

Tools for Learning

SUSTAINING BOOKS—THEIR PLACE IN THE CLASSROOM

IOLITA ERSLAND

"I'M AFRAID NO MEALS," said Christopher, 'because of getting thin quicker. But we *will* read to you.'

"Bear began to sigh and then found he couldn't because he was so tightly stuck, and a tear rolled down his eye, as he said,

"Then would you read a Sustaining Book such as would help and comfort a Wedged Bear in Great Tightness?"

"So for a week Christopher Robin read that sort of book at the North end of Pooh and Rabbit hung his washing on the south end—"¹

Because Christopher Robin was aware of the fact that Pooh would get himself into situations of great tightness, Christopher was forehanded enough to have on hand a supply of sustaining books from which to choose for purposes of comfort. Fortunate is the teacher in a classroom who can turn to a shelf of "that sort of books" in moments of great tightness. For certainly in any roomful of children there are times when, like for Pooh, the middle of things occupies so much space and becomes so big that no end is in sight nor is one end aware of what is going to happen to the other one. Now that is a somewhat confused analogy but it does say what I want to say. Every classroom should have a group of sustaining books.

For times when a group of children feels the need of sustenance or when the teacher feels that her pupils need to be sustained or for any other time, there should be a small imperative room library. And at the same time there should be a period for using them. No teacher need feel this is an impractical suggestion, for the number of books in this selection may be so small that it could be built in a very few years at little expense. And every teacher, if she cancels her inhibitions about the literature period being frivolous, and her fear that it takes too much comparative

time in her program, can find the time for making use of these books. For the sake of "keeping one's mind from sinking or giving way" and for "buoying up" spirits (Webster's definition for sustain) let there be readily available for wedged moments, reading matter light enough to be enjoyed while it is read and yet solid enough to stay with you long after. And let there be time for it to be used.

I am convinced that each group should have its own books. I repeat this firmly because so often the central supply in the common library is considered adequate for the whole school. The common library has its definite place surely but let a few standard supporting books belong personally to the fourth grade or the fifth grade or the sixth. Nor does this group of books take the place of the room library. It is just that they must be sure to be in the room.

Now what shall belong on this key shelf or permanent collection? Two kinds of books must be there—poetry books and read-aloud books. The one label, *read-aloud books*, would cover both kinds since poetry books are precisely read-aloud books. There are many people, however, who would consider poetry books as among the first which could as well be borrowed from the library. I maintain strongly that they should be the first, or among the first, books for a group of

Pupils should be able to have books close at hand, where they may be thumbed constantly. In this month's introduction to "Tools for Learning," Iolita Ersland, Fourth Grade Teacher, Experimental School, University of Iowa, points out that while a school library affords a good choice of suitable books for children, it is the classroom that should provide a nucleus for the "read-aloud" and "over-again" type of book so dear to the hearts of the small fry.

¹ Taken from WINNIE THE POOH by A. A. Milne, published and copyrighted by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.

children to own and have constantly accessible.

Furthermore, I am in favor of having as many poetry books as it is possible to acquire, that is, it would be quite desirable to have as many volumes of poems, some in duplicate, as there are children so that at some periods everyone can be reading poetry—with motivation and not compulsion of course. That may be going too far, you say. But certainly let there be a generous number of collections. I know I am not overemphasizing the poetry period when I recommend this. It is only that enjoyment of poetry has to be like having the coffee pot on the stove all day long.

From experience I know children will use these books. They will know where to find a certain poem in them. For any grade some or all of the following will be desirable though there are other titles equally as good; *Here We Come A-Piping* for the very young, but liked by the older; the two delightful Milne poetry books; *Now We Are Six* and *When We Were Very Young*; *Silver Pennies* and its sequel, *More Silver Pennies*; *Sung Under the Silver Umbrella*; *My Poetry Book*, appealing to all ages; *Tirra Lirra* and *Complete Book of Nonsense* for the mirthful; *Rainbow in the Sky*, a good middle collection; *Under the Tent of the Sky*; and *This Singing World* for the slightly older or the teens.

With encouragement children in any grade above the second will read these collections themselves. Briefly the best encouragement is, "Find a poem that you would like to have me read to you." Later it may be, "Find a poem that you would like to read to the group." Poetry should be heard and not seen, but it should be well read always and enthusiastically but simply presented.

