

**Discussion of *To Teach To Love* by Jesse Stuart
Galesburg Public Library Tuesday Book Club
September 2006**

1. About his psychology teacher, Henry Dickinson, Stuart writes (p. 77):

I was all in favor of this lively, energetic man. He put himself unselfishly into his teaching. I was so much for him that I memorized all the important parts of the dry-as-dust textbook. Professor Dickinson was criticized by many because of his actions, but he was never criticized by me. He got my response in laughter and in liking his course – under this man I made a standing-up A, best in his psychology class. In his class I never thought about grades! I thought about what he was saying. And I never missed one of his lectures.

Did you ever have a teacher like this?

2. Commenting on his biology class, which he hated because it required dissection of live animals, Stuart writes (p. 78):

...in a course I detested I made a B or a C. I don't remember. I don't care. I'll never forget the inhuman feeling for life in Professor Grannis' biology class. There were those who said he was a fine teacher. Maybe so. But I never said it. I thought he was a mediocre teacher without any feeling for life.

Live dissection is still controversial today. What are your reactions to this passage?

3. When the commodes stopped up after everyone was sick from eating spoiled meat, Stuart agreed to help unstop the sewer lines (p. 102).

Not many students would do this. I was one of six...I went down into one manhole, which certainly wasn't a pleasant place to work. ...I worked until afternoon, cut classes, to help clean out the manholes and get the sewage system working again. ...I was none too good to clean out manholes on a college campus for a college education! To be a college graduate was my dream!

Do you think college youth of today would volunteer for this job? Why or why not?

4. When Stuart won both first and second place in a short story writing contest, the teacher put the second place winning to a vote from the class, and Stuart lost the vote (p. 124).

Was this fair? Did anything like this ever happen to you or someone you know? What effect did the experience have?

5. Stuart writes (p. 136),

'Don't ever mark a book,' teachers used to say. 'It is a disgrace. And don't turn the corners down. Keep your books in good condition....' I want to say, 'How would you like to go straight to hell and stay when you get there? My books are my own. They are not things to keep in mint condition, either. They are mine – and sure as pencils leave traces where they have been, you'll see mine traced and retraced. My books are to be used, and I use them....'

Do you agree with Jesse Stuart or the teachers he quotes? Why?

6. Stuart is advised to give up being a county school superintendent because he “had got people riled against” him (p. 172).

What had riled them up? I hired married women as teachers. I paid teachers according to qualifications and experience. I wouldn't pay huge fees for menial labor. ... I paid no attention to politics and politicians running my school system. ...

Do you think someone teaching today could experience a similar situation?

7. Stuart writes (p. 177):

If we only had in America today more teachers who could teach beyond – and still include – the required subject matter, teachers who could inject beauty into their teaching, we could change the face of America. We wouldn't find the streets in our small towns and cities littered with piles of rubbish, and we wouldn't have our nondescript and ugly rows of houses in coal-mining towns. Inspirational teachers can have a profound influence upon the youth who will later occupy state and national positions and influence a nation.

Is Stuart right? Why do you agree or disagree with him?

8. Stuart writes of teachers (p. 182):

...A few of us have been stupid enough to tell students they cannot succeed in this or that. This is dangerous. After many years of teaching and associating with young people, I have learned to respect the ideas of my students, particularly the ideas I didn't understand. And I have learned never to tell a student he cannot succeed in this or that.

Did a teacher ever tell you that you could not succeed at something? If yes, tell us about it. How did that make you feel?

9. When a boy is caught stealing, Stuart takes him behind closed doors and asks the boy (p 189), “Can you, if I never tell a teacher, never tell anybody, so this won't ruin you as a man in later life here, go home and sin no more? Will you promise me? Will you be as good as your word?” The boy never steals again and becomes a fine citizen.

When a group of girls is caught skipping school and stealing merchandise (p. 238), Stuart and another teacher agree not to tell anyone but to “set them on fire” with a paddle. The female teacher paddles all of the girls and, Stuart writes, “Today all seven are fine citizens. Three are teachers themselves today.”

What do you think of these stories?

10. Stuart speaks strongly that teachers are not paid enough (pp. 204 and 205):

America is my country – and I'm as much a product of America as a stalk of Indian maize corn. Therefore I have a right to criticize and praise. And I say that we certainly have departed from what our forefathers established in this country....

I cannot understand how this nation can underestimate the worth of its schools, when it was founded on the basis of free schools and free religious worship. I am not proud of the way my native country has treated its teachers.

Do you think what Stuart says is true today? Why or why not?

11. Describing his experiences in Egypt, Stuart writes (p. 296),

These young and old Americans who bellyache about freedom in America should try being in a dictatorial country such as Egypt now and then. One simply doesn't criticize the Egyptian government, or President Nasser, who is the Egyptian government.

What reaction does this quotation evoke in you?

12. On p. 299, Stuart relates that "in America approximately forty-eight percent of our elementary and secondary pupils drop out of school before they reach or finish the twelfth grade."

According to a U.S. Census Bureau news release from 3/28/05, a report called "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2004" says that 85 percent of those ages 25 or older reported that they had completed at least high school. A report by Jay P. Greene called "High School Graduation Rates in the United States," released November 2001 and revised April 2002, says that it is closer to 71 percent; this report notes that the discrepancy between a figure of 86 percent found by the National Center for Education Statistics and the figure of 71 percent is "largely caused by NCES' counting of General Educational Development (GED) graduates and others with alternative credentials as high school graduates, and by its reliance on a methodology that is likely to undercount dropouts."

Is the state of education in the U.S. better today than when Stuart published this book in 1970? The statistics seem to indicate that we are. What do you think?