not borrow books from the library in any volume states:

> The reason librarians take the facts about the reading of college students so hard is that we all subscribe, more or less, to the basic assumption that reading is a good thing, and therefore a lot of reading must be better (5:5).

Beauchamp declares that the outside reading program should be an integral part of the English program. He believes proper guidance in this area aids greatly in producing competent readers. He warns, however, about evaluation: each teacher should probably first evaluate his own program (9:147).

Artley in summarizing Dora V. Smith's article (74:180-205) says, "A love of reading is one of the greatest

gifts which school or home can give to children, and the love of reading is achieved first through finding pleasure in books" (4:9).

J. N. Hook in a publication frequently used as a college text book states, "Every English teacher requires, or at least encourages, students to read material in addition to that read by the class as a whole" (40:33).

Lucia B. Mirrielees in commenting on the importance of the outside reading program states, "Personally, I count it the most important part of English work" (49:319). Her book is also widely used as a text and reference in college methods courses on the teaching of English literature and composition.

Blaisdell comments in his book Ways to Teach English, "With the teaching of literary appreciation should go the development of the habit of good reading" (10:391).

Rosenblatt believes that "our aim . . . is to help students develop a lifetime habit of turning to good literature" (63:308).

Dorothy Dakin reiterates the position that widespread reading should be encouraged at all levels (21:380-81).

"In naming our aims in education," Alm states, "we teachers say that the establishment of a lifetime reading habit is important"(2:470).

"Most teachers agree that one of the chief aims in the teaching of English is to develop in their students a love

of reading. The time honored means of achieving this end has been the formal book report" (18:36-37), is stated by Clark and Eaton in Modern Techniques for Improving Secondary English.

None of the authors cited in the bibliography of this study has stated that it is not desirable for one to develop a lasting reading habit.

A look at adult reading habits. Quotations such as the above are numerous. The consensus is that it is desirable to develop a love of reading. Have we done so? Surveys indicate not. Asheim discusses the possibility of a student's getting through certain college courses without doing any reading outside of the required text and concludes that such would be possible. He raises the question since recent surveys indicate that fifteen per cent of the college students do not withdraw a single library book and another sixteen per cent withdraw on the average less than one per month. He cites another survey which shows that 57 per cent of those with high school education stated they had not read a single book within the last year. These facts raise the question of the efficiency of our education system in this area. The survey by Dean Asheim explains some of the variables in the reading habits of college students that make some of the figures by colleges not entirely reliable. There is, however, nothing in the article that

makes one encouraged by the present reading habits of high school graduates. Actual amount of reading done is far below the desirable level. His figures show we still fail to develop a permanent reading habit in more than one-half of our population (5:3-26).

Elledge reports on a survey returning students in the fall of 1958 at Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota. When asked to name the two books read during the summer enjoyed most, he learned that less than one-half of the students had read two books during the preceding summer (29:147).

From the above, it is obvious that the love of reading, so commonly talked about as being desirable, is not being developed by our secondary English program of outside reading--at least not in a large portion of our high school graduates. Asheim found there is a relationship between education and reading habits. While 57 per cent of the high school graduates stated they were not regular readers, twenty-six per cent of the college graduates stated they did little or no reading. On the other hand, only eighteen per cent of those who had no education beyond elementary school could be classified as regular readers of books (5:4).

Let us not condemn the school too severely for this; it is true the outside reading program is not achieving its goals, but extenuating circumstances at least partially remove the blame from the schools. A. Sterl Artley of the

University of Missouri recognized that the home must accept part of the responsibility for this failure when he stated:

> Until the schools provide a rich literature program with a wealth of material related to the interests of children and until parents see the need and importance of providing a rich literary environment in the home, let no one complain about comic books or drugstore pulps. In this case we get just exactly what we pay for, or in this case, what we don't pay for (4:12).

If Artley were writing today, six years later, he would have to give greater consideration as to what the growth of television has done in diverting the interests of a portion of the school children away from a good literature program. It is one more demand on the pupil's time. If the home provides nothing more in the line of reading encouragement by the parents than the daily paper, a pulp magazine, a comic book, or evening after evening of run-of-the-mill television, it is probable that many pupils from such environment will not be able to see much value in reading for pleasure. The results of the above surveys, which show less than half our adult population to be regular readers of books, make no effort to evaluate as to the quality of material that is being read by those who regularly do a fair amount of reading. It is difficult to criticize the reading habits of children when adults set such a poor example before them.

Why should people read? Not all who write on the subject agree that to read a great deal is a good thing.

All encourage the reading habit, but some would have it develop with more selective tastes. Asheim does question the value of extensive reading for its own sake; he feels limited, guided reading as followed in many courses is more important than unguided, indiscriminate choice (5:20-21).

Mirrielees, also a strong advocate of a person having a lasting love of reading, believes guided selection is an important part of the program. She believes a person should develop a discriminating choice at the same time the reading habit is being developed (49:318-19). However, with few exceptions, writers on the subject hold that it is well for a person to read extensively. The specific objectives may vary from person to person but the general objectives, the development of a better individual, is found in almost all articles written on the subject.

Eric W. Johnson, head of the Junior High School, Germantown Friends School, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, while stressing requirements and guided choice instead of evaluation in a secondary reading program, sets forth the following reasons and methods of stimulating reading in junior high school students:

> . . . we believe that one of the best ways to prepare boys and girls for college is to keep pressure on them to read, to praise and talk about reading, to try to get students to read as challenging books as we can, but <u>not</u> to require certain lists of books for all children (42:74).

Mr. Johnson is interested in developing the pupils' desire and interest in reading. He believes that if the student is also a reader he will have greater chance for success in college. He also ponders the statement, "Some children read no matter what the teacher does and others won't read regardless of what the teacher does (42:74)." What the child brings from home, his parents' attitude toward reading, might explain this.

Matilda Bailey, author and lecturer, states in an article on the role of reading in a child's development that reading fiction can open the door for many young people to begin to see through many of their hates, fears, prejudices, and frustrations. Although the series of events in the story is primarily what holds the interest of the young reader, universal themes which relate to the successes, failures, disappointments, family problems, and other frustrations of young characters presented in a wholesome way do help the young reader in his own situation (6:515-21). However, stories that tend to moralize too much are frequently rejected by junior high students. Didacticism is not needed to present the above themes.

Rosenblatt describes the role of literature as something that must be relevant to life, something of value here and now:

> Books are losing out in the competition for America's attention; evidently college students read very little. To blame this on failure to expose students to specific books or types of books is to over-simplify. A more realistic explanation, surely is that the student in school and college has not been led again and again to literature relevant to his ongoing life, offering him, here and now, aesthetic pleasure in actual reading and help in organizing his sense of himself and his world. Once such a feeling for literature is established, we need not fear neglect of the masterpieces of the past or the present (63:308).

The teacher who carries out a program that fills the present needs of the pupil while insuring a progressively more mature taste as the child matures, will have a successful program. A high percentage of that teacher's pupils will progress toward acquiring genuine and lasting interests in good literature.

Those who write on the subject of the desirability of a person's having good reading habits, often become so engrossed in the character development aspect of reading that they frequently overlook one of the simplest and truest values of reading. Reading can be an enjoyable activity. The simple fact that a person reads and enjoys the activity will aid in achieving many of the goals stated above. Robert G. Carlsen recognizes this value in his discussion on bringing young adults to books. He suggests how to capitalize on it:

> For most people, reading is an enjoyable activity. There is nothing magical or profound in stimulating and guiding the reading interest of an individual. If we have books and make them easily available, if we know books so that we can help the individual find an initial interest in reading, if we can help him bridge the gap

> between one reading interest and another, if we bring to bear the social interaction between people in regard to reading, we can develop enthusiasm for books that will exceed our greatest expectancies (17:139).

This statement was directed at librarians, but there is much in it that a teacher can use.

The Public Relations Department of General Electric answers the question, "Why read?" in its publication General Electric's Answer to . . . Four Why's. The two introductory paragraphs illustrate the basic assumptions held on this subject by General Electric personnel:

> One of our teacher friends wrote us recently. Among other things his letter said, 'At our school we have Shakespeare's plays on record. We can't get our boys and girls to read them any more.'
>
> That set us to thinking. We had always assumed that everyone liked to read if only for entertainment's sake. We were sure that everyone had to read, simply to learn the things that go to make up our day-to-day lives whether it's how to run a store, or how to put up a TV antenna, or how to make an outdoor fireplace. We had thought that, sooner or later, everyone has to go to the library to look up something (32:10).

From the same article, under the sub-head, "Study depends on reading," the writer states:

> We did a little checking and found, among other things, that Michigan State College thought it necessary to tell each of its freshmen: 'Since about 85 per cent of all study activity depends on reading, it is undoubtedly your most important means of learning in college' (32:10).

The entire article is clear, concise, and written in a vocabulary that is easily understood by most high school pupils. General Electric will furnish to any school requesting the publication up to thirty-six copies. It tells the

pupil how we read to learn, why knowledge rather than pull is more important today and how most of this knowledge is gained by reading. The article continues by classing reading as a method of self-education, how we put ourselves "in the know" by reading, and why the pupil should learn to be a reader with discriminating choices so he will "Read things that are worthwhile" (32:10-11). The article concludes by giving the following advice to high school pupils:

> Why read? Almost all that is worth knowing is in words. It takes an easy familiarity with reading and a tremendous appetite for recorded knowledge--past and present--to keep in step with these fast-moving times.
>
> Our high school English teacher used to say to us: 'We are what we read.' Later an annoyed college instructor said, as we struggled over a long passage: 'It's painfully true that the way not to become a fathead is to fatten the mind.'
>
> These are hard words, but in them is an elementary truth: If you liken your mind to a container, it is the only one we know of that the more you cram into it the more it can hold.
>
> Your English teacher knows how to make you a better reader. With your co-operation, he will help you develop good reading habits. He will open up some everlastingly long avenues of fun and profit. One day you will be grateful for his help and pleased that you had good-enough sense to consult him. You can solve any problem if you know how to read it (32:11).

