

# 'Touchstones' puts students, teachers on fair ground

Touchstones peddles the art of intelligence

By Karen Welsh Martin

Contributing writer

It sounds like the perfect class: no right or wrong answers and no preparation required.

Teachers abdicate their role of authority in the classroom, and even students who cannot read benefit.

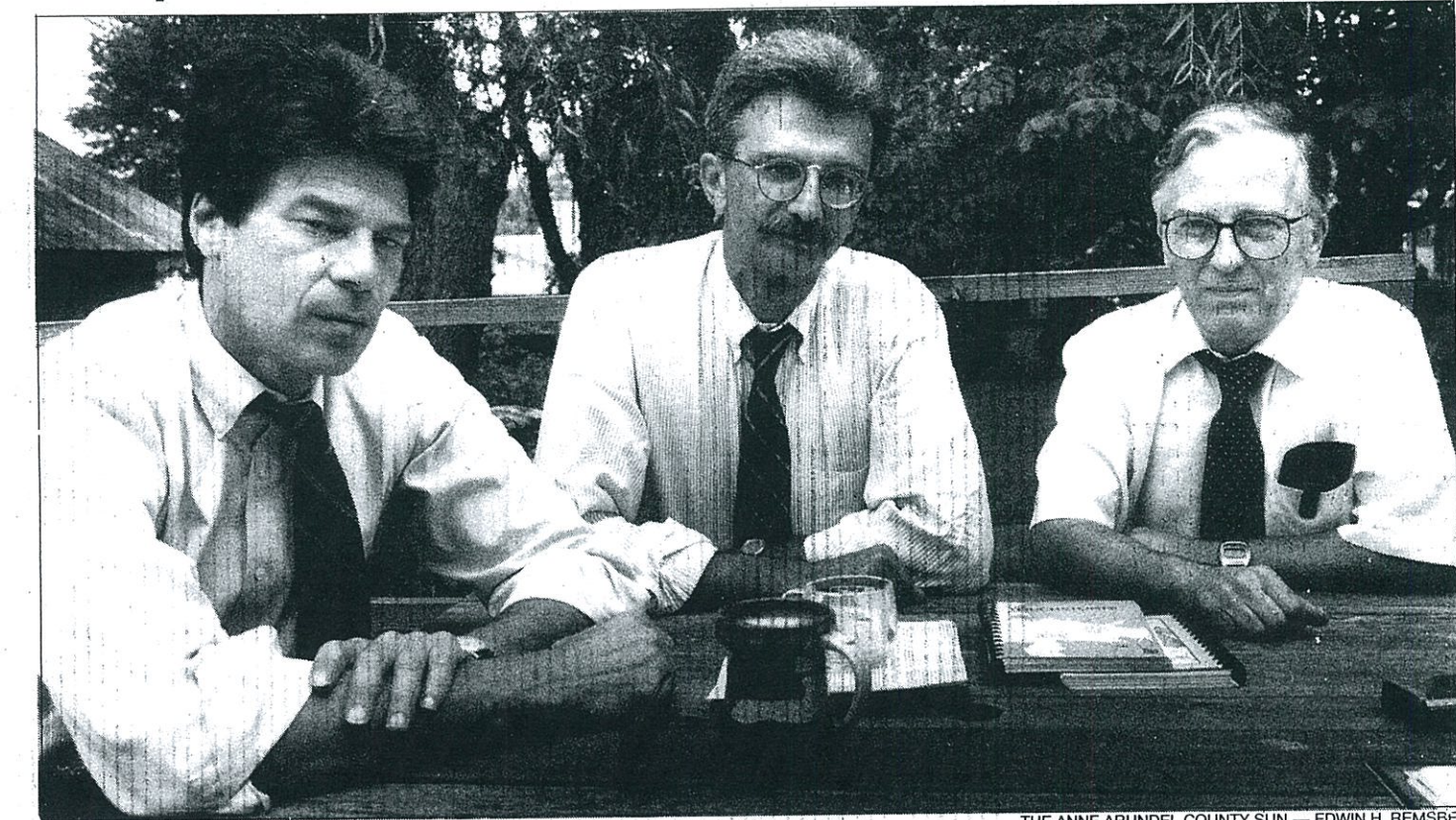
And best of all, there are no tests.

Touchstones, a discussion class created by three St. John's College faculty members, is teaching more than 20,000 children nationwide to teach themselves, to learn to think responsibly and develop a greater understanding of students of different backgrounds.

In the program, students are introduced to classical works of literature and science through short readings by the teacher. Afterwards, the group — and here the teacher is just one among equals — discusses what they've just heard.

Touchstones aims to have children learn from each other, to increase their awareness of the world around them and their tolerance of views different from their own.

"The purpose of Touchstones is not to teach students the contents of the readings included in the program, although that might happen, but to enable a group to in-



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Howard Zeiderman, Nicholas Maistrellis and Geoffrey Comber, (left to right) who created Touchstones, bring the Classics to public schools.

crease its sense of community and its ability to reach a more productive interpretation of the texts," said Geoffrey Comber, who formed CZM Associates in 1984 with

Howard Zeiderman and Nicholas Maistrellis, to market the Touchstones program.

Although all three men are tutors at St. John's, the program is

not affiliated with the Annapolis college.

Touchstones is being considered for use in the county school system, school spokeswoman

Jane Doyle said.

"We have the Touchstones volumes in our inventory," she said.

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"Before Touchstones, I never realized that I could read aloud so well," Gillian said. "As a result of the class, I am considering entering a dramatic reading contest at school."

## Education