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

I turned to the young man sitting next to me and said,
"Sexual intercourse." He smiled and nodded his shaggy

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

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

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

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

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

No word is forbidden to students in Neubeck's class
(although he himself deliberately refrains from the most
pungent Anglo-Saxonisms), and no question is too hot to
answer. When kids ask what the Professor thinks about
premarital sex, he tells them: "Americans overemphasize
'scoring' in everything they do—business, sports, and
even sex. What is really important is not scoring a con-
quest, but rather, what happens between two people. The
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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
67 When a student asks if masturbation is harmful,
68 Neubeck answers that one, too: "There is no scientific
69 evidence that masturbation leads to anything detriment-
70 al. Of course, if a person is masturbating a dozen times a
71 day, I'd say he was concentrating on only one thing. I tend
72 to be a little suspicious of anyone who overdoes anything."
73
74 In Neubeck's class, kids discuss everything from techni-
75 cal virginity to extramarital sex, from pornography to
76 prostitution, from menstruation to menopause, from
77 abortion to abnormal sex. The Professor quotes from the
78 poetry of e. e. cummings, Bertrand Russell's autobiog-
79 raphy and John Updike's Couples, as well as Masters and
80 Johnson's study of the physical aspects of sex. Reading
81 assignments include Vance Packard's The Sexual Wilder-
82 ness, a book called Sex and Love in the Bible, plus articles
83 from scientific journals with titles like "Extent of Spousal
84 Agreement of Certain Non-Sexual and Sexual Aspects of
85 Marital Adjustment."
86
87 What is really outstanding about Neubeck's course is
88 not so much what he teaches, but how he teaches his
89 students to think about sex. Says the Professor: "For the
90 first time, many of my students find in this class an adult
91 who is willing to openly admit that he is a sexual being.
92 I'm not defensive about sex, and I don't want them to be."
93
94 Two years ago, when Gerry Neubeck began his sex lec-
95 tures, his three grown children threatened to picket the
96 class with signs reading: "Dad is a Dirty Old Man." They
97 were kidding, of course, but for many Americans, sex is no
98 joke, and any man who teaches it is a little suspect. In spite
99 of the sexual revolution we are experiencing now, the
100 story of the birds and the bees is, at least among the
101 hard-core middle class, still the biggest conversational
102 taboo in the country. Neubeck is succinct: "People equate
103 talking with doing."
104
105 It's true America has come a long way from the day in
106 1934 when a censor blue-penciled the word "syphilis" out
107 of the New York health commissioner's radio script. And
108 we're light-years from those pre-1960 movies when Hol-
109 lywood put married couples into twin beds, chastely sepa-
110 rated by a night table.
111
112 There is a sexual revolution in this country, and
113 Neubeck points out for his students some of the signs: the
114 growing acceptance of the pill, even among Catholics, and
115 the first appearance of scientific journals devoted to sex.
116 But the simple fact remains that a lot of people aren't
117 ready for the revolution. Neubeck itemizes some of the
118 sexual conflicts Americans are saddled with:
119
120 • Sex is considered both dirty and disgusting, and sa-
121 cred and beautiful.
122 • We regard sex as something to be treated delicately,
123 yet by not talking about it ourselves, we encourage those
124 who deal with it grossly.
125 • We acknowledge the idealism of youth, yet we are
126 afraid to be honest with them about sex.
127
128 "I don't have all the answers for you," Neubeck explains
129 to his students, "but you should be aware of the confusion.
130 Somewhere along the way, sexuality got separated from
131 the rest of life. I want to integrate it again. As soon as you
132 try to hide something that is essentially normal, people
133 overreact. The forbidden-fruit flavor of sex makes it all the
134 more fascinating."
135
136 One hung-up generation passes along its bits of misin-
137 formation and guilt feelings to the next. This sort of Vic-
138 torianism is a long time dying. Recently, the teen-age
139 daughter of a friend came home from school and said one
140 of the nuns had warned the girls not to wear patent-
141 leather shoes because, in the reflection of their shiny sur-
142 face, boys could see up under a young lady's skirt. I hadn't
143 heard that chestnut in years, but here it was still making
144 the rounds.
145
146 The question asked by one Minnesota student sums up
147 the national conflict about sex. "Why," he wanted to
148 know, "is it easy to tell your date a dirty joke and impos-
149 sible to ask what she thinks about premarital sex?"
150
151 Proof of this conflict is found in the kind of sex informa-
152 tion available to young people these days. College stu-
153 dents can, for example, watch the multidefowerings
154 of Candy at any neighborhood theater, and they can
buy, quite openly on campus, underground newspapers like the Berkeley Barb, with frankly explicit want ads ("WANTED: One stud, well-hung, to act as houseboy..."), but only a few can walk into a classroom and learn about sex from a qualified teacher.

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

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

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

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

This conditioning turns out grown-ups who play word games: Neubeck gives three examples: the doctor who asks his patient if she has an irritation in "the sexual organ"; the divorce lawyer quizzing his client on whether her husband "had relations with" the other woman; the mother who asks her 13-year-old if he has "funny feelings" in bed at night. At this point in the lecture, Neubeck unfailingly asks his class to recite the correct words: "vagina," "sexual intercourse," and "nocturnal emission."

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

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

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.