Dora V. Smith states, "Reading serves many purposes in the lives of young people" (75:180). The following list summarizes the many purposes she believes reading serves in the lives of our pupils--purposes she feels can be achieved by guidance in individual reading:

1. Locating information necessary to the solution of personal problems
2. Identifying, extending, and intensifying their interests
3. Giving young people awareness of themselves and others
4. Furnishing emotional release or satisfaction
5. Inducing intellectual curiosity and reflective thinking
6. Developing social insight through reinforcement or challenging of attitudes
7. Giving opportunity for re-examination of sense of values
8. Providing aesthetic experience
9. Developing critical appreciation of books, magazines, and newspapers
10. Giving sense of belonging to the culture
11. Furnishing recreation through pure enjoyment and entertainment (75:180-84).

The last reason, frequently the least attended to, is possibly the soundest reason for developing a love of reading. The world of books is a nearly inexhaustable area of enrichment where the ever increasing leisure of Americans could be spent. Sometimes it is difficult to promote an activity strictly on a pleasure basis because there is a segment of the American society that still frowns on an activity that is purely a pleasurable one. There is also the materialist who sees little value in an activity unless the gain from it can be weighed, picked up, and showed to friends and neighbors as a solid indication of success.

Dora V. Smith bears out the contention that recreational reading is important in the following statement:

> The first prerequisite in developing a habit of reading is that young people should have a good time in the process. Sheer fun is still a worthy object of reading as it has been through the ages. The library shelves should abound with books of humor, animal stories, interesting narratives of youthful escapades, and an adventure thriller which aim only to give delight and entertainment. A generous allotment of time should be given to guidance in this area (75:184).

Summary of Chapter III. Under Hechscher's definition of a book, it has been concluded that an important prerequisite for a writing to be called a book is that it holds a mirror to events that have been passed through an ordering and seeing mind. He points out in this definition that there are many books not considered as good books that serve a valuable purpose in developing readers. They are a beginning for many boys (and girls) not yet ready for classics.

Hechscher's definition of reading was also cited. There is more to reading than transferring symbols into words. One must apply reflection and judgment if any experience is to be gained from the activity.

Those who write on the subject give almost unanimous approval to the idea of developing wide and lasting reading interests. The only reservation on this point was that a carefully guided program of developing readers of discerning taste was better than merely developing readers who read extensively. This is a very fine point and probably does

not represent a difference in view as much as it is a difference in semantics. General endorsement is given to the idea of an outside reading program in seconday English classes as a method of developing lasting reading interests.

Despite the fact that outside reading has been a part of the secondary English classes to the point of almost being considered a tradition by some, adult reading falls far short of what is desirable. Although there is a relationship between highly educated people and the amount of reading they do, statistics indicate that slightly more than one-fourth of the college graduates cannot be considered regular readers of books. The poor reading habits of adults were cited by one author as a basic factor in the reading habits of children. He contends the school is not entirely responsible for pupils' reluctance to select better reading material.

The reasons why a person should read are multitudinous. We read to gain information, to follow directions, to experience pleasure, to develop insight, or to have vicarious experiences. General Electric's advice to high school pupils as to why reading is indicative of the role at least one of America's large business firms expect the English teacher to take in developing lasting reading habits and ability in people.

CHAPTER IV

THE BASES AND THE VALIDITY OF THE REASONS FOR ASSIGNING BOOK REPORTS

No documented study has been found to indicate how many teachers give one reason and how many have another in mind when they assign book reports. Below are listed five aims that study indicates are the common objectives teachers have in mind when they assign book reports. Probably no teacher has all five in mind when the assignment is made. Two or three of the objectives at any one time would be a reasonable goal. But each of these goals is held by some teachers. Although it has not been possible to find statements, in a positive sense, that teachers believe that book reports accomplish such-and-such an end, many negative statements have been found and will be cited stating that formal written book reports do not achieve certain goals. It may be that these goals are accepted along with the tradition of book reports; it may be that, as with other traditions, certain basic assumptions are accepted without anyone's ever bothering to categorize them. Thus this list of objectives is not the result of any positive statement listing the objectives of book reports. They are the result of the most commonly found negative statements used by the authors of the literature on the subject of book reports.

1. Book reports encourage reading and thus help in developing a lifetime love of reading.
2. Since the pupil must evaluate what he reads in order to write a book report, he must read carefully and critically and thus become a more discerning reader.
3. Book reports are valid, practical writing experiences.
4. A book report is written proof that the reading has been done.
5. Since the outside reading program is an integral part of the language arts program, it must be graded.

The book report serves as a device to evaluate the pupil's progress in this area. These will be discussed on an individual basis citing authorities who state book reports do not achieve the above goals. However, there will be occasions where one quotation will relate to two or more of the above headings.

Book reports encourage reading and thus help in developing a lifetime love of reading. Stephen Dunning in his article "Everybody's Doing It But Why?" in which he discusses the results of the use of the formal written book report in conjunction with an outside reading program, states, "If it is true that most of us justify book reporting by assuming that it encourages wide worthwhile experiences with literature, it is necessary to report that we

have not been successful" (26:29). In the same article he states that he believes the stereotyped book report of author, highpoint, why-I-liked-the-story collected on a certain day when all class members, or almost all, complete the assignment is not achieving the objectives of the outside reading program--encouraging reading. This common practice is not producing what the overall program hopes to achieve (26:33). The reason for this, he continues, is that there is a lack of relation between the reporting activities and the literature. Book reports, like any other pupil activity, fail to produce the desired results when there is little in common between teacher objective and pupil objective. We have goals established in our outside reading programs, but according to Dunning, our book reports are not helping reach these goals. He is referring to the formal book report. The teacher assigns the report supposedly as part of a program which has the overall objective of developing readers of lasting and discerning tastes. The book report is then used for such varied purposes as a grade, proof that the book has been read, or as a practical writing exercise. This conflict of purpose causes the program to break down (26:30).

In a study made in 1959, Robert G. Carlsen secured accounts from almost 100 adults--accounts which he calls "reading autobiographies." The following is a paragraph from one he considers typical:

> Through high school, I was not concerned with my reading at all except when I had to turn in a book report. Of course, my book reports were never very good because I never read any of the books. I became bored with the book before I got even a third of the way through them (17:134).

Carlsen believes that the book report, under most circumstances, does not encourage young people to read. For the book report to be an effective device in encouraging young people to read, it must be a non-threatening situation. Since the book report is always the result of a threatening situation in which the teacher is judging and grading, it is his opinion that the book report perhaps drives more children away from reading than towards it (17:137).

Irma Dovey, commenting on the role of book reports in the elementary school, said, "Teachers hoped that book reports made them (students) read but were never sure that it made them want to read" (24:137). (Italics mine). The teachers must have felt that the book report should have had some purpose, such as making the pupil read, but were not sure that it did so.

D. G. Schubert believes that a varied program where the stereotyped formal book report is avoided by the teacher will aid in developing lasting reading interests; the teacher must use ingenious methods and imagination if the reporting or evaluating procedures are to be an aid in developing a true love and desire to read. It is the formal written book report that causes pupils to remark, "I'll never read

another book because I might have to make a book report" (68:264).

It has been established in Chapter I that book reports are widely-used in connection with an outside reading program. In Chapter III it was established that the goal of an outside reading program is to encourage the development of a lasting reading habit of wide interest and discerning taste. These two go together. Any teacher who uses book reports with the outside reading must assume that the reports are aiding the program. If not, they become busy work.

Goldstein has come to the conclusion that the prospect of having to write a report, often dims the enthusiasm of the reader. Many students who like to read, do not relish the task of putting down on paper such things as author, publisher, plot, setting, climax, and ending. He has switched to oral book reports and other oral activities to promote his outside reading program because he knows people would rather talk about an experience than write about it (33:303-04). How long would you enjoy your favorite recreation if after each time you engaged in this leisure activity, you had to write a three-hundred-word essay describing your feelings or some other reaction to the event?

Eric W. Johnson believes his method of book reporting does encourage the children to read, but he is not speaking

of the usual formal book report. He is referring to a reading notebook the pupil developes somewhat independently along his line of interest and partially at his own pace. He does require some type of book report as an aid in guiding the choice of the pupil. From past experience he believes the long formal book report works counter to the teacher's purpose--developing lasting reading habits (42:74-77).

The Committee on Curriculum Planning and Development of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals reports in their study of the English language arts:

> Whenever oral and written book reports of discussions are assigned, they should contribute to the students' lifetime interests in literature and add to their literary growth. Such reports should not require students to merely prepare a summary of setting, plot, characters, climax and outcome of the book. Students should react to some of their reading in much the same manner as a literary critic who reviews and evaluates newly published literature. They should read literary reviews in current periodicals and analyze the approach used by critics today. Oral reports may not only serve to motivate reading in new and diverse areas, but may also give students practice in communicating to others personal convictions or vicarious experiences which have influenced their thoughts or feelings (50:53).

The committee endorses book reports as a means of encouraging the development of literary interests but does not consider the formal book report of setting, plot, etc. as being adequate. The varied approach that stimulates the pupil's imagination is recommended. One of the objectives the committee believes book reports should accomplish is that they should contribute to the pupil's lifetime interest in literature and add to his literary growth (50:53).

In her article "Yes, Book Reports," Elizabeth Sloat endorses the use of the written book report because she concludes it does the following for the pupil: It gives direction to the reading done beyond the class assignments, teaches students to read more purposefully, broadens outlook on life and at the same time, improves ability in oral and written communication. She says, "one of the big challenges that confronts me today is developing a taste for good reading in my students and helping them form permanent reading habits" (73:429). She approves book reports as an aid in meeting this challenge but again there is the problem of semantics. When she discusses her book reporting procedures, she does not talk about the formal report that covers such matters as title, author, setting, climax, and "why I liked the book" or the formal procedure of a required number of books to be read and the reports due on specific dates. She includes varied approaches to the reports, discussions, and sharing of reading experiences. She makes allowances for individual differences in reading levels, maturity, and interests (73:429-30).

