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Literary Studies

There is not just one way of studying literature. There are different ways, all depending on enthusiastic members prepared to do the required reading, on the choice of cheap, accessible books and on an equally enthusiastic group leader. The leader may or may not be a literature specialist but must be one who knows enough to get all the group members fully involved. That means deciding what to read and how to study the chosen text.

The readers' choice. Members take turns to suggest a book and lead a discussion on their choice. The advantages are that it can promote maximum participation, develop leadership and critical skills. The disadvantage is that there is likely to be an uneven quality about both the reading material and the level of study and discussion.

Theme work. A programme of reading is organised around a theme; for example, the theme of "Time and Place". The reading list might include the following: Flora Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford* - English rural and family life; Mrs. Gaskell, *North and South* - the industrial north versus the rural south:

China Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* - African experiences of colonisation: Toni Morrison, *Beloved* - the experience of slavery in the southern States.

A particular genre. For example, science fiction: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*: H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*: A. C. Clarke, *Of Time and Stars*; or romantic writings on the

theme of forbidden love from a vast field: *Women's Own*, a magazine story or a Mills and Boon novel: Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*: poems, songs or films illustrating this theme.

The disadvantage of using these last two methods is that they may provide too much material for a coherent and satisfying programme of work. The advantage of following a theme or genre is the excitement of discovering connections within and between texts.

Open University Courses. The current OU course A210SG4 Approaching Literature is not yet available through our Swap Shop but may be obtained second hand from an individual willing to sell. This course has sections on 'The Realist Novel', 'Romantic

Writings' - mostly poetry, some Shakespeare, Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, and Caryl Churchill's play *Top Girls* - representing modern drama.

The advantage of an OU course is that it has a unique coherence and provides a ready-made and stimulating programme of work. The group can choose according to its interest and use the good study guide material. The disadvantage is that someone has to do a lot of preparation, selecting and summarising, to reduce the material to manageable proportions. The earlier OU Literature course, A312 The Nineteenth Century Novel and its Legacy (part only), is available through the Swap Shop and is recommended.

To set about studying the chosen texts, here are a number of basic questions for discussion.

- What, in 8 or 10 words, written down and shared by everyone, is the book all about?
- The structure. How is the story told? Whose voice tells it and in what time frame?
- The plot or story line. Where and when, historically and socially, does it happen? Which are the critical points, and who or what changes? Is it convincing? What about the ending? And the opening lines, how well is the scene set?
- Judge the style and use of language. Find words and examples to describe the style of writing, e. g. descriptive, lyrical, ironic, humorous, colloquial, inventive, etc.
- What about the characters? The author's intentions and experience are relevant to a discussion on the characters but so are those of the reader, and so are the interpretations going beyond what the author may intend. Questions of the general appeal and moral 'rightness' of a character are often of less importance than we like to think. Equally important questions relate to why the author creates that particular character and that particular situation.
- What are the themes and issues? Themes are contained in the text itself. Issues are broad social

questions which the text raises. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice* one theme is parental irresponsibility and a relevant issue might be the laws of inheritance.

- What is the cultural and historical context of the writer and how does the book relate to other texts and authors? This is an important and difficult question. Help may be found in

the local library on the Literary Criticism and Biography shelves or one of the reasonably priced guides published by Penguin. Radio 4 and TV have book reading and review programmes.

Mary Cooper, Stockton-on-Tees U3A

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Poetry Groups

Bridgewater U3A

Each fortnightly meeting lasts two and a half hours and follows this format. Firstly, each member reads their poem on the theme set at a previous meeting and the group enter into a debate on its merits, praise or constructive criticism. Then we have a workshop, each writing a poem on a given subject in about twenty minutes, followed by peer comment. The standard is often very high and can be very amusing, despite being written against the clock.

We end our meeting with one member, each in turn, presenting the works and life of a selected poet. Around all this is woven news and information relating to the current world of poetry. The success of the group comes from the enthusiasm of the members.

