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11-1931

## Reading in the Home: The Novel - Second Year

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### Recommended Citation

Lewis, Leora J. and Dolve, Mary A., "Reading in the Home: The Novel - Second Year" (1931). *Extension Circulars*. Paper 310.  
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# Reading in the Home

## The Novel---Second Year



**Books provide home recreation**

**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE COLLEGE  
EXTENSION SERVICE**

**C. Larsen, Director  
Brookings, S. D.**

## Reading in the Home

Reading in the home contributes abundantly to the recreation and development of the family. Rural home makers all over the state are raising the questions:

1. How can we secure good books to supply our reading needs at as low a cost as do the town home makers with their public library facilities?
2. Where can we secure assistance and suggestions to aid us in our reading?
3. How can we become better readers so that we may get the most out of what we read?
4. How can we interest our children in more and better home reading?

To answer these questions the Extension Service and the South Dakota Free Library Commission are developing cooperatively a 5-year "Reading in the Home" project, which any home extension club may include in its regular program of work.

The first year will give information in regard to library facilities available, especially the service which can be secured from the South Dakota Free Library Commission. Reading lists will be featured and suggestions made which will be helpful in the development of group reading.

The second year will feature reading for recreation with emphasis upon the novel. The essential qualities in a worth while novel will be discussed and a list of books recommended for individual and group reading will be included.

The third year will probably center around children's reading in the home.

The work for the fourth and fifth years has not been planned in detail.

A new program will be developed each year for five years. The first two years' programs are now available.

# READING IN THE HOME

## THE NOVEL--SECOND YEAR

by

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It is interesting to note the change which has taken place in the public attitude toward the novel during the period of our own national history. Condemned during colonial days as wicked, sneered at as a waste of time during the Victorian period, tolerated later as a legitimate means of recreation, the novel is now considered as one of the most worth while forms of literature. It has a definite recreational value, but it also offers a medium for a better comprehension of human nature, a wider knowledge of racial customs and characteristics and a broader understanding of the background of history.

### Choosing a Novel for Study

In choosing a book for analysis and study either by an individual or a club, care should be taken to select one which has some depth. There are many light cheerful stories which will serve occasionally to pass away a few hours, but a continuous diet of this light fiction destroys one's taste for better books and blunts one's appreciation of fine writing. In this class fall the mystery stories which are so popular at the present time, and light love stories such as those appearing in the popular magazines. A book to be worth while must in some way mirror a segment of real life. It will contain something of sorrow as well as joy, will show human weakness as well as human virtue.

In making a selection of books for reading, avoid narrowness. Be willing to read books which take you outside of your own experience; not to do so is to limit your own mental growth. In recent years a large number of books have appeared which give true pictures of life in other lands. "A Passage to India" by E. M. Forster is the outstanding novel about India; the recent novel "The Good Earth" by Pearl S. Buck is an excellent portrayal of Chinese peasant life. Selma Lagerlof, through her novels, gives us fascinating glimpses of Scandanavian life, while John Galsworthy interprets English social and political life for us in his "Forsyte Saga" and other novels. To one who has not traveled and read widely, these books are a little more difficult to read and understand than those which

deal with our own mid-western prairie life, but through them we gain a broadening of our horizon which is priceless.

It is well worth while occasionally to read or even to re-read an older novel; especially one of those which represent the finest writing of their period. Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray still have a message for us, and a comparison of modern novels with some of these older ones which have stood the test of time gives us a basis for judgment as to their value.

### Evaluating a Novel

In studying a novel there are certain definite rules which must be observed.

1. Approach the book fairly by trying to understand its background and by putting yourself in sympathy with its characters. For example, let us consider "Laughing Boy" by Oliver La Farge, the novel which won the Pulitzer prize for the year 1930. This is the story of a Navaho Indian Laughing Boy, and his sweetheart, Slim Girl.

To understand and appreciate the story one must for a time view life through the eyes of Laughing Boy. Having had little contact with the whites he lives according to the Navaho traditions. These require chastity, loyalty to the tribe and to its traditions. Gambling, the killing of an enemy, the duping of one of another tribe or an American, all are perfectly legitimate. To the Indian, Laughing Boy, it is the American code of ethics which is inconsistent and false and not his own, and when one realizes how warped Slim Girl's ideas of right and wrong have become through her contact with the whites, one is inclined to agree with him.

Different periods of history require a mental adjustment on the part of the reader. A novel of the seventeenth century depicts characters whose moral standards and code of living are entirely different from our own. To judge the characters by present day standards would be entirely unfair.