Thus, we see there are those who do approve of book reports as a method of developing a love of reading. They believe a properly conducted program of book reporting encourages the child to read more. In each case, though, the endorsement has not been in support of the formal book report. The author has given his support to a program that

would appeal to wide and varied interests with many different kinds of reports and activities involved.

Since the pupil must evaluate what he reads in order to write a book report, he must read carefully and critically and thus become a more discerning reader. Much of what has been said in the preceding section could also be said here. However, since some writers do speak about the two subjects separately and specifically, it was deemed necessary to separate the discussion of them.

J. N. Hook condemns even the oral type of book report that consists of "Lester, will you tell the class about your book?" He believes it leads to a report that is unorganized and rambling. Much more critical thinking and discerning taste developes when the pupil is asked a specific question such as, ". . . In the book that you read, what example of bravery did you notice?" (40:239-40).

In discussing the relation of literacy to the reading of literature, Squire says of English teachers who labor to develop appreciation, taste, and enjoyment of good literature that there are reasons to doubt the success of their programs (77:154-60). Since most English teachers require outside reading and since it is rare to find an English teacher who does not require book reports to further this program of developing taste and the ability to evaluate material read, the method is not succeeding.

In discussing the frequent criticisms of outside reading programs in secondary schools and the adjunct book report, Beauchamp declares,

> Critics labor under the impression that book reports are designed to encourage voluntary reading. I submit that this reason is unrealistic. The book report is used by most teachers to insure careful reading of the required books (9:148).

He condemns the formal book report as not achieving either of the above purposes. He gives a typical set of directions of the sort too inadequate to merit use but still in widespread favor with many teachers. These directions include describing the most interesting event or the most exciting scene, classifying the book, describing the hero, writing a brief note about the author, and so on. See Appendix B for some very similar directions. "It is no wonder that our students cry out against this immature busy work" (9:148). It goes almost without saying that busy work occasionally does achieve one goal: it keeps the pupils busy. In referring to the usual book report of title, author, and high point of the story, Beauchamp flatly states that it does not prove the book has been read. Under these methods, a student admitted to him that he had used one report six times (9:148).

The typical autobiography from Carlsen (17:134) cited on page would not lead one to believe that book reports aided in developing discerning readers. The person evidently managed to get through high school without completely

reading a book. The book report, as it too frequently does, became her end: it was required and she completed it, but she did not widen her reading interests by completing the book report.

Writing in Instructor, Marentz relates her experience with the formal book report where the author, title, part-I-liked-best approach was used. "The reports were stereotyped and the children were not interested in writing or listening to them" (46:12). She believes that the necessity of having to write a book report has a negative effect on the child in so far as widening his choice of reading material. He frequently takes the first book he finds since any book will fulfill the assignment of writing a book report. If, in the pupil's mind, the book report is the assignment instead of the pleasant encouragement of reading a book, it is probable that the selection of the book would not receive the emphasis that it should.

A School Sister of Notre Dame writing for The Catholic School Journal cites the various weaknesses of the formal book report. She points out how, through various means of fabrication, the pupil can get by without really doing much reading. To develop discerning taste in literature, she recommends a program with variation in procedures. Regarding this objective, she states:

> Thus it is through individual selection based on character and abilities; and through flexible testing that reading will become for all youth all the book

> week slogans claim that it is: a stepping stone to unity, a pillar of freedom, a sword of the spirit, the voice of God speaking to the whole soul, and the maker of the whole man (67:88).

The following is from the National Council of Teachers of English' publication The Language Arts in the Secondary School:

> Emphasis on the choice of books and unit teaching hastened to modify ideas of what used to be called 'outside' reading, a formal, and too frequently futile, activity. Often one book read and retold by a class was followed by one book, possibly of a similar type, read independently by individual students; in some cases the second book was identical for all. Sometimes a certain number of books was required for a years reading, perhaps ten books from an outmoded list that the teacher may have borrowed. Usually a written report was required. Seldom was there communication between the book and the reader or a spontaneous sharing with classmates of the joy of the experience or possible contribution of ideas to the solution of a human problem. Too often the requirement resulted in copying or paraphrasing another's report. Under the circumstances, a common greeting between teachers was, 'How many book reports do you require for outside reading?' Stress on number and requirement ignored communication or growth in understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment (53:134-35).

The Council's use of the past tense in the above statement is not entirely correct: by some authorities cited in this study, it is far from correct. Perhaps there has been a bit of indulgence in wishful thinking--discussing that which would be as if it were. The Council does not condemn an individual reading program; quite the contrary is true. It condemns the dull unimaginative program where the pupil reads so many books per term, hands in a report for each as proof the book has been read and begins to associate the idea of reading books with an experience in which

he used various methods of subterfuge to fulfill the required number of reports. Regarding the development of individual reading in the secondary school, the Council states:

> A broad program of individual reading guidance is essential in any well-rounded curriculum in literature. Such guidance, often carried on through broad topical units in which students read many different sections bearing on a central topic or theme, must be based on keen awareness of general interest and preoccupations of adolescents at various levels, for those interests are important for motivating reading (53:178-79).

The consensus on this subject is that book reports do not encourage critical and discerning reading. Some intimate the opposite results.

Book reports are a valid practical exercise in writing. The checking of book reports for correctness of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure is not impossible: it is time consuming. Elizabeth S. Sloat endorses the use of the written book report because she believes it teaches the student to read more carefully and purposefully, broadens his outlook on life, gives direction to his reading beyond the class assignments, and at the same time improves his ability in written expression and communication (73:429-30). She does not endorse a stereotyped, formal report.

Sister Mary Lorraine, C. S. J. spoke at the Fifty-seventh Annual Meeting of the National Catholic Educational Association on the topic "Book Reports: For or Against?" Although the speech was directed to teachers in grades one

through four, certain points are pertinent to this study. Quoting from the summary published in the National Catholic Educational Association Bulletin:

> Can pupils in Grades 1 through 4 develop language arts skills effectively through oral and written book reports? The answer is an unqualified yes. In fact, book reports are the liaison between reading and the entire language arts programs.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> To function as a key person, the effective teacher:
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The aim of all book reporting should be a brief account to interest and arouse the curiosity of the listener or reader. It should never be a burdensome analysis or a lengthy retelling of the story.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The problem is not for or against book reports but rather for the kind of book reports that evoke and stimulate critical thinking (72:361).

The Sister's unqualified endorsement of book reports, oral and written, is followed by her unqualified rejection of the stereotyped, formal report. She believes the right kinds of book reports can have many valuable uses in the language arts programs.

Lucia B. Mirrielees in discussing teachers who reject the proposition that literature lends itself as subject material so "the pupil can concentrate all of his energies upon spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence construction," states they do so because "consciously or unconsciously, they resent the possibility of staling literature by having

pupils use it as subject matter for their grubby little themes" (49:301). In commenting further on this practice, she states:

> This attitude has been delightfully expressed by the late professor S. S. Seward of Stanford University, who, in describing the teacher's use of literature as a basis for composition, compared it to the use a teacher in shop might make of a picture of the Colosseum should he hold it up before the class with the injunction 'Look; then go build a woodshed like it.' Teachers who agree with Professor Seward would tend to draw theme subjects from activities, surroundings, the pupil's thoughts, observations, or imaginings, not from his reading (49:301).

The above comments by Mirrielees refer to literature in general as a basis for subject matter to be used in composition writing. She makes more specific comments in the chapter "Motivating Composition in Relation to Pupil's Reading." Regarding the use of outside reading as a basis for composition work, she says:

> Do you know how outside reading correlated with composition is conducted in many schools? The teacher announces to a class of varying reading ability and varying mental ages that in three week's time a book report will be called for. She doubtless reminds the class at least twice. The day of trial at last arrives. It is sort of a literary Judgment Day when the just and unjust are tried. The teacher writes on the board some enlightening queries suitable to any type of book her forty pupils may have stumbled upon either with or without a guiding list. They presumably include such favorites as these:
>
> 1. Describe the most exciting scene in your book.
> 2. Tell the last important incident in your book.
> 3. Describe the hero (or heroine) and tell one characteristic incident about him (or her).
> 4. Tell clearly in good essay form why you did or did not like the book read.
> 5. If your book is not a novel, sum up for us the main idea that the author gave and illustrate this idea so that we see his method of developing it.

> (Do you wonder that educated under this system, many college freshmen confess to never having read a book while in high school, but to having secured the necessary information by word of mouth?) These questions the pupils answer in writing. The papers are collected, corrected, returned and placed in the pupils' notebooks. Credit is given each pupil for one book read; and a new literary Judgment Day is announced. Thus, enjoyment of reading is cultivated. Thus, penetration and sensitivity are developed.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> What effect does this set day of judgment have on outside reading? It makes reading a task. It overshadows the book. Again and again you will hear pupils say, 'I don't like to read a book if I have to make a report on it'; 'That's a good book; it's easy to remember'; or 'Read this book; it's short.' (49:319-21)

Such statements not only condemn the practice of using book reports as a method of motivating composition, they also weaken the claims of some that book reports aid in developing wider interests in reading or that they aid in developing a lifetime love of reading. When the selection of a book is based on how easy it will be to make a report on it, it is highly improbable that the pupil is going to be selecting progressively more mature books.

In the section on using literature as a motivation for writing, Mirrielees concludes:

> . . . that composition and literature should often be combined, never at the disadvantage of the literature read.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> In spite of the discussion just ended, I am convinced that it is wiser to draw much of the material for themes from pupil's own experience, actual or imaginative, rather than to force him back into a century not his own (49:323).