Dennis Martin

Basildon and Billericay U3A

Due to its popularity the poetry group has had to divide. The Poetry for Pleasure group chose subjects for the whole year and each member brings two poems on the theme to the monthly meeting. They may be 'seasons and time', 'senses and relationships', 'humour and history' or 'parodies and Shakespeare'. The combined research brings together poets as diverse as Pope and McGonagall, Plash and Belloc, Larkin and Wordsworth, with Betjeman, Ted Hughes and Pam Ayres being firm friends.

The second group, Poetry for Discussion is deliberately kept small, each member taking a turn to introduce a poet, from Shakespeare to Heaney. Mutual trust and respect enable the group to face differing interpretations and healthy scepticism of poetry gurus, while horizons are widened and

confidence increased.

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Literature Groups

Liverpool U3A

We have been meeting for two hours once a fortnight for the last five years with about fifteen members. We decided to study seriously only fiction and poetry but we have joined the Play Reading Group to look at drama.

We select the titles for study six months in advance. Generally we choose a cluster of novels which have something in common, such as a period of history or a country or a theme. For example, we are reading novels and poetry about the First World War, Pat Barker's trilogy *Regeneration*, Sebastian Faulkes' *Birdsong* and the poems of Wilfred Owen and others. At each meeting one member will give a short introduction to the author and some aspect of the work. We have studied the poetry of Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes for several sessions but we also have open meetings when favourite poems are read.

Ruth Calma

Chesterfield U3A

"A good book is the best of friends, the same today and for ever", writes Martin Tipper in *Of Reading*. A good book is certainly a friend but one of the pleasures of friendship is discovering different aspects of another personality and, in this respect, the friend does not stay the same. When that friend is a book, a literature group provides the opportunity to see its text from many points of view.

Our group of twelve members has been meeting for three years, reading novels, biographies and travel books. Sometimes we discuss one text, sometimes a theme and members share information of relevant titles and authors. It has been difficult to obtain sufficient copies of a chosen book but by organising the programme several months in advance it allows titles to be ordered from the library or inexpensive editions of classic titles obtained.

Derbyshire Library Services has received funding to support local reading groups. They can supply ten copies of certain titles, collate information to assist reading group organisers and provide copies of *Vintage Reading Guides* (published by Random House, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA) which suggests ways to discuss individual titles. A County Literature Promotion Officer liaisons with interested groups and offers advice.

Heather Shaw

Leighton/Linslade U3A

We started a Booklovers' Circle about a year ago, and meet fortnightly. An English literature class (mainly the classics) already exists, but we decided to cover biography, travel and modern quality fiction. We discuss any recent news regarding authors and books, also any relevant radio programmes. We then go round the group, each talking about the books we have read. We do not all read the same book, but several books have been so widely praised that most of us have read them. We lend each other books and there is a book box from which one can borrow.

It appears that this group is very much enjoyed and one of the popular features is that we can read books of our own choice, and with such a gathering of bookworms, there is no difficulty in compiling a reading list!

Marian White

Orpington U3A

Our reading groups - Bookworms and Bookends - work on similar lines to those well described by Heather Williams in her helpful Start-up Leaflet. Listening, responding, sounding off against each other, this is when the group comes to life; this is how we educate each other. For this to work we all need to read the book-of-the-month. How to get multiple copies of a text? We use our friendly neighbourhood public library. Each study group has a library card giving an extended loan period. We choose our shared texts well in advance: this month Bookworms chose to read (devour?) Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces*, winner of the 1997 Orange and Guardian Fiction prizes, in great demand a year ago and now languishing on library shelves around the borough. By librarian's witchcraft ten copies were at Orpington Library within ten days ready for our next meeting, a marvellous service for us, and the librarians evidently welcomed increased mileage for their back stock.

In return for this service, we write and print occasional book lists, for distribution round borough libraries, reviewing books we have enjoyed. In November, our members took part in poetry readings organised jointly with the British Legion. A local novelist is being invited to speak to our members in the library.

