

## Talks About Our Winnetka Schools

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### LITERATURE

It is appropriate that the topic for this week's talk be literature, for next week is book week throughout the nation.

No more difficult question confronts the teachers of Winnetka at the present time than that of books for children. We have at our disposal the recommendations of the American Library association and the book lists of many school systems. Each of these has been thoughtfully prepared. The very trouble lies in the fact that these lists are prepared thoughtfully rather than scientifically. Unfortunately, the thought of an adult does not always point the way to the interests of a child.

Some books ranked by adults as classics, and listed as being most valuable to children, prove quite uninteresting to the boys and girls of today. The swiftness and fullness of life in the twentieth century has changed the standard for young people's reading, just as it has changed that of adults. The number of us grownups who actually sit down on an evening to read Thackeray, or George Elliot, or Walter Scott, or Jane Austin, is exceedingly small.

### Must Compete with Films

Books must now compete with the movies in wide range of activities and in an intensity of life that is sometimes sensational, and at times, stimulating.

Good books should counteract some of the feverishness of present day living, but must, at the same time, keep one awake and interested.

In making up our reading lists in the Winnetka schools, we are bearing in mind the following desirable attributes of good books for children.

### Desirable Attributes

1. Interest. A book which is not interesting to the child who reads it is a dead loss to him so far as literature is concerned, whatever its other fine qualities.

2. Appropriateness of Grading. A book which is given to a child who is too young to enjoy it is liable to be avoided by that child even when he is older. We cannot afford to prejudice children against the very books we want them some day to enjoy.

3. Ethical Value. There is no attempt to choose books that moralize. Such an attempt would violate the first qualification—interest. It is necessary, however, to see that the attributes of the characters in the book which one is led to admire through reading are attributes which we want our children to emulate.

4. Style. This is distressingly intangible and there is room for the widest divergence of opinion concerning it. This much, however, is evident: the books must be written in clear, effective, good English.

5. Appropriateness of Subject Matter. A book might conform to all of the above criteria and still be thoroughly inappropriate in its substance for school children. A book on a school reading list should deal with activities and emotions which are within the experiences of the child.

6. Appropriateness of Form. We have found that the circulation in the school library of an attractively illustrated edition of a book is so much greater than that of an unattractive edition, that the more expensive book is really more economical. The money spent on an attractive edition supplies a much larger number of children with reading material than would the same amount of money spent on two or three cheaper editions. It is easier to teach a child to love a book which is beautiful than one which is unattractive.

Since we realize that our book lists are incomplete, a great deal of freedom is allowed to the teachers in the various grades in the crediting

of books suitable to the capacities of their individual children, and available for their use. This is especially true among the teachers of the seventh and eighth grades.

### Cites Two Phases

Literature work in the Winnetka schools has two phases. By far the most important phase is the reading of a wide variety of good books. Every room has a library and we are constantly at work trying to make this library conform to the ideals set forth above. Every child reads at least one hundred books between first grade and eighth.

The second aspect of literature work is that which used to take a large portion of school time—the intensive study of a few classics. This type of study has, in the past, turned many children away from books instead of attracting them. We are endeavoring to give it to them in sufficiently small doses and with enough of the fun element to prevent it from repelling them. We confine this work largely to the seventh and eighth grades and, even there, it occupies only a small part of the school program. Some study however, of how our best writers get their effects, and intense tasting of a few samples of the best literature is undoubtedly of value.

A careful investigation of a wide range of children's books by a large number of teachers, children, and parents, is being contemplated. When the details of this investigation are under way they will be reported more fully. At present we are using such lists as are available and adding to them such books that, in our experiences, have aided in giving to the children a taste of reading good books.

