



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1982 Volume II: Autobiography

American Personalities: Autobiographical Sketches

Curriculum Unit 82.02.06
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Introduction

Students in ESL classes are often introduced and made aware of only the grammatical structure of the new adopted language, which they are compelled to learn in order to be part of their new environment.

Teachers often dedicate the majority of time to the study of differences between the native and the target language, as was the case when I was first exposed to English. Spending a great deal of time on the structure leaves little or no time to introduce the student to famous Americans, cultural heredity, noteworthy inventions and historical contributions which have made this country what it is.

In my case, after a couple of years, I could construct complete sentences, position adjectives, form adverbs, but had no knowledge of who B. Franklin was, of what A. Lincoln had done to alleviate slavery and why Martin L. King Jr. was regarded as a leader.

This cultural emptiness has incited me to include, in my teaching of ESL, various mini-units which allow the foreign student a glimpse of what and who has made America.

This unit will aid me in introducing the students to American personalities whose fame and contributions have left, and continue to leave a mark in American history.

This unit is designed for foreign students. The reading level varies from approximately 3.5 to 5.0; therefore, it is imperative that I choose short excerpts, preferably adopted versions, which expose the students to who the person was, biographical data, and his contributions to our nation.

I intend to use this unit with high school students. The material needs to have a high interest level and an intermediate reading level. The majority of the activities concentrate on vocabulary words, reading at loud, and classroom discussion. These activities will allow the student to expand his vocabulary, increase his reading level and express himself in English.

Teachers may find it appropriate to use this unit in other ESL classes or developmental English classes, since it could be easily upgraded by selecting longer excerpts or requiring the students to read the entire work.

This unit could cover an entire school year, but for my purpose it will cover a short period of time, since other

aspects of the language have to be taken into consideration.

Upon termination of the unit, the students will have a compact view of who some famous Americans are and why they are regarded as such.

Objectives

The main objective which my unit seeks to achieve is exposing the foreign student to American personalities. I find it necessary to give the foreign student the opportunity to learn about Americans who have played an important role in the unfolding of America.

Secondly, I strive to increase students' reading level and vocabulary usage. To meet this objective, the students will be required to read selections from autobiographical writings, discuss and comment on the reading. Each reading will be supplemented with vocabulary lists. Quizzes, spelling games, usage of words in complete sentences, and defining the newly acquired vocabulary words, will allow the students to use the new words.

Another objective will be to let the students look into the voice, the feelings, the sentiments, family relationship, ambitions, contributions and achievement of fame on the part of the character.

The ultimate objective will be to let the student write his own autobiography. Each reading selection will be followed by a writing section. Part of this section is autobiographical in nature. At the end of the unit a compiled autobiography of each student will result.

Strategies

This unit will concentrate on selections from B. Franklin, M. Twain, A. Lincoln, Booker T. Washington, F. Douglass, Maya Angelou, Maxine H. Kingston and Martin L. King Jr.

The amount of time spent on each selection depends on the complexity of the reading, its length, the students' motivation and ramified activities.

Course of Study

English Language Services, Inc., *Scenes of America* . Collier Macmillan International, Inc., 1973.
Benjamin Franklin: "Three Great Puffy Rolls"

Summary The selection informs the students about who B. Franklin was, his family, his ambition to be a sailor, his relationship with his brother, his background as a printer, his becoming a political figure, his inventions and discoveries and his contributions as a writer.

B. Franklin was a self-made man, rebellious at times, ready to take advantage of the situation to benefit from it, but he has left a mark in American history which immortalizes him.

His diplomatic abilities, his ability as an initiator, his adventurous personality, his fame as an inventor and his literary contributions are to be explored and admired.

Activities Vocabulary, character's data, introduction and study of proverbs.

1. The students will be given the following vocabulary list. They will be required to define the words and use each word in a complete sentence.

autobiography clever journey
apprenticeship encourage row
seek secret pier
diplomat master exhausted
statesman trade awkward
roles assistant foolish
appearance

Classroom activities Spelling game, vocabulary quiz

Spelling game: Divide the class into two teams. A word from the list is given. Beginning with the group's leader, the word is spelled, if misspelled, the other team gets a chance. The team that spells it correctly gets a point. At the end the team with the most points wins.