Chris Fruin

Basildon and Billericay U3A

Our Literature group chooses a theme for each month - such as jealousy or old age - and we read one or two books to illustrate that theme. Each book is introduced by a member of the group who leads the subsequent discussion. Since the group was formed nearly ten years ago we have discussed more than 180 books, mostly novels, but including biography, history, children's books and short stories. We have read authors as diverse as Austen and Amis, Kipling and Kafka, Waugh and Woolf. We have tackled Proust, Joyce and Henry James as well as little-known oddities like Augustus Carp and Archie and Mehitabel.

Worthing U3A

Literature: There are two sessions each month, one of them being based on a novel and the other on a poet. The members of the group read the chosen works beforehand and there is a leader for the discussion that follows each session. Recent novelists and poets studied have included Bruce Chatwin, Charles Dickens (*A Christmas Carol*), Thomas Hardy, Dylan Thomas and Ted Hughes.

Plays and Playwrights: This group developed from a theatre group with a programme of talks, outings and theatre trips, but decided to study writing for the stage in more detail. Tom Stoppard and Alan Ayckbourn have been the playwrights featured recently.

Play Reading: This group meets to read either a one act play in one session or a longer play spread out over several sessions. At the last Members' Meeting for our U3A the group presented "Miss Pringle Plays Portia" by Victor Maddern and Lynne Reid Banks. The meeting at the village hall was enlivened by interruptions and comments from characters among the audience. Although it was a reading, the characters made their entrances and exits and were appropriately dressed, making it thoroughly entertaining.

Poetry Reading: Each month there is a theme for the session and members of the group find poems which relate to it. Each person reads two or three poems and introduces them. The local library's excellent poetry section is well used, and each theme produces a wide variety of styles and periods, from Shakespeare to the present day. Recent themes have been 'gardens', 'time' and 'birds/flight'. The group has presented a poetry reading for a members' meeting on two occasions, on the theme of 'cats and dogs' and 'children and childhood'. This year our theme is 'the sea'.

Writing for Pleasure: When the convenor of the Creative Writing group decided to stop, the members of the group decided to carry on "writing for pleasure".

Beryl Jolliffe

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"If you are willing to learn, there are new things all around you. Learning keeps you young and vital".
(George Shultz, former United States Secretary of State, when 69 years)

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Literacy and Libraries

An international survey has found that the level of adult literacy is strongly associated with age, education and employment status. Older people tend to perform less well and education is not always a good predictor of literacy.

The measurement is taken by three dimensions: prose literacy (the ability to understand text), document literacy (the ability to locate and use information in charts and timetables), and qualitative literacy (the ability to perform basic arithmetic operations on numbers embedded in text). Performance is then grouped in five levels, Level 1 being the lowest.

Level 3 is considered to be the minimum required for coping with modern life and work but about half of the adult population of Britain do not reach that standard. Men did better than women in document and qualitative literacy. However, Britain's levels of literacy were similar to other English speaking countries, Australia, Canada and the United States.

Has this measurement of literacy anything to do with changes in lifestyle? Another survey analyses participation in leisure activities. As expected, 99% of adults watch television and about 88% listen to radio, but only 65% (71% female, 58% male) read books. Although 76% males and 68% females read a national newspaper in 1981, only 62% and 53% respectively did so in 1996.

So what books do they read? On average each head of population in the United Kingdom read 4.7 fiction and 2.2 non-fiction books in 1995-6. People in the English counties borrowed just over nine library books each in the same period, but since the mid-1980s there has been a decline in the total number of library books borrowed. Now the public libraries are extending their lending facilities to cassettes, CDs and videos.

An analysis prepared by Loughborough University gives the subject of books borrowed from public libraries in 1996-7.

Adult non-fiction 21.3%
Children's fiction 22.3%

General fiction 21.0%
Children's non-fiction 6.0%
Mystery, detection 12.8%
Light romance 10.4%
Historical fiction 3.1%
Short stories, horror and humour 1.1%
Science fiction 0.1% Westerns 0.7%
War 1.2%

Statistics! "One in two UK households own a pet, ranging from dogs, cats and rabbits to the more exotic snakes and spiders." (*Social Trends 28.1998*) But that is another story!

