

## **Instructor's Explanation of "Literacy and Culture in America"**

The graduate course T & L 798, colisted with English 790, (3 credits) was offered by me, E. Jennifer Monaghan, at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, over the course of two weeks in June 2002. Two thirds of my students came from the Department of Teaching and Learning, and one third from the English Department. This proved to be a most successful mix. I would like to thank my students, Karen Bates, Emily Donnelly, Jennifer Hightower, Dan Karasek, Kathy Schmiedeler, and Jamie Stiede, for their significant contributions to the class. I have added their suggestions to the course bibliography.

My aim was to introduce my students to some of the key cultural continuities and changes in the teaching and learning of literacy from the beginning of the American colonial period up to the United States in the 1970s. Our major focus was on how, over time, literacy acquisition has been mediated by religious beliefs, gender, class, and race. We looked at literacy acquisition in formal and informal settings, at schools and in the family, but we also tackled more theoretical issues such as the literary canon.

Because "readers" (reading instructional textbooks) were the most important text for reading instruction until the whole language movement of the 1980s, our discussion frequently included selections from them. We were fortunate to be able to hold the class in the Kenneth Spencer Research Library of the University of Kansas, which allowed us easy access to the library's superb holdings of children's literature and literacy textbooks.

For the course, I was determined that students should read primary sources as well as secondary sources. All the primary sources related to the readings from the secondary sources, and our mainstay for the latter was selected chapters from Cathy N. Davidson's edited *Reading in America: Literature and Social History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

It was simply not possible, in my view, for students to write a worthwhile research report during such an intensive course, which ran for four hours a day for nine out of ten weekdays in two weeks. I therefore gave the class one free day in the middle of the second week to give them time to write the second paper, and I extended the deadline for submitting the final paper until a month after the class finished.

### **Titles of Research Reports**

The titles of some of the students' research reports were:

"Literacy in the Slave South: A Teacher's Guide."

"Bottom-Up Reading Instruction in David Tower's *Gradual Readers*, 1841-1868."

"Balancing the Art and Science of Writing: Carpenter and Broughton's Approach to Early Twentieth Century Writing Instruction."

"Exploration of Remedial Reading in the 1930s."