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Call for Papers for the
Minnesota English Journal

For the Fall 1994 and Spring 1995 issues

Here are some suggested topics:

- "Best Brief Strategies" (50-200 word descriptions of successful teaching techniques)
- Original poetry: your own or that of your students
- Full length essays on teaching strategies/classroom activities
- Rhetoric/teaching composition
- Language issues
- Literary theory
- Composition research
- Literary criticism/analysis with an awareness of teaching
- Censorship issues
- Teaching critical thinking
- Discussions of unique courses or programs in English/Language Arts
- Reading — research and pedagogy
- Nonfiction literature
- Professional issues
- Writing across the curriculum (particularly descriptions of programs)
- Canadian literature for American students
- Bibliographies relating to the previous topics
- Review of current books
- Children's literature
- American literature
- British literature
- World literature
- Literature for young adults
- "To Air is Human" humorous or thought-provoking examples of misspellings or unexpected language use from student and faculty papers

Use MLA style; include a version of your article on computer diskette if possible.

Deadlines **Fall 1994 —October 15, 1994**
Spring 1995 — May 15, 1995

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To Our Readers:

This issue of the Minnesota English Journal has seven stimulating articles and three reviews, all focused on strategies for teaching, ideas for selecting texts, and the ways we as teachers and writers fashion our public identities.

For the first time, I'm experimenting with some new features:

Best Brief Strategies: Quick descriptions of specific, practical teaching techniques or tricks that have succeeded in stimulating your students' enthusiasm and excellence in language and literature.

To Air is Human: Humorous or thought-provoking examples of misspellings or unexpected language use from student and faculty papers. We all enjoy sharing innocent linguistic slips and unintended puns. Send them to me with the grade level and anything else I need to create a context.

Book Reviews: As you see from the Announcements page, I'm actively recruiting your reviews of timely, helpful publications. There I've identified some NCTE publications that may interest you, but I'll take your suggestions eagerly. What new text book would you like to preview in print? What new commentary on pedagogy or politics has caught your attention? What new works of imaginative literature would you like to add to the teaching canon on a permanent or experimental basis? Call or e-mail your suggestion, and I'll see to it that you get the book so that MEJ readers can have your insights.

Student/Faculty Collaborations: In this issue MCTE president Liz Nist publishes an article in which she collaborates with her student Michelle Anderson to share perspectives on portfolio examinations. Meanwhile, Michael LaFleur, a graduate student in rhetoric and advisee of Sharon Cogdill from St. Cloud State University, includes a lively presentation regarding the changing roles of the popular communications media. I urge you to share your best collaborative efforts with the MEJ and at the same time encourage your best students with the attention that comes from publication.

Original Poetry: The fall issue will include some poetry by MCTE members. I'd enjoy reading yours.

Of course, I hope to continue the MEJ's tradition of publishing excellent, thought-provoking research articles of conventional length—10 to 25 pages typescript, MLA style. Let me know your suggestions for the journal.

Literary Writing Textbooks: A Review Essay

by
Anne O'Meara

In the past few years, a number of new textbooks for college courses in writing about literature have joined the three that have dominated the market for years: Edgar V. Roberts's Writing Themes About Literature, Sylvan Barnet's A Short Guide to Writing About Literature, and Kelley Griffith's Writing Essays about Literature: A Guide and Style Sheet. These new texts—and revised editions of the more familiar ones—have appeared in response to changes in the fields of literary study and writing pedagogy, changes that have raised questions about the purpose and scope of literary writing courses. To write a literary writing textbook these days is to grapple with difficult, and perhaps ultimately unanswerable, questions. Because there are so many possible answers, however, current literary writing textbooks now offer teachers some clear alternatives.

Given the current lack of agreement among literary scholars about common values and approaches to literary study, it is not surprising that literary writing courses aimed at introducing students to the field will also lack a fixed identity and purpose. The most pressing difficulty for literary writing textbooks is the question of methodological approach. In teaching students to write literary essays, should the textbooks take a formalist approach, concentrating on close readings analyzing plot, character, and figurative language, or should they introduce students to the range of critical approaches practiced today? It might well be argued that it has fallen to the authors of literary writing textbooks and to the editors of literature anthologies to work out the answer to the vexing question of how to present literary theory to undergraduates.

