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## Global Goals for English: NCTE and the Dartmouth Seminar

**"The [Dartmouth] Seminar was an intense, difficult, major experience for anyone who cares deeply about the teaching of English in the schools. Most of my basic assumptions about teaching were questioned in one way or another, and, at the very least, I think I (and others) emerged with new perspectives."**

**James Squire in memorandum to Executive Committee (1966)**

"What is English?" From August 20 to September 15 in 1966, more than fifty teachers from Britain, Canada, and the United States convened to answer this question and many more on the fundamentals of English at the Anglo-American Seminar on the Teaching of English, more commonly known as the Dartmouth Seminar. Sponsoring the seminar with the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) and the Modern Language Association (MLA), NCTE had many of its members participate in the discussion, including Executive Director James Squire. The purpose of the seminar was not only to define the basics of English but to also share teaching strategies in the hopes of devising new ideas to change English curriculums for the better.

Indeed, it was found that a wide gap existed between British and American schools of thought regarding the English curriculum. In "A Long Way Together: A Personal View of NCTE's First Sixty-Seven Years," J.N. Hook described the conflict between the two: "In many British schools, the Americans found, no written curriculum existed, or at best, a list of literary works to be read sometime during the year; the sometimes massive curriculum volumes of some American schools appalled the British, who preferred spontaneity" (1979, p. 220). Despite these differences, teachers at the Conference were able to reach agreements on some key issues, including the ultimate goal of English teaching, which was determined to be for the personal growth of each student (p. 221).

After the seminar, books and journal articles were published based on what was discussed at Dartmouth, including *Growth Through English*, by John Dixon, and the series, the *Dartmouth Seminar Papers*. The opinion of whether the seminar had a lasting influence on the English curriculum varies among English scholars, according to Joseph Harris. In his article "After Dartmouth: Growth and Conflict in English" published in *College*

*English*, Harris summarized how English teachers with a positive perspective regarded the seminar: "Dartmouth has symbolized a kind of Copernican shift from a view of English as something one learns about to a sense of it as something one does" (1991, p. 631).

Harris argued that in reality, however, "the Dartmouth ideas seem to have failed to have much practical effect on what actually goes on in many English classrooms. Rather, the day-to-day work of most teachers, in both America and Britain, from preschool to the university, seems to have continued on after Dartmouth much as it had before – marching lockstep to the demands of fixed school curriculums, standardized tests, and calls for improved skills and increased cultural unity." That was not to say that Dartmouth did not have any effect. Dartmouth "continue[s] to shape the kinds of talk about teaching that go[es] on at conferences and in journals," Harris wrote (p. 632). To learn more about the Dartmouth Seminar and its origin, organization and influence, take a look at the featured records below.

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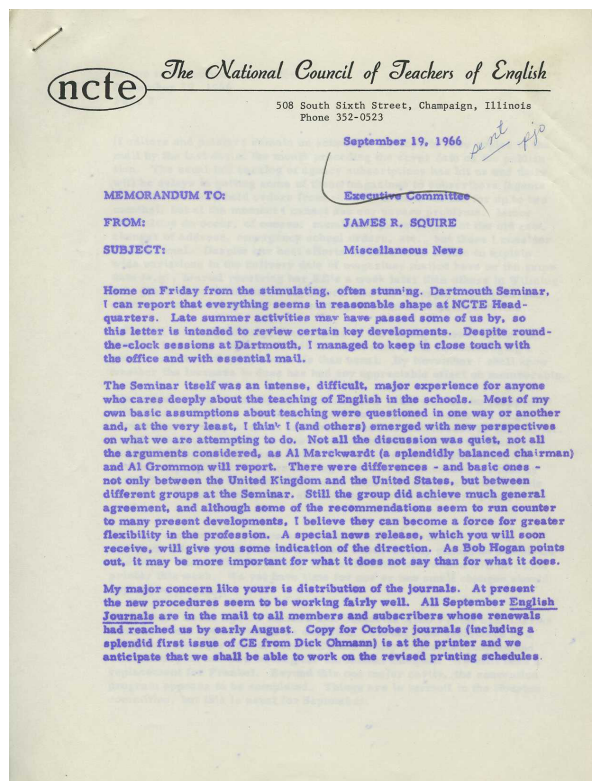
***Dartmouth Seminar Papers Series***