It is clear from the contributions to this issue that the public library service for U3As varies around the country. Few have a facility to borrow several copies of one title for longer periods useful for literature groups. Often

county library services are subject to economy drives when rates are being set. Hours of opening are reduced and the mobile service in country areas is curtailed. As retired people rely on the public library for information, education and relaxation, maybe they should be the more sensitive to these threats.

In a green paper, "Building the New Library Network", the Government sets out plans for setting up a network of libraries all linked through the Internet by the year 2002. There are staff to be trained and the content of the database to be decided upon, with an emphasis on life-long learning. National and local government papers, directories, information resources, etc. will have to be converted into user-friendly material for the general public.

Some libraries already have terminals for reserving and renewing books using the number on one's library ticket, with a database of all the titles throughout the county.

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Creative Writing Groups

Lytham St. Annes U3A

Our Writing for Pleasure Group, apart from a couple of our more adventurous writers, feel no need to publish for profit. Our aim is to write short stories, character studies, poems and essays, each based on a theme or topic specified at the end of the fortnightly session.

When the group started in 1992, with only six members, tasks to be evaluated and discussed were fewer

so there was time to prepare the next topic by introducing examples from literature - novels, poems and plays - to stimulate ideas. For example, for the topic 'Clergymen' we studied Barbara Pym's Bishop Grote, Chaucer's Parson and Prioress, Trollope's Mr Slope and Bishop Proudie and, of course, Jane Austen's Mr Collins. Drama was our main source for 'Boy Meets Girl'. We looked at Romeo's meeting with Juliet and Enobarbus' description of Antony's meeting with Cleopatra. The material chosen for 'Music and Musicians' proved a rich source of ideas for the pieces group members wrote.

Since there are now sixteen members, time for exploring literary examples is limited and often topics are only briefly introduced. Poems are useful for they can be quickly read and discussed. We have recently used *Ozymandias* and *My Last Duchess* as stimuli for writing. A selection of mini book reviews, from a weekend newspaper, was the starting point for members to write their own first chapter of the novel reviewed.

Competitions, particularly those set by the U3A Writers' Network, have been useful to us. Our members will certainly respond to the U3A Writer of the Year topic, 'Travellers' Tales'. Our most adventurous member, who has had articles published in *Choice* and *Quartos* magazines, and four short stories read on BBC local radio, was runner-up in a recent national U3A competition. One of our accomplished poets has received regional prizes for her poems and short stories.

Although there is no pressure to have our work published for profit we all like to see our words in print. We provide short stories, poems and articles for Lytham St. Annes U3A quarterly magazine, the *Herald*, and contribute regularly to the regional U3A/Life Long Learning Forum magazine. We have produced two anthologies of our writing which were enthusiastically received by local U3A members. Our latest venture, inspired by a competition in the *Daily Telegraph*, was a booklet of mini-sagas and haikus which we asked our U3A friends to judge.

Over the last seven years we consider we have created a writing workshop which encourages, stimulates, and provides ample scope for the literary ambitions of all our members.

Dorothy Meredith

East Suffolk U3A

This group of twelve generates lively exchanges in the pursuit of their skills. In 1995 they published their first book, a selection of sixteen stories. The quick sales encouraged them to publish another of twenty-one stories in 1997, typed, photocopied, collated and bound by the group.

One member keeps an eye open for writing competitions and outlets for articles in magazines and local papers. Amusing stories, tales of bygone days, hobbies and women's interests find a market and the satisfaction of seeing one's words in print. Beginners' writing tends to be autobiographical but practice

develops imagination and that individual touch which makes for interesting writing.

Lillian Morrow

Liverpool U3A

The group began in 1995 and by 1997 had published a book, *Creatively Stretched*, containing poems, descriptive essays and short stories. Originally the members would write at each session and immediately discuss the work, but now writing is done at home and the work read aloud and discussed. They meet for two hours fortnightly. Liverpool U3A has a magazine, published twice a year, which provides another outlet for the work of both the creative writers and the poets.

