

## Learning from Research

### Literature Survey Reveals Few Changes in School Reading Lists

*Silas Marner* is out, and *Romeo and Juliet* is in.

That's one finding from a recent study by the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature, based at the State University

of New York at Albany. The study, summarized in the report, "A Study of Book-Length Works Taught in High School English Courses," surveyed 488 public, independent, and parochial schools to find

the books typically taught to students nationwide and compared its findings with a similar study carried out in 1963 by the Educational Testing Service (see chart).

The rise of *Romeo* and the decline of *Silas* notwithstanding, the study found relatively little variation in authors studied over the past quarter-century, according to the report by Arthur Applebee, who directs the center. Shakespeare was most frequently taught, having four of the 10 most popular books read in schools in 1988.

The assertion that Western cultural content has been eroded in schools, charges leveled by scholars such as Allan Bloom and E.D. Hirsch, Jr., found little support in the center's study. If anything, the study discovered more of a consensus among schools as to what should be taught; the number of books taught at 30 percent or more of the schools surveyed tripled from nine in 1963 to 27 in 1988.

Moreover, the study undercuts assertions that a growth in minority or woman authors has eroded the traditional canon. In the 1988 list, there were no minority authors represented, and only one woman, Harper Lee. "The canon of texts as it emerges here shows little recognition of the works of women or of minority authors," the study asserts. "In all of the settings which we examined, the lists of most frequently required books and authors were dominated by white males, with little change in overall balance from similar lists 25 or 80 years ago."

Other findings from the study:

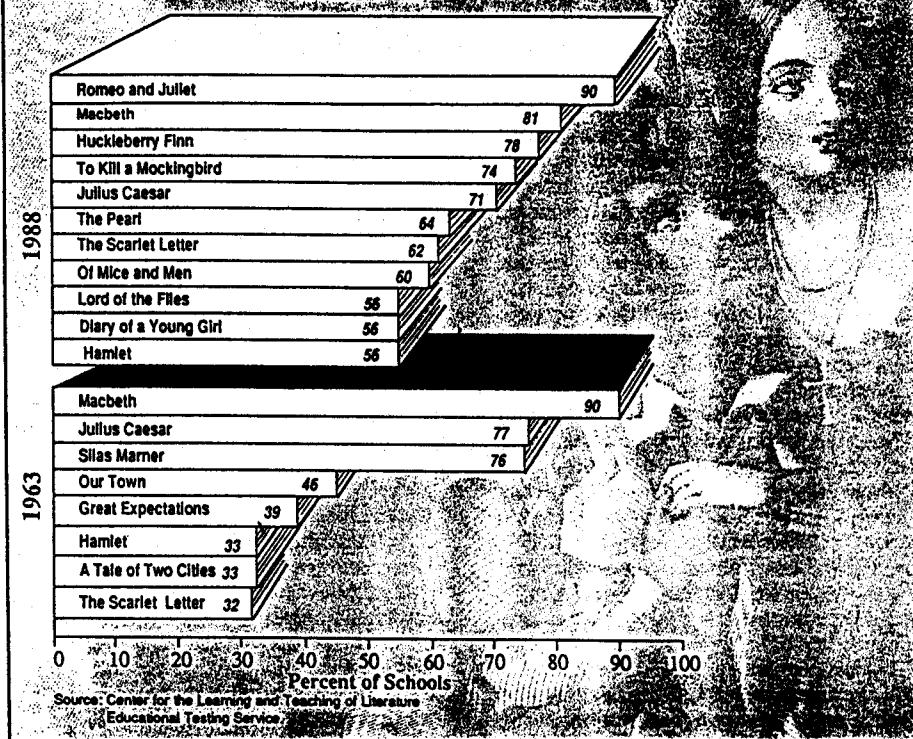
- Although percentages varied, the top 10 books studied showed few differences when public schools were compared with independent and parochial schools.

- While the books required in grades 9-12 were largely similar, the works required in grades 7-8 were considerably more varied. *Call of the Wild*, the most popular choice in grade 7, was taught in only 22 percent of the schools, and *Diary of a Young Girl* (34 percent) was the most common selection in 8th grade.

- Lower English tracks studied some of the traditional authors but were more likely to use young adult or "motivational" literature than were the upper tracks. When tracks were compared by the type of institution (public, independent, or parochial), greater consistency was found among the books read by the upper tracks than the lower.

Copies of the report are \$7 from the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature, School of Education, State University of New York at Albany, 1400 Washington Ave., Albany, NY 12222.

Books Most Widely Used in Public Schools.  
Grades 7-12



By permission of the Folger Library

### Briefly . . .

ASCD members are reminded of the new deadline for proposing resolutions to be considered at the 1990 Annual Conference. Under new guidelines developed by the Resolutions Committee, Dec. 31, 1989 is the latest date that resolutions will be accepted. Resolutions approved at the conference will become statements of the Association's position on educational issues. To submit resolutions, contact Ruben Ingram, Superintendent, Fountain Valley School District, 17210 Oak St., Fountain Valley, CA 92708; or Diane Berreth, Director of Field Services, ASCD, 1250 N. Pitt St., Alexandria, VA 22314. For a list of priority issues identified by the Resolutions Committee, see the September 1989 *Update*.

ASCD is making available free copies of a new brochure, "Religious

Holidays in the Public Schools: Questions and Answers." ASCD is a member of a broad coalition of education and religious groups sponsoring the brochure. For a copy, contact ASCD Member Relations, 1250 N. Pitt St., Alexandria, VA 22314.

School principals seeking to enhance their reading programs might wish to examine *Becoming a Nation of Readers: What Principals Can Do*. Based heavily on findings from the 1985 report of the Commission on Reading, this 23-page report suggests how principals can create a community of readers and describes what constitutes sound reading instruction. Copies are \$2 each from the National Association of Elementary School Principals, Educational Products Center, 1615 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314-3483.