## Memorandum Post-Seminar

In this memorandum to the Executive Board, James Squire reflected happily on his experience at the Dartmouth Seminar: "Home on Friday from the stimulating, often stunning, Dartmouth Seminar, I can report that everything sees in reasonable shape at NCTE Headquarters." Along with being one of the principle organizers of the Dartmouth Seminar, Squire was a part of Dartmouth's first working party to draft "What is English?", and he was also the editor of the first book in the Dartmouth Seminar Papers series, *Response to Literature*.

**Item:** Memorandum (September 19, 1966)

**To learn about related material, see the following record series: [15/70/005](#)**



Squire shared his enthusiasm with the board in this memorandum about the Dartmouth Seminar.

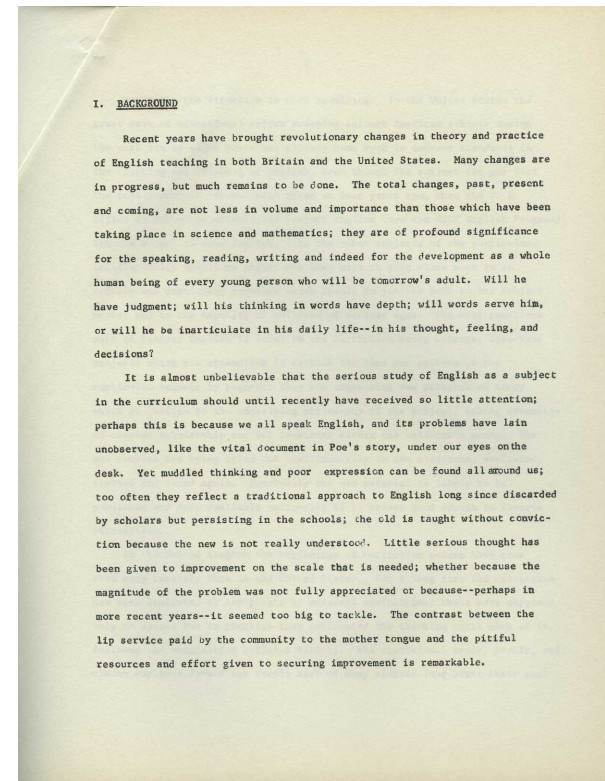
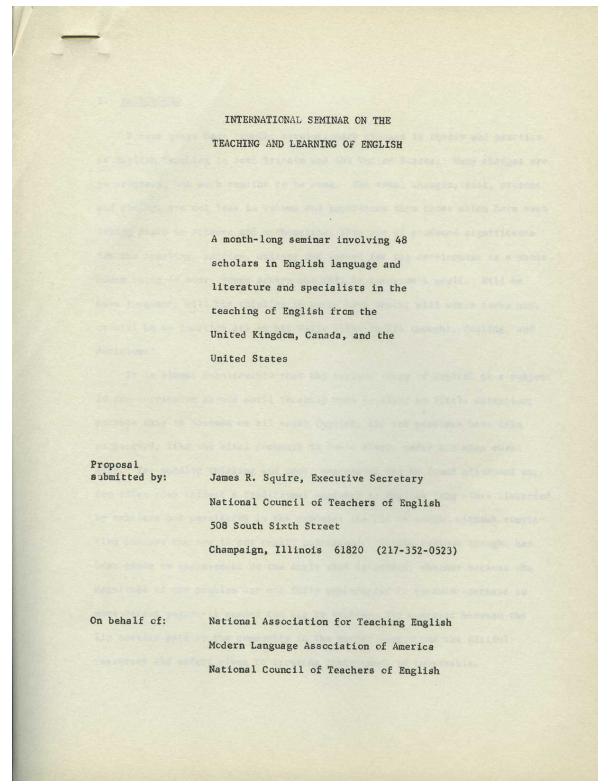
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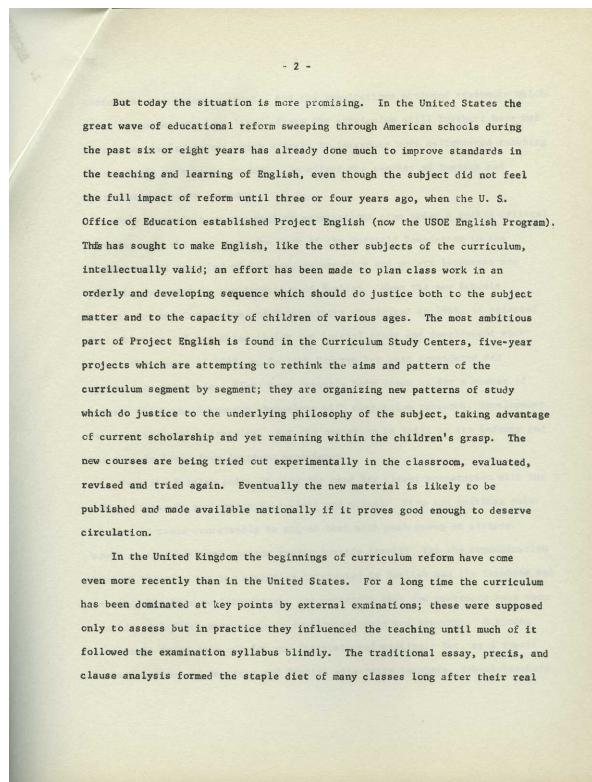
## Proposal for the "International Seminar on the Teaching and Learning of English"