Vocabulary quiz The students are required to spell the words, define them and use them in complete sentences.

2. Reading: Read the selection at loud. Individual students will be asked to read. The reading is paraphrased. Upon termination of the reading, give the students the following questions as homework to be done written. These will serve as a base for discussion.

- A. Where and when was B. Franklin born?
- B. What won B. Franklin fame?
- C. Who published the second newspaper in the U.S.?
- D. What motivated B. Franklin to write for the newspaper?
- E. What was Benjamin's brother reaction when he found out about his writings?
- F. What kind of relationship existed between him and his brother?
- G. When B. Franklin got to New York, why did he decide to move on to Philadelphia?
- H. After a rough voyage, he reached Philadelphia. What was the first thing that he did?

3. Proverbs: B. Franklin also wrote an almanac; *Poor Richard* . In this almanac, he included proverbs.

Give the students a definition of proverbs and a list of proverbs. (See attached list) Read the proverbs in class. Let the students interpret each proverb. Discuss what is the truth and/or the advice that each proverb illustrates.

Activity After the students are familiar with the proverbs, each student is required to choose four proverbs from the list given and write a native language proverb equivalent to the ones chosen.

4. Writing: Topics to be researched

A. B. Franklin and his time.

B. B. Franklin was a printer, inventor, author, statesman, and diplomat. What were his contributions in each field mentioned above.

Autobiographical writing

A. My voyage to the United States.

B. My arrival in a new country.

C. My first impressions of my new home.

English Language Service, Inc., *Scenes of America* . Collier Macmillan International, Inc., 1973.

Mark Twain: "Steamboat A-Comin'"

Summary Recalling a pause of his adolescence, M. Twain introduces us to a period in his childhood when becoming part of a crew on a steamboat was the dream of all the young boys who lived in the town of Hannibal, Missouri.

His success in becoming one of the best known American writers, makes him an important personage in American literature.

He too, has contributed immensely to the portrait of how people lived during the 1800s along the Mississippi shores.

Activities Introduction to the importance of the Mississippi River as a mean of transportation. Account of M. Twain's life as a young boy and his ambition. Discussion and writing.

1. Trace the route of the Mississippi River. Become familiar with the states it crosses. Let the students discuss what are the advantages of a navigable river, related to commerce, communication and traveling.

2. Reading: After the reading has been completed, ask the students to write a short summary.

3. Discussion: A discussion will follow touching upon the following questions.

A. Who was Samuel Clemens? How did he come about to choose the name M. Twain?

B. What was the predominate ambition among the young boys of the town? What factors

contributed to this ambition?

C. A clear picture is given of the town before and during the docking of the steamboat. What changes are noticeable? What feelings are created by the coming of the steamboat?

D. What were M. Twain's dreams?

E. Why did M. Twain run away from home?

F. During the time spent with Mr. Bixby, and learning the art of piloting a steamboat, what hardships accompanied the ultimate success?

4. Writing: Topics to be researched

A. M. Twain and his life on the Mississippi.

B. The invention and importance of a steamboat

C. M. Twain's literary contributions to literature. Exploration of M. Twain's works.

Autobiographical writing

A. My native town-city.

B. My ambitions.

Grindell, Marelli, Nadler. *American Reading*. McGraw-Hill Book Company. N.Y., 1964.

Abraham Lincoln: "Lincoln's Autobiography"

Summary In reading part of his autobiography the students will discover the self-made president. He had no prominent family to shape his background. It was his strong will and the understood necessity to pursue an education which led him on.

His presidency was overshadowed by many conflicts.

Interludes of American history are included in his autobiography.

Activities Reading, Vocabulary-synonyms vs. antonyms, dictation, writing.