A further source of difficulty is that literary writing courses are hybrid courses growing out of two fields—literary studies and composition studies. In addition to negotiating the question of literary methodology and striking a balance between the study of literature and the study of writing, textbook authors must choose among various approaches to teaching writing. The field of composition studies has a paradigm crisis of its own. Textbooks may exhibit a current-traditional orientation that emphasizes features of the text, a process orientation that emphasizes the actual processes writers use for generating ideas, organizing, drafting, and revising, or a social constructionist orientation that combines traditional and process orientations with the larger objective of studying the writing conventions, essay types, and ways of knowing specific to the discipline. Recent research in writing-across-the-curriculum has focused on the ways in which both academics and professionals in the fields actually think, write, and use disciplinary conventions with the goal that this knowledge should be more closely integrated into writing-intensive courses (Jones and Comprone 66). This emphasis in composition studies overlaps heightens the problem posed by current developments in literary theory mentioned above: What are the accepted ways of knowing and writing in our field, and how should they be incorporated into literary writing textbooks?

A third source of difficulty for textbook authors is a decision about their intended audience. Literary writing is introduced in various courses: in stand-alone literary writing courses for majors and minors; in introductory literature courses, which may be required for majors and minors or elected for general education requirements; and in literature-based first-year composition courses. Although literature disappeared from many first-year writing courses in the 1980s, the matter has recently resurfaced for debate in College English (see Lindemann, Tate), and many literary writing textbooks are clearly marketed simultaneously for all the courses I have mentioned. This merging of audiences—with their several needs, interests, and goals—makes it even more difficult to answer questions about literary methodology and writing pedagogy.

Finally, there is the problem of stance. If this is an introductory course, a course designed to invite students—whether majors, minors, or general education students—into the ongoing conversation about literary works, what attitude toward the rules of conversation should textbooks take? That is, should they reproduce the discourse conventions without comment? Or, should they prescribe, describe, critique, or even transform current practices?

Though the textbooks considered below vary considerably in their answers to these questions, all of the authors extend an invitation to students to join the on-going conversation in literary studies, and all of the books discuss the features of the analytical/critical essay, documentation conventions, and plagiarism. All of them might also be considered to be taking part in an intertextual dialogue begun by Roberts, Barnet, and Griffith. Edgar V. Roberts's Writing Themes About Literature (1991), first published in 1964 and now in its seventh edition, is marketed to writers in either composition or literature courses. It is unabashedly formalist in its approach to reading and text-centered in its approach to writing. There is no mention of recent critical theory, and the literary works included for discussion are overwhelmingly canonical. Roberts has no apologies for his approach: "It is no longer new, but it is still novel. It works" (xiv).

Like Roberts, both Sylvan Barnet's A Short Guide to Writing About Literature (1992, 6th ed.) and Kelley Griffith's Writing Essays about Literature: A Guide and Style Sheet (1994, 4th ed.) are primarily writing books, but both Barnet and Griffith emphasize the processes of reading and writing more, particularly the pre-writing, idea-generating processes. Both briefly describe a number of recent critical approaches but rely primarily on the formalist approach in their discussions and sample student essays. Barnet expands the customary student essay types—explication, analysis, researched essay—to include writing fiction about fiction, illustrating this genre with a sample student essay retelling Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" from the husband's point of view.

Ways In: Approaches to Reading and Writing About Literature. Gilbert H. Muller and John A. Williams. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994. 115 pp. Contains three parts: Critical Reading and Writing (2 chapters); Elements of Literature (3 chapters describing respectively the elements of fiction, poetry, and drama and how to interpret and evaluate these genres); and Literary Research (1 chapter).

This slim volume is meant to accompany such McGraw-Hill literature anthologies as Bridges: Literature Across Cultures or The McGraw-Hill Introduction to Literature and would be most useful in an introductory literature course or a literature-based composition course; a more extended treatment of reading and writing processes as well as the elements of literary genres would be desirable in a course for English majors and minors. The Critical Reading chapter contains a very brief introduction to eight critical approaches. The Writing chapter contains sample personal, analytical, comparative, and argumentative essays as well as a brief guide to writing processes. A sample research paper is also included.