To make the seminar a reality, Squire wrote the proposal for its funding on behalf of MLA, NATE, and NCTE. Originally called the "International Seminar on the Teaching and Learning of English," the seminar was meant to bridge the gap between English and the hard sciences, which have already been the subject of serious reform. Squire wrote, "It is almost unbelievable that the serious study of English as a subject in the curriculum should until recently received so little attention." The Carnegie Corporation ultimately financed the Dartmouth Seminar in full.

**Item:** Proposal, "International Seminar on the Teaching and Learning of English"(c., 1966)

To learn about related material, see the following record series: [15/74/001](#)





The cover and first couple of pages from Squire's proposal for the Dartmouth Seminar, which aimed to reform the English curriculum.

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## Pre-Seminar Work

With the seminar funded, Squire then worked with inviting scholars, teachers, and consultants, identifying what kind of expertise was needed for the seminar to be a success and who was a likely candidate with the necessary knowledge. In organizing the seminar, one colleague that Squire worked closely with was John Dixon, a British teacher who would later publish *Growth through English*.

**Item:** Proposal, "International Seminar on the Teaching and Learning of English"(c., 1966)

**To learn about related material, see the following record series: [15/74/001](#)**

COUNTY COUNCIL OF THE WEST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

 *Bretton Hall · West Bretton · Wakefield*

Principal JOHN F. FRIEND, M.A., B.Sc. Telephone BRETTON 261

16th May, 1966.

James R. Squire, Esq.,  
Executive Secretary,  
National Council of Teachers of  
English,  
508 Sixth Street,  
Champaign,  
ILLINOIS.

Dear Jim,

It seems incredible that only three weeks ago we were meeting in Dartmouth. Even the season's shifted - looking out into the park now, I see a summer blue haze over chestnuts and beeches.

Very many thanks for your paper on "A School for All Seasons" which has certainly whet my appetite to hear more of your enterprise - especially when you come over! The Clarendon Press have promised to send you a couple of copies of "Reflections", the book we did in my department at Walworth School. I would now stand by most of the teachers book but not the "Facts & Exercises" as such. You're to understand that poems, novels and plays were given half the time and work based on Reflections material the rest, though there were connections of course.

I had expected the seminar to be exciting intellectually, but I now look forward to something broader - a real exchange between two distinct and yet closely interwoven cultures.