H. G. Patterson

South Lakeland U3A

We have evolved our own method of working which has served us well for over five years. Each member of the group, is invited, but not compelled, to write something each fortnight. Contributions are read out and briefly discussed. Copies are handed to all members to prepare written comments at home for discussion with the authors at the next meeting. The comments are expected to include the readers' reactions to the effectiveness and impact of the piece and suggestions for improvement.

We publish a small booklet each year for our U3A members and co-operate with other groups. Some of our plays have been produced by our Poetry, Prose and Play writing group and our booklet designed by our Art and Computer groups.

Fleet U3A

Fleet U3A was formed four years ago. It has now grown to almost six hundred members with over forty special interest groups. The Creative Writing group was one of the very first groups to be formed. About a dozen members attended the initial meeting and were encouraged to write about personal experiences. This enabled members to overcome initial nervousness when reading out their work, and gradually to get into writing fictional stories, dialogue, poetry, travel articles, short radio plays and so on. Occasionally a speaker is invited, usually an established writer who would pass on the benefits of his or her experience in having work published.

In the second year, a small anthology was brought out entitled *WordAge One*. We meet fortnightly to

read our work and to receive comments on it from the others, always kindly given and with helpful intention for we do not wish to discourage our members. We set a topic to write for the next session. Whilst at first this topic may cause bafflement, invariably we have found that inspiration comes to the rescue and ideas flow, so that interesting articles, stories, poems and plays are ready for reading at the next meeting.

Recent topics have included 'If trees could speak' and even 'Rent-a-Tome' produced some remarkable ideas. No two people produce work which is even superficially similar. We find that the regular meeting and the topic produce a stimulus which urges us to write. In the absence of the group few of us would have the discipline or the incentive to write much. We find it provocative and rewarding. Last year we produced another anthology, *WordAge Two*. Some of us have had success in sending work for publication and to competitions.

B. C. Fox

Contributions were also received from the following U3As describing similar activities in their Creative Writing groups.

Aylesbury Vale, Milton Keynes, Abergavenny, Wirral, Sudbury, Bookham and District, Epsom and Ewell, and Southend

The Editorial Panel has been pleased to receive these contributions to SOURCES, not all of which could be contained in this 12pp issue. There are 144 Poetry groups, 164 Literature groups and 125 Creative Writing groups in the U3A.

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Where can we get

U3A Start-up Leaflets for poetry, literature and creative writing

There are four leaflets available from the U3A National Office which enable new groups to make a start in the interests focused upon in this issue.

How to lead a Poetry Group was prepared by Kate Wedd (Bristol U3A). *How to start a Poet Profiles Group* was written by Cynthia Watts and Beryl Dixon (Basildon and Billericay U3A). Stella Claydon (Lewes U3A) put together 12 pp of very useful advice in the *Creative Writing Handbook*. Lastly, *How to start a Group for Bookworms* by Heather Williams (West Wilts U3A) provides ideas for those who simply love reading and entering into disciplined critical discussion.

Start-up Leaflets, all A5 size, can be ordered from National Office at 40p each, 3 for £1 or 8 for £2.50 plus postage (20p up to 4 copies, 31p up to 8 and 39p up to 12). Cheques must be payable to The Third Age Trust and must be accompanied by a suitable stamped addressed envelope. (see Sources No.1 for the full list of Start-up Leaflets)

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Subject Network Co-ordinators

Poetry: Shirley Thew, 51 Ozonia Way, Wickford, Essex SS12 0PQ

Creative Writing: Harry Carter, 23 Leskinnick Terrace, Penzance, Cornwall TR18 2HB Groups wishing to contact other U3A groups with the same interest can call upon the aid of the Subject Network Co-ordinator.

Teaching ICT Skills to Third Agers

This new 36pp booklet is a timely addition to U3A Start-up publications. It provides suggestions for the teaching of computing and Internet skills to U3A members who need help and encouragement to master basic knowledge. It is written by Mike and Elaine Williams of Hastings and Rother U3A.

Order from National Office at £1.00 each with stamped addressed A 5 envelope.