Reading, Writing, and the Study of Literature. Arthur W. Biddle and Toby Fulwiler, eds. New York: Random,1989. 181 pp. Consists of three parts: Prelude, Reading as a Writer (5 chapters), and Writing as a Reader (5 chapters). Glossary of literary terms.

This text, addressed particularly to English majors and minors, is distinguished by its efforts to introduce students to English studies as a community of practitioners. Like Barnet and Griffith, its primary focus is on the interrelationships between reading and writing in literary study. Each chapter is written by a different person in the form of a personal essay/scholarly meditation complete with citations. The essays are conversational in tone and emphasize what the writers, themselves practicing scholars and writers, do as they read and write about literature. The common purpose in these essays is to de-mystify the work of literary authors and academics.

The five chapters on Reading as a Writer include Fulwiler's chapter on journals as a way of writing informally about reading, a chapter each on fiction, poetry, and drama, including the elements of these genres, to help students read effectively, and a chapter introducing current literary criticism and theory. This final chapter emphasizes that all readers have an approach to literature, examined or unexamined. In addition to the usual brief description of current critical approaches, in a list at the end of each subsection it cites representative works and emphasizes the questions typical of each of the ten approaches.

The part of the book devoted to Writing as a Reader contains chapters on what are called "student genres." One chapter is devoted to the critical

essay, including the descriptive, evaluative, and interpretive essay; each essay type is described in terms of function and features, and general advice on the writing process is given. The chapters on the essay examination (including take-home exams) and the research paper follow a similar procedure. Researching through interviews and site visits is discussed in addition to researching in the library. No sample critical essays or research papers are included.

Samples and/or excerpts are included in chapters for two unusual student genres. "Writing Personal Essays" describes autobiographical or personal essays written about or in relation to literary texts. One example consists of several paragraphs from a dialogue between Virginia Woolf and a male student who is an aspiring writer. The dialogue, based upon a reading of A Room of One's Own, is about fiction and relations between the sexes. Another chapter, "Imaginative Writing and Risk Taking," examines imitation and parody of literary genres or a given author's style, as well as sequels and re-writings of literary works.

Biddle and Fulwiler see their book as a guide to newcomers. They are orienting students to the reading, writing, and thinking practices of those currently engaged in literary studies. They discuss literary theory so that students can recognize their own assumptions and those of others; they discuss elements of literature and features of student genres so that students will become familiar with the vocabulary and modes they can use to enter the conversation. Compared to other literary writing textbooks, there is little close reading or specific emphasis on texts; the emphasis is on procedural knowledge necessary for reading, thinking, and writing about texts in the current context of literary studies.

Exploring Literature: A Collaborative Approach. Kathleen Shine Cain, Albert C. DeCiccio, Michael J. Rossi. Boston: Allyn, 1993, 263 pp. Consists of two parts: Exploring Literature Together: Identifying Issues and Generating Topics (6 chapters) and From Exploration to Communication: Making Formal Presentations (6 chapters). Reprints 12 literary works. Three appendices: collaborative projects, essay assignments (including how to take exams), and glossary of literary terms.

Of the books reviewed here, this book has the most radical implications for transforming the classroom. Its emphasis on collaborative learning permeates every aspect of the reading and writing processes. Like Biddle and Fulwiler, it is premised on a view of literary study as a collegial activity, and its purpose is to help students become active participants in that enterprise. But conversation is never a metaphor here; collaborative meaning-making is at the heart of all of the processes described in this book. And if the book is to be used to its fullest advantage, these processes would become the central activity in the classroom.

Cain, DeCiccio, and Rossi emphasize collaborative reading and writing processes rather than knowledge of critical theory, which is not discussed. Speaking of the collaborative classroom, they remark: "Students begin to practice what critics and professors do when they make meaning of a work: read, ask questions, discuss, write, read again, ask more questions, discuss again, write again, and so on" (v). The emphasis throughout is on active participation in an ongoing dialogue as a way of recreating literary texts. "In this sense, meaning is **made**, not **found**" (vi, emphasis theirs).

