

SELECTION 2

Sex for Credit

Vocabulary Review

honesty, *candor* and humor
 the most *pungent* Anglo-Saxonisms
 Neubeck is *succinct*
chastely separated by a night table

1 I turned to the young man sitting next to me and said,
 2 "Sexual intercourse." He smiled and nodded his shaggy
 3 head. "Sexual intercourse," he repeated.

4 Now, before readers rip out these pages, please under-
 5 stand that we were sitting in a great, gray lecture hall at
 6 the University of Minnesota among dozens of students
 7 who were saying the same words at the same time. The
 8 second lecture of a course called "Human Sexual Be-
 9 havior" sounded like a kindergarten word drill—except
 10 for the words. Leading the class, and clearly enjoying
 11 himself, was Professor Gerhard Neubeck.

12 "Don't look at me when you speak," he urged us. "Turn
 13 to your neighbor. It's more embarrassing that way. Now,
 14 let me hear 'vagina.'" We all muttered the word while
 15 Neubeck stood, hands in pockets, eyes gleaming, like Vic-
 16 tor Borge about to launch one of his mad attacks on an
 17 unsuspecting piano. "Louder, please," he demanded in a
 18 calm voice. "VAGINA," we shouted. Laughing and self-
 19 conscious, we tried "clitoris" and then "erection."

20 After class, Neubeck stood in the window of his office on
 21 the new West Bank campus in Minneapolis. "The first big
 22 hang-up I run into with each new class is the vocabulary,"
 23 he explained. "This idea that sex talk is dirty talk is deeply
 24 ingrained in us. I have to desensitize my students so that
 25 sexuality becomes less loaded for them. Saying the words
 26 out loud is a good start. If you repeat 'vagina' often
 27 enough, it loses some of its threat."

28 It may surprise those on the far side of the generation
 29 gap to learn that college students today need any sexual
 30 desensitizing, but it's true. At least the kids are smart
 31 enough to recognize their hang-ups and to make some
 32 attempt to understand them. That's more than can be said
 33 for many parents who like to pretend that sex doesn't
 34 exist.

35 Students at Minnesota are luckier than most—the ad-
 36 ministration has made some provision for sex education.
 37 Even more important, students find in Neubeck's class an
 38 honesty, candor, and humor that are rare on other cam-
 39 puses. Most universities—if sex is taught at all—either
 40 limit it to the basic biological facts, antiseptically pre-
 41 sented by a gym teacher, or sandwich it into a marriage
 42 course, somewhere between the lectures on choosing a
 43 china pattern and balancing the family budget. Hardly
 44 any notice is taken in such courses of what Neubeck calls
 45 "the enormous emotional and psychological complexities
 46 that go along with the physiology." And yet, that is what
 47 the kids want to know about. Which is why Neubeck's
 48 course is always filled on the first registration day every
 49 quarter. Although "Family Studies 100—Human Sexual
 50 Behavior," as it is listed in the university catalogue, is
 51 officially limited to juniors and seniors who plan profes-
 52 sions dealing with the sex problems of others, many in the
 53 class are there to understand their own sexuality.

54 No word is forbidden to students in Neubeck's class
 55 (although he himself deliberately refrains from the most
 56 pungent Anglo-Saxonisms), and no question is too hot to
 57 answer. When kids ask what the Professor thinks about
 58 premarital sex, he tells them: "Americans overemphasize
 59 'scoring' in everything they do—business, sports, and
 60 even sex. What is really important is not scoring a con-
 61 quest, but rather, what happens between two people. The

62 decision to have intercourse, made jointly by two rational
63 people, is a lot different from the impulsive exploitation of
64 one person by another, which is often the way it is in sex
65 before marriage."

66 When a student asks if masturbation is harmful,
67 Neubeck answers that one, too: "There is no scientific
68 evidence that masturbation leads to anything detrimental.
69 Of course, if a person is masturbating a dozen times a
70 day, I'd say he was concentrating on only one thing. I tend
71 to be a little suspicious of anyone who overdoes anything."

72 In Neubeck's class, kids discuss everything from techni-
73 cal virginity to extramarital sex, from pornography to
74 prostitution, from menstruation to menopause, from
75 abortion to abnormal sex. The Professor quotes from the
76 poetry of e. e. cummings, Bertrand Russell's autobiog-
77 raphy and John Updike's *Couples*, as well as Masters and
78 Johnson's study of the physical aspects of sex. Reading
79 assignments include Vance Packard's *The Sexual Wilder-*
80 *ness*, a book called *Sex and Love in the Bible*, plus articles
81 from scientific journals with titles like "Extent of Spousal
82 Agreement of Certain Non-Sexual and Sexual Aspects of
83 Marital Adjustment."