2. Consider the work as a whole and do not judge it by reading certain isolated passages.

3. Having read a novel carefully and without prejudice, one is ready to analyze it according to the following points:

**Plot.**—Every novel is composed of a series of events or happenings which combine to make up the plot. There are two ways of developing plots. The first and best known is the dramatic method. In this the episodes are so arranged as to create an interest more and more intense until one reaches, somewhere beyond the middle of the book, a place which marks the climax, from which point the story follows to a natural conclusion. Bliss Perry in his "Study of Prose Fiction" likens this climax to the point where a sky rocket turns and begins to fall.

The other plan of outlining a plot is the epic method in which the incidents are arranged as they would naturally happen in a man's life. Dickens usually followed the epic method while George Eliot and Bulwer Lytton used the dramatic form of plot.

Whatever type of plot is used, the reader has a right to demand that



the events shall appear to be logical, the interest sustained and the ideas original and well developed.

**Characterization.**—Upon the drawing of the characters, much of the success of a novel depends. In analyzing a novel the following questions may be asked. Are the characters well drawn? Do they appear as living people or only as puppets? Are their actions consistent with the persons whom the author has introduced? Is there sufficient contrast between the various characters? If they are all good or all bad, the effect is equally tiresome.

**Setting and Background.**—The setting of a novel is like the frame of a picture, it must be in harmony or it destroys the effect of the whole. The author must have a sufficient knowledge of his background so that the events of the story are natural to the period and the environment. If



An attractive place for books can be made from a few bricks and stained boards

a historical story, events must be correctly presented; if the scene is laid in another country, the effect of environment on character should be so skilfully brought out that one realizes that the story could not have been enacted equally well in some other country.

A novel of farm life presupposes a knowledge of rural problems, a story of industrial life, an appreciation of conditions under which laboring people work and live.

**Style.**—There are so many well written books produced in the world that it is not worth while to waste one's time in reading a novel which is

poorly written. To be a master in the use of language, one need not write elaborately. Willa Cather among modern American writers is a master in the use of simple forceful English. She paints her portraits with words as a skilful artist wields a brush, making simplicity and directness her keynote.

**Author's Purpose.**—A novel which is written for purposes of moral instruction is usually a failure. As soon as an author attempts to make his characters preach, they become puppets instead of living people and we lose interest in what they do or say.

On the other hand, the reader's impression toward a book is unconsciously affected by the author's attitude toward life. It is the sympathy for the lower classes in England shown in Charles Dickens' novels, which has made them live; it is the moral earnestness expressed by Tolstoi in his *Anna Karenina* which makes it rank in America with the truly great novels of the world.

To condemn a book as immoral because it deals frankly with any of the problems of life, is to be narrow. Some of the greatest books revolve about the greatest crimes. "The Scarlet Letter" deals with results of adultery, "Othello" with murder. Frank Shuman in his "How to Judge a Book" sums up the matter in a few words when he says, "If the author views evil cynically or makes it appear seductive, or treats it as a peep show, pandering to the baser passions, his book may be called actively immoral."

4. Consider the opinions of others.—Read what critics have said of a book. Do not be afraid to differ from their opinions, but know why you differ.

5. Compare with other books. It is often helpful to compare a book with some other novel in the same field which you can consider as standard. Use Owen Wister's "Virginian" as a model for a novel of western life, and note by comparison how flat and insipid most other novels of the west appear.

### Measuring the Novel

Having drawn an outline by which a book may be judged, let us measure by its rules a book of current fiction, "A Lantern in Her Hand" by Bess Streeter Aldrich.

**Synopsis of Plot.**—"A Lantern in Her Hand" is the story of Abbie Deal, the daughter of a Scotch aristocrat and an Irish peasant who with her husband, Will Deal, leaves her Iowa home to pioneer in a new settlement in Nebraska. Determined that the children shall have the advantages and opportunities of which she was deprived by her early marriage and migration to Nebraska, Abbie Deal toils and sacrifices and ultimately realizes her own ambitions in the lives of her children.

**Approach.**—It is easy for any one who has lived in the middle west to adopt a sympathetic attitude toward the characters in the story since its setting is more or less familiar to all of us either through our own experience or because of frequently heard recitals of pioneer hardships on the part of our neighbors.

