



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1981 Volume II: An Interdisciplinary Approach to British Studies

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## Introduction

American education is a kaleidoscope of opportunities, and no theme, however unifying it may appear at first glance, can prevent the many colors from bursting forth. Nor should it, for a false uniformity would harm both teachers and students. The following material reflects this diversity and the intention on the part of seminar leader and Fellows alike that diversity should be enhanced rather than hampered by the classroom experience.

Britain remains a nation important to Americans. The language in which these units were written, and for the most part the language in which our teachers interact with their students, is an inheritance from England. So, too, are many of our literary judgments and certainly our literary classics. But our history too, at least as a discipline, is drawn more from British models than from any other nation, for canons of evidence as employed by the professional historian are, after all, much the same as those of the lawyer, and these in turn were acquired from English common law. Thus the seminar was a wedding of two disciplines deeply rooted in the British tradition, and in approach and content it sought to explore how British history and literature could be made more meaningful to American students today.

The result was several exciting discussions, new insights (for seminar leader fully as much as for the Fellows), and new strategies for the teacher. We had this in common, as well as mutual respect and a good spirit of fun. This spirit can be seen in all these units, ranging from pirates to the Beatles, taking up along the way how history as process may be shown through building a model cannon to the plans of the nineteenth century or how the Western world created stereotypes of Asian cultures and thus shaped foreign policy toward China. We discovered again the seamless web while realizing once more that in the end all of human life—and all the means by which we lead, persuade, goad our students to learn, and they in turn persuade and challenge us as teachers—is also utterly unique.

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