In the introduction to the text Mirrielees offers a suggestion to the prospective teacher as to what can be done to make the outside reading program a success:

> You can stimulate much free reading both by eliminating time spent in fruitless class discussion of material already comprehended and by awakening interest in many books rather than centering interest upon a few. More than you probably realize, you can increase reading by the elimination of the old-style book report and by substituting book-discussion days (49:27).

She repeats this same thought as to the value of book reports later in the book when she states:

> This section will have served its purpose if it leads you:
>
> . . . . . .
>
> To guard against decreasing the enjoyment of reading--thoughtful, intelligent reading--by the bugbear of reports (49:323).

Cross and Carney include literature as a source of subjects for compositions (20:288). They discuss various other activities for the evaluation of outside reading, but when they liken the outside reading phase of the English program to the dessert course after dinner, they state the mother "skillfully . . . works into them a great many of the likes and dislikes of her family, and serves them attractively, and gives no test afterwards. This is the rule to follow in an outside reading program" (20:411-15).

Under "Problems Peculiar to Writing," The National Council of Teachers of English's Commission on the English Curriculum mentions several subjects to be used in writing

experiences, but book reports are conspicuous by their absence (50:319-22).[1] At various points in the book, methods of stimulating interest in reading are discussed. The following paragraph summarizes well the points to be guarded against in any reading program:

HINDRANCES TO INTERACTION BETWEEN READER AND BOOK

> The end of the teaching of literature and reading as growth is different from a glib recital of authors, titles, characters, plots, or quotations. The study of literature is not a formal, restricted, forbidding study often associated with the years when all books in English classes were prescribed by college entrance requirements, state courses, or school pronouncements. The end is not facts or externals, but the effect upon the reader. The study of English in a secondary school or college that leaves students cold or hostile to literature and reading, that developes antagonisms, that leads to closed doors of pain and cryptograms and hieroglyphics rather than enlightment, perception, pleasure, and curiosity defeats its own purposes. The study of literature that takes students further and further from life and from real culture negates the end for which literature is taught (52:376).

In no way does the Commission indicate by this statement that literature is a good device to use in the development of correct writing ability. It reaffirms the previously stated idea: The only valid purpose of any activity by the pupil relating to a book he has read is to heighten the interest and understanding of that book.

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[1]It might be added at this point, formal book reports receive very little attention in publications of the Council. Some of the statements they do make, are worded as if the Council had concluded that such reports are used so little and are such poor techniques that they merit little space in its publications. The quotation on pages 62-63 of this study (53:134-35) is an example of the formal book report being referred to as a practice of the past, not the present.

Writing for Grade Teacher, Martha Dallman stresses the importance of guidance and planning in a book reporting program, "If he does not know how to do this," she says referring to book reports, "it becomes an unpleasant task and making the report often has a negative effect on the pupil's development of good reading habits" (22:54). While giving limited approval to the use of book reports as exercises in writing, she points out that "The major purposes of book reports are to interest the pupils in more worthwhile reading and to help them acquire various skills in the language arts" (22:54). For this program to be successful, she stresses the necessity of keeping reports short.

Edwin H. Sauer makes the following two statements regarding literature and composition:

> It goes without saying that writing should be part of every activity in the English class. Writing experiences should grow out of the lessons in sentence structure, grammar, usage, and especially literature. We must encourage children to write on what they have read: give them topics which will require interpretation of a story or a poem or a section of a longer work. Again, may I insist that the topics be kept within the range of student understanding--let's avoid topics like 'The Symbolic Presentation of Narrative Epiphany in Dubliners by James Joyce.' (I hope it will not seem to the reader that I am inventing these esoteric topics. I have seen assigned to high school students every one which is quoted in this chapter.) But certainly students can write clear expository paragraphs about evidence of conflicting economic classes in The House of Seven Gables, or whether Macbeth really sees or only imagines he sees the witches, or where Huckleberry Finn stood on the question of slavery. However, students must do more than write merely on literature. This practice gives the course an air of professionalism. As if the only function of the English class is to turn out writers, teachers of literature, or literary critics. The

> high school English class must serve the complete man and the whole curriculum. Expository and pursuasive writing, with exercises on a wide variety of subjects, are essential (66:86).

In the above quote it is obvious that Sauer approves the coordination of literature and composition. In the following quote, he clarifies his ideas as to how book reports can be useful in such a program:

> The traditional book report, with its list of characters, summary of the plot, brief sketch of the author's life, has fortunately just about disappeared. Indeed, some teachers have abandoned the written report altogether in favor of individual conferences with the students, or oral reports before the class, or the recording of titles on three-by-five cards which are handed in occasionally, or just free discussion periods in which students talk about their reading with their classmates. My personal preference is for some kind of written work--a composition, ideally developing the thought of the book. Often I have asked students merely to answer two questions, 'Why do you think the author wrote the book?' and 'Why do you think he wrote it as he did?' The results are not always satisfactory, but they have the advantage of being the work of the students (66:158).

A book report is written proof that the reading has been done. Brother John of the Cross finds book reports unsatisfactory for this purpose:

> The purpose of the book report from the teacher's point of view is to determine whether or not the student has met the required assignment and to provide an appropriate grade thereon. A distinction must be made between the purpose of reading, and the purpose of the report. Reading we require in order to instill or increase in the student some moral or intellectual value, but the report is fundamentally for, and/or testing of sustained contact with a book that is considered of some value to the student.

> If a written book report is long enough to convince the teacher that the reading has been done, it is usually too long to be conscientiously corrected. If it is short enough to be conscientiously corrected, it is generally too short to convince the teacher that the reading has been done (11:304).

In discussing other methods of checking and evaluating pupil progress in outside reading, Brother John suggests the use of prepared tests. However, he states, "Prepared tests decrease the value of book reports as a practice in composition" (11:304).

In discussing his reasons for inaugurating a new method of evaluating the outside reading of his English classes, Abraham D. Singer commented as follows on the written reports: "Their written book reports . . . had left me for the most part undecided, I announced, as to who had actually read the entire book or just a part of it" (69:63).

The use of book reports as a device to determine whether or not the book has been read, Dora V. Smith considers as worse than just a waste of time. It is actually a distraction from duties that could otherwise be performed:

> In spite of encouraging progress in many schools throughout the country, the average English teacher today spends six or eight times as long 'finding out whether the students have read the books' as he does inducing young people to read them. If he would reverse the process, he will find it much less necessary to engage in wholesale sleuthing to find out what reading has been done. Reading habits are not built in six week jerks. They grow normally from day to day in relationship to new and developing interests (75:203-04).

Paul W. O'Dea heartily endorses the use of book reports in his senior English classes at Arlington Heights, Illinois. But he is equally strong in his criticism of the rigid program relying on the "conventional" book report. He states that there are many other methods that will establish the book has been read, "and of ascertaining equally important aspects of the novel reading" (57:98). He further declares:

> Let us review the facts: (1) most teenagers have not, do not, and will not ever like to write meaningful evaluations of their reading; (2) most teenagers like to read but are not trained to get the most out of challenging reading material; and (3) nearly all teenagers like to talk about their reading even to a teacher, provided they are not subjected to an inquisition. And let us make the most of these facts (57:98).

O'Dea is convinced that it is necessary to ascertain that the reading has been done, but he is fully aware that to accomplish this objective, the teacher must do more than hand out a set of mimeographed book report directions.

On the subject of book reports and their role as evaluative techniques and as proof that the material has been read, Dwight Burton has the following to say:

> Evaluating student performance in book reports or other activities connected with study of literature is, naturally, part of the total matter of teacher observation already discussed. This is a separate category here because book reports are so much a part of the literature class. Book reporting may be a tradition that either works for good or bad, and the book report may take many forms and purposes. One of these purposes, whatever the form, may well be the evaluation of student growth.

> However, evaluation, or any other purpose, may not be served at all by the 'name the book-name the author-what is the setting?-list the main characters-briefly summarize the plot-how I liked the book' routine of the traditional--sometimes standardized in mimeographed form--book report. Such reports are designed principally to tell whether Johnny really has read what he claims to have read. This may be one function of the book report, but any activity carried on with or after reading should provide a time when the student has or learns to have the pleasure of sharing his reading experience with others (13:258).

Burton further states that the primary function of the book reporting is the development on insights into the art of reading literature. He describes several methods of book reporting that will accomplish this goal. He considers variety in reporting procedures as paramount.

Since the outside reading program is a vital part of the English curriculum, the pupil's progress in this activity should be measured. The book report serves this purpose. Can the understanding of a reading experience be measured and graded? Although this topic was discussed in some detail in Chapter I, further attention should be given to this topic at this point by examining a few more of the statements pertaining to it. O'Dea (57) and Burton (13) cited above on this and the preceding page have given serious consideration to the problem of evaluation in the quotations from their work on the subject of book reports.

Beauchamp believes the book report is an outgrowth of the felt need to evaluate the pupil's progress in the required reading program (9:147-48). As previously cited,

he no longer relies on the formal book report in evaluating his pupils' outside reading, but he does evaluate by the much more sensitive personal form of studying actual student response and applies personal stimulation to those who are lagging.

In 1935 in his book The Teaching of Literature in High School, Reed Smith stated that no type of evaluation has proven entirely satisfactory in evaluating a pupil's reading experiences, but he considered the thematic type book report as the lowest on his list of preferences. One reason he condemns them is that he believes from the pupil's point of view, they are distracting since they necessitate the accumulating of facts and anticipating questions while he should be absorbed in reading an interesting book (76: 392-94). Smith has the following to say specifically on the subject:

> Even if we succeed in awakening a nascent love for good literature, there is no practical way of testing and evaluating it either quantitatively or qualitatively. This is true in spite of repeated efforts on the part of teachers of English and of education to devise workable tests of this kind. . . . The thing that really counts--electrifying personal contact with a great poem or a noble story, the emotional glow, the spiritual thrill--all this lies outside our scope of examining machinery (76:7).

This same quote was used by Burton (13:261).

