

**THE HIGH-  
SCHOOL LIBRARY**

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The High-school Library by Gilbert O. Ward

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## VII

### THE HIGH-SCHOOL LIBRARY

GILBERT O. WARD  
Cleveland Public Library

**Present position.**—Libraries in high schools are not new, but a widespread change in teaching methods in recent years has brought them into increased importance. This change has called upon the pupil to do work in the laboratory instead of watching demonstrations by a teacher, and to do collateral and supplementary reading in preparing for recitations instead of depending more or less exclusively upon prescribed textbooks. In proportion as the change has affected individual schools, especially in the departments of English and history, the library work of the students has been increased.

Public libraries have long served high-school teachers and students in their increasing demands with varying degrees of mutual satisfaction. But schools in which library work has become highly developed have found the ordinary forms of public-library service inadequate to the new needs; and although in many cases, for one reason or another, it will doubtless continue to be advisable or expedient for an outside library to act as substitute for a library in the school building, it is nevertheless increasingly recognized that, in the words of a state superintendent of public instruction, "No really good high school is possible without at least a fair library equipment."<sup>1</sup> This equipment may be administered by the school or by the public library. In the very small school it may mean a few picked books bought or borrowed by the school, kept in a classroom, and cared for by a teacher. But in schools large

<sup>1</sup>R. J. Aley, *Books and high-school pupils.* (In *National Education Association Proceedings*, 1909.)

enough for their departments to be differentiated, it implies a well-equipped, adequate room with several thousand volumes, and a trained librarian devoting full time to library work.

The present chapter is written with special regard to the latter type of library and with emphasis on those features of practice which distinguish high-school from other library work.

**Function.**—In its relations to the school, the high-school library corresponds in a general way to the college library rather than to the public library. Its first purpose is educational; its readers are chiefly or solely teachers and students. It differs from the normal-school library in the lack of professional aim and in the greater immaturity of its student readers. Its general functions are to supply books for class work and for cultural reading, and to impart a working knowledge of the use of books and libraries. Some specific duties are: co-operating with teachers in preparing and supervising class library work, guiding students' reading, preserving school ana, and acting as agent between public library and high school.

The first purpose of the library is for reference and reading; the occasional practice of unloading superfluous or undesirable students from classrooms upon the library makes the librarian's task of discipline much harder, hinders the library's legitimate work, and is wholly bad.

**Room.**—The library should be in an accessible, central situation, away from all noise.

In size it should be proportionate to the size of the school. There is no formula to express this proportion, but it has been found in two actual cases that a school with an enrolment of about 1,400 often sends 60 or 65 pupils to the library for library work, for a full-time single period. Both of these schools, one technical and the other academic, are situated in a large city with excellent public-library facilities.

The equipment required is of much the same kind as that in a public library of equal size. Shelving should be of the wall

type as far as possible, to permit of easy supervision. Tables accommodating not more than six or eight readers are preferable to those of larger size and should be broad enough for comfortable reference work. Important items of equipment which should not be overlooked are noiseless floor covering, closet room for supplies and new books, librarian's locker, wash basin with running water, magazine rack, vertical file, bulletin boards, and typewriter with card-cataloging attachment. A glass show case is useful for exhibition purposes.

**Library funds.**—The high-school library may derive its support from one or several of a number of sources. In many states, the law provides for the establishment or aid of school libraries. In the most progressive cities which administer their high-school libraries according to modern ideas there is an annual appropriation by the city. In any high school, the library should be represented in the budget on the same footing as other departments and the appropriation granted by the school board should be on this basis. When the public library contributes, its share is likely to take the shape of a quota for books; in such cases it also usually pays the salary of the librarian. In starting a new library, or in purchasing pictures, statuary, or other equipment which is ornamental rather than essential, it may be undesirable or impossible to obtain or utilize a regular appropriation. In such cases money may be raised from voluntary contributions, proceeds of entertainments, fines, etc. The plan, however, of relying regularly on such resources, although it may stimulate a sense of proprietorship in the school library, discriminates in favor of wealthy student bodies, is unfavorable to steady and consistent growth, and, by making a distinction between the position of the library and that of other departments, invites neglect from an indifferent school board. It is no more naturally appropriate for the high-school library to depend on such means than it is for the high-school laboratory or for a public library to be so dependent.

To insure continuous, consistently high efficiency, the high-school library, like any other active library, requires, whatever the source of its income, a regular definite appropriation available for spending as needed. When the support of a high-school library is to be shared between school board and library board, a matter for consideration in planning the division of expense is whether the school board is willing or able to furnish a regular, readily available income for books.

**Book selection.**—High-school students range in age from fourteen to eighteen years. First-year students will read many of the books read by the students of upper grammar grades; fourth-year students can use many of the books suitable for a college Freshman. Books for student use must therefore be chosen, not only with reference to their general suitability for high-school use, but with particular regard to the different ages of students.