**Analysis.**—The plot of "A Lantern in Her Hand" is not original and in places becomes almost melodramatic. The characterization is good—the

people figuring in the story are real flesh and blood human beings and are typical of the class of pioneers who settled this western country. The author weakens her otherwise excellent character portrayal by imaginary conversations between Abbie and Will Deal after the death of the latter. The strength of the book is in the setting. Mrs. Aldrich knows of the life of which she writes, and a certain human touch in relating typical incidents such as the birth of Abbie Deal's children, a Nebraska dust storm, a grasshopper plague, etc., amounts to a positive genius. The book is only fairly well written—certain trite phrases being repeated in a way which often grows tiresome. Nevertheless the author has succeeded in giving us a strong and true picture of pioneer life which is both pleasing and convincing.

### Comparison with "Giants in the Earth" by Ole Rolvaag

**Synopsis of Plot.**—"Giants in the Earth" O. E. Rolvaag is the story of Per Hansa and his wife, Beret, who come from the mountains and fiords of Norway to make their home on the plains of South Dakota settling in the vicinity of Sioux Falls. To Per Hansa there is a certain grim joy in subduing the elements. He is a born leader and pioneer. Beret on the other hand never takes root in the new soil. Homesick, terrified and superstitious, she finds comfort only in her religion and the book ends on a tragic note.

**Approach.**—To appreciate the story one must know something not only of pioneer hardships in a new country, but of the lives and superstitions of the Norwegian fisher folk from whom Per Hansa and Beret came.

**Analysis.**—The plot is original and well worked out, the characters excellently drawn and their actions consistent. The setting of the book is true, and the incidents such as the blizzard and the grasshopper plague are skilfully told. From a literary standpoint, it is a fine piece of work although those familiar with the Norwegian language tell us that it has lost something in translation. The author is evidently trying to interpret for America and the world the spirit of those pioneers who first settled the plains in the middle west. Because he is a Norwegian, he has wisely chosen for his central characters the pioneers of his own race. The book is important to South Dakotans, not alone because it deals with early settlements in our own state, but because it ranks as one of the outstanding novels of middle western pioneer life. Some critics even give it first place in this field.

**Comparison of the Two Novels.**—"Giants in the Earth" is undoubtedly a finer piece of writing and will live when "A Lantern in Her Hand" is forgotten. On the other hand there is a sympathetic appeal to the average person in "A Lantern in Her Hand" which "Giants in the Earth" lacks. Abbie Deal, courageous not because she is without fear, but because her devotion to her husband and her children is stronger than her fears, represents more nearly the type of pioneer woman who settled the middle west than does the homesick superstitious Beret. Both writers have succeeded in giving true pioneer pictures even though the craftsmanship of the one is much better than the other. The two novels make an interesting comparison.



### Novels Suggested for Study

Ethan Frome, by Edith Newbold Wharton.  
 Laughing Boy, by Olive La Farge.  
 Forsyte Saga, by John Galsworthy\*  
 Cimarron, by Edna Ferber.  
 Giants in the Earth, by Ole Edvart Rolvaag.  
 Kristian Lavransdatter, by Sigrid Undset\*  
 The Great Meadows, by Elizabeth Madox Roberts.  
 The Good Earth, by Pearl S. Buck.  
 Drums, by James Boyd.  
 Jalna, by Mazo De la Roche.  
 Lantern in Her Hand, by Bess Streeter Aldrich.  
 The Great Hunger, by Johan Bojer\*  
 Cora, by Ruth Suckow\*  
 Wintersmoon, by Hugh Walpole\*  
 Death Comes for the Archbishop, by Willa Sibert Cather\*  
 Bridge of San Luis Rey, by Thornton Niven Wilder.  
 Doctor Serocold, by Helen Rosaline Jordan.  
 Deepening Stream, by Dorothea Canfield Fisher\*  
 Ambrose Holt and Family, by Susan Glaspell.  
 Shepherds in Sackcloth, by Shella Kaye-Smith,\*  
 Years of Grace, by Margaret Ayer Barnes.  
 Trailmakers of the Middle Border, by Hamlin Garland\*  
 The Emigrants, by Johan Bojer\*  
 Early Autumn, by Louis Bromfield.  
 Lion's Den, by Janet Ayer Fairbank.  
 Barren Ground, by Ellen Anderson Gholson Glasgow\*  
 Dodsworth, by Sinclair Lewis.  
 Mamba's Daughters, by Du Bose Heyward.  
 A Little French Girl, by Anne Douglas Sedgwick\*  
 The Grandmothers, by Genway Wescott\*  
 Wrong Side of the Tracks.  
 Ring of the Lowenskolds, by Selma Lagerlof\*

### Books About Books for Use in Study

Aspects of the Novel, by Edward Morgan Forster.  
 How to Judge a Book, by Edwin Llewellyn Shuman.  
 Fine Arts of Reading, by Robert Emmons Rogers.  
 Study of Prose Fiction, by Bliss Perry.  
 What Books Can Do for You, by Jesse Lee Bennett.  
 Delight of Great Books, by John Erskine.  
 Open that Door, by Robert Sturgis Ingersoll.  
 Rewards of Reading, by Frank Luther Mott.  
 Technique of the Novel, by Carl Henry Grabo.