Dora V. Smith (75:202-03) and Dorothy Dakin (21:380) cry out against the futile practice of so many teachers expending their energies on fruitless grading instead of the more positive activity of developing reading interests.

Mirrielees (49:319-21) states book reports are used as a grading device--a practice she disapproves.

In "Are We Teaching Our Children to Cheat?" Fowler refers to the pupil's desire for grades on book reports as one of the reasons for cheating (31:28-30).

The problem of grading the book report is too closely related to the problem of the fabricated book report to discuss them as features entirely isolated from each other. Accordingly, the subject of grading the book report will again receive some consideration in Appendix A where attention is given to the prevalence of the fabricated report.

Summary of Chapter IV. The five reasons given on page 54 for assigning book reports have been refuted by numerous citations from articles written on the subject. Most of those who write on the subject of outside reading who have been cited in this chapter, agree that (1) there are methods of reporting that can be used as an aid in developing lasting reading interests in the pupils; (2) certain activities carried on in connection with reading books helps develop discernment in taste; (3) some composition activities related to literature have a practical value; (4) it is sometimes desirable to determine if the reading has been done; and (5) pupil progress in a reading program should be evaluated. In all the literature studied on the subject, not a single article has been found in which

the author gives more than very limited endorsement to the formal written book report as an aid in achieving these goals: several have been cited who believe the formal written report has adverse results on the pupil in-so-far as reaching the above goals is concerned.

CHAPTER V

A FAILURE: THE FORMAL WRITTEN BOOK REPORT

Thus, it has been shown that book reports are required by most teachers from their pupils in secondary language arts classes, and that correcting these papers is, because of teacher workload, a serious problem. Also, the value of meticulous correction of large numbers of papers has been challenged by no less an authority than the National Council of Teachers of English. Some authors raised considerable doubt as to whether it is possible to evaluate the pupil's understanding of what he has read. Several authors question whether it is possible to grade the imponderables of a reading experience. Since part of the problem of grading book reports hinges on the fact that children report on many books the teacher has not read, the possibility of limiting their reading to a list is roundly condemned. All book lists that received any endorsement were found to be lists running from several pages to being booklength themselves. Many of the authors recommend careful guidance rather than unaided aimless wandering in book selection as a help in developing quality in taste, but none recommend the limiting list.

Since book reports are used with almost all outside reading programs, the literature relating to this outside reading was examined. Outside reading is wholeheartedly

approved in the literature. By some it is considered the most important part of the English program. The list of eleven purposes of this program from Dora V. Smith (75) indicates the reason for the general acceptance of this program. The literature indicates that formal written book reports have long been an adjunct of the outside reading program.

In Chapter IV the various reasons for assigning book reports were discussed. At least a sizable portion of the writers on the subject reject each claim made for the formal book report. The basis for contending that some of the claims are held is based more on negative statements than on positive ones. For an idea to be worth repeated refutation, those making the denials must have reason to believe the idea is held by a large enough number of people to be worthy of refuting.

There was a problem of definition in Chapter IV: the term "book report" did not always mean the same to all people. Elizebeth Sloat (73) and Eric Johnson (42) endorse book reports as achieving many of the goals other writers claimed they did not reach. Because these two writers when they speak of book reports mean the conduct of a wide variety of activities centered on reading, not formal book reporting, and with the greatest emphasis on guidance, not grading, we can correctly conclude that they are not endorsing the same thing so many others are condeming.

Sloan and Johnson are as critical of the formal name-the-author-and-title, give the climax, why-I-liked-the-story type of book report as is anyone else. They no longer use it. They have sought through the introduction of variety to improve their programs.

Sister Mary Lorraine (72), cited on page 64 of this study, gave unqualified endorsement to the use of book reports. Following this approval, she stated that the problem was not whether book reports should be used, but whether the right kinds of book reports were being used. To her, the stereotyped book reports and others that do not evoke critical thinking are failures. They do not aid in achieving the desired goals of the outside reading program.

The formal written book report is not an aid to the outside reading program. Up to this point, many references have been cited as to why children should read and why an adult should have developed lasting reading interests of good taste. Are we doing this? The answer is "No, we are not." Formal book reports, the almost universal adjunct of the program aimed at reaching this goal, are failures.

Many citations have been made in previous chapters citing book report failures in specific areas. In this concluding chapter quotations are cited that concern this very basic and general conclusion: The formal written book report does not aid in developing lasting interests in good

books. There are those who go a step farther and express a belief that the formal book report is negative in its results because of pupil resentment, but since this study has had as its focal point to determine if the writers of the professional literature believe the formal written book report aids in achieving expressed or implied goals, conclusions regarding this possible negative result are left to be drawn by the reader.

As proof that the present and recent reading programs have not been succeeding in developing good reading habits in a large percentage of the people, one need only examine the findings cited by Dushane (28:703) in an editorial in Science. He found cause for alarm when he compared the percentage of people in the adult population of America who, in 1956, answered "Yes" to the question, "Do you happen to be reading a book at the present time?" with the percentage who answered "Yes" to the same question in 1937. The figure in 1937 was 29%; by 1956 it had dropped to 17%. A figure quoted by Asheim (5:3) relating to the answer to a similar question in 1947, about half way between the two dates cited by Dushane, was 21% answering "Yes." This indicates a steady decline in adult reading during these twenty years. From 29% to 21% to 17% is cause for concern if all the good things cited about the desirability of developing wide and lasting reading interests are true; and many observers have found reason to endorse the practice--none has been found who condemn it.

To continue Dushane's observations, "The statistics give evidence of a grave cultural inadequacy and an even greater cultural decline" (28:703). He says this because he holds that books play an indispensable role in the transmitting of the ideas that hold a civilization together. It is a matter for general concern (or alarm). Dushane concludes, "Whether or not Johnny can read is one thing. Whether or not he does when he grows up is another. The answer apparently is: seldom" (28:703).

It is not intended to imply by the above figures that book reports have been contributing to this decline in reading in the adult population of America. It is to illustrate that such a decline does exist and to an extent that is causing some concern. The figures cited above by both authors correspond to or are from the American Institute of Public Opinion. Asheim paints a somewhat gloomier picture than the first glance at these figures reveal:

> When we realize that the 'reading' being reported here covers any kind of simple identification of black marks on white paper we must acknowledge that reading in its fuller sense, reading as defined by Mr. Heckscher's paper (cited on page 31 of this study), must be even more limited than these figures show (5:3).

The unpopularity of book reports with pupils is quite generally recognized in the literature on the topic. This raises the question, "Is it possible to build a love of some activity by trying to develop that love through a thoroughly disliked activity?"

Writing on this subject for High Points, a publication of the New York City school system, Irving Carlin comments:

> One of the devices commonly used to encourage reading is the book report. A customary technique is to draw up a list of criteria and provide a book list and then a due date. In actual practice this becomes a chore to some pupils who comply by merely copying or paraphrasing the advertising 'blurb' (14:54).

Alma Vanek discusses in her article "Book Reviews with a Purpose" the problem of pupil dislike of book reports as being an indication of the failure of the program. She remarks:

> We can readily understand the first remark, ('I like to read but I don't like to prepare a report of what I read.') because we adults wouldn't enjoy our reading so much if we had to think of planning a review of the books we read (81:38-39).

To avoid this stigma, she has developed group methods in which the class reads and discusses around a central theme.

Stalder and Davenport in an article entitled "Book Report Tests Increase Reading" published in the Catholic School Journal discuss the use of commercial tests over the use of formal book reports. In their opinion the tests are valuable because ". . . the adequacy of the test cannot be fully grasped until the book itself is read, preferably by a person who has lost his dread of reading a book because he must write a report on it" (78:35). They accept the prepared tests over the formal book report because they feel the latter has too many drawbacks to be of help in a reading program.

Hook considers the problem of the book report failing to achieve its goals of stimulating pupil interest in reading important enough to bring it up twice in his book The Teaching of High School English. Under a discussion of outside reading he states, "Nearly all students quietly detest a traditional 'book report day' on which each is expected to discuss his book in accordance with some creaking formula" (40:33). Under a discussion of evaluating outside reading he says, "'Book report days' are still among the most detested in those schools where students must make written or oral reports according to rheumatic formulas" (40:86). (Hook does not consider the oral book report as any improvement if the same formulae used in the formal written report are applied to the oral one.)

Burton comments in The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals:

> Class activities carried on after or in connection with reading have much to do with students' approach to reading and attitude they develop toward it. The venerable tradition of book reporting is still very much with us though the book reports may take forms different from the book-name the author-what is the setting-list the main characters-briefly summarize the plot-how I liked the book routine which usually wastes the time of both teachers and students. Often students tend to view activities following reading with distaste rather than anticipation. Teachers might profitably evaluate these activities to decide whether they are igniting or short circuiting interests in reading (12:42).

Burton firmly believes the formal written book report is a waste of time to both teacher and pupil. If such is

true, it could hardly be achieving any constructive goals. At the time he made the above statement, he was editor of the English Journal.

C. E. Lapp describes in her article "Creative Book Reports in Junior High School" how she revised the stereotyped book report by adding a personal evaluation scale and a list of suggestions that would require creative thinking to lessen the stifling effect of the formal book report. She has the following to say regarding the use of the formal book report:

> Generally speaking from the student's point of view, the reporting of books he has read falls into the category of 'busy-work'. . . . although the teacher knows that book reporting should involve creative experience for the junior high school student, oftentimes the book report is recognized as a 'curriculum necessity' and is accepted in the stereotyped form of a synopsis.
>
> Undoubtedly there is educational merit in the summarization and classification skills inherent in typical book-reporting techniques which are such an important part of the language arts curriculum. Yet the very name 'language arts' implies creativity should not be stifled in any area within an arts program (43:337, 338).

The author includes in the article methods of making book reports creative and interesting.

