Books You Might Like

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Abstract

Probably the most familiar lament of the college student is, "I don’t have time to keep up with the new books—or, the old ones!..."
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Books and Cokes

PROBABLY the most familiar lament of the college student is, "I don’t have time to keep up with the new books—or, the old ones! It'll be years before I get caught up with my reading!" In the rush of getting to classes, of studying, of plunging into week-end social activities, the pleasant pastime of curling up with a good book gives way to the straight-backed chair before a study table, and to fighting to stay awake over a chem manual. But there is one painless and profitable way to keep up, partially at least, with things literary. That's by spending an hour each week at Books and Cokes.

Any book review is, of course, second best to reading the book for yourself. But the unique feature of Books and Cokes is that the reviewers are students, who present their comments informally before an audience composed exclusively of students. By tradition, all faculty members are "included out." The student reviewer is free to discuss whatever aspects of the book he wants to. The book is of his own choosing. He can critically appraise it however he likes, without fear of censor.

How did such a student activity as Books and Cokes get started here, on the campus of a technical school, supposedly not interested in things of this nature? In the fall of 1941, when Bob Lee was the editor of Sketch Magazine, he suggested the idea to the Sketch Publication Board. The Board agreed to sponsor such a program, and it has since been one of the duties of succeeding Sketch editors to arrange the programs, approve the books to be reviewed, and generally, to act as chairman.

When the program was in its experimental stages, Books and Cokes met only during fall quarter. It was followed in winter quarter by Books and Coffee, a series of reviews presented by members of the faculty of the English and Speech Department. Then, in 1943, at the suggestion of the manager of the Memorial Union, Books and Cokes was extended to a spring quarter series, also. Thus, throughout a school year, it is possible to hear at least thirty books reviewed, and whether you ever get around to reading them or not, for yourself, some knowledge of them can be picked up in this casual way.

Without the encouragement of Colonel Harold E. Pride,
director of the Memorial Union, an enthusiastic friend of all student group meetings held in the Union, Books and Cokes could never have grown and developed into the popular position it holds on campus. The Student Board, of the Memorial Union, has supported the program from its beginning, and, recently voted to serve free cokes at the forums, thus providing a literal fulfillment to the program's title.

Evidence that interest in this student-planned and student-performed program is wide-spread was had last fall quarter when a representative from the campus of the state university visited Books and Cokes, to find out how the plan operated, so that, if he were favorably impressed, a similar program might be initiated through the Memorial Union on the SUI campus. He was favorably impressed, and it might be a source of considerable satisfaction to the students of Iowa State College to reflect that we do have a few of the more truly “liberal” student activities, here on our campus, than can be found at even the liberal arts schools!

Those students who volunteer aren't necessarily masters of public speaking, nor are they possessed of any more “free” time than the average. They simply have a favorite book, a pet book, about which they'd like to say a few things. Or maybe it's a favorite author. Usually, the reviewer is sincere in his desire to explain the particular feature of the book which interested him, to read aloud those passages he most enjoyed, or to tell some detail of the author's background he's found interesting. The experience of presenting ideas and emotions about a piece of writing before an informal (and very critical audience) is two-fold for the student reviewer: he gains an immeasurable self-confidence (ask those who have given reviews!) and, he learns to evaluate—or devaluate his own judgments upon putting them to the test of verbalization.

Every Thursday, about four o'clock, clusters of students detach themselves quietly from the idle chatter in the Grill, or, they come hurrying from classes, from dormitories, sororities and fraternities—all headed for the spacious Oak Room of the Memorial Union. There, around solid oak tables, cokes are sipped, knitting needles click, pipes are lit and re-lit, smiles exchanged, occasionally hearty laughts and sometimes somber, thoughtful silences shared—but, in all, a satisfying, we think, and a pleasant hour is always yours at Books and Cokes.

—Nancy Stewart, Sci. Fr.