

**LITERARY INTERPRETATIONS, OR, A
GUIDE TO THE TEACHING AND
READING OF LITERATURE; WRITINGS
BY LOWELL, HAWTHORNE,
TENNYSON AND EMERSON**

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Literary Interpretations, or, a Guide to the Teaching and Reading of Literature; Writings by
Lowell, Hawthorne, Tennyson and Emerson by Arnold Tompkins

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ARNOLD TOMPKINS

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LOWELL, HAWTHORNE, TENNYSON
AND EMERSON

INTRODUCTION AND ANALYSES

BY

ARNOLD TOMPKINS



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INTRODUCTION.

READING, whether silent or oral, is the process of interpreting written discourse. This involves both the printed form and the content of the discourse. When the child enters school he has considerable skill in the interpretation of oral discourse; but he now comes upon an obstacle in the printed language. Hence the first phase of reading work is to secure skill in the interpretation of the written symbols of discourse. The new symbol must be gotten out of the way, so that the pupil may live in immediate touch with the thought, as he has been accustomed to do in the case of oral speech. When this has been accomplished, to a fair degree, text-books are placed in the hands of pupils, and henceforth they have a continued experience with thought through printed symbols. They are now reading to learn; whereas before they were learning to read, in the narrow sense of interpreting symbols.

But the ordinary didactic prose which the pupil is required to interpret in the lessons assigned from the text does not cover the whole of discourse interpretation. Skill in the interpretation of literary discourse must be sought in a line of its own; and the ad-

vanced reading work in the grades, as well as the literary work in the high school, has for its special object skill in the interpretation of literary discourse. Having mastered the symbols of discourse, the student is ready to enter on the special line of literary interpretation. Advanced reading should be quite exclusively literary; for all the other lessons furnish an abundant opportunity for drill in the interpretation of didactic discourse. That it requires special training to interpret literary discourse no one will question; and if systematic attention is not given to it in the special line of reading work, the training to such interpretation will be missed altogether.

Furthermore, primary reading, which has for its immediate purpose skill in the interpretation of the printed symbols of discourse, consists also in literary interpretation. Symbols cannot be learned directly, but must be approached under the impulse of their informing ideas. To the child the motive is not the symbols, but the life contained therein. Hence it approaches a piece of discourse with the same motive as does the advanced student. Since the child's chief interest is in literary discourse, he should secure his skill in language interpretation under the literary impulse. It may be observed that the child constructs discourse under the impulse of ideal sentiment; it is inevitably a poet. It naturally speaks in figures of speech and poetic imagery. The first reader should be to the child what Dickens is to the more advanced student.

It thus appears that the whole course of work in reading, from the primary grade through the high school, is chiefly literary. This fact is recognized in making school readers; for there is always, in these later days, a predominance of literary selections; and it may be a question if all selections should not be such. Practically, at any rate, a line of work runs through the public school consisting chiefly of literary interpretation. Hence the method of literary interpretation is of primary interest to every teacher.

The first question that arises for solution is, How and where shall we search for this method? Can it be imported or invented and labeled as somebody's system? Can we not find it somewhere in our catalogue of methods; as, the word method, the sentence method, the phonic method, the analytic method, the synthetic method, the cumulative method, etc.? All such are partial and confusing. The compass that guides the teacher out of the woods is the fact that every subject contains its own method. The method of a given subject is not something to be applied to it; it is the life and structure of the subject itself. The nature of literature determines how literature must be thought; and, therefore, how it must be taught.

The following chapter on the nature of literature is simply a search after the method in literature; and the succeeding interpretation of the four selections is for the purpose of making clear the spirit and method of literary interpretation as indicated in the first chap-

ter. These selections are used as means to illustrate method in literary analysis, and are not given for their own value. Yet on this last score no apology need be made for the selections; for I do not see how the Reading Circle Board could have made better selections, if the purpose had been solely direct literary help to the teacher. And further, let it be noted, that each of the selections is a treatise on pedagogy, if it be pedagogically interpreted. I am accustomed to use these selections; and others like them, for strictly pedagogical instruction. It was not my purpose to make such use of them in the following discussions; but it is hoped that those who study this book in the Teachers' Reading Circle will do so. If this should not be done, the deep inspiration of the selections in themselves is necessary to a true professional spirit. We often miss the best professional help by supposing that it can be found only in what is labeled professional. The teacher lives on the same bread as others, but his bread is transmuted into teaching power; and so he must read much of what other people read, but his reading is transformed into the spirit and the power of a teacher. If, then, the analysis of the selections should serve a threefold purpose at the same time, the general wealth of value will exalt the main purpose of securing a true method of reading and literary study in the public schools of Indiana.

ARNOLD TOMPKINS.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, April 6, 1896.

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