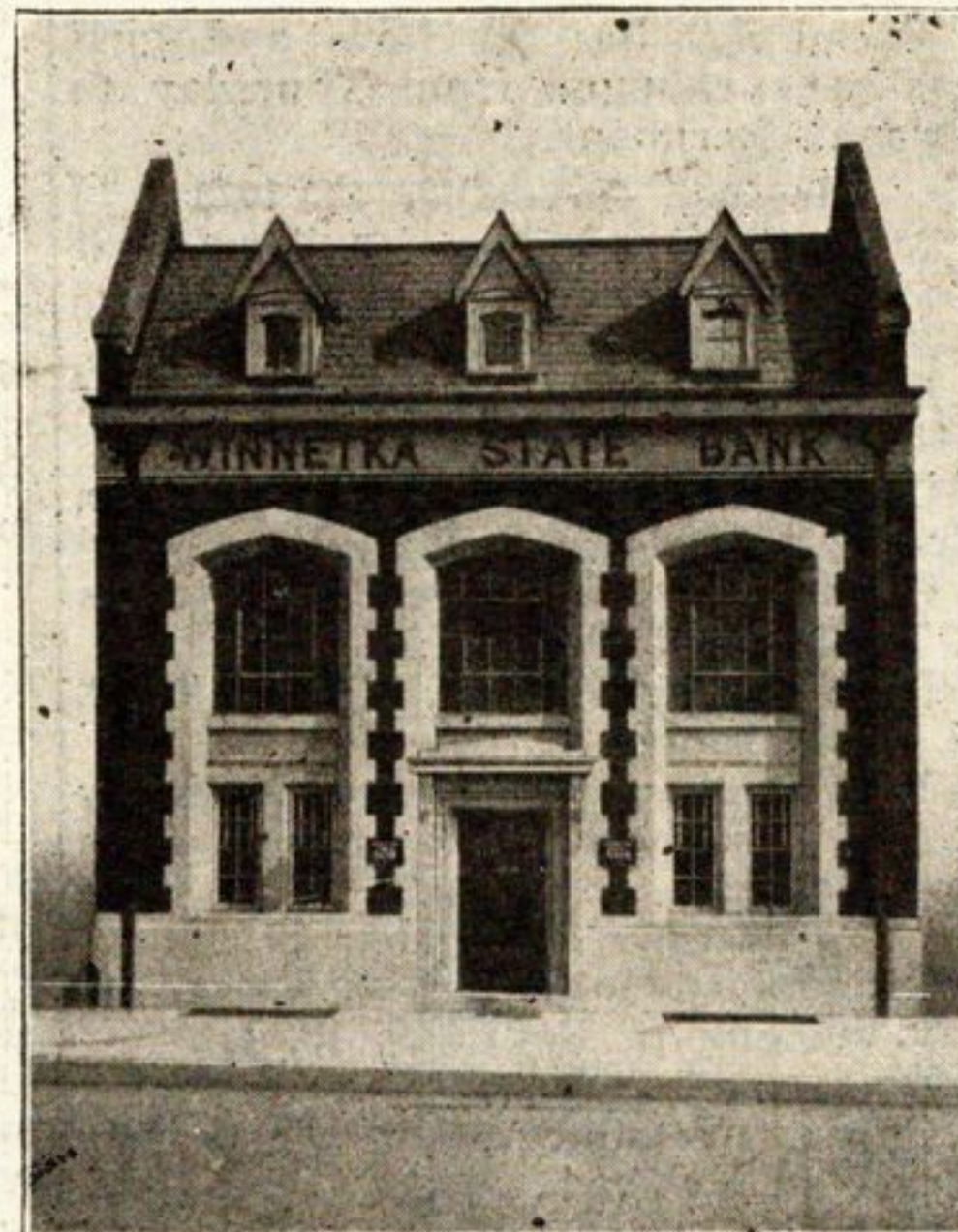
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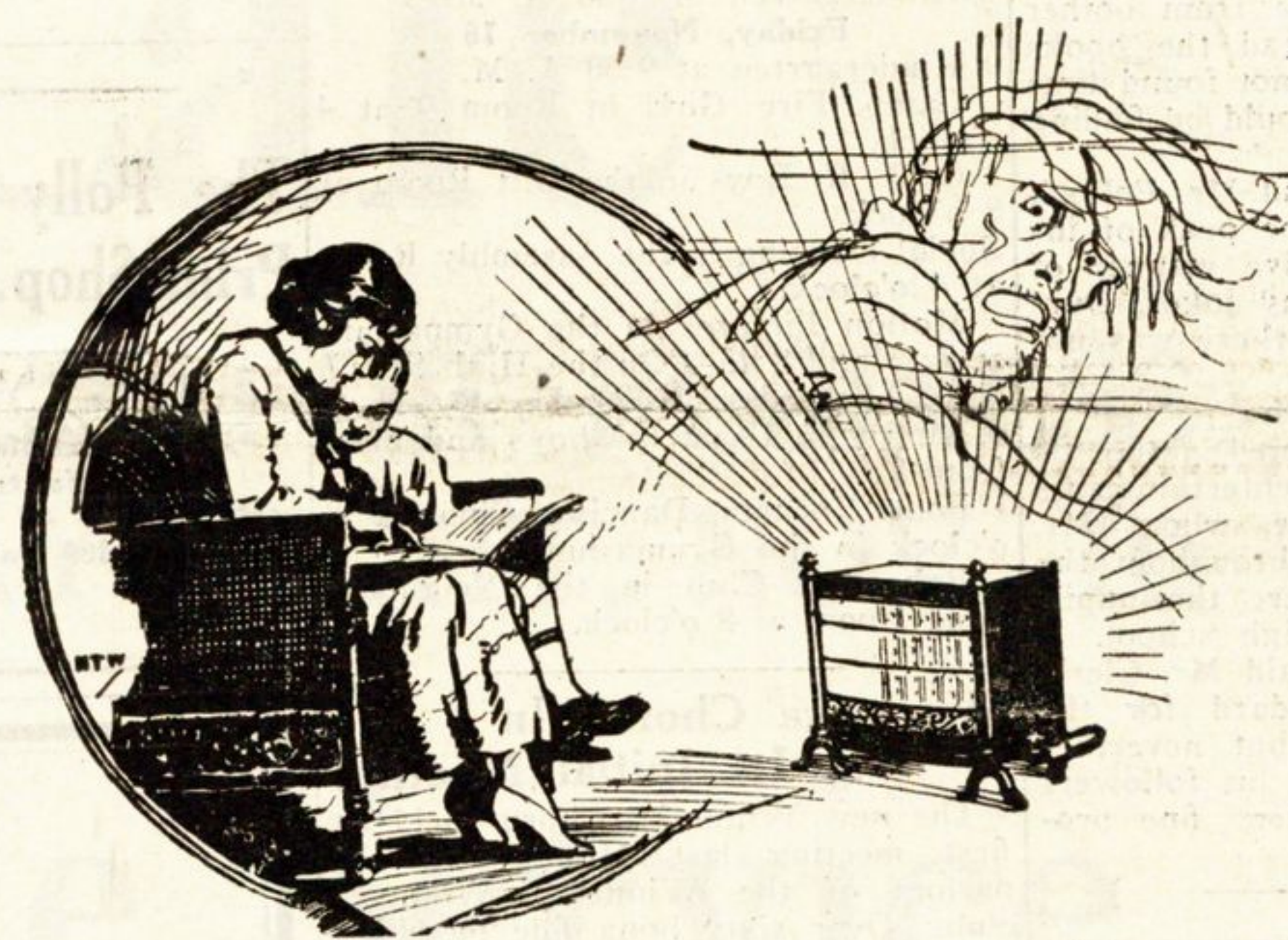
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