The authors spend as much time explaining collaborative procedures to explore literature as they do discussing writing processes and essay genres, assuming apparently—like Barnet and Griffith—that the hardest part of literary writing is not exactly the writing but the generating of ideas. In the first part, after a brief introduction to collaboration in general, they devote a chapter each to procedures for dialoguing with the text, with one's self, with peers, and with the experts. Their 23-page chapter on active reading introduces the elements of various genres, including character, figurative language, etc. as suggestions of what to attend to in a text; they also call students' attention to patterns of repetition, to difficult passages and to references. The chapter on double-entry journals is presented as a way of getting one's ideas to dialogue with each other; initial observations are placed on one side and one's later comments on these ideas are written on the other. Throughout all these exploratory chapters,

examples by four students are given; a transcript of a group discussion among the four is included in the chapter on peer groups. Research topics are seen as arising naturally out of these interactions and resources for beginning one's search are presented.

The final chapter in this exploratory section presents a case study consisting of excerpts from the four students' annotations, double-entry journals, group discussion, and informal research as they study a group of works with similar themes: short story (Chopin's "The Story of an Hour"), poem (Lady Mary Chudleigh's "To the Ladies"), drama (Susan Glaspell's "Trifles") and essay (Ann Grace Mojtabai's "Polygamy"). No commentary is added, the authors remark, so that students may provide their own (67). At the end of the book, two other groups of works are reprinted with a similar literary genre distribution and a balance of canonical and unfamiliar works.

In the formal presentation section, the emphasis is on going public from the explorations already completed. Discussion of writing processes focus on developing a thesis, dealing with both academic and unreceptive audiences and using common organizational patterns. The theme of using various dialogues to help oneself write is continued in a lengthy section on peer review of various kinds at various stages. The usual essay genres,—explication and analyses of various kinds—and conventions of a research paper—paraphrase, quote, plagiarism, documentation forms—are explained. A chapter on personal and creative genres extends the usual list of student genres. Here again, examples are included: student personal narratives, short stories, poems, and even a sequel to A Doll's House.

This book, then, actually aims to recreate its version of the scholarly community in addition to describing its public discourse conventions. It is also unusual in its devotion of nearly half the book to procedures for exploring one's initial responses to the point where a thesis is latent. This emphasis on exploring in the midst of discussions of literary conventions, group interaction, and the demands of public presentation might help students sustain their own ideas at the same time that they learn the language of literary studies.

A Guide to Literary Criticism and Research. Bonnie Klomp Stevens and Larry L. Stewart. 2nd ed. New York: Harcourt, 1992, 192 pp. Consists of two parts: Critical Approaches to Literature (3 chapters covering 13 approaches) and The Critical Essay (2 chapters—one on the essay, one on research processes). Three Appendices (Resources for research, Form of essays, Documentation).

This book occupies the opposite end of the spectrum from those that emphasize writing processes. It doesn't even have "Writing" in the title, and it is frankly addressed to upper-level students. This book answers the questions posed at the outset of this essay by taking a tiered approach; it does not intend to be primarily a writing book but assumes that students have learned basic writing and reading processes elsewhere. Its premise is that even in "well-designed" literature programs, many students enter upper-level courses with an inadequate sense of the range of critical approaches and of the resources available specifically for literary research; this book is designed to help students enter more knowledgeably into literary studies. The authors believe that research and criticism are complementary activities, that one always employs a method and should be aware of the assumptions behind that method, and that student and professional writing about literature exists on a continuum (vii-ix).

Stevens and Stewart's expressed purpose is to map the terrain for students in a way that will allow them to understand their options and make informed choices. They remark that "the descriptive approach best reflects our own view of literary study as a collegial activity and our desire for a book that will allow students to see themselves as partners in that activity" (xi). Accordingly, their chapters on 13 critical approaches describe the underlying assumptions of each approach, the questions that most interest its practitioners, its characteristic features and values, and common criticisms of each approach. Every section ends with a list of cited and recommended books.