84 What is really outstanding about Neubeck's course is
85 not so much what he teaches, but how he teaches his
86 students to think about sex. Says the Professor: "For the
87 first time, many of my students find in this class an adult
88 who is willing to openly admit that he is a sexual being.
89 I'm not defensive about sex, and I don't want them to be."

90 Two years ago, when Gerry Neubeck began his sex lec-
91 tures, his three grown children threatened to picket the
92 class with signs reading: "Dad is a Dirty Old Man." They
93 were kidding, of course, but for many Americans, sex is no
94 joke, and any man who teaches it is a little suspect. In spite
95 of the sexual revolution we are experiencing now, the
96 story of the birds and the bees is, at least among the
97 hard-core middle class, still the biggest conversational
98 taboo in the country. Neubeck is succinct: "People equate
99 talking with doing."

100 It's true America has come a long way from the day in
101 1934 when a censor blue-penciled the word "syphilis" out
102 of the New York health commissioner's radio script. And
103 we're light-years from those pre-1960 movies when Hol-

104 lywood put married couples into twin beds, chastely sepa-
105 rated by a night table.

106 There is a sexual revolution in this country, and
107 Neubeck points out for his students some of the signs: the
108 growing acceptance of the pill, even among Catholics, and
109 the first appearance of scientific journals devoted to sex.
110 But the simple fact remains that a lot of people aren't
111 ready for the revolution. Neubeck itemizes some of the
112 sexual conflicts Americans are saddled with:

113 • Sex is considered both dirty and disgusting, and sa-
114 cred and beautiful.

115 • We regard sex as something to be treated delicately,
116 yet by not talking about it ourselves, we encourage those
117 who deal with it grossly.

118 • We acknowledge the idealism of youth, yet we are
119 afraid to be honest with them about sex.

120 "I don't have all the answers for you," Neubeck explains
121 to his students, "but you should be aware of the confusion.
122 Somewhere along the way, sexuality got separated from
123 the rest of life. I want to integrate it again. As soon as you
124 try to hide something that is essentially normal, people
125 overreact. The forbidden-fruit flavor of sex makes it all the
126 more fascinating."

127 One hung-up generation passes along its bits of misin-
128 formation and guilt feelings to the next. This sort of Vic-
129 torianism is a long time dying. Recently, the teen-age
130 daughter of a friend came home from school and said one
131 of the nuns had warned the girls not to wear patent-
132 leather shoes because, in the reflection of their shiny sur-
133 face, boys could see up under a young lady's skirt. I hadn't
134 heard that chestnut in years, but here it was still making
135 the rounds.

136 The question asked by one Minnesota student sums up
137 the national conflict about sex. "Why," he wanted to
138 know, "is it easy to tell your date a dirty joke and impossi-
139 ble to ask what she thinks about premarital sex?"

140 Proof of this conflict is found in the kind of sex informa-
141 tion available to young people these days. College stu-
142 dents can, for example, watch the multideflowerings
143 of *Candy* at any neighborhood theater, and they can

144 buy, quite openly on campus, underground newspapers
145 like the *Berkeley Barb*, with frankly explicit want ads
146 ("WANTED: One stud, well-hung, to act as house-
147 boy. . . ."), but only a few can walk into a classroom and
148 learn about sex from a qualified teacher.

149 Academically, Neubeck has all the proper credentials
150 for his job. For 14 years, he taught an undergraduate
151 course in preparation for marriage at the university. He is
152 now president of the American Association of Marriage
153 Counselors and acting head of Minnesota's Family Study
154 Center. He runs a postdoctoral program on marriage
155 counseling and, in the evenings, works with his own pa-
156 tients.

157 More important for his students are the personal qual-
158 ities Neubeck brings to class. He and his wife Ruth have
159 been married for 28 years, a match described by their
160 22-year-old daughter Eva as a "very beautiful relation-
161 ship." Both Neubeck and Ruth are German Jews who fled
162 the Nazis in 1939. Perhaps because he barely escaped that
163 horror, the sexual fears that preoccupy Americans seem
164 small by comparison, and he is able to view the scene with
165 detachment. Happy in his marriage, Neubeck brings an
166 emotional security to the class.