Jerome Carlin, in his article "Your Next Book Report . . ." states, "While every device to encourage the love of reading should be employed, compulsory requirement of a specific number of books to be read and reported on continues to be essential in the English curriculum" (15:16). He follows this statement with the following comment on the professional literature of today:

> Our professional literature has published some sense and some silliness in suggestions on book reports. On the silly side is the book report which takes the form of drawing a loom such as Silas Marner might have used. If the picture is a supplement to a genuine study of what the novel has to say about people and life, it is welcome indeed. If it is the picture of the reader's entire response to the book, it is all too little to be accepted (15:16).

Carlin gives no approval, however, to the formal book report. Contrariwise, he lists and describes twenty-eight possible book report forms followed by thirty-four guide questions to aid in stimulating interest in the program by giving the pupils a variety of activities. Many of his suggestions are conducive to oral and group activities (15:17-22).

In discussing attitude on the part of the pupil, Beauchamp warns, "Deadly dull summaries of books are not necessary and ought to be avoided" (9:149). He advises the use of a wide variety of techniques which stimulate rather than stultify the building of reading interests. Attitude is believed to be important in building future reading habits.

In her article, "A New Kind of Book Report", Sister Mary Edna writing for the Catholic Journal states that because of the extreme dislike of book reports by her pupils coupled with her goal of stimulating good wholesome interest in leisure reading, she developed a new type of reading evaluation (71:46A).

Brother John of the Cross (11:304) speaks of the book report as being one of the two most unpopular events with pupils in school. He makes no effort to interpret the results of this unpopular status.

In discussing "Conflicting Assumptions in the Teaching of Literature," Carlsen compares the modern view with that of the traditionalists. He believes the modern view which stresses interaction between the reader and the material read brings much better results than that of the traditionalist who possibly develops a hostile reaction in the pupil by the application of external pressures (16:382-86, 424). The traditional book report prepared according to a formula and due every so often during the year is an external pressure poorly motivated. Carlsen concludes that literature must be taught as an art because to do so "is to develop -- from the inside -- something deeply personal" (16:424).

Hatch takes a similar viewpoint. He says in part:

> Unfortunately there are some schools and teachers oriented to the 'mental discipline through forced reading school of thought' and they are pointed to as examples of 'teachers with standards.'. . . Proof of the failure of this method is the lack of readers of good literature among high school graduates (38:334-335).

In his article in The Authoritarian Personality, T. W. Adorno states that if a child is forced into a surface submission to parental authority, he develops hostility and aggression which are poorly channelized (3:482).

Surface submission to teacher authority to complete a book report by a certain date may have the same poor result.

Irma Dovey states that at one time her book reports were sheer drudgery for all concerned. She made them come to life by adopting methods that deviated far from the formal book report (24:71).

Goldstein believes that book reports given according to an outline prepared by the teacher "often dims the zeal of the student who wants to read but does not relish the idea of putting down on paper main characters, author, publisher, setting, plot, ending, etc." (33:303). To "dim the zeal" is opposite from the result which we are trying to achieve. It loses ground instead of gaining.

Inhelder comments on the usual dislike pupils have for formal book reports. This was one of the main reasons she developed a varied approach to reading evaluation (41: 141).

Lazerson in commenting about his reasons for trying a different approach stated, "Many book report lessons have an effect other than that intended by the teacher. Student reports are often dull and stereotyped" (44:52). He does not interpret what he means by effects other than intended, but speaking immediately about the negative terms dull and stereotyped leads one to believe the other results are negative.

Mercantante speaks of the resentment by pupils of some aspects of the formal book reporting program as causing apathy on the students toward the program's goals (47:54).

Mersand (48) looks upon the formal book report as the bete noire of the English class. An object of fear or aversion repels, drives one away from the activity. The unpopular black beast again is looked upon as a detriment to the secondary English class.

The last paragraph quoted from Mirrielees (49) on page 67 indicates the negative influence she believes certain book report practices have upon the pupils' outlook toward reading. Summarily, she states the stereotyped book report makes reading a task, having to make a report causes some to select books on the basis of how easy they will be to make a report on rather than on the basis of personal interest or growth.

The citation from the English Language Arts (52) refers to the study that leaves the pupil cold or hostile to literature, leads to closed doors, rather than enlightenment. Student resentment, according to this statement, does develop a negative attitude toward an activity.

Thus the opinions are that the formal book report, which is supposed to aid in developing lasting reading interests, is not doing so. Actually, many writers on the subject believe book reports, because of the dislike pupils

have for them, produce negative results in the outside reading program.

As part of the report of the Committee on Individual Differences sponsored by the National Council of the Teachers of English, Kathryn Mansell comments as follows on college freshmen's reading habits:

> The fault must be with us and not with them. Why do we teachers insist upon old methods and old content and the same responses from everyone? We repeatedly require stupid formal book reports in spite of the realization that they kill all joy in the book itself (54:132). (Italics mine.)

This pupil aversion to book reports is a reason frequently cited by writers on the subject for the failure of the outside reading program where the formal written book report is still in use.

Sister M. Celine, O. S. F. believes there are two factors in developing a successful reading program. In her article "Books to Meet Many Adolescent Needs" published in The Catholic Journal she states:

> We educators know the importance of reading and guidance and we are cognizant of the influence of a good book. Furthermore, nothing magical or profound is required in stimulating or guiding the reading interests of an individual. Only two factors are of prime importance: first, to know youth; second, to know books (70: 58).

She gives numerous suggestions for fulfilling the various needs of youth through reading and thus having a successful reading program. The formal written book report is not among the suggestions. Perhaps she knows youth well enough to know how they react to a very distasteful assignment.

Guy Wagner and Max Hosier express a thought similar to that expressed by Sister Celine. In their article "When Reading Seems Important" they state that successful teachers get their children to become better readers by getting the children to feel reading is important. Fifty suggestions are given to aid in accomplishing this goal. The required formal book report is not included (82:545-51).

Dorothy Leggitt stresses the necessity of a variety of patterns or activities to be followed if any kind of book reporting program is to be successful. In addition to the written report, she urges that oral and pictorial reports be included (45:217-19).

In her discussion of the outside reading program in her book English in the Small High School, Gertrude Stearns states emphasis should be on reading, not reporting. Ideally, no report would be expected (79:243-44). She considers the formal written book report to be a failure because "The knowledge that a report must be written actually interferes with the pupil's enjoyment of reading, and cheating is rampant where such systems are used" (79:243).

When speaking of the ineffectiveness of reading under compulsion as is the case in programs where the required formal book report is used, Thomas C. Blaisdell says that those who have read because they must to complete course assignments, not because it was a pleasure, have not developed the reading habit. In encouraging reading, he believes

the enthusiasm of the teacher, availability of materials, and careful guidance are much more effective as stimulants than required assignments (10:391-402).

D. G. Schubert in his article "Inviting Book Reporting" concludes that, "Although some form of book reporting seems necessary in recording and evaluating pupil progress in reading, the foregoing need not incur negative student reaction" (68:265). He further states that a book report can be a rewarding experience of sharing with others; it can be a valuable social experience through oral reporting. It is the program limited to the formal book report that he condemns as not aiding in the development of sound reading habits (68:265).

Norman E. Barnes in his article "On High School Book Reporting" published in the National Education Association Journal states:

> The English teachers in our Tulsa system generally encourage students to spend more time on reading books rather than reporting on them. We don't want book reports to become a penalty for reading (7:166).

He describes several ways of stimulating reading. He believes a variety of methods of book reporting will avoid the danger of the book report becoming a penalty.

In the following statement, Theresa M. Form summarizes quite well the lack of respect the writers of the professional literature have for the formal required book report as a stimulant to the outside reading program:

> I suppose there is a place for the formal written book report but, frankly, I avoid them like the plague. I have heard many say that one of the things that made them hate books as pupils was the inevitable book report. Besides they are the dullest things for teachers to read! There is so much dishonesty connected with them, too. I don't want to penalize a student for reading. I want him to enjoy reading and then do something enjoyable in connection with his reading. The last thing I want to be, when it comes to reading for pleasure, is a policeman. That's fine in history, but not in this delicate weaving of a reading program (30:171).

By using a variety of reporting methods and activities, she avoids what she considers the failures of the formal written book report.

In 1935 the National Council of Teachers of English stated its view as to the futility of reading programs where certain requirements and deadlines have to be met:

> Freedom in choosing what to read should be accompanied by freedom to choose whether or not to read, for the reading habit cannot be economically developed through compulsion. The school does best not to require any particular amount of reading, but to surround the pupil with reading stimulations and opportunities. By so doing, they (students) will become accustomed to occupying free time with books and magazines, perhaps even to the point of making time to read. 'There is abundant evidence that pupils will read more, now and hereafter, under stimulation and guidance than under specific requirements.' For an outside reading program to be successful, prescription must be practically abolished (51:21).

This leaves four unquoted authors cited in The Education Index under the topic "Book Reports" whose writings do pertain to book reports on the secondary level. These articles make no direct comments on the value of the formal written book report. Accordingly, any conclusions drawn would be very close to pure supposition. Their titles indicate one thing: Their authors use a method other than

the formal book report for evaluating and stimulating students' outside reading. The articles are:

1. Alm, Richard S. "Buzz Sessions about Books" (1)
2. Gulick, James. "Method for Organizing Classroom Book Reading" (36)
3. Noble, Donald. "Television Script Book Reports" (55)
4. Parstock, Bennett J. "The Newest Medium for Book Reports" (58).

Concluding summary. Several points exist on which we find a consensus among those who write on the various aspects of the outside reading program and its related book reports. It is agreed that a person should develop wide and lasting interests in good literature. It is agreed that the outside reading program in the secondary language arts program is an essential part of this goal of developing readers with discerning tastes and that the formal written book report is an almost universal adjunct of this outside reading program. Specifically stated goals the formal book report aids in accomplishing, except in a negative sense, are rarely found. It is as if the formal book report is a tradition. It is used today and tomorrow because it was used yesterday and two and three generations ago.

The consensus of those who have written on the subject of book reports is that formal written book reports do not succeed in advancing the outside and individual reading, the programs of which they are usually a part.

