



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1997 Volume II: American Children's Literature

Introduction

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Our topic may seem small enough but is in fact huge, there having been a small mountain of books for children turned out by the American press since Samuel Goodrich published *Tales of Peter Parley* in 1827. We tried our best to gain an overview of the field by reading a series of classic texts, starting with Goodrich and some folk tales, moving through *Little Women*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Little House in the Big Woods* and the like, and ending up with books that represent the explosion of multicultural fiction created in the last thirty years or so—books such as Ann Petry's *Tituba of Salem Village*, Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, and Walter Dean Myers's *Scorpions*. We concentrated on books for older readers, although many of them are readable to younger children.

From this base, the teachers in the seminar have moved out to construct a varied collection of units. But they are not so varied as not to fall into some thematic groups, and I have organized them accordingly. The first four deal with war—Casey Cassidy's on the Revolution, Tom Holmes's on the Civil War, and Laura Pringleton's and Renee McKinnon's on the Second World War. Renee's is part of a Beecher School team project on diversity, and as such it forms a bridge to the second group, on multicultural literature. Besides the Beecher units (the other three are Jean Sutherland on Hispanic literature, Gerry Martin on the literature that surrounds Jewish holidays, and Karen Carazo on African-American poetry), this group includes Waltrina Mullins's unit on picture books by African-American authors, and two units, by Stella Samuel and Delci Lev, on folk tales from diverse cultures. Lastly there appear two units that don't fit into any group, Terry Matthews's on adventure books and Jeanne Lawrence's on bibliotherapy. I think that there is a wealth of material here, particularly for elementary and middle-school teachers, and I hope that it will be widely used.

I would like to acknowledge the value to us all of an excellent bibliographical guide: *Children's Literature: A Guide to the Criticism*, by Linnea Hendrickson (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987). And I would like to say that these units, our seminar discussions, and my own researches have introduced me to a wealth of new authors and books, and I am about to leave for my vacation with a bag full of them.

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