The only writing genre that is discussed is the critical essay, and again the approach is descriptive; the possible features and functions of the introduction, body, and conclusion are described. Short samples by professional academic

writers are discussed, and strategies used in specific essays are summarized as examples. The authors also address the "language of criticism," summarizing and commenting on a debate among professionals in PMLA over the use of technical and exclusionary language in place of a more readily accessible style. In this chapter, the emphasis is on features and options for the text rather than the processes used to produce it. There is more attention to process in the chapter on research methods. And the appendices on form and documentation are, as the authors point out, frankly prescriptive.

Because of its emphasis, there are no student sample essays or even complete professional ones, no literary works, no glossary of literary terms. Interestingly, this book is the only one in the sample that refers to the reader in the third person. Instead, the book characterizes the current state of the profession, emphasizing the current approaches to discussing literature. English majors and minors might profit from a discussion of a larger number of essay genres—more than the critical essay—or from a discussion of the current debate about the predominance of critical argument in scholarly essays, presented in much the same way as the authors examine the debate over theoretical jargon.

Texts & Contexts: Writing About Literature with Critical Theory. Steven Lynn. New York: HarperCollins, 1994, 259 pp. Contains 8 chapters, the first an overview of critical approaches and the last an explanation of research processes and research paper writing. The middle six chapters describe, demonstrate, and guide students through various critical approaches.

Like Stevens and Stewart, this book focuses on literary theory, but it gives equal attention to writing and reading processes. More than any of the other books reviewed here, this book demonstrates how theoretical perspectives can be integrated into thinking, reading, and writing about literature. Each of the six middle chapters focuses on a critical approach such as New Critical, Reader-Response, and Feminist, describing its purpose and applying its assumptions and typical questions to a short story or poem. Lynn demonstrates the process of pre-writing, shaping, and drafting an essay for each critical approach and ends each chapter with two literary works and guiding questions to help students practice reading and writing about literary works from the given critical perspective. A bibliography of representative works for each perspective is included.

This book is an interesting approach to the problem of integrating theoretical perspectives into undergraduate literary writing courses. By necessity, Lynn narrows the focus of some perspectives, and the result is somewhat reductive, most notably in psychological criticism. As an introduction to theoretical perspectives, however, Lynn's strategy beneficially integrates theory and literature while demonstrating how assumptions and questions guide all readings of literary works. Because many theoretical perspectives assume significant expertise in other disciplines, employing theoretical perspectives is not easily done at the introductory level, but Lynn's descriptions and demonstrations are lively and sound introductions. This book might work especially well as one text in an undergraduate literary theory course.

The Compact Bedford Introduction to Literature: Reading, Thinking, and Writing. Michael Meyer, ed. Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 1994. 1473 pp. Contains four parts. Three anthology sections on fiction, poetry, and drama. Each section contains subsections on reading the genre; elements of the genre; a contrastive study of two authors including works, authorial comments, critical articles and excerpts from two recent, contrasting views of their work; an extended critical case study of one literary work; and a collection of other literary works of the genre with special attention to world and contemporary literature. The final section—on critical thinking and writing—includes a discussion of nine current critical approaches, and reading, writing, and research processes.

This book, really an anthology for an introductory literature course, is surely more than anyone would want for a literary writing course. This volume is nonetheless attractive for literary writing courses—and thus included here. Literary theory, critical articles, and literature are presented together consistently throughout this volume: excerpts from critical articles employing current

theoretical perspectives appear with the literary works on which they comment, and nine theoretical perspectives are described in the last section of the book. Meyers has also done a service for the teacher (particularly in the post-photocopying era) by collecting and excerpting relevant, related, readable, current critical articles.

A common failing of many literary writing textbooks is that theoretical approaches are described—sometimes quite perfunctorily—and the remainder of the book is devoted to a fairly formalist discussion of the elements of literature. Many teachers prefer this approach on the grounds that students need to understand the elements of literature before they apply more complex theoretical perspectives, though it has frequently been argued in reply that a formalist approach is a theoretical perspective, not a neutral baseline. Although this anthology discusses the elements of literary genres at length, it, like Lynn's book, encourages students to consider literary works from a variety of theoretical perspectives. The emphasis in this book, however, is on the recognition and analysis of the various perspectives rather than—as in Lynn—on the production of writing employing them.