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Languages

Purbeck U3A

To help us when visiting an Italian restaurant abroad, we invited the manager of the local Italian restaurant to give us some tuition. We went through the procedure of booking a table and ordering a meal from a typical menu. We have enjoyed a meal at his restaurant and at the same time learned more about the language and customs of the Italians. *Charles Patterson*

International language contacts

The U3A National Languages Network Co-ordinator, Gloria Blackburne, aims to increase the number of international contacts between U3A groups around the world. This can be achieved by exchanging a greeting for the year 2000 in the language studied, for example in French to a group in France or in Italian to Italy. Alternatively a group studying Latin or Greek or any other language might send a

greeting to a similar group elsewhere in the world, even in Australia or New Zealand.

The content of the message, apart from good wishes for the new millennium, could include some information about the home U3A and the way the language is studied.

There are 610 language groups in 384 U3As. Those groups interested in this venture should, firstly, make contact with others in their region or locality to assemble a list of U3As wishing to participate, together with the languages involved.

This regional list can then be sent to the National Co-ordinator who will pass back addresses from overseas U3A groups interested in establishing contact with us. The suggested date for sending messages is autumn 1999.

***Gloria Blackburne, 37A Viceroy Court, Wilmslow Road, Manchester M20 2RJ
(0161 434 1194) - e-mail: gloria@blackburne.u-net.com***

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Resource Centre News

Response from readers

Many people have contacted me, since the last issue of SOURCES was published, to comment on various aspects of Resource Centre News. I have been especially pleased to be offered material, produced by groups for their own use, which they are willing to place in the collection for others to borrow.

Others have responded by giving feedback on the quality and value of material they have received on loan. Often borrowers just put a short note in the package when they return an item telling me if it was useful or had limitations for their particular study group.

Some of the most varied comments have related to the foreign films on video which language groups have been using enthusiastically. These have ranged from "wonderful, the group thoroughly enjoyed it" to "too frantic for us - something quieter next time please". Any suggestions for more titles to add to our collection will be received with gratitude and, if they are available with English subtitles, I will buy them.

Literature Groups

This issue is focusing on literature, poetry and creative writing. This is an area in which we are only just starting to collect material. There seems to be little available in slide format but I have discovered some

useful material on video. One group has highly recommended the series of videos, *Story of English*, produced by the BBC as a series of videos exploring how English developed and spread as an influential, global language. The BBC also produce a complete set of Shakespeare's plays on video (for educational use only) and I am happy to buy any of these that you may need.

A set of twenty-eight biographies of famous authors has been produced by Academy Media, ranging from Austin through Dickens, Elliot, Keats to Walter Scott and Wordsworth. A complete list is available from the Resource Centre. The BBC also have a series of twenty-four videos, *Great Writers of the Twentieth Century*, which we have available for loan and might also be useful to groups studying the life and works of modern authors.

For groups interested in calligraphy we have acquired a wonderful set of slides illustrating the work of Irene Wellington, and a video on the same subject by Jackie Devereux.

Those groups interested in creative writing might like to use *Ways With Words - BBC guide to creative writing* which is a 90 minute audiocassette with an accompanying booklet.

Other new material

In response to requests we have added a great many new slide sets to the collection since the beginning of the year. They cover astronomy, history, gardening, geography, geology, transport, energy, science and ornithology. These are sets of 12 or 18 slides with notes and can be used easily by people without very much subject knowledge, or by experts who might choose to augment the notes from their own experience.

We have also acquired some walking and travel videos. The latter have been carefully chosen so that they do not overlap with those already held in the Salford Video Collection which is organised by David Butterworth and which regularly advertises travel videos for loan in *Third Age News*. This service used to charge for the loan of videos to cover its costs, but they now have a grant from Resource Centre funds in order that the service can be free to users, as ours is. The only cost for any U3A member is return postage on the items borrowed.