The other part of the sustaining library is made up of the read-aloud books. These are the ones which the teacher herself reads to the children—the books which she feels that they must not grow up without hearing. "Wouldn't you feel terrible if you thought your child would grow up without knowing *Wind in the Willows*? Wouldn't he have been cheated?"

It is that sort of book which is to help fill out the shelf. Most of them are standards, standbys, the over-and-overs as they have been called. There can't be any mistake about including them because they have been loved

for years by children. Often they are much too difficult to read for the child to read himself. Perhaps that is a good thing for because of the difficulty they become something to be shared by teacher and pupil. When they are read aloud, Alice and Pinocchio, Toad and Rattie, Rikki-Tikki and Winnie-the-Pooh become shared friends and a bond for the one period in the day when "there is no pull" as one teacher put it.

There will not be many of this sort for there is not, even in a maximum allotment for reading aloud, time to share more than a few each year in each room. The most satisfactory way to choose titles is to read many and select with the help of lists those books which seem to fit a particular group of children. It is satisfying to read many any way you put it for there is no more delightful occupation.

These books sound so important. How can I know that they are the sustaining kind? I think there is an answer.

When a four-year-old says, "I was scared, as scared as Andrewshek when the green goose came to get his feathers and ate all the *Poppy Seed Cakes*"—

When a first grader chides a classmate by quoting from *Peter Churchoomouse*, "Fuss, fuss, fuss—Well, I'll be twitched!"—

When the boys in a fourth grade group returning from an excursion walk along chanting, "Five little crocodiles, Swinging in a tree" from *Tirra Lirra*—

When a third grade boy, a problem child says of *Just So Stories*, "Oh, please, Miss Brown, don't finish that book, and if you do, begin it over again."—

When incidents like these occur you can be sure that something which has been read to them has stayed with the children.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Association for Childhood Education: *Sung Under the Silver Umbrella*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1935.
- Austin, Margot: *Peter Churchoomouse*, E. P. Dutton & Company, New York, 1941.
- Brewton, John E.: (ed. by) *Under the Tent of the Sky*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1937.
- Clark, Margery: *Poppy-seed Cakes*, Doubleday, New York, 1924.

- Fyleman, Rose: (collected by) *Here We Come A-piping*, Stokes, Philadelphia, 1937.
- Grahame, Kenneth: *Wind in the Willows*, Scribner, New York, 1923.
- Huffard, Grace T., and Carlisle, L. M., and Ferris, Helen; *My Poetry Book*, Winston, Philadelphia, 1934.
- Kipling, Rudyard: *Just So Stories*, Doubleday, New York, 1912.
- Lear, Edward: *Complete Book of Nonsense*, Duffield, New York, 1927.
- Milne, A. A.: *Now We Are Six*, E. P. Dutton & Company, New York, 1927.
- : *When We Were Very Young*, E. P. Dutton & Company, New York, 1924.
- Richards, Laura E.: *Tirra Lirra*, Little, Brown & Company, Boston, 1932.
- Thompson, Blanche Jennings: *Silver Pennies*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1925.
- : *More Silver Pennies*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1938.
- Untermeyer, Louis: *This Singing World*, Harcourt, Brace & Company, New York, 1923.
- : *Rainbow in the Sky*, Harcourt, Brace & Company, New York, 1935.

LANDS & PEOPLES

A distinguished series of books designed to acquaint young people with the vital areas of the world

Russia, China, India, Australia,
Turkey, Oceania, Dutch East
Indies, Mexico and South America.
Others in preparation. Ages 10-15.

\$1.00 each.

Send for descriptive circular

HOLIDAY HOUSE

72 Fifth Ave., New York 11

This new book —

Developing the Secondary School Curriculum

by J. PAUL LEONARD

President, San Francisco State College

Ready in May

Prob. pp. 608

Prob. price \$3.50

Gives students and professional workers in secondary education an overview of the development of the secondary curriculum in the United States up to the present time.

Covers all aspects of the reorganization of the secondary curriculum.

Offers specific suggestions on methods of improving the curriculum through the conventional subject matter approach or through basic reorganization into larger units of instruction without regard to specific subject matter lines.

A basic text for courses on the secondary school curriculum, and reference or collateral reading for courses dealing with secondary education.

If you teach one of these courses, write for an examination copy.

RINEHART & COMPANY, Inc.

formerly Farrar & Rinehart

232 Madison Avenue New York 16

Copyright © 1946 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.