The limited approval they do receive is received only when they are a part of a program where many different techniques are used. The stereotyped program used over and over received no approval. When used alone, the formal book report does not aid in developing a wide or lasting interest in reading. It does not help in developing readers of discerning choice. It does not prove that the book on which the report is written has been read. Nor is it a legitimate device for grading the pupil's reading comprehension. There are competent authorities who doubt that the imponderables of a reading experience can be graded. Many authors on the subject believe that there is strong pupil aversion toward the formal book report; and because of this aversion, they believe we fail to develop reading interests in our young people that are solidly enough established to carry over into adulthood. One of the bases of these conclusions is the frequent references to the poor reading habits of adults despite the efforts of schools to graduate people with a love of reading.

This general agreement about the value of book reports has been established by examining the opinions and observations made by the most respected authors in the field. These authorities are people connected with education: most of them are or have been teachers of English. No effort has been made to construct a selected bibliography to support a given viewpoint. The only reason no wholehearted

support has been cited for the formal book report that is still in wide use, is that not a single unequivocal endorsement was found.

There is general agreement that progress in the outside reading program should be evaluated; but the evaluative techniques used should be secondary to the main goal of developing reading interests and tastes, not ends in themselves. All other activities must be supplementary to this one main goal. Since the formal written book report does not aid in this major objective--but may actually obscure it--and since it is not an aid in achieving the secondary objectives cited above, little can be said in defense of its continued use.

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A P P E N D I X A

APPENDIX A

FABRICATION:
A POSSIBLE NEGATIVE RESULT OF FORMAL BOOK REPORTS

The body of this report has dealt with negative statements regarding positive claims for the formal book report. Basically, the statements were to the effect that formal written book reports do not aid in promoting a lasting love of good literature. Not only do the authorities think the formal book report hinders the reading program, some believe that the formal written book report encourages cheating among the pupils. Several of the authors cited in the body of the text have touched on this, but some writers discuss it specifically.

The literature on the subject. At various points throughout this report, the matter of formal book reports being made by various methods of circumventing the necessity of reading the book has entered the discussion. Whether or not this practice of fabricating book reports without reading the book, or in some cases even after the book has been read, has an adverse effect on the reading program is a moot question. Authors have stated that they devised methods other than the formal written report to increase interest and reduce the number of stolen passages, copied reports, and copying of book jacket blurbs.

Two authors expressed the belief that the reason so many reports are fabricated is a lack of understanding on the part of pupils. When one considers the workload of the average English teacher as cited on pages 21-22 of this study, it is plausible to assume the teacher, under the duress of an overly burdened day, does not find the time to explain the objectives fully enough to avoid the lack of understanding on the part of his charges. These two writers discuss the problem on widely different levels: one in elementary school and one on college level.

In her discussion of book reports on the elementary level and guidance in a reading program, Martha Dallman stresses the importance of helping the pupil plan the report. If he does not know how to do this, writing the book report becomes an unpleasant task, and making the report often has a negative effect on the pupil's development of good reading habits (22:54).

James Rundle, a college professor, states he became alarmed at the number of stolen passages he was receiving in college papers, including the work of graduate students, submitted as book reports, book reviews, or collateral reading. After making a careful analysis of his program, he concluded the students did not know how to write a truly critical paper on a piece of literary work. Professor Rundle developed a program in which he stressed how to do these papers instead of placing all the emphasis on getting

them done by a certain date. He found that once the students knew how to do what was wanted, there was no need even to warn against plagiarism. It was no longer a problem (64: 438-40).

A School Sister of Notre Dame stresses the impossibility of making one program such as the formal written book report, fit all students within one class, let alone two or more classes. She cites the various methods of fabrication such as the report on the half-read book, the copied report, and the report on the movie in lieu of having read the book. Elastic programs with variations in procedures, she believes, will cut this problem down (67:87-88).

Gordon, editorializing in The School Review, comments on teachers' attitudes towards Master Plots: "It seems to this editorial writer that when such collections are successfully used by students to obviate the purpose of book reports, the book reports are not worth doing in the first place" (34:191). The teachers' main concern was that these plots would be copied by students. Some teachers even wanted these books placed on very restricted circulation to prevent them from falling into the pupils' hands. Gordon further states that thoughtful teachers have for years been speaking against the type of book report that could be faked by so easy a method. Changing to programs with a student interest basis, he believes, will make such things as Master Plots an asset to the activity.

In the National Parent Teacher in an article "Are We Teaching Our Children to Cheat" Fowler cites book reports as a source of cheating. He states in part:

> . . . cheating often flourishes, unchecked and undetected by teachers in oral and written book reports. Children to whom reading a book is a painful task resort to copying book jacket blurbs, searching out printed book reviews, or even borrowing a report from a friend. And in dozens of classrooms these reports obviously cribbed from other sources, pass unchallenged by indifferent or overly trusting teachers (31:29).

Some would insert "or overworked" in the last sentence.

Dorothy Dakin, when referring to the practices around the formal written book report, says, "All experienced teachers agree that pupils cheat readily when writing such reports and that they are not above reporting on the same book year after year" (21:380). Her solution to this would be for the teacher to spend more time on guidance and encouraging reading rather than dissipating energies reading and grading reports.

That there is a large amount of fabrication going on in the programs requiring formal written book reports hardly seems questionable. To continue a program that practically invites such a practice is not defensible. This does not mean we have to abandon our program of developing individual reading; nothing in this study comes to that conclusion. It does mean that the teacher who uses the formal written

book report must rebuild his reading program with the development of reading interest as the central objective rather than the heavy emphasis on a certain number of formal written reports due on certain days through the school year.

A P P E N D I X B

APPENDIX B

A STUDY OF THE BOOK REPORTING PRACTICES IN THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS OF THE YAKIMA DISTRICT

Originally it was intended to include this appendix in the body of the study as an example as to what is happening in junior high school classes in a typical district, but no criteria were found to establish whether or not the district studied was typical. Furthermore, a study of the literature on the subject of the formal book report led me to believe that more would be accomplished by determining the consensus of the professional writers in this area on the subject than would be by the addition of one more limited survey of practices within a specific district. For this reason, the result of the survey is included in the appendix as illustrative material as to practices and results within one district. After the survey of the book reports and of the teachers was completed, too many inadequacies remained in the information for it to be a valid basis for a thesis: Nevertheless, the information garnered in the two surveys is as valid a basis upon which to draw conclusions as is frequently used by some of the professional writers on the subject. The problem of the fabricated book report receives heavier stress in this appendix than it does in the main body of this study because it was originally

intended to base the study close to this one specific topic. The desirability of covering the more general topic precluded this. However, a study of this survey re-enforces the conclusions of the study of the literature: The formal book report is not aiding in achieving the goals of the outside reading program of secondary English classes.

The district. Three junior high schools serve the Yakima district. During the 1960-61 school year 2714 pupils attended these schools. The population of the district is approximately 50,000. A relatively representative cross section of American society is represented therein.

The junior high school English curriculum of the district. Each English teacher in the junior high school system is supplied with a copy of the district published "Junior High School Curriculum Guide." In addition to a potential load of about one hundred written assignments annually if the syllabus is followed, the syllabus for each grade requires six book reports per year (eight for honors or pilot classes). This is the minimum total for written and oral reports. One of the procedures suggested under written work in the syllabus is "written book reports." The "Guides for Giving a Book Review" in Tressler follow the "give-the-title, author, setting, describe-the-main-characters, tell-one-or-two-important-incidents" routine that is roundly criticized in the professional literature (80:199).

A critical scrutiny of some representative book reports. In order to determine if reading interests were being stimulated, or if development in grammar was being accomplished in the outside reading program, the book reports from four English classes were examined. Deciding whether or not the book had been read presented an immediate and difficult problem. How can a teacher tell from a short report when the teacher has not read the book? This question still has not been solved. By comparing the book report and the book it was apparent that an excessively large amount of the reports were fabrications. The following table shows what was found on this point:

Obviously fabricated	106
Fabrication suspected but not proven	82
No reason to suspect authenticity.	172
Unable to locate book	40
Total	400

This first step eliminated about one-half of the reports from being worthy of any further consideration. As a consequence, no effort was made to examine the reports or to evaluate their use as tools for developing proficiency in language skills.

The most common tactic used in fabricating a book report in the papers examined was to copy or paraphrase the book cover blurb. By counting the books in several sample sections that had book covers, it was determined that

approximately 27% of the books in the library serving the school attended by the classes writing the reports examined, were covered. In contrast to this, of the 360 books located that had been used in making the reports, 181 had covers. Apparently the book cover does attract the pupil.

Reproduced below are two examples of the use of the book cover blurb in making a book report. The book report is followed by the jacket blurb. The first example is by a student of high ability. It displays more sophistication since the report is not a verbatim copy of the blurb. Some sentences, however, are identical. The second example, that of a low ability student, displays little imagination. There is evidence that could lead one to believe the high ability student had actually read the book but because of a lack of understanding, as cited by Rundle in Appendix A, or a lack of self-confidence, the pupil has used the blurb as a crutch in writing the report.

The report covering the book A City for Jean was done by a ninth grade student of above average ability. It illustrates more originality in using the book report than does the second example, Outcast Stallion of Hawaii, which was done by a below average pupil. In each case, the book jacket blurb is followed by the student's report.

> People were what Jean cared about and in her desire to serve them she chose a career in humanity. When she stepped from college right into the job of social investigator, she was afraid to explore the seamy streets of the great city and enter constructively into the life

of her sixty families. Before she had time to take a deep breath Jean found herself holding the big, fiery D'Adamo family together and helping bewildered Willy Merlin to emerge as a happy, useful man. She caught an eleven-year-old boy's illness just in time, steered a brilliant young girl toward achieving her life's ambition, and managed to prevent a young couple (not too unlike her own Dick and herself) from wrecking their marriage on hidden rocks.