Loan System

The Resource Centre is now using the computerised library management system, Limes Millennia, for its stock catalogue, names and addresses of borrowers and for recording all loans. This also allows the automatic tracking of overdue items but thankfully it is rare to have to send overdue reminders to U3A members. I would ask you to make sure that all your loans are returned very promptly as other groups are often waiting to use them on a specific date and a fast return helps in circulating the material around the groups who need it.

At the time of writing the Resource Centre completes its first six months as a working unit. Around 350

items have been sent out on loan during this period and a large number of enquiries have been dealt with. The volume of work is growing at a steady pace and new stock is being added all the time.

Building work is expected to disturb normal working at the National Office during the summer months. I hope to keep the loan service running normally but the speed of response to enquiries may be affected. I hope you will take this into account but continue to use the service whenever you need to.

Elizabeth Gibson, Resource Centre Manager.

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Bridging gaps

Across generations

The idea of bringing together a group of U3Agers and school Sixth Formers came from a report of activities in Seaford U3A. They had run a discussion group which had the rule that neither parents nor school staff were to be present.

Two grammar schools in Salisbury warmed to the idea and for two years about ten U3Agers and ten teenagers have met after school to hold a forum, a mix of ideas and opinions on matters of topical, ethical or political interest. The programme for the fortnightly meetings is worked out at the first session. One of each age group takes it in turn to open the subject for about five minutes. The U3A group leader acts as chairman, encouraging all to join in the conversation and stimulating a fresh approach when red herrings appear or tongues get stuck.

By leaving out the parent age group there seems to be freedom to express opinions and to debate issues frankly, without any embarrassment or discourtesy. Is it because the 60 and 70 year olds are leaving the world stage and the 16 and 17 year olds have not yet stepped on to it?

The Salisbury young adults come from the history and politics class in their first year of sixth form. Subjects tackled this academic year have included President Clinton, the legalising of cannabis, the politics of smoking, reform of the House of Lords, the state of matrimony, homosexuality and the future of the church.

Both age groups have discovered their prejudice about each other. Assumptions have been seen to be unfounded. Not all U3Agers want to restore capital punishment and not all teenagers want to smoke tobacco or cannabis. This forum is a real learning experience.

David Ensor, Salisbury U3A

Across races

A reader has asked whether there are any U3As based in areas with an ethnic minority population. This member, Lancashire born and Yorkshire bred, served in the Second World War and became a graduate teacher. Being West Indian she has suffered prejudice but has found that teaching the history of black people in Britain has reduced racial misunderstanding.

Has any U3A studied racism, ethnic minorities, race relations or multi-racial Britain? Do U3As have members from other races? What resources are there to assist study of the subject? The Imperial War Museum (Education Officer: Anita Bellam) has a pack, *Together*, aimed to show that our multi-cultural society has a shared history. Where else?

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Age is an opportunity no less
Than youth itself, though in another dress.

(*H. W. Longfellow 1807-1882*)

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Debate of the Age and U3A

We had hoped to provide a comprehensive report on the work done on this national project in U3As across the country. Unfortunately only very few U3As responded to the request from the National Office for reports. This article is therefore incomplete but may inspire other groups to take up the subject.

BARNSTAPLE U3A are preparing a

conference in May 1999 to discuss "The Future of Health and Care". The chairman of their meeting will be Emeritus Professor Leaper, former Chairman of the Training Advisory Committee of Age Concern, England. They are co-operating with Age Concern Barnstaple who have facilitated some financial support. They expect to compile a report on the conference and their own work for submission to the Millennium Debate.

GUILDFORD U3A tackled the project in a study group which met monthly for two hours and discussed a different set of issues at each session. Their subjects included retirement patterns, pensions,

life-long learning, environmental issues and the many, often unrecognised, contributions of older people to society. They plan to report their findings to Age Concern for the Millennium Report.

RICHMOND U3A worked with their Current Affairs Group and held discussions on some of the issues listed by the Millennium Debate proposals. These were Health and Care, Paying for Age, Work and Lifestyles, Values and Attitudes and the Built Environment. They found their debates very stimulating and came to a number of conclusions on the type of changes which would have to be implemented in the future if an ageing population is to function more effectively. In particular they felt that the prevailing value system is one of the major influences on attitudes, priorities and allocation of resources. They verbally attacked a number of "holy cows" including the reassessment of commercial activities, the concentration of wealth, capital intensive processes and the "casualisation" of employment.

