

BOOK REVIEWS

Ouida Wright, ed. *Reach for Stars*, Toronto: Ginn and Company, 1966, Reader and Teachers' Manual, 480 pp. and vi, 351 pp.

The first remarks by a Canadian reviewer about Canadian reading material must always be an expression of gratitude to the author or editor for the quantity of time and energy taken to produce it. The majority of us, who may carp at the nationalism of U.S. materials but never do anything concrete about it, must admire the conviction of those who do actually take a positive step towards a Canadian point of view.

Mrs. Wright's contribution to the Ginn Canadian series is welcome, however, not just because it was produced in Canada but because it has valuable features that give it distinction. For one thing, it is an almost entirely original collection. Mrs. Wright has taken the trouble to make her own selections of stories and poems rather than merely finding substitutes for U.S. oriented materials, so she has had a heavy task in producing both reader and manual. The fact that she has had to fit her choices into what appears to be the U.S. developed "skills-scheme," for the most part, must have made the task more difficult than if she had been free to develop her own outline of skills.

And the choices she has made seem to me to have been very well thought out, especially if one is looking for materials that should interest boys. The selections are widely varied in both type and context and of generally good literary quality.

The manual has been carefully written and presents a large number of ideas for use of the reader materials. Besides ideas for introducing the selections and guiding the reading, the author has provided profuse suggestions for both writing and enrichment activities, all of which stress the interrelatedness of the language arts. Certainly teachers should be able to find suitable activities for almost any group being taught.

The device of including questions within the text received my enthusiastic support when it was used in the U.S. edition and I was pleased to see that Mrs. Wright had retained it in her book. Space normally taken in the manual for such questions can be used for other ideas; the teacher is relieved of the necessity for either writing them on the blackboard or of asking them one by one in the "secretive" manner so popular in lower grade readers; and they form a possible source of guidance for pupils using the book independently as supplementary rather than basal instruction. Since the questions are generally

thought-provoking and direct attention at many different reading skills, teachers will be grateful that the author has included in the manual suggested answers. It might be added that the questions asked, the answers suggested and the creative writing ideas offered should, once used, have on-going value for the teacher who is uncertain about teaching the skills of reading literature.

Although some teachers are inclined to want a workbook for every text, I, for one, was delighted to see the provision made for a worksheet package to supply seatwork exercises. The only improvement here might be for the Ginn Company to produce these as ditto masters, a practice becoming increasingly common with some publishers.

Whatever adverse comments one may make on *Reach for Stars* should probably be classed as "biases of the reviewer" rather than as "faults of the book." However, for what they are worth I would make these remarks:

1. I was sorry that the author found no way to avoid using the introductory material of the U.S. manual that is aimed at persuading teachers towards use of a single book with the majority of a grade. Even though Mrs. Wright has taken the step of suggesting that the book can be used as a departure platform for an in-

dividualized reading programme, my own feeling is that one should never offer even left-handed support to the teacher who wishes to cling to uniform instruction.

2. The second complaint relates to the first, really, and cannot be blamed on the Canadian edition alone. There is no statement about the readability of any of the material. The vague suggestion that if readers used the grade 6 reader "successfully" last year they should be ready to use the grade 7 reader this year seems to me very weak. One should simply not talk about adjusting to individual differences at one point and then at another avoid giving the information that might make such adjustment possible.

3. The Canadian edition's major weakness, I believe, lies in its lack of cohesion. The selections are not grouped under any unifying theme and their potential impact, therefore, is reduced. This is particularly true of the selections chosen for the teaching of the content reading skills. Organized as they are, I think it unlikely that they will fulfill their stated purpose.

4. A feature of the Canadian edition that seems to me to add very little to the programme is the inclusion of

unit tests. The author points out herself that these have no validity for judging *general* reading achievement; and the suggestion that a reading test can be recommended on the basis of its having "content validity" may be very misleading. This reviewer objects strenuously to the idea that teachers should be led to think it a good idea to examine pupils on the content of a reader. One can find support for the testing of vocabulary, but not for the testing of story content, either directly or indirectly. The only justifiable way of using the tests, it seems to me, would be as "open book" exercises.

5. The approach to word analysis seems highly mechanical and very much rules-oriented. Although skill in word attack is needed by junior high pupils, there are many more interesting ways to go about teaching it than through rules of syllabication and accent; and weaker pupils find such an approach particularly difficult.

Perhaps the best final comment that can be made is one the author herself will not, I am sure, consider faint praise: *Reach for Stars* is, in many ways, at least as good as anything produced in the United States for the same level of reader; and is better than most

produced in Canada. The fact that although many Canadians would like to suggest that anything produced in Canada is "more literary," "more intellectual," and so on than anything produced in the United States, leadership in the field does come from across the border and most of what we know has been learned from American research. Mrs. Wright's material shows that she has used that research both selectively and creatively and in that way is giving leadership herself in the Canadian context. She is to be congratulated.

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W. H. Auld and H. L. Stein.
The Guidance Worker. Toronto: W. J. Gage Ltd., 1965, 338 pp., \$5.50.

To say that this book can be read may sound trivial, but it is a pleasant surprise to encounter conciseness and clarity after the mass of guidance jargon currently being published. Besides contributing a number of original ideas to Canadian guidance theory, Professors Auld and Stein have successfully "translated into Canadian" most of the current and usable ideas in *Guidance and Counselling* from the United States.