literature. Further, while major changes in the curriculum had apparently already taken place by the time of Anderson's 1964 survey (only 12 of her titles were on the 1907 list), changes in the curriculum have continued to be made to these mid-century changes; only 18 of the 43 books on Applebee's 1989 survey are on Anderson's 1964 list, and only 16 of the 45 books on the NEATE survey are on Anderson's list. Finally, many major characters in the most frequently assigned works of fiction are now adolescents—as in *The Pearl* and *Romeo and Juliet*—and many of the top 40 or so titles for grades 7-12 are now suitable for students with moderate reading ability.

To judge by these lists, there does not seem to be any strong evidence for the existence of a canon in high school literature programs over the past century, if by a canon we mean a group of literary works remaining essentially unchanged from decade to decade. We do not yet know how much the content of contemporary secondary school anthologies has changed over the century, but the surveys noted here clearly indicate a cultural change over the course of the 20th century in the major works now read in the schools. Perhaps results from future surveys of contemporary anthologies will help us determine whether this cultural transformation is reflected in these texts as well.

Nor is it clear that a majority of our students today read the same works. Almost 800 titles were listed by the 322 schools in Applebee's survey. The 132 teachers in the NEATE study named 720 unique titles, only 328 of which were mentioned two or more times, and only 12 of which were mentioned by 20 or more teachers. The results of the NEATE survey, especially, suggest that one teacher's literature program may be quite different from another's, if not from teacher to teacher in a school, then at least from school to school.

**Questions to Consider**

Although we should rejoice that

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**What a 1st Grader's Parent Needs to Know**

**FRANK M. BETTS**

In 1987, E.D. Hirsch Jr.'s *Cultural Literacy* quickly became the center of debate over what our children should know. You either hated it, or you loved it. Now the first two volumes of The Core Knowledge Series, *What Your 1st Grader Needs to Know* and *What Your 2nd Grader Needs to Know*, edited by Hirsch (Doubleday, 1991), purport to offer the "fundamentals of a good 1st (or 2nd) grade education."

Highlighting the fundamentals of language arts, geography, world and American civilization, fine arts, science, and mathematics, both books are compact, with fewer than 300 pages of text, pictures, and brief suggestions for use. They are being mass-marketed to parents and schools through bookstores and supermarkets.

To parents, the books recommend discussing the material with their children "20 minutes per school day in the academic year." In homes where time to read and access to literature is limited, the anthology of poetry, stories, and essays, though small, is useful. To educators, the books offer only a skeleton for a core curriculum. The content will be familiar to most teachers, with many old favorites from children's literature. The information is intended to supplement, not replace, classroom materials—to be used "about 40 to 50 percent of students' instructional time."

If these recommendations are followed, the series might be useful. However, Hirsch seems to imply a questionable cause-and-effect relationship between this core curriculum and student achievement. Two other implicit reasons for a balanced core of shared knowledge are at least as significant: the importance of continuity of instruction in a mobile society and the need for a shared foundation of accurate data from which to make meaning. The former makes the case for a common sequence of content area coverage, the latter for factual content. This does not exclude the need for thinking skills, although readers might infer this from the absence of discussion about how to use the materials most effectively.
American high school students now tend to be exposed to a predominantly "Americo-centric" literature program insofar as major titles are concerned, my analysis of the changes in these top titles raises a number of questions for English teachers and coordinators (Stotsky 1991a). I raise these only as questions because I believe that university researchers should not presume to tell high school educators what they should or should not do.

Intellectual content. First are questions about intellectual content. Are we in danger of losing our poetic heritage, the influence of the language and ideas of the 19th century British and American poets who have been among the most gifted writers of the English language? Further, are today’s students sufficiently exposed to adventure stories or works of humor to stimulate strong reading habits? In addition, are our most able readers studying works of fiction and nonfiction as intellectually complex and as challenging in vocabulary as students 100 years ago studied? Or have we "dumbed down" the curriculum for all students in a legitimate effort to accommodate an extremely broad range of students? The brevity and the vocabulary in many contemporary works raise this concern. Conversely, are we patronizing many less able readers and denying them an opportunity to become acquainted with longer, more thematically complex, and lexically challenging works?

Moral content. No less important are questions about moral content. Have we distorted or arrested character development in our students by providing excessive exposure to juvenile protagonists in the works they read? Should more characters of intellectual and moral maturity be available as role models in the literature they read? My concern is not the absence of moral issues (most contemporary works contain moral issues) but the absence of morally mature characters in contemporary works, of all ethnic and racial groups, "white" and "nonwhite," and of both genders.

For example, I’ve been unable to find any teacher who assigns Maggie’s...