1. Reading: Let individual students do the reading as a class activity. Discuss and paraphrase it. Include the following questions as part of the discussion.
 - A. Describe Lincoln's childhood? How would you characterize it? Why?
 - B. How does Lincoln describe the schools of his days? How are today's schools and education different from those days?
 - C. Why can we say that Lincoln was a self-made man?
 - D. What kind of work did he do as a young man?
 - E. From the reading done or any other sources, how would you characterize A. Lincoln? Why?
2. Vocabulary: Give the students the following vocabulary list. Require the students to look up a synonym and an antonym for each word.

undistinguished

paternal

battle

labor

wild

assiduously

desirable

lean

coarse

wizard

Classroom activity Flash cards containing the vocabulary words are used. Each card has a word from the list. First individual students will be called to give a synonym for the word shown. The same thing will be done for antonyms. During the third step of the activity, the teacher will give

either a synonym or an antonym and the students will give the word related to it from the list.

3. Dictation: Dictate the following sentences. Two students will be asked to write the sentences on the board. As a group the class will correct the sentences. The class is required to correct individual papers. The dictation is collected and re-read for overlooked errors.

A. My father, at the death of his father, was six years old, and he grew up literally without education.

B. My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families-second families, perhaps I should say.

C. We reached our new home about the time the state came into the union.

D. Still, somehow, I could read, write, and add, but that was all.

E. During that legislative period, I studied law, and moved to Springfield to practice it.

F. I was losing interest in politics when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise aroused me again.

G. I have a dark complexion, with coarse black hair and gray eyes.

4. Writing: Topics to be researched

A. Lincoln's involvement in the Civil War. The reasons and the outcome of the Civil War.

B. Lincoln's presidency.

C. Lincoln's assassination

Autobiographical writing

A. My first day of school.

B. My personal description.

English Language Services Inc. *Scenes of America* . Collier Macmillan International Inc., N.Y. 1968.
Booker T. Washington: "Up from Slavery"

Summary We trace his life back to his birthplace, a plantation in Virginia.

As a slave, B. T. Washington tasted the injustice of not having a rootage. He didn't know much about his ancestry.

His pursuit for education led him to be a great educational leader. He became the organizer and later the president of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

Activities Reading, classroom discussion, vocabulary and writing.

1. Reading: Do the reading in class. Call on individual students to read and paraphrase it. As the reading is done, point out B. T. Washington's childhood, hardships, ancestry, eagerness to learn, his observations of slaves at the time of the Emancipation Proclamation, and his feelings related to the first day of school.

2. Classroom discussion: Supply the following set of questions.

A. What does B. T. Washington know about his ancestors? Why?

B. What hardships did he have to cope with as a boy?

C. What jobs did he have as a young slave? Why did he regard taking the corn to the mill as the worst job?

D. What feelings predominated before and after the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation? Why?

E. How did he get the name Booker T. Washington?

F. What contribution did he leave to humanity?

3. Vocabulary: Give the students the following words. In class look up their meaning. Discuss them. As homework let the students write a composition (free topic) using the vocabulary given.

emancipation free document

choose flax warn

reputation equal former

monument mill journey

plantation mistress contribute

ancestry freedom wealth

provide proud despite

victim result exist

protect

4. Writing: Topics to be researched

A. Slavery in the United States.

B. Causes and outcome of the Civil War.

C. Booker T. Washington's contributions in the field of education.

Autobiographical writing

A. My ancestors.

B. How I got my name.

C. My parents.

Marjorie B. Smiley, John J. Marcante, Frank F. Brown. *Two Roads to Greatness*. The Macmillan Company, N.Y., 1964.

Frederick Douglass: "A Slave's Beginning"

Summary: In his life as a black man, he was born as a slave, witnessed the mistreating of slaves, recognized the power held by learning, spoke out about the freedom of mind and body, and ultimately became the first person to occupy a place as a representative of the Negro.

Activities Reading, discussion, writing.

1. Reading: Let the students read the excerpt in class. Paraphrase it.
2. Discussion: Assign the following questions. Require the students to answer the questions in writing. Use the questions as the basis for a class discussion.
 - A. At the beginning, what is F. Douglass concerned with?
 - B. Why was it important to him to know his age?
 - C. How would you feel if you had no sense of when your life began? Why?
 - D. What does he know of his parents?
 - E. What is the reason that F. Douglass gave, why children were separated from their mothers?
 - F. At the end of the selection he writes ". . . I received the tidings of her death with much the same emotions I should have probably felt at the death of a stranger." Why does he write this? What feelings could be attached to this?
3. Writing: Topics to be researched
 - A. F. Douglass' contributions to the emancipation of slavery.
 - Autobiographical writing
 - A. The time and the place of my birth.
 - B. The death of a dear person close to me.

