

Students Write...

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Student Participation

As students, our lives are affected by many factors. What and how we are taught become very important to us, since we are soon to embark upon college. However, some teachers do not realize this, and thus frustrate the student when they make certain decisions on the manner of teaching.

I had an English teacher who requested the students' opinion on what they should learn. This made me feel a certain ecstasy, for someone was asking my advice on something pertinent to me. My reply was that students should be given time to read as many books as possible so they could build their vocabulary, increase reading comprehension, and have a chance to learn more about life. To my dismay, I was told that to have such an idea of augmenting reading comprehension I must have the mind of a kindergartner, that vocabulary would improve through communication with other students.

This response did not seem logical to me, for I could not comprehend how one could

increase his vocabulary by communicating with the other people in the class, unless the teacher happened to be an intellectual. Also, I was under the impression that the ability to read well, and the knowledge gained by it, would be one of the student's most valuable assets when he reached college.

Well, the teacher kept us busy that semester—decorating bulletin boards, memorizing plots, and *printing* all essays. It is very difficult for me not to feel an inward sense of unachievement when I view one semester of possible learning being lost forever. I become even more depressed when I realize that a teacher had decided it was more important to impress her colleagues by the attractive bulletin boards in her room than to answer the needs of her individual students.

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Growing

As I grow in maturity, the need to exert my independence is also growing within me. I feel that I am becoming mature enough to make my own decisions, and I resent someone else trying to make up my mind for me. My parents are the figures of authority with whom I conflict most often. They let me make my own decisions, as long as they don't conflict with their own.

They were pleased when I chose to go to UCLA because they were afraid I was leaning toward Berkeley and "radicalism." My father has stated that he would not allow me to go to Berkeley, period. I can understand his concern, because he works with Mario Savio's father and they have discussed student behavior fairly often. But I do resent the fact that he completely ruled out Berkeley as a school without

even talking to me. He seemed to believe that he unquestionably knew what was best for me.

I tend to look upon adult figures of authority as looking down on me because I have not reached the magic age of 21, as though, until then, I don't know enough to think reasonably. I try to make most of my decisions by looking into myself and deciding what is right for me, and not the people around me. Selfish perhaps, but I am all I really have or really know, so my decisions have to be made with that in mind. My parents or anyone else cannot own me, and I resent the attempts to run my life.

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Lonely Rider Blues (and Other Sorrows)

Cycle-glide through
Blood-sun west
Where
Yellow-evil orb
Glints down
Speaking mutely
Of slow death
And all memories
Cool and floating gulls
Are washed away
On the move from
Where-were-we
To
How-far-is-it
Child of sixteen
Eyes of eternity
Clings
And
Loves
But
I'll be back later
Give you a ride

Yeah
Morrison and
Shaman's blues
All floating
Above
The room
Acid anthem odysseene
Bike throbs
Breathing hot
If you had a soul
What would you be?
To graveyard's staring statuary
Acid eyes weep
"You're such a fool, Mother
I hate you so much"
So aimless, pointless
You'd be damned
If you weren't already
Life, endless
And
I can't find my way home.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: My poem, "Lonely Rider Blues," etc., deals rather indirectly with "participation to maturity." It's about the bikers, large motorcycle groups like Hell's Angels, Satan's Slaves, Iron Titans, Straight Satans, etc., whom I have gotten to know over a few years. At first glance, their life, especially to a young person whose judgment is still immature, seems glamorous and uninhibited. This is because they have broken away from society and created one of their own. Actually, in the end, this life is very wasted, and the people end up nowhere. They are finally bound by their almost animalistic desire for total freedom, which was unattainable as soon as they joined a group. Then they're in a group, stuck with a way of life that they now know isn't the way at all.

BREAKDOWN: SEPARATE MEANINGS

"Cycle-glide . . . slow death"

The first part shows the silent-burning-desert feeling of desperation. The lost-battle, about-to-die feeling of someone in a situation he

wants no part of. "It's too late now, man. You'll have to run with the pack. Or the pack will run you down."¹

"all memories . . . washed away"

The cool, smooth-flowing, before kind of life is slowly fading into oblivion, because this new, dire, desperate, scratching-for-a-foothold life in the group is now all-important, for survival depends upon the quickness of your mind.

"On the move . . . How-far-is-it"

Lack of goals and directions: riding aimlessly, nowhereing maybe till you die of it.

"Child of sixteen . . . Clings and Loves"

"Someone who has been exposed to too much, much too often, often too soon,"² now clings to a maybe form of security: as a small-town girl may cling to a just-passing-through biker.