The 100-page section on critical thinking and writing focuses on processes used in writing about literature. A brief discussion of the canon debate and the descriptions of nine theoretical perspectives are included along with illustrative excerpts from scholarly essays and a bibliography of recommended readings. Typical questions from each critical perspective are included as part of the section on developing a thesis. Sample student essays—an explication, an analysis, and a comparative essay—are included. A separate chapter on research processes and conventions as well as a sample research paper complete this section.

These literary writing textbooks vary considerably in their content, their emphases, and their pictures of current literary study. Taken together they reflect the variety of current discourse practices that make up our field. They do not, however, simply reflect current practices. They also shape literary writing instruction and present us with the opportunity to envision new ways of introducing our students to the field of literary studies.

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A Case Study of a Portfolio Final Exam Pilot Project: A Student and Teacher Collaboration

by
Michelle Anderson and Elizabeth Nist

What is the Portfolio Final Exam?

Portfolio is becoming a common term in language arts classes at all levels. Nevertheless, the word Portfolio remains a mystery to many teachers and students. What is a portfolio? The mere mention of the word often stirs debate because we don't all share a common definition. Part of this confusion arises from the fact that portfolios have multiple uses: a means of entrance assessment, a file of work in progress, a display collection of finished work, and a means of exit assessment, to name a few.

Our purpose here is to describe one of these uses in depth by presenting a case study of portfolios used as final examinations (exit assessment) in Composition I and II at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. Michelle Anderson, a student in Composition II, undertook this study as her research project for her portfolio. Elizabeth Nist, the teacher, collaborated with her in revising this research paper as a journal article. Together we present both the students' and teachers' experiences collected in this case study.

Michelle Anderson: Students' Introduction to the Portfolio Final Exam

When our teacher first said the word portfolio in our composition class, I thought of a portable case for carrying loose papers or drawings. A portfolio final exam? We had never heard of that before, so we had lots of questions.

Elizabeth Nist, our teacher, explained, "Here at Anoka-Ramsey Community College (ARCC), a group of English teachers has been piloting a portfolio final exam for about two years. In our classes, in order to pass Composition I and II, the students must submit a portfolio containing samples of their writing to another instructor, an outside reader who will determine whether the work meets the standards set by the ARCC English Division. The instructions for this final exam are printed on a folder that becomes the cover for your portfolio. Many of your questions may be answered with a close reading of these instructions" (see figures 1-4).

After reading these instructions together as a class, we still had several questions that we needed cleared up before attempting this massive project. The first and most important question was, "Do we have to be there the day of the final?"

"No," Mrs. Nist answered. "The portfolio is your final; it must be handed in on the last day of class. Your writing, not your body, must be there on the day scheduled for the final exam."

This answer took us by surprise. Maybe this wasn't so bad after all. But we persisted. "How much does this exam count on our final grade?"

Mrs. Nist explained, "Each paper you do is graded individually during the quarter. The outside reader will evaluate your portfolio as pass or fail. I will read and assign a letter grade to it. This grade, along with all your other scores, will be averaged for the course grade. You may choose to revise the papers you include in your portfolio for a better final exam grade."

At this point the class worried about finding time to get all the papers completed, but Mrs. Nist handed out a course schedule which outlined each assignment, including the amount of time given for revision before going on to the next paper. After we had talked about all of this, a sigh of relief echoed throughout the room.

We still had our worries about the portfolio. At worst, it felt like a lot of busy work that required a complicated process of organization. We knew we had our hands full, but it became easier as we got into it. A lot of the work was done in class workshops. Days were set aside for drafting and for reading one another's papers to give feedback. We also had conferences where we could discuss our work individually with our teacher. The course requirements were very clear, and we liked having the opportunity to revise.

On that last day of class, we all felt a sense of relief that our portfolios were complete, and most of all, we were proud of our work. "This is what I've done! This is me!"