Maya Angelou. *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings* . Random House, N.Y., 1969.

The following activities cover page 1 to 10.

Summary *As a teenager, she faced the traumas of growing up in an unsettled environment. Shifted from her parents to her grand-mother's house to her mother's to her father's she overcame many ordeals. By being a dance instructor, an actress, the Northern coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a producer and a writer she has made her mark in history.*

Activities *Reading, discussion, vocabulary, writing.*

1. Reading: Let the students read the selection and paraphrase it.
2. Discussion: Starting with the following questions, carry on a class discussion.
 - A. What is the dream that she explores at the beginning of the reading?
 - B. Why do you think she's dreaming of being "white"?
 - C. How did she feel when she realized that she had wetted herself?
 - D. Why were they living with her grandmother?
 - E. How would you characterize her grandmother? Why?
 - F. What does she notice about her grandmother's customers as they come in the store?
3. Vocabulary: Let the students define the following words, and use each word in a complete sentence.
 - wiggle
 - rustle
 - kinky
 - squinty
 - cruel
 - nappy
 - inordinate
 - pew
 - persimon
 - insult
 - calamitous
 - supernatural
 - grumbles
4. Writing: Topics to be researched
 - A. What are Maya Angelou's contributions to our society?
 - Autobiographical writing
 - A. The most embarrassing moment of my life.
 - B. My neighbors.

Maxine Hong Kingston. *The Woman Warrior* . Vintage Books A Division of Random House. N.Y., 1977.

The following activities cover page 54 to 60—"My mother and father. . . . It must arrive safely or else my grandmother and I will lose each other."

Summary Enclosed in a family of immigrants, M. H. Kingston grew and unfolded. Her youth was ruled by the figure of her father's unpleasant memories of his native country. Her surroundings are part of a world left behind.

To read her work unfolds doors to the understanding of immigrants' life. Adaptability is a slow process. It is difficult to discard of who, what or where you came from and let in a new culture.

Activities Reading, vocabulary, discussion, writing.

1. Reading: Let the students read at loud the selection in class.
2. Vocabulary: Let the students compile a list of unfamiliar words. Make a list of vocabulary words from the students' lists. Look up the meaning. Use each word in a complete sentence. Write a composition using the vocabulary. Have a spelling bee.
3. Discussion: Analyze the reading.
 - A. How does her family background influence her life?
 - B. Why is it difficult for her to be a true American?
 - C. Have her parents become fully adopted to the American way of life?
 - D. Where, specifically, do we notice her parents attachment to the old country?
 - E. Compare and contrast the cultural customs mentioned with our American ways?
4. Writing: Let the students write a summary of the reading.

In writing comment on the cultural differences encountered in the reading

Autobiographical writing

 - A. My legacy to my native country.

Henry I. Christ. *Modern Short Biographies* . Globe Book Co. Inc., N.Y., 1979.

Martin L. King Jr. "I Have a Dream"

Summary *The determination of freeing his race has made him one of the greatest black leaders in fighting for "God given rights"—equality and freedom.*

Activities *Reading, discussion of Civil Rights Movement, writing.*

1. Reading: Let the students read the selection and summarize it orally.
2. Discussion: Discuss the reading. Briefly discuss the Civil Rights Movement-motivations, struggles, conflicts, outcome of the movement.
3. Writing: Topics to be researched
 - A. M. L. King Jr. and his struggle for equality.
 - B. M. L. King Jr. assassination.
 - Autobiographical writing
 - A. I have a dream.

Lesson Plan #1. Introduction to autobiography Benjamin Franklin

Objectives *To give the students a definition of autobiography.*

To introduce the students to B. Franklin.

Give the students a definition of autobiography. Briefly mention that an autobiography reflects a person's life. Most of the time it reports events in a person's life of major discontentment.