"But I'll be back . . . Yeah"

¹ Taken from another biker poem.

² From another poem.

Someone, a biker, who's not coming back to her and knows it, not because he doesn't want to come back—he just knows he won't make it.

"Morrison and Shaman's blues . . . room"

A song (Shaman's blues) by Jim Morrison (of the Doors). It's a desperate song, gives the feeling "Now, man, or you may never get the chance again." With the usual perverted Morrison undertone, the song is heavy badness. Saying it floats above the room makes it seem easy compared to what's happening to everybody else.

"Acid anthem odysseene"

My own special no-special-meaning mind-phrase that just seems to fit in right there.

"Bike throbs . . . What would you be?"

Bikes are alive. They have to be. But they never answer. What would they be if they had souls? Don't they?

"To graveyard's . . . hate you so much"

A biker whose mother died when he was young. "Why did you leave, mother? You left me all alone."³ Now he hates her for deserting him and letting him ruin his life as he knows he has.

The last part is obviously showing someone who realizes that he can't hack the life he's dumped himself into, and then realizes that he can never get out.

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³ From "Biker Blues."

A Parable of Bridges

There once was a young boy who had a great love for the sea. So great was his attraction to it that he was determined to build a great sailing vessel in which he would live his life and experience everything there is to experience. Having an eager, open mind but lacking practical skill he sought out one who could help him fulfill his plan.

It is said that the boy went through several attempts, yet only half a boat or none at all was the usual end. There seemed always to be a flaw in the one from whom he sought help or a flaw in the manner in which help was given. There was the one who thought himself the greatest builder of boats and who stood aloof giving lofty instructions to the boy. One denied the boy his own part in the building of his vessel, wanting to do it for him. There was another who urged the boy to forsake his foolish, youthful plan and to return to those things that had always been taught, to learn what others had been learning for ages. Perhaps the worst was he who turned his back in disgust and impatience because of the inquiring, imaginative nature of the boy.

Such clouding of his once shining idea by these attempts and failures caused the boy to lose his eagerness for everything. Worse still he came to feel that his search was useless, and he wanted to quit.

This is how things were, so the legend says, when the boy met the old man. On the edge of the ocean was the old man who worked with great but determined effort on an uncompleted vessel. The boy both curious and indifferent asked the old man what he was about. The man said all his life he had been trying to build his vessel yet as he grew older his work got harder. He pleaded with the boy to help him finish it. At first the boy helped for he had nothing else to do. But then he grew more involved. And he began to listen when the old man showed him how to fashion the vessel. Some say the old man was rich in wisdom as he was in age, for he sometimes showed the boy but was careful to let the boy do it for himself with only his guidance.

Mistakes were times for the old man to teach the boy to tolerate imperfection and failure and to learn from it. The old man never ruled the boy, each was unto himself—one giving knowledge to the other. Respect guided their conduct toward each other. The old man never felt the finished vessel was the aim but only that he and the boy should work when they felt the urge to and enjoy the labor for its own sake. The boy worked freely and loved it for the man allowed the use of any tool in any way; there were never rules of use or custom to be broken. In this way the boy used his greatest

tool, his mind, to think of new ways to use tools to achieve what he desired.

Had the boat never been completed, it wouldn't have mattered. It was incidental to all that had been accomplished in making the boy and the old man wise in more than just worldly matters.

But the boat was finished and the boy and the man were pleased that they had made a thing that would serve them both in the end.

The man-child eager to try out his knowledge, to give his knowledge to others, set sail in the vessel. Refusing an invitation by the boy to go with him, the old man, so the legend goes, was last heard of fashioning another vessel on the beach while a small boy watched from a distance.

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The Curve of the Iron Horseshoe OR The Abbey Road Conspiracy

Let me tell you, life is a triptych;
the universe is a trinity.
We all see things in threes:
birth, life, death—
liberal, conservative, the middle road,
we are all one.
Yet three reflections we see in the pool:
god the changecoat,
god the schizophrenic,
and god the dirty old man.
Man.
Man is a dirty old word.
If god is as dirty as we,
god is not god,
but you and me.
If god is our life and our love and our breath,
then what is there to justify death
but ourselves?
As three is but a number,
so we are but ourselves.
All our fate is but a tape;
likewise is our wealth.
The cruel night wind is frosty;
beware of your health.
Three spires on the pitchfork,
its head to the sky;
the sickle knows not
what is right or wrong;
trod not, brave cook
the grappling hook;
but the curve of the iron horseshoe
is but a single, bent prong.
Follow its wayward rainbow
and don't be long.
Come over and around