Some of us were already planning to submit our portfolios with our university applications. Others talked about using theirs for future references for jobs. Meanwhile, we were anxious to see how the outside readers would respond to our work.

Elizabeth Nist: Teachers' Reading and Evaluation of Portfolios

Portfolio final exams have been an explosive issue in our English department. Most of the debate among our faculty about portfolios has seemed to focus on the evaluation process. Many teachers objected to postponing grading until the end of the quarter. They claimed their students demanded grades on their papers throughout the quarter. They also claimed that the workload presented by stacks of ungraded papers to be faced all at once during finals week was impossible.

Consequently, as we developed our process, we agreed from the beginning that instructors could choose whether to grade papers as usual throughout the quarter or move toward the Elbow/Belanoff portfolio model with teacher response during the quarter and evaluation only at the end. In either case, the portfolios were compiled by the students and presented to their instructors on the last class day of the quarter.

Meanwhile, throughout the quarter, the instructors participating in the portfolio "pilot" met about once a month to discuss assignment design and portfolio requirements. While the instructors assigned letter grades to each portfolio in their own sections, the "second" readers rated the portfolios as "pass" or "fail." These were the determining questions: "Is this Composition I student prepared for Composition II?" or "Is this Composition II student prepared for upper division college work?" During the last week of the quarter we met to read and discuss sample portfolios and establish criteria for our reading. We began with our latest draft of criteria and made revisions based on our most recent experience and current writing assignments; then we tested the criteria against sample student papers. Consequently, our criteria were evolving into a document that described the three levels of mastery students had to demonstrate for (1) entrance to college level work, (2) completion of Composition I, and (3) completion of Composition II. This drafting and norming of criteria was essential every quarter. The sample portfolios were then brought to the reading session for reference as necessary.

Each instructor selected about eight portfolios from each section (about 30%) for second readings. Usually we began our selection with those that were borderline pass/fail cases and then added others that might be borderline A/B or B/C. It was important to present a range of student work in order for the evaluation to have any validity. Ideally, all of the portfolios would be evaluated by outside readers, but given our student/teacher ratio and faculty mindset, this was difficult at first. In the future we hope to recruit and train readers from outside the English Division to participate in this evaluation process. With a larger pool of readers, all of the portfolios will receive outside readings. More importantly, by involving faculty from other disciplines in the discussion of assignment design, in the norming process, and in the evaluation of student writing, we will be strengthening writing across the curriculum.

But for now, at the time scheduled for the final exams in Composition I and II, we composition instructors met in one of the classrooms and presented our portfolios. We each randomly selected and read an agreed-upon number, often making notes to the student writers and enclosing those notes in the

portfolios. Following the reading, we discussed each of the portfolios that we had failed. Instructors also requested discussion of any portfolio that was problematic.

At about this point in the process, several other faculty joined the readers group to plan academic advisement of the students who needed help. These faculty advisors included an academic counselor, our reading specialist, and our Access Services Coordinator.

The whole process took about three hours. The atmosphere was collegial and professional. Someone acted as scribe throughout the discussions and typed up the quarterly report to be distributed to the entire English Division.

Elizabeth Nist: Teacher comments collected from the Quarterly Reports

In the June 1992 report, the faculty listed the following advantages of the portfolio final exam:

- Students have a chance to do their best work and show a variety of their work.
- The emphasis on drafting and revision and the deferment of assessment, permit instructors to be "writing coaches" in the classroom and when responding to writing.
- Assembling and managing the portfolio demands organization of the teacher and students.
- Reading and evaluating portfolios promotes collegiality and collaboration among the participating faculty. Teachers share assignments and evaluation criteria, which promotes norming of faculty grading practices.
- The portfolio process subjects individual teacher's assessment criteria to self-scrutiny; the adjustment to a common standard is initiated by the instructors, not imposed from outside.
- The readers serve as real representatives of a broad academic audience, so the process is a powerful and effective way to teach the dynamics of the rhetorical situation.