Introduce B. Franklin. Briefly talk about who he was, his accomplishments as a printer, inventor, statesman and diplomat. Follow the introduction with the filmstrip "Franklin, Benjamin-American Leader". Comment on the filmstrip.

Begin the reading. Read the selection aloud. Paraphrase and comment on it.

Assign the questions related to the reading, to be done written for the next day.

Lesson Plan #2 . Booker T. Washington

Objectives *To illustrate to the students a broad notion of slavery.*

To introduce the students to Booker T. Washington's life and how he achieved fame.

Show the movie “Out of Slavery”. The movie traces the history of the Negro in America from his arrival to the outbreak of the Civil War. It pictures slavery in the old world and outlines the development of the slave trade in America. It also shows his role in the American Revolution and discusses slave labor as the foundation of Southern Wealth.

Comment and discuss the movie. Begin the reading selection. Allow students to read and comment on the life of Booker T. Washington.

The lesson can be ended by assigning either the questions for the classroom discussion or one of the topics to be researched.

Lesson Plan #3. The life of an immigrant

Objectives Let the students share feelings and emotions about immigrants.

Illustrate and allow the students to look at the complexity of our immigrant’s life in the process of adaptability.

Introduce the students to Maxine Hong Kingston, an immigrant’s daughter.

Begin a general class discussion on how the class would feel if they, involuntarily, had to move to another country where they didn’t speak the language and didn’t know anyone, and they know that they would never be able to go back to their native country. Lead the discussion to what problems and difficulties do immigrants encounter. Make a list on the board. Discuss each one individually. Allow the students to look into the reasons for immigration: Economics, political, work, etc.

Show the movie “The Golden Door”. Photographs and historic motion pictures are put together with contemporary scenes of Ellis Island to recall America’s immigrant heritage and its influence on our development as a nation.

Read the selection from the Kingston’s book. Here the students come in contact with the old influencing the new and how she feels trapped by her parents old ways. As an immigrant’s daughter she is split between two worlds; that of her parents and the one in which she lives.

Proverbs

The early bird catches the worm.

You can lead a horse to water, but you can t make him drink.

Don’t wait for the ship to come in. Row out and get it.

A stitch in time saves nine.

A new broom sweeps clean.

A tree is known by the fruit it bears.

Never trouble trouble till trouble troubles you.

Two heads are better than one.

Better late than never, but better never late.

You can have your cake and eat it, too.

You can catch more flies with molasses than you can with vinegar.

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

A rolling stone gathers no moss.

Make hay while the sun shines.

You can't tell a book by its cover.

A small leak will sink a big ship.

Keep your chin up.

The world is your cow, but you have to do the milking.

Reach for the high apples first, you can get the low ones anytime.

Procrastination is the thief of time.

Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today.

A penny saved is a penny earned.

If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well.

The half of doing a job is getting at it.

Take care of the pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves.

Save your pennies for a rainy day.

Audiovisual Material

This material is available at the Department of Audiovisual Education, Winchester School. Materials may be ordered on special forms available in each school, or by phone calling extension 8687. These materials will be delivered to the school and collected every Monday or Thursday, according to the schedule posted in the school office.

Volume 18—Issue 7

15 min.—Color—(m.h.)

FATHER OF THE SPACE AGE-A special color report, March 1976.

A film biography of Dr. Robert H. Goddard, who launched the world's first liquid propellant rocket on March 16, 1926.

Volume 18—Issue 1 & 2—1975-76

22 min.—color—(i.m.h.)

FAITH IN OURSELVES-A special bicentennial color issue—October 1975.

A stirring pictorial panorama in sight and sound mood and music of the people, place and events that helped shape America's heritage and history.

Volume 14—Issue 6

13 min.—B & W—(m.h.)

THE GOLDEN DOOR-Rare, still photographs and historic action pictures are blended with contemporary scenes of Ellis Island to recall America's immigrant heritage and its influence on our development as a nation.

Volume 15—Issue 3

13 min.—color—(m. h)

SATCHMO AND ALL THAT JAZZ-An entertaining and informative film biography that relives on music and words . . . sight and sound . . . the life and times of Jazz immortal Louis Armstrong.