Among books used for reference, many excellent standard works, scholarly textbooks, works of literary criticism and the like, some of which find their way into high-school book-lists and textbook bibliographies, are too detailed or difficult for high-school use. Among books for general reading, much fiction, travel, and biography, most poetry, and almost all essays require for their appreciation a mental background which even Seniors in high school can rarely possess.

Teachers' recommendations are often of great help in selecting books for special reference and study, but of much less help in choosing books for general reading. They should be welcomed, but must sometimes be followed with discrimination.

**Reference books.**—Many of the general reference books found in a well-equipped public library are useful in high-school work. Particular mention may be made of encyclopedias, unabridged dictionary, atlas, biographical dictionaries, newspaper almanacs, yearbooks, books of quotations, collections of prose and poetry, debaters' handbooks, etc.



Some important types of books of a more special nature are textbooks (especially in the sciences and useful arts), historical sourcebooks, biographies of literary or historical persons, popular works on the manners and customs of important periods, readers, illustrated popular or semi-popular works of many kinds, well-edited editions of English classics studied, translations of foreign classics adaptable to high-school use, government publications (e.g., the farmers' bulletins for agriculture and domestic science), and college and technical-school catalogs.

Books for special reference and study should be limited rather closely to the curriculum.

*General reading.*—Fiction in the high-school library is useful in inducing the reading habit, in encouraging better reading, and for general inspiration. It must be carefully selected with deference to the normal tastes and capacity of the ordinary high-school student. It should be wholesome and should have literary value.

Generally speaking, it is found that students, especially the younger ones, prefer plot to style, action to analysis, broad humor to subtle humor, romantic sentiment to humdrum experience, and the familiar to the foreign. Thus they prefer Sherlock Holmes to Marius the Epicurean, Treasure Island to Romola, Tom Sawyer to Cranford, To Have and to Hold to Joseph Vance, and The Varmint to Tom Brown at Rugby.

For inducing the reading habit, books must be direct in appeal, clear in style, and not too long. For more advanced reading, much of the tested and better popular fiction and many standard novels and classics can be used, including novels with historical backgrounds. When possible, at least one copy of a classic should be chosen in an attractive illustrated edition. The problem novel, the sex or highly colored romantic novel, the conventional school story, and the machine-made novel of

any sort are for differing but obvious reasons undesirable in the high-school library.

Biography and travel offer a convenient trail away from the exclusive pursuit of fiction. As in the case of fiction, it is necessary to consider the nature of a book's appeal, and how much mental background in the way of historical or other reading a book will need for its appreciation. Poetry in general requires to be "pushed" by a librarian or teacher who herself loves it, and should be presented in as attractive a form as possible. Comprehensive, general compilations, and works of individual poets, complete in one volume, are useful for reference, but are likely to be fine in print, heavy to handle, bulky, and unattractive. In many cases, there are attractive editions of "selected works" or of single longer poems which are much more agreeable to read, and often are quite adequate for any probable reference use.

Books of little literary value which should be represented for other reasons are accurate, up-to-date, well-illustrated works (not textbooks) of popular science and the useful arts, including books on amateur work of different kinds.

Younger students in general will enjoy many of the books which are read by the older children in the children's room of a public library.

*Magazines.*—As in the case of books, magazines are selected principally either to provide material for use in class work or for general information and recreation. Under the first head are included magazines on current events, domestic art, domestic science, and fine arts; under the second, the better general magazines and magazines of popular science.

Magazines of both kinds are useful as an aid in preserving order when students have finished their assigned work and are looking for something to do before the end of the hour. They are also valuable in schools where students come from non-reading homes as "bait" to attract students into the reading

habit. Their use must be watched somewhat in order that they may not be read to the neglect of lessons.

Magazine indexes are needed under the same circumstances as in any other library, with this difference: When the public library is better equipped with files of magazines, a magazine index in the high-school library is useful in noting references and making lists to be looked up later in the public library, and in borrowing material from the latter. High-school libraries which cannot afford to subscribe to a cumulative magazine index may be able to supply the lack in part by procuring back numbers from the public library.

*Pictures and clippings.*—Pictures are useful in illustrating topics discussed in class, for bulletin-board display, and for exhibit purposes. A collection may include portraits of authors and historic characters; pictures of places, of buildings, of events of historic or literary interest; pictures illustrating mythology, geography, industry, flowers; reproductions of works of art; specimens of design and ornament, house interiors, fashion designs, etc. They may be cheap prints, clippings from magazines, or plates from some expensive work such as Foord's Decorative flower studies, which has been cut up to make it more available. A satisfactory way of handling such material is to mount it on cardboard of uniform size, about 13½ inches by 17 inches, assign a subject-heading to each, and file the pictures vertically in alphabetical order, in covered boxes.

Useful material on current events, local history, and school happenings is preserved in the form of clippings, which are satisfactorily handled by filing them in large envelopes arranged, like pictures, alphabetically by subject-headings.

*Classification, cataloging, etc.*—In progressive libraries administered by boards of education and therefore not obliged for the sake of economy or expedience to conform to public-library practice, the following are some changes in the Dewey decimal system of classification as commonly applied in public