Very best wishes,

*John Dixon*

John Dixon

MAY 20 1966

Mrs. Dorothy Saunders  
April 29, 1966  
Page 2

April 29, 1966

Professor Albert Harkness, Director of the Dartmouth Seminar, joins me in hoping that you will accept this invitation to consult as what we believe may be a meeting of great significance to the Mrs. Dorothy Saunders living in this country.

5612 Parkaton Road  
Washington, D. C. 20016

Very truly yours,

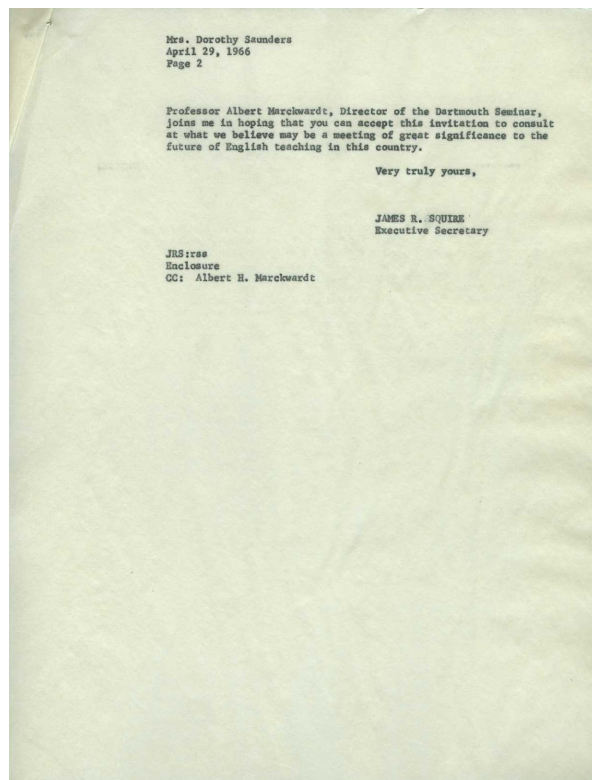
Dear Mrs. Saunders:

This summer at Dartmouth College, the National Council of Teachers of English is cosponsoring with the Modern Language Association and the National Association for the Teaching of English (England) a month-long seminar on the teaching and learning of English. From August 20 to September 15, some fifty scholars and specialists in teaching from England and America will be involved in the study sessions, as indicated in the enclosed summary of the conference plan.

One of the problems of concern to participants is the writing of children in primary and elementary grades. We particularly would like to arrange for a session during the second week at which various samples of children's writing could be presented and discussed and know of no one whom we would rather have make such a presentation than you. Your discussion of children's writing at the Nebraska conference this spring was illuminating to many who attended and we would like to have something similar at Dartmouth.

Accordingly, we invite you to join the Seminar for a two-day period on Monday and Tuesday, August 29 and 30, as a special consultant. We would hope that you could arrive on Sunday afternoon, August 28, and remain until Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning, August 30 or 31. On Monday morning we would hope you could consult informally with some of the study groups involved. We would plan the general presentation on that afternoon. Tuesday could be reserved for informal consultation with organized groups and individuals. If you are able to come at this time, we are hopeful that we may also be able to involve at the same time--perhaps in a joint presentation--Mrs. Sybil Marshall from Great Britain or Eldonna Everts from NCET.

We would reimburse your air jet travel expenses to Dartmouth and return, as well as your lodging and per diem. In addition, we can offer you an honorarium of \$100 per day for each of the two days of consulting.



From left to right, a letter sent to Squire from John Dixon, who would become a significant figure at the Dartmouth Seminar. In the next letter, Squire invited Dorothy Saunders to be a consultant at the Seminar.

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## Post-Seminar Work

At the seminar itself, participants were divided into working groups. James Squire was in working party one, which tackled the question: "What is English?" Once the seminar was over, however, the work did not stop. NCTE, NATE, and MLA sought to publish their works. A press release dated just eleven days after the seminar announced that two books were to be published about Dartmouth, which would be written by Herbert Muller (*The Uses of English*) and John Dixon (*Growth through English*). In January of 1967, the minutes of the Steering Committee of the Dartmouth Seminar revealed the nearly complete plans for publishing.

