

Larry R. Johannessen (Editor).

ILLUMINATION ROUNDS: TEACHING THE LITERATURE OF THE VIETNAM WAR

National Council of Teachers of English, 1992

186 pp.

Nearly eighteen years after the fall of Saigon, the specter of the Vietnam war still haunts us. Millions of middle-aged educators are faced with teaching a war that to them is not yet history. They are still dealing with their own ambivalent and sometimes painful perceptions of that war. Yet history must be taught, and this generation of students is, by virtually all accounts, woefully in need of that teaching. The war has become a part of American popular culture, but the Rambo-ized version of American troops fighting (to quote former President Reagan) "with one hand tied behind their backs", however popular politically, does not serve the facts well. It is incumbent upon educators to sort this out, and to present the history of the Vietnam war in lucid fashion to today's students. However, as most classroom teachers will attest, lucidity is usually not enough. The best learning takes place when students can sort things out for themselves, with judicious and provocative assistance in the classroom.

Larry R. Johannessen, in his book *Illumination Rounds: Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War*, provides a sensitive and insightful approach that could be used by both history and literature teachers to promote meaningful study of the Vietnam war. Johannessen and others in the field operate from the premise that today's students are intensely curious about the war, but quite ignorant of both its origins and its outcome. Their ignorance, Johannessen says, is due to the "national amnesia" that the war has engendered. Because Vietnam was our nation's first "teen age war", the literature of the war can speak to students in ways that no history text can. The real value of Johannessen's book is that it provides a workable model that the high school or even middle school teacher can actually use to create a lesson, a unit or an entire course on the literature of the Vietnam war.

He provides a carefully annotated list of resources for classroom use, including a list of recommended nonfiction works for teachers. On the list are personal narratives, oral histories, novels, plays, poetry, short stories, collections, anthologies, films, and photography/art collections. His notations include suitability for classroom use, degree of difficulty, and notation for particularly violent language or images. He includes questionnaires and opinionnaires which he has designed to accompany specific reading assignments, and even includes sample discussion questions and tips for the classroom teacher in conducting meaningful discussions that encourage problem-solving and critical thinking.

Johannessen's credentials and expertise as not only an experienced teacher but a Vietnam veteran are clearly evident in this volume. He offers sensible and sensitive insight into dealing with the violence and strong language that characterizes much of the literature of the war, often a concern to both teacher and parent. If his approach is employed students and even the most conservative of parents should be able to understand the validity and value of both the violence and the strong language. Johannessen's approach encourages teachers to promote critical thinking. He wants students to analyze the values and experiences of the generation that lived the Vietnam war, so that they can perhaps better understand why and how that war became America's longest and most divisive conflict.

His work should serve as a useful compendium for the classroom teacher who for lack of time for reading and research has not yet put together the materials to teach the much-needed unit on the Vietnam war. They can use *Illumination Rounds* and get on with it.

Yvonne Baldwin
Morehead State (Ky.) University

Liz Waterland (Editor).

READ WITH ME

Lockwood, UK: Thimble Press, 1988.

APPRENTICESHIP IN ACTION

Lockwood, UK: Thimble Press, 1989.

As I sat in my chair having finished Waterland's, *Read With Me* (1988), I tried to think of something, anything, which children learn in a way even remotely similar to that which used to be universal in the teaching of reading. I was unsuccessful. Still, I was disturbed and intrigued by Waterland's use of the term "natural" throughout the book as though she had discovered something fundamental about children. What is natural to children anyway? Well they play and through play they seem to discover things and create meaning in their lives. Traditional schools must appear as singularly odd and unnatural places to children, especially very young ones. This is no accident, schooling was not designed with children in mind, except as products or outcomes. It is eerie that this language, the language of the industrial metaphor, rings so ominously familiar.