

# **LITERATURE AND LIFE IN SCHOOL**

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Literature and Life in School by J. Rose Colby

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**J. ROSE COLBY**

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LIFE IN SCHOOL**



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BY

J. ROSE COLBY, PH. D.

*Professor of Literature in Illinois  
State Normal University*



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## PREFACE

THIS is not a book about English. It seeks to be frankly and simply what its name declares — a book about literature and life in school. Since, in spite of all that has been said and done to foster the introduction of literature into secondary schools, it still is hardly more than a beggar at the doors of a great proportion of our elementary schools, it has seemed once more worth while to make a plea for its presence in school life from the first day to the last. As is true of any rational plea for the use of any subject in school, this plea is based on a consideration of the essential business of the school, of the essential need of children, of the real nature of the subject, and of its true, its proper work, consequent thereupon. The book further undertakes to suggest means that may be employed to secure to literature some measure of fulfillment of its proper function in the life of children. This includes a study both of the general character of the material to be used and of the method of handling the material. It does not undertake to lay down a set course, nor to suggest special devices for class work. Finally, the book ventures a look ahead into high school and college and the life that lies beyond and

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outside of the classroom, to see how the subject fares and should fare there, and to find justification in life itself for the nature of the plea it makes for the handling of literature in school.

In condensed form the ideas developed in this book appeared in articles in "The Elementary School Teacher," for April, May, and June, 1903. I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to Principal Ella Flagg Young, of the Chicago Normal School, then Professor of Education in the University of Chicago, for help of many kinds freely given by her from her well-nigh unequaled judgment and experience; and to Professor John Dewey of Columbia University, who induced me to re-write the articles on a larger scale, and who has read much of the manuscript. My thanks are given also to the University of Chicago Press for permission to make use of matter in these copyrighted articles.

J. R. C.

NORMAL, ILLINOIS  
Sept. 18, 1906.

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# LITERATURE AND LIFE IN SCHOOL

## I

### THE TRUE FUNCTION OF LITERATURE

SCHOOLS exist to help home and society make a human being out of the undeveloped human animal.

For unnumbered ages the slow processes of nature have been at work to bring him into being, a little, sprawling, naked, helpless body, with unknown potencies of thought and feeling and action. Behind him are all the years that preceded human consciousness and all the years since human consciousness began, all the blind struggle of man with the earth and elemental powers, all the wars of man with man, all the superstition, the fear, the savagery, the lust, the hate, the dawning affection and wonder and reverence, the hard-won knowledge of self and the world, the broadening consciousness of relationships, the growing mastery of the environment by brain and hand and heart, out of which has issued the present world. And all about him is this world of the present, complex, enormous, mystifying, insatiable in its demand for knowledge, for skill, for thought, for love. Of this world the newborn child is already unconsciously a part. He is in a sense the

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very centre of its life; the most fundamental institution of society exists for him and because of him; while the character and the existence of all institutions depend on what with the passing years he shall bring to them out of the poverty or the wealth of his being. For the past and the present he is irresponsible. Out of the unconscious, unrecorded ages, out of the ages recorded by growing consciousness in tool and weapon, in dish and tablet, and, finally, in temple and scroll and book, he has brought his inheritance, — a body organized to stand erect and use the hand, and a crescent soul in whose instincts and potencies the experiences of all that past survive and make possible for him a full human existence.

What shall constitute a full human existence as the present sees it has likewise been determined by that same past. For that past created the present, and to live a full human life to-day means to enter into this present with a living, a vitalizing consciousness of the already discovered relations that make its being. Multifarious and bewildering though they be, these relations are nevertheless of but three kinds. We are earthborn, creatures of the dust, breathers of the air, dependent for mere existence on cosmic forces of light and heat and motion and attraction and repulsion. All about us, visible and invisible, clearly manifest in creature or dimly divined as the source and law of all being, is the presence of life, a life that is not ours, that yet in a myriad ways con-