not under and through.
Bypass the ways
of the other blue jays.
Be different.
Be better.
Be you.
Tarry not long
on the castiron grin,
lest you be crushed to earth
like an old lizard skin.
Begin:
there's a flaming red goat
on a throne far away.
The shoe of his hoof
bends a different way.
Sharper than steel,
the horn on his foot;
he ploughs his dead fields
enough to draw blood.
The trees in his garden
are cigarette butts,
and many's the time
he's torn out your guts.
His ice-skating rink
is hotter than fire;
nude skaters are pink
with suppressed desire.
Glass shards pierce their feet,
strapped on to their skates;
they skim the burning ice
until it's too late.
The ice gets too thin,
and under they go
to the inky, hot waters
below;

where fluorescent beasts
and undeclared wraiths
meet the living dead
and their jaws gape!
But it is the unlucky
who escape.
As they surface for the air
which isn't there,
a flotilla of ships
mows down the bare.
The ghostly armada
lacks rudders and masts;
they're powered by Boreas'
demoniac blasts.
The ships, there are two;
from them sprouts a bulk,
like two dead trees
and upon them a hulk
like an egg and a giant and a tree
all in one,
and inside it's all hollow
like a cannon-gun.
A demon-tavern
is playing inside;
at the opposite end
a ghostly head rides.
Its lips bared in anguish,
straight-ahead staring,
upon its head
a bagpipe is blaring,
played by a spider;
it rides on a platter
perched upon the giant's
grey matter.
A bizarre parade
swings around in a trance;
on the platter round the bag
weird partners dance.
A ghastly green bishop
leads a bloodless nude,
while a leather-clad bird
says something lewd.
This vision is painted
on a picture by Bosch,
to whom I will say
thanks very much.
Perhaps he sensed,
or partly saw,
humanity dominated
by its own corrupt law;
the young being led
like puppets on string
to slowly but surely
abandon their thing;

being ground to shades
of their sad grey elders,
as they're listlessly led
to the knives of the gelders.
Something inhuman
is living amongst us,
grinding youthful zeal
into impotent dust;
this thing called the system
was meant to protect us,
but now it looks like
it'll finally wreck us.
The kraken arms reach out
and strangle our schools;
they dilute with lead
the golden rules.
The darkening shadow
threatens to smother;
it makes us fight wars
and hate one another.
It vilifies faith,
and turns law to crime;
it makes people old
and devalues our dime.
We used to have just enough
but now we have too much power;
renounce this tower of horn and hide
or *we* will be the ones devoured.
For power's the system,
once our trusty machine,
which has since run wild
and become something obscene.
If we should give in,
you'll hear power gloat;
we shall be delivered
to the behemoth's throat;
the horseshoe shall be twisted
to fit the hoof of the goat,
and we shall skate on steaming ice
and be mowed by the boat.
But the horseshoe is tough;
its dusky arch is strong,
and soon you will ride it
if you do no wrong . . .
Remember Christ of long ago?
Was he god? I do not know.
At any rate, he lived his life
blunting power's crooked knife;
they killed him on his native turf,
but he lived to ride the horseshoe's curve;
today, you still can find our lord
on the dashboard of a Ford,
hands uplifted, plastic smile
as you do over seventy miles.

But *you* won't be smiling unless, I'm told,
you chose to ride the Abbey Road,
east of night and west of day
over the iron passageway.
You'll know when you get there, after hours,
when your plastic Jesus bursts into flowers,
and a little while after, it won't be long,
you'll hear your car burst into song.
Just follow the iron horseshoe,
I don't know what you'll find;
although the way is long and hard,
you may find peace of mind.
At worst, you may find still more power,
multiplied beyond belief in a celestial tower;
a cynical, deranged Jesus may be round the bend,
crucifying himself mockingly again and again.

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i talk
you talk
he talks
she talks
we talk
you talk
they talk

i don't hear
you don't hear
he doesn't hear
she doesn't hear
we don't hear
you don't hear
they don't hear

let
us talk
let
us hear

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Students should participate,
On issues affecting their fate
Or later they find,
In their impinged-upon mind,
Conflict that fills them with hate.

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me,
e'm me!
Now, you can't conform me
to your ideas.
i will listen,
when you won't
and hear.
i will look
when you do,
yet I shall see
what you can't
you talk . . .
incessant babble,
i wish to speak for me,
my ideas.
Not to be ignored,
Nor ignoring.
Can you say the same?
I'm not the perfect mold,
You wanted.
i want to listen
to my fellow man,
and hear . . .
comforting him,
guiding him,
when all is not right,
Can you say the same?

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