They discussed the need for more interaction between different policy areas which make an impact on young and old which would produce a more homogeneous society. We cannot report on how they plan to use the findings of their debate but it is hoped that they will find their way into the final Millennium Debate report.

LONDON U3A set up a Debate of the Age study group in October 1998 and have met fortnightly since then. After two or three sessions the group decided that the inward-looking approach of discussing the five major issues of the Millennium Debate would not advance thinking very much. They, therefore, concentrated their efforts on one of the subjects, Values and Attitudes.

The approach was to draw up a series of questions which they could address to young people outside the U3A. An approach was made to a local community secondary school. By chance one class (Grade 8) was working on a "granny project" which had already alerted the children to some of the issues of ageing and of inter-age relationships. The U3A group was invited to work with the class. The children individually answered the U3A questionnaire which the U3A group then analysed. Finally, in March 1999, U3A invited the whole class (27 children of multi-ethnic mix and aged between 12 and 14) and their teacher to tea and set up a debate between them and 17 U3A members. This was recorded and is being analysed.

The group also ran a quiz for the children, asking them to choose three out of ten activities which could be enjoyed jointly by young and old and which would lead to better mutual understanding. Two prizes were given for the best ideas. The answers proved most enlightening and offered interesting possibilities for future co-operation between the school and U3A. London U3A intends to continue with this kind of investigation, possibly with college students. A number of individual interviews have already been recorded, in writing or on tape, by some members.

A final report on their work will be submitted to Age Concern Millennium Debate.

WEARSIDE U3A worked with their Architecture group and drew up a questionnaire on housing which was filled in by 75 out of 78 U3A members. The replies gave valuable information on the histories of

their house occupation and their future requirements as well as attitudes to moving and size of home, etc. Enquiries of this kind should be of great value to the national debate.

ABERGELE U3A discussed "Values and attitudes in an ageing society" and realised that since future policies depended on the attitudes of the younger generation they would make contact with sixth formers in the local grant-aided school and discuss the subject with them. We hope to hear more from them later.

CONCLUSION It is encouraging to see that a number of different approaches to the Debate of the Age have materialised within the U3As. It is hoped that others will be inspired to tackle some of these important issues. Please send your ideas and reports on your work to SOURCES for inclusion in future issues.

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Archaeology

"If you are an archaeology enthusiast; if you wish to take up archaeology seriously, study it, enjoy it - but not become a professional - then the Council for Independent Archaeology is the body for you". So reads the website of the Council (www.archaeology.co.uk/cia/). Its purpose is to encourage diversity and pluralism in archaeology, independent of the state and to support the amateur. It holds meetings and an annual congress. It provides an archaeology placements service to assist those who want to go on a dig.

Mike Rumbold, Hon. Sec., Council of Independent Archaeology, 3 West Street, Weedon Bec, Northampton NN7 4QU (01327 340855)

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U3A/University of Plymouth Conference

The University of Plymouth is hosting two study days on "The Arts in the West Country" on 26-27th June 1999, with lectures on West Country architecture, photography and art, followed by a visit to the City Museum and Art Gallery, and lectures on arts, music and literature followed by a music performance.

Day fees are £9.00 each. Single rooms per night are £16.50 (en-suite) or £13.50 (standard). Also available is a two course dinner (£7.75) and breakfast (£5.75). Application forms, from your U3A secretary, are to be sent to Len A. Slaughter, 7 King's Meadow, Winkleigh, Devon EX19 8HD

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In the next issue

SOURCES No.5 will be mailed in August and will focus on music. There are U3A choirs, instrumental groups, handbell ringers, opera appreciation groups, etc. If your U3A has a story to tell which will help others, you are invited to submit a contribution to reach SOURCES at the National Office by 25th June 1999.

New readers may apply for a free copy of SOURCES by sending their address and postcode on a postcard to the National Office.

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