Volume 7—Issue 3

20 min.—B & W (m.h.)

AMERICA-THE MELTING POT

YANKEE CALLING (p. 114)

29 min.—color—(i.m.h.)

This unique film vividly recalls the history of those Yankee Craftsman, inventors and peddlers who made

Connecticut into a manufacturing state during the period from the end of the Revolution to the start of the Civil War. Yankee Calling traces these developments through the eyes of a young craftsman of today, who finds out why doing one's thing is an old Connecticut tradition.

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER-ANIMALS PICNIC DAY

10 min.—color—(p. i.)

One person is often very different from another and this story introduces the concept that those differences can be beneficial to all of us.

OUT OF SLAVERY-1619-1860

21 min.—B & W—(m.h.)

Traces the history of the Negro in America from his first arrival to the outbreak of the Civil War. Pictures slavery in the ancient world and outlines the development of the slave trade in America. Depicts the life of the Negro as a slave in the South and as a free man in the North. Shows, his role in the American Revolution and discusses slave labor as the foundation of Southern wealth.

MY LIFE TO LIVE

24 min.—B & W (h.)

Rod Kellogg, a young college student feels he should do what's expected of him, is really not the person he'd like to be. His search for self-identity leads him to put into perspective his childhood memoirs and his parents, death until he finds himself and begins to live his own life.

IRVING WASHINGTON

18 min.—B & W—(m. h.)

Brings to life significant episodes in the life of Washington I., the first U. S. writer to receive prominent recognition in the world of literature. Traces Irving's early life in N.Y., and describes his travels and life abroad.

"I . . . HAVE A DREAM."

Life of Martin L. King

35 min.—B & W (m. h.)

The story of this dedicated man's life and the forces that brought him to the leadership of his people are explored by using actual new film footage.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS part 1 & 2

60 min.—color (m. h.)

It deals with the role Douglass played in the abolitionist movement from the time of his escape from slavery up to the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation; depicts the tremendous courage of a fugitive slave in his

fight for freedom for his people.

A. LINCOLN

20 min.—B & W (i. m. h.)

The film follows Lincoln's life from youth, through legal and political careers to his election as president.

It also highlights the Emancipation Proclamation and the Gettysburg Address.

A. LINCOLN—part 3

27 min. B & W (i. m. h.)

It shows Lincoln from the teenage boy at a backwoods "blab school" to the tall young man starting a life of his own.

PEARL S. BUCK. "AN AMERICAN FROM CHINA"

p. 40 of catalogue

TWAIN, MARK-GREAT AMERICAN AUTHOR

p. 27 of catalogue

FRANKLIN, BENJAMIN-AMERICAN LEADER

p. 26 of catalogue

MARTIN L. KING JR.: "There Comes a time", "How Long America", "I Have a Dream", "We as a People".

Annotated Bibliography includes reading list for teachers and students*

Selma Lagerlöf. *Memories of My Childhood. Further Years at MÆrbacka* . Translated by Velma Swanston Howard. Garden City-N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1934.

The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge . New York: Printed in the USA by J. J. Little and Ives Co., 1929.

Helen Keller. *The Story of My Life* . New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1961.

Francis Hackett. *American Rainbow-Early Reminiscence* . New York: Liveright, 1971.

Thyra Ferré Bjorn. *This is My Life* . New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.

Arna Bontemps. *Free at Last The Life of Frederick Douglass* . New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1971.

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- Maureen Howard. *Facts of Life* . New York: Penguin Books, 1978.
- Jane Addams. *Twenty Years At Hull-House* . New York: A Signet Classic Published by the New American Library, 1961.
- *James Baldwin. *Notes of a Native Son* . Boston: The Beacon Press Beacon Hill, 1962.

The Education of Henry Adams —An Autobiography with a new introduction by D. W. Brogan. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961.

Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein , Edited, with an Introduction and Notes , by Carl Van Vechten and with an essay on Gertrude Stein by F. W. Dupee. New York: The Modern Library Published by Random House, Inc., 1962.

The Confessions of St. Augustine a new translation by Rex Warner. New York: A Mentor-Omega Book published by the New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1963.

* Students' reading list

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

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