



—TOM MOSIER / Miami Herald Staff

'New Journalist' Tom Wolfe Addresses Audience of 32 English Teachers
... 'there is simply not enough time being spent . . . on composition'

Wolfe: Schools Straying In Approach to Writing

By RON SYMPSON
 Herald Staff Writer

"I was an academic tramp," confessed Tom Wolfe, sounding for the moment more like the hero of a confession story than the member of an elite clan of pop writers known as the "new journalists."

But Wolfe, speaking to 32 Broward English teachers, was talking as he says he writes — "in scenes." The ability to tell a story in scenes — to cement together and humanize real episodes — has been lost among many writers, he explained, because this country's school sys-



WOLFE

tem has strayed from some fundamental methods of teaching.

"There is simply not enough time being spent . . . on composition," said Wolfe, whose initial fame emanated from his book, "The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test." In that book, Wolfe told the story of writer-gurudrug-experimenter Ken Kesey and his Merry-makers.

"THE PSYCHEDELIC OR hippie thing seems to be dead," Wolfe said, "but only because it's dead in the press." In truth, he said, the "movement" is still growing and will lead to this country's "third great awakening" of religious involvement.

But Wolfe's audience was not composed of psychedelic or religious experimenters. Though they ranged in style from the grayhaired, contented-smile-on-her-lips old

maid to the eight-on-mister, who-needs-a-tie young rebel — the 32 listeners had one thing in common: they were English teachers.

Wolfe explained that he thought teachers needed to get back to the basics of rhetoric and the hard-and-fast rules of good grammar. Once these things are learned, said Wolfe, students can begin to express the important things about themselves and the lives around them.

Today, he explained, "there is a drama being acted out in which the children are being called on to work out the most massive problems of our society."

Perhaps, one teacher suggested in response, schools should deemphasize literature so that composition can be stressed.

But Wolfe disagreed. That, he said, "would be like eating your toe to get nourishment."