Penalties Against the Fixed Rules

There was no need to waste time in preliminary admonitions. Miss Dove's rules were as fixed as the signs of the zodiac. And they were known. The penalties for infractions of the rules were also known. If a child introduced a foreign object — a pencil, let us say, or a wad of paper, or a lock of hair — into his mouth, he was re­quired to wash out his mouth with yellow laundry soap. If his pos­ture was incorrect he had to go and sit for a while upon a stool without a back-rest. If a page in his notebook was untidy, he had to rewrite it. If he emitted an uncovered cough, he was expected to rise immediately and fling open a window, no matter how cold the weather, so that a blast of fresh air could protect his fellows from the contamination of his germs. Again if he felt obliged to disturb the class routine by leaving the room for a drink of water (Miss Dove loftily ignored any other necessity) he did so to an accompa­niment of dead silence. Miss Dove would look at him — that was

For:

1. Punishment helps to do away  
   with animal instincts such as  
   greed, anger, idleness and  
   discourtesy which lie in the  
   depth of human nature.
2. It is impossible to bring up  
   self-confident,strong-willed  
   citizens without any  
   punishment, as it keeps them  
   under control.
3. The thing that distinguishes a  
   man from a brute is not  
   instinct but performance, and  
   certain kinds of punishment  
   help here a lot.
4. Not all kinds of punishment  
   are acceptable, but it is  
   inevitable as a phenomenon to  
   control discipline.
5. The means of punishment is  
   important, it should never be  
   humiliating, never  
   contemptuous. Children are  
   not monsters, some of them  
   simply go a little further than

they intend.

6. It is not punishment itself that  
is important, but the threat  
that it represents (it keeps  
children from breaking the  
rales).

Against:

1. It is no good to discipline children through fear.

2. Any punishment (corporal punishment in particular) humiliates a human being.

1. Teachers who punish their  
   pupils do not care for  
   children, they care only that  
   children conform to the rules.
2. When one uses any kind of  
   punishment he brings up  
   (produces) cruel and heartless  
   people.
3. Punishment leads to lies, as  
   children would tell any lie to  
   prevent the unpleasant act.

6. Punishment destroys a child's personality.

15. The extracts given below present controversial subjects. Team up with another student, work out arguments "for" and "against" and discuss the ex­tracts in pairs. Use conversational formulas of agreement, disagreement, giving opinion (see Appendix).

A. Should a teacher take home his pupils' work to check it?

"Don't fall into the habit of bringing work home, Rick. It indi­cates a lack of planning, and you would eventually find yourself stuck indoors every night. Teaching is like having a bank account. You can happily draw on it while it is well supplied with new funds; otherwise you're in difficulties. Every teacher should have a fund of ready information on which to draw; he should keep that fund supplied regularly by new experiences, new thoughts and discov­eries, by reading and moving around among people from whom he can acquire such things."

B. Should a teacher plan all the procedure of a lesson?

"The rest of that summer Miss Dove mapped her strategies in her bed-chamber. To represent a classroom she laid her father's chessboard on a table by the north window. The squares were desks. The ivory men were children. For hours on end, moving them about the board, speaking to them in unequivocal terms, she did what might be called "practice teaching". To the last detail she planned her procedure. The greeting to each class, as it entered the room, the ceremony of its dismissal, the rules and penalties and forms were all settled upon. The presentation of her subject matter was carefully considered."

C. Should compulsory school attendance be abolished?

"We should abolish compulsory school attendance. Our com­pulsory school attendance laws once served a humane and useful purpose. They protected children's rights to some schooling, against those adults who would otherwise have denied it to them in order to exploit their labour, in farm, shop, store, mine, or factory. Today, the laws help nobody, not the schools, not the teachers, not the children. To keep kids in school who would rather not be there costs the the schools an enormous amount of time and trouble, to say nothing of what it costs to repair the damage that these angry and resentful prisoners do whenever they get the chance. Every teacher knows that any kid in class who, for whatever reason, would rather not be there, not only doesn't learn anything himself but makes learning harder for anyone else. For many kids, not go­ing to college, school is just a useless time-wasting obstacle pre­venting them from needed money or doing some useful work."

D. Should fixed curriculum be used in schools?

"Some harder reforms are required. Abolish the fixed, required curriculum. People remember only what is interesting and useful to them, what helps make sense of the world or helps them enjoy or get along in it. All else they quickly forget, if they ever learn it at all. The idea of the "body of knowledge", to be picked up at school and used for the rest of one's life, is nonsense in a world as compli­cated and rapidly changing as ours. Anyway, the most important questions and problems of our time are not in the curriculum, not even in the hot-shot universities, let alone the schools. Check any university catalogue and see how many courses you can find on such questions'as Peace, Poverty, Race, Environmental Pollution and so on."