



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1980 Volume I: Adolescence and Narrative: Strategies for Teaching Fiction

Introduction

When ten of us met around the seminar table every Tuesday, we came from different disciplines and different school environments. We counted three foreign language teachers in our number, one social science teacher, and six instructors of English; the latter group included a twelfth-grade teacher, an eighth-grade teacher, and a teacher whose work is with high-school seniors reading on an eighth-grade level.

Our differences didn't end there. Several units in this volume reflect the work of those who see fiction as an excellent way of teaching other things. For others, fiction is the message and not the medium, the teaching problem and not the solution. How do we get our students past the view that the novelist's art isn't part of life?

No seminar title could hold together a group so diversely composed. Indeed, many things were seen in our collectively chosen name; some of us concluded, from the books we read and discussed together, that adolescence and fiction are made for each other while an equal number of us decided that adolescent protagonists most often represent some other difficult human condition. What could—and did—bind us together was our common conviction that good fiction matters, that it is moral in the widest sense, and that it has everything, therefore, to do with our lives. Implicit, too, in every unit in this volume is the belief that teaching fiction can be no less moral, and no less necessary, a calling.

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