With warmth and concern, plus a maturity she didn't know she had until the moment she needed it, Jean brought all these people the help they required to become, instead of public wards, self-reliant, self-respecting families. All over the city, doors and confidential records -- and hearts -- opened to Jean in the course of her extraordinary job. What she learned about people, and about love, gave her rewarding new insights into life, especially her own romance with Dick.

The following is the book report on A City for Jean. It will be noted that the first paragraph of the student's report bears a strong similarity to the one from the book jacket.

A City for Jean

The time is in the middle 1900's. The place is at a welfare agency in New York. The main characters are Jean Abbott, Dick Wilson, Mr. D'Adamo and his family, Bill and Betty Fowler, and Mr. and Mrs. Willy Merlin.

Jean was a college graduate, then twenty-one in the story. People were what she cared about, and in her desire to serve them she chose to be a social investigator in welfare work. Before she hardly got started, Jean found herself holding the big, fiery D'Adamo family together and helping hilariously bewildered Willy Merlin to become a happy useful man. She caught an eleven-year-old boy's illness just in time, steered a brilliant minded young girl toward achieving her life's ambition, and managed to prevent a young couple (not unlike her own Dick and herself) from wrecking their marriage. What she learned about people, and about love, gave her rewarding new insights into life, especially into her own romance with Dick Wilson.

The D'Adamo family was one of Jean's sixty welfare families. There were seven children and one boy eighteen who was supposed to support his family because Mr. D'Adamo was too weak and old to work. He blamed his son for not supporting the family by getting a job (which was hard to get). Jean fixed it all up by helping him get a suitable job and prove to his family that he was capable enough to make some of his own decisions.

Bill and Betty Fowler were a newly wed couple who found themselves slowly going into the hole. Jean helped them with advice and encouragement which helped Bill get a good position in a business firm and brought the two back together.

Willy Merlin was a happy-go-lucky, middle-aged, poor man who was another one who couldn't get a job. With Jean's help he was finally able to have his own cafe.

I enjoyed this book because I learned how poor people really have to live and that by being kind and helpful to them is all they need to get another good start in life.

The following is from the book jacket of Outcast Stallion of Hawaii. It will be noted that in some cases the student report is not even a good job of copying. There is nothing in the student's report that could not have been garnered from the book jacket blurb.

Pirate, the great palomino stallion, was an outcast. Because of a partly destroyed hoof, he could no longer work as a cow pony. Turned loose on the huge Kukaiau ranch, it was only a matter of time before he would wander into the high country and be killed by the lack of water or wild dogs.

But Bart Holiday, fresh from the mainland and beset with his own problems of making a place for himself on the ranch, was stubbornly determined to save the horse by doing the impossible--making a shoe for the injured hoof.

The story of the long struggle of trial and heartbreak error is set against an exciting and unusual background in which Bart learns to play his part in round-ups and brandings, as well as luaus and surf boarding.

The following is a student report on Outcast Stallion of Hawaii.

> Summary: Pirate, a great palomino stallion was an outcast. Because of his partly destroyed hoof he could no longer work as a cow horse. He would of have driven off from the farm and killed by lack of water or by wild dogs. But Bart Holiday, fresh from the mainland and beset with his own problems, made a home and saved him from doing the impossible without a decent hoof.
>
> So Mr. Thompson, the ranch owner, helped them both out.
>
> The story ended when bart had to go back to the East. And they both parted.

Other methods used to fabricate the reports were to copy a few paragraphs from the book, to read the first and last chapter of the book and base the report on this limited reading, to make a report on a picture book, to turn in a report twice on the same book, or to have reports by two students on the same book and find too many identical statements in the two reports.

Under the heading "Fabrication suspected but not proven" would be such as the report from a poor student who suddenly writes in even, flowing sentences, using polysyllabical words, and with spelling and punctuation correct, but no book review or jacket blurb is found to prove what appears probable. Also when a ninth grade pupil reports on a fifth grade book, the possibility is raised as to whether or not the pupil is reporting on the same book year after year. Some reports were simply so brief and vague that it was impossible to draw any relation between them and the books they purported to cover.

A survey of English teachers' practices in the junior high schools in the district. To gather more information about the program in the district on the outside reading at the junior high level, a questionnaire was circulated among those teaching English at that level in the district. The fact that thirty-five of the thirty-seven teachers answered the questionnaire indicates the high level of interest in this problem.

The following briefly summarizes the answers received:

All teachers stated that they do have an outside reading or free reading program in which pupil participation is required. By thirty-five teachers checking four and five as being used to a limited extent, or predominantly as was indicated by thirty of the thirty-five, it is clear that the formal written book report is the most commonly used method in the system of evaluating outside reading.

EXHIBIT I

Questionnaire to gather information pertaining to a thesis entitled "An Evaluation of Book Reports in the Yakima Junior High Schools as a Method of Stimulating Outside Reading."

I. Do you have an outside or free reading program in your English classes? If No, Why? Yes 37 No___

If Yes, is student participation required? Yes 37 No___
If Yes, how many books is each pupil required to read per year? (Answers varied from 6 to 12)

II. Which of the following activities best describes the activity most frequently performed by the pupil after he has read the book?

0 1. No report required, written or oral.

11 2. Oral report

3 3. Class discussion

10 4. Brief written book report which includes title, author, and short comment on the book. How many required of each pupil during the 1960-61 school year?____

20 5. A written book report in which the pupil gives the title, author, and does some type of composition work about the characters, plot, story, or some other topic related to the book. How many were required of each student during the 1960-61 school year?____

2 6. Other (Please describe)

III. How do you evaluate the required written book report? (I know we do not write or talk about the work we do not correct, but I am trying to do so in the light of its being impossible to evaluate all the written work in English classes.) Check the following one that most nearly describes your procedure.

0 1. No evaluation

7 2. Check mark entered in grade book to indicate the required book report made but no evaluation of it nor returning it to pupil.

(Exhibit I, continued)

11 3. Some required book reports graded, others not. Returned to pupil? Yes___; No___. If Yes, what percent? ___%

9 4. Required book reports all thoroughly evaluated both as to content and mechanics. Returned to the pupil? Yes___; No___.

0 5. Other (Please describe).

*Six stated reports were thoroughly graded but not returned to pupil. They did not want them to be re-used.

IV. Do you ever find evidence of a written book report being fabricated? Never 2; Occasionally 17; Frequently 12. (No answer 2)

V. If you require written book reports, about what percent are never turned in? ___% (Varied from 0 to 50%)

VI. Do the students write the book report in class under the teacher's supervision or on their own, usually outside of class? In 10; Out 25. (Two indicated both)

What was the average number of pupils per English class that you taught in 1960-61?___ (Varied from 22 to 35)

How many English classes did you teach during the 1960-61 school year? ___ (Varied from 1 to 5)

Number of students each teacher has in English classes:

All reports graded and returned (9 teachers)	Reports graded, made available to pupil but not returned (6 teachers)	Part of reports graded and returned to pupil; others not (11 teachers)	Reports not graded or returned to pupil (7 teachers)
33	30	70	30
70	33	70	60
34	66*	128**	30
32	120	64	136
60	99	165	68
62	62	105	32
64	410	60	99
22		64	455
64***		25	
442		64	
		60	
		875	

Section IV
Degree of fabrication indicated

Never	2
Occasionally	17
Frequently	12
No answer	2
	33

Section V
Percent of reports not turned in indicated by teachers

0%	3
1 - 5	4
6 - 10	10
11 - 15	3
16 - 20	4
21 - 25	5
26 - 30	1
31 - 40	0
41 - 50	1
over 50	0
	31

Two did not answer
*Deleted thoroughly before answering item 4, Section III.
**About 50% of papers graded. These were made available to pupil but not returned to him.
***Stated on questionnaire, "I did this year--my first, but others say it is not advisable because children would copy."

Section VI
Reports written in or out of class

In	10
Out	25
	35

Two teachers indicated both methods used.

It will be noted that there is some degree of relationship between total load of English students and whether or not the papers were graded. The eleven teachers who graded only part of the papers had more pupils than did the fifteen who graded all the book reports. Also the seven teachers who did not grade the reports at all had more pupils than did the nine who graded and returned all the reports.

The table indicates the concern about the fabricated report. Over one-third of the teachers queried were concerned about the frequent fabrication of reports. They verbally expressed the belief the ends of the program were being thwarted by this practice among the students. Also those who indicated they knew book reports were occasionally being prepared by devious means believed such practices were making the program of doubtful value. Actually, most of the teachers who did not express some serious concern about the results of this practice were those who indicated they had developed various activities to use in connection with their outside reading programs as means of evaluating the progress and of stimulating reading interests.

As indicated by Section VI, several teachers have tried to eliminate the fabricated report by having the reports done in class on a specific day. These were not generally considered as satisfactory. They were written under the pressure of time and thus were hastily thrown together. Under such conditions, little critical thinking was reflected in the report.

Section V illustrates how frequently the "required" reports were not completed. Three teachers indicated all reports were turned in. A survey made in this area would possibly reveal a close relationship between classes of high ability and a high percentage of the reports completed. Also high percentage of completions came from classes where there were many types of reporting activities. Some teachers indicated a rather high percentage of reports were completed because if the pupils did not complete the report detention was assigned until the report was completed. Others achieved the same results by holding the threat of a "Poor Work Slip" being sent to the parents. These teachers were also concerned about the frequency of the fabricated report. Approximately fifteen per cent of the "required" formal book reports were never completed.

This survey was made by going to each teacher and helping him fill out the questionnaire. By this method, twenty-five of the teachers were contacted. Letters were mailed to the other ten. Again the degree of interest in

this area is illustrated by the fact that eight of these ten letters were answered. Through these personal contacts, considerable information was gained regarding how the teachers felt about this problem. Book reports are not checked as thoroughly as would be liked because of the time factor. Many teachers stated that the problem of book reports was the most pressing and confusing problem they had to deal with in their English classes.