167 He wants to show his students how better communica-
168 tions can take the scare out of sex. "As I see it," the Profes-
169 sor says, "sexuality is not a matter of whether you do or
170 don't, but rather, the nature of it. It isn't enough just to
171 learn how to avoid problems and resolve conflicts. You
172 should be able to learn to enjoy what life offers."

173 Our breakdown in sexual communications begins early,
174 Neubeck explains to his class: "A child sees, hears, and
175 feels sexual phenomena. To a certain extent, he is allowed
176 to participate—watching Mommy change her clothes and
177 Daddy take a shower—but a censorial curtain is dropped
178 when it comes to talking about it. A child who asks what a
179 four-letter word means quickly finds out that is forbid-
180 den."

181 This conditioning turns out grown-ups who play word
182 games. Neubeck gives three examples: the doctor who
183 asks his patient if she has an irritation in "the sexual
184 organ"; the divorce lawyer quizzing his client on whether
185 her husband "had relations with" the other woman; the
186 mother who asks her 13-year-old if he has "funny feelings"

187 in bed at night. At this point in the lecture, Neubeck
188 unfailingly asks his class to recite the correct words: "va-
189 gina," "sexual intercourse," and "nocturnal emission."

190 For him, sex goes far beyond a physical phenomenon.
191 "Intercourse," Neubeck says, "cannot be described clini-
192 cally." Which is, according to him, the flaw in the Masters
193 and Johnson study, where 705 volunteers were observed
194 in intercourse. "The researchers were only aware of what
195 was happening physically," he says. "Nothing was known
196 about the emotional state of the subject."

197 In contrast to this clinical approach, Neubeck reads a
198 long description written by a woman in her 30s, telling her
199 reactions after having intercourse with a man she loves.
200 The passage is both explicit and intense as she describes
201 the rhythms and climax of making love. The class sits
202 silent as he reads. No one rustles papers, no one shuffles
203 his feet—and no one takes notes. It is painfully moving
204 and beautiful.

Selection 2 Comprehension Questions

Decide whether each of the following statements is true or false according to the selection. Then mark T or F in the appropriate place.

- _____ 1. Professor Neubeck permits only questions that he thinks are appropriate.
- _____ 2. There is still misinformation among the present generation about sex.
- _____ 3. Professor Neubeck has his students recite sexual vocabulary in order to encourage students to recommend the course.
- _____ 4. The flaw in the Masters and Johnson study is that the emotional state of the subjects was not studied.
- _____ 5. Professor Neubeck will use any word that his students do.

Choose the correct answer for each of the following questions and circle the letter before it.

6. Which of the following is *not* a sexual conflict mentioned in the selection?
- a. Sex is both dirty and beautiful.
 - b. We acknowledge the idealism of youth, but we are afraid to be honest with them about sex.
 - c. You can tell a person a dirty joke but can't discuss premarital sex.
 - d. School children are encouraged to ask questions in class, but they may not ask about their sexuality.
7. Which of the following statements is true according to the selection?
- a. Professor Neubeck will use any word that his students do.
 - b. Professor Neubeck has his own private patients in addition to his teaching job.

- c. Professor Neubeck's children are opposed to his teaching the course.
 - d. Professor Neubeck began teaching after his wife was killed by the Nazis in 1939.
8. Which of the following statements is *not* true according to the selection?
- a. Professor Neubeck feels that even today's college students have sexual hang-ups.
 - b. When Professor Neubeck began his course, his children picketed the class with signs reading, "Dad is a Dirty Old Man."
 - c. Most college courses in sex education do not take much notice of the emotional and psychological complexities of human sexuality.
 - d. The course is given at the University of Minnesota.
9. What does Professor Neubeck think of premarital sex?
- a. He thinks that it's great—the more "scores" before marriage, the healthier it is for one's sexuality.
 - b. If it gets rid of hang-ups and prevents excessive frustration and/or masturbation, it is probably desirable.
 - c. When it is a joint decision made by two rational people it is probably OK, but it is bad when it is exploitation of one person by another.
 - d. As long as it is not overdone it is desirable—anything overdone, however, is detrimental.
10. According to Neubeck, why is sex information still taboo in this country?
- a. People equate talking with doing.
 - b. Too much knowledge is dangerous—it may cause more premarital sex.
 - c. It is against our religious traditions.
 - d. Our Victorian middle class feels that too much knowledge about our sexuality will cause us to be less civilized.