**Item:** Proposal, "International Seminar on the Teaching and Learning of English"(c., 1966)  
**To learn about related material, see the following record series:** [15/74/001](#)

*James Squire*

WORKING PARTY ONE : DRAFT REPORT.

What Is English?

We begin with the assumption that it is not our task to define English the language, but to confine our attention to English the instrument of nearly all education, and -more particularly - to English as an end in itself as it is for example in a secondary school English class. Since we wish to stress first the operational aspect of English as "language in use" we have accepted James Britton's suggestion (in his response <sup>problem, active</sup>) that the question be reframed as: "What should the English teacher do?" We answer this first in general and inclusive terms, and then propose to indicate distinctions and choices within the field thus bounded.

1. English as Operation

The English teacher should engage his pupils in activities which-

a) enable the pupil through language (to admit to) his internal representation of the universe those experiences which are of moment to him;

X? ~~and~~ <sup>at all times</sup>

b) improve his mastery of the language.

Many of these activities fall with both (a) and (b), since it seems a reasonable hypothesis that pupils will most improve their mastery of language when they are using language for purposes that are important to them. There will be times when the teacher organises classroom activities in terms of the pupils' immediate concerns in living, with no consideration of what particular language learning is involved; equally he may wish at other times to organise activities in terms of his conception of the language uses to be mastered. (The proportion of activities organised in this latter way will be low in the

*Not simple as I think*

*at all times*  
*undisruptive*  
*purpose*

*Include ref 4 pages - 3*

**ncte** *The National Council of Teachers of English*

FOR RELEASE ANY TIME September 26, 1966

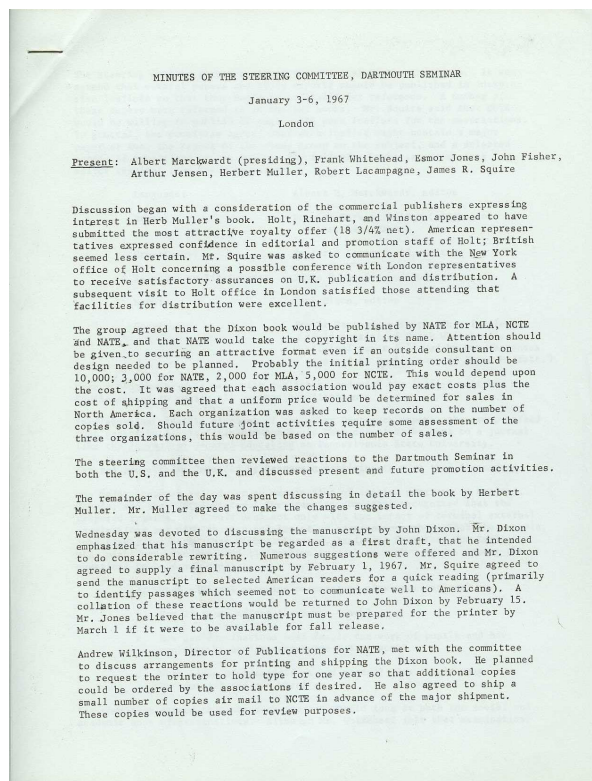
A blueprint for redirecting the focus of English teaching in Anglo-American countries emerged this month from the deliberations of more than fifty scholars and specialists in the teaching of English at a month-long meeting at Dartmouth College.

In concentrated sessions conferees from the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States reviewed current practice, research and development, and promising new ideas affecting the teaching of English at all educational levels.

The Dartmouth Seminar was financed by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and cosponsored by the Modern Language Association and National Council of Teachers of English in America and Great Britain's National Association for the Teaching of English. Director was Albert H. Merckwardt, Professor of English and Linguistics, Princeton University; Associate Director was Frank Whitehead, Senior Lecturer, Sheffield University. Arthur Jensen, Professor of English and former Dean, Dartmouth College, served as chairman of arrangements. The participants and consultants, almost equally divided between England and North America, represented all levels of education--elementary, secondary, college and university, and teacher education. (See attached list.)