NOTE.—A limited number of copies of each of the books on the above lists are included in the book collection of the South Dakota Free Library Commission at Pierre. If they cannot be secured from a local library, they may be borrowed from the commission as an **individual loan** for a period of a month.

\*Any other novels by the same author may be used, as the books are of almost equal value.

## Library Facilities

**Free Library Commission.**—The South Dakota Free Library Commission is a state department financed and managed by the state for the benefit of its people. The department helps with the organization of both town and county libraries and also lends books to any person or group of persons living in South Dakota.

Book loans are made in various ways as follows:

**Community or Traveling Libraries.**—Any small town or any group of families living in the country (such as Home Extension Clubs) may borrow a collection of books from the Library Commission. These collec-



Conveniently placed books give a friendly atmosphere to any room

tions vary in size from twenty-five to fifty volumes and contain a proportionate amount of non-fiction and fiction both for children and adults. The collections are loaned for six months, but may be exchanged for new books as often as is desired.

**School Collections.**—Small groups of books suited for supplementary reading in schools are loaned to schools for periods of three months.

**Individual Loans.**—Any individual in the state may borrow from the Free Library Commission for a period of one month books for reading or study. The department maintains a fine collection of books of travel.

biography, history, science, drama, etc. Only novels of special merit are made available to individuals.

**Rules for Borrowing.**—In the case of the community libraries, five people in the neighborhood are required to sign a card. For school loans, the signatures of the clerk and president of the school board are required. There is no requirement for individual loans save filling out the application card. In all branches of the service, the borrower pays for the transportation of books. No other charge is made.

At certain seasons of the year when demands are especially heavy, the supply of books available for traveling and school libraries is sometimes exhausted, and in such cases, applicants have to be placed upon the waiting list to be served as new books are received or old ones returned.

**The County Library.**—A county library is not an institution but a library system maintained at county expense through which books are distributed to every section of a county. The plan provides for a central distributing point, usually located in the county seat, branches and stations in all of the towns and centers in the county, collections in all of the schools and parcel post service for families which cannot conveniently call at the central station or a branch for their books.

Where there are one or more strong public libraries in a county, service is given through the existing library through a contract between the county commissioners and the library board.

A county library system is especially desirable for two reasons; first because it is the only library system which gives people in the country and in the very small towns the same book privileges which the people in the larger towns have, and second because it is so economical. Where people in small towns pay one dollar and more per capita for the maintenance of village libraries, in Potter, Tripp, and Hyde counties in South Dakota the per capita cost for library service for the year ending July 1, 1930 ran from 45 cents to 80 cents.

County libraries in South Dakota are located in Tripp, Hyde, Potter, and Buffalo counties. In Moody County the county commissioners have recently taken over the Flandreau library and will no doubt in time develop a county library system similar to that used in the other counties.

The libraries have all been successful; their book collections have grown rapidly and the circulation of books has been large. In each county the number of borrowers from among the people on the farms has made up at least half of the total registration. The following figures from the 1931 report of the Tripp County library indicate something of the possible growth of the service. Tripp County has a population of 12,703 and the library was established in 1921:

Number of branches and stations—17, number of borrowers registered—5,150, number of borrowers living in country—3,605, number of books in library—14,950, number of books loaned in year—85,644, cost of library for year—\$5,224.

According to the South Dakota law, a library is established by the county commissioners when 40 per cent of the legal voters petition for it. The main thing to remember in initiating a campaign for a library is that the educational feature of the campaign is more important than the se-

curing of the petitions. Before a petition is circulated, the majority of the people in a county should know about the library, the way in which it operates, its advantages over other systems and its probable cost. The Free Library Commission at Pierre, is at all times ready to send out information regarding the county library and suggestions as to ways of campaigning.

**Town or Municipal Library.**—In South Dakota most of the towns which are large enough to support public libraries have them. No town in the state with a population of 2,000 and over is without a tax supported library and many smaller towns have them. There are seventy-six libraries in the state, fifty-nine tax supported and seventeen privately supported.

Most public libraries make it possible for people living in the country to borrow books. Some charge a small fee while others give the service free of charge.