Two books, to be published in 1967, will present the detailed findings and recommendations of the Seminar. Herbert Miller, Distinguished Service Professor of English and History, Indiana University, author of The Uses of the Past, is preparing a report for the general public. John Dixon, Senior Lecturer, Bretton Hall College of Education, England, is writing a report for the profession. Additional statements and articles will be released by the cosponsoring associations during





**The draft, press release, and minutes demonstrate the emphasis of producing publishable works at the Dartmouth Seminar.**

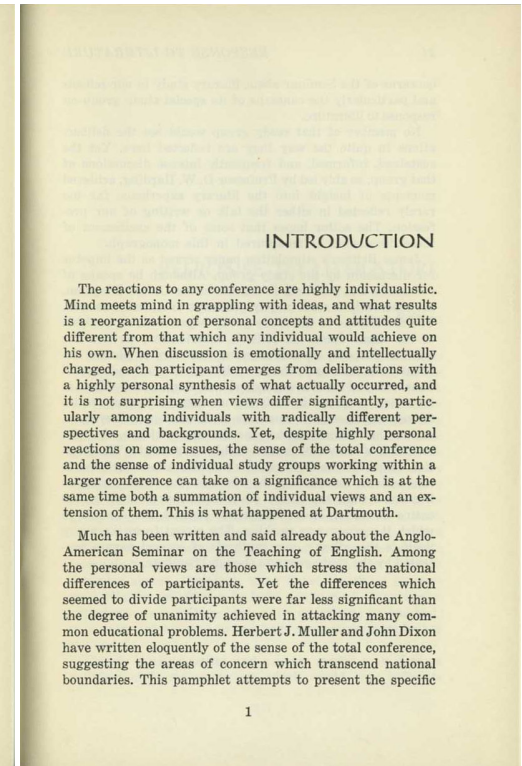
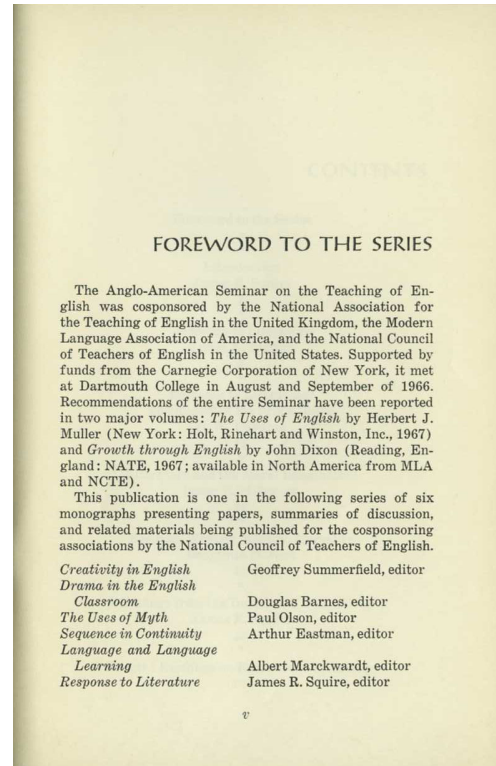
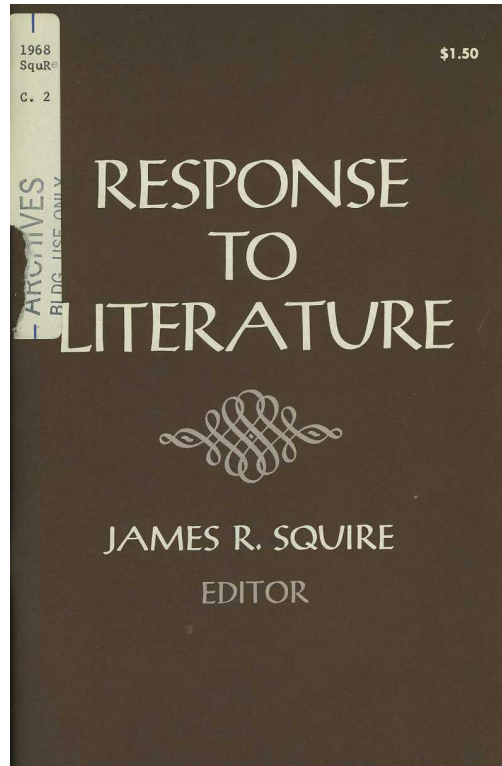
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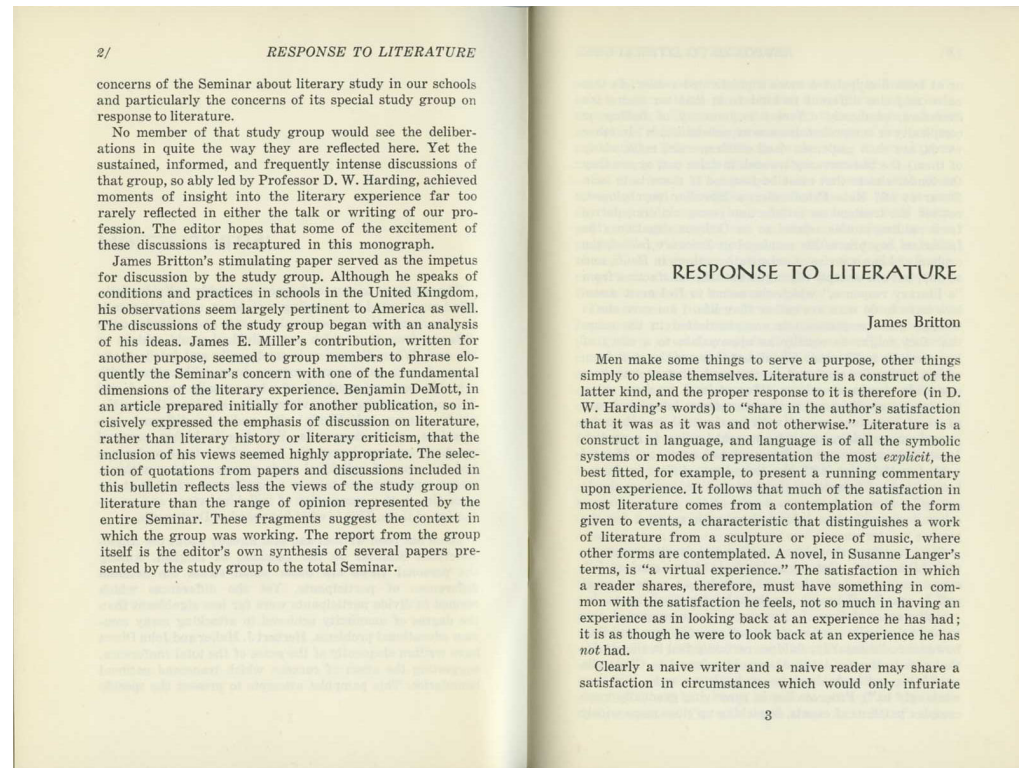
## Dartmouth Seminar Papers Series

Besides *Growth through English* by John Dixon, the Seminar also inspired the series, the *Dartmouth Seminar Papers*, which summarized the papers and discussions covered during the Seminar. Titles in this series include, *Creativity in English*, by Geoffrey Summerfield, *Drama in the English Classroom*, by Douglas Barnes, *The Uses of Myth*, by Paul A. Olson, *Sequence in Continuity*, by Arthur Eastman, *Language and Language Learning*, by Albert H. Marckwardt, and *Response to Literature*, by James R. Squire.

**Item:** Copy of *Response to Literature* (1968)

**To learn about related material, see the following record series:** [15/71/820](#)





Cover and the introductory pages from *Response to Literature*, which explained the Dartmouth Seminar, giving the volume context.

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