Disadvantages:

- Teachers dislike the tendency for "everything" to come in at the end of the quarter.
- Some colleagues have said they are hesitant to participate in the group readings because they feel threatened by the practice of exchanging and reading one another's students' work.
- Portfolios take extra time: (1) teacher time to organize the portfolios (about 1 to 2 hours/section); (2) teacher time for second readings (about 3 hours during final exam week).

Early in our portfolio pilot project we wanted to explore how portfolio assessment results compared with an in-class essay exam and the national "Subject Examination in English Composition" (the "CLEP" test published by Educational Testing Service). We discovered that the portfolio was the only assessment instrument that addressed all of the course objectives. The standardized exam primarily assessed language usage and reading comprehension; the in-class essay best assessed fluency. By including in the portfolio an in-class essay that required students to analyze a reading, students were able to demonstrate competency in all the outcomes described in the syllabus. The reflective cover letters to the portfolio readers required students to make explicit this connection between their work and the course objectives.

At the end of each quarter we evaluated the entire portfolio process and often revised the portfolio instructions and our reading process. The January 1993 ARCC Portfolio Readers Report said, "This participating faculty concluded that benefits of the portfolio assessment process, for instructors and students alike, outweigh the disadvantages."

In addition to echoing the advantages to instructors listed in 1992, this 1993 report claimed that students enjoy the following benefits:

- The process permits, even requires, revision. Students are placed in a situation where revision is meaningful because it is shaped toward specific audiences and purposes.

- The process permits students to exhibit their mastery of the entire range of outcomes, from the development of an essay through formal presentation of it in standard language and format.

- The making of a portfolio validates students' writing; their writing is worthy of professional presentation.

If asked, would students themselves offer these kinds of responses to the portfolio final exam?

Michelle Anderson: A Survey of ARCC Students' Responses to the Portfolio Exam

For my research project in Composition II, I surveyed 87 students in ARCC English classes during the third week of Spring Quarter 1993 in several sections of Composition I and Composition II. Because it was early in the quarter, nearly half of the students responding were only just beginning work on the portfolio exam or the exam had only been briefly introduced by their instructor at the time of this survey. However, the other half showed a good sense of understanding about the portfolio exam and what was expected of them. Some of the Composition II students had completed portfolios in their Composition I classes.

STUDENT SURVEY

As a result of your participation in the portfolio final exam this year, how would you rate the following about the English Program and your instructor in helping you deal with the portfolio system?

1. Did the portfolio exam help you feel that your writing met these minimum standards?

Yes	No	No Opinion
74%	10%	16%

2. Did the portfolio exam give you a good sense of what is required in this writing course?

Yes	No	No Opinion
78%	9%	13%

3. Did the portfolio exam encourage you to consult with your instructor?

Yes	No	No Opinion
68%	22%	10%

4. Did the portfolio exam encourage you to work with a tutor in the Writers Workshop [peer tutors in our open writing lab on campus]?

Yes	No	No Opinion
34%	47%	18%

5. Did the portfolio exam encourage you to revise?

Yes	No	No Opinion
83%	7%	9%

6. Did the portfolio exam give you sufficient opportunity to demonstrate your meeting the course's standards?

Yes	No	No Opinion
78%	7%	15%

7. Which kind of final exam would you choose for a writing course?

portfolio	in-class essay	outside-class essay
46%	15%	20%
multiple choice		other
13%		7%

8. Did the instructor's use of portfolios influence you to register for a particular section?

Yes	No	Not sure
15%	64%	21%

9. Would use of portfolios influence your choice of sections in a course in the future?

Yes	No	Not sure
34%	29%	37%

Three-fourths of the students responded that the portfolio exam helped to clarify course requirements and minimum standards. An impressive 83% said that the portfolio exam encouraged them to revise their work. Only 34% reported working with peer tutors in the writing lab; however, 68% consulted with the instructor. I expected this to be true because the instructors were available, so students sought them first. Students tended to think of the tutors as remedial help rather than as trained readers responding to drafts. Since 83% of the students said they revised their papers, I had to conclude that they were relying on class group work and teacher response to guide revision.

From this survey I also found that many students who took part in the portfolio exam liked the final and gave positive responses. The others had very little knowledge of the portfolio system and had no opinion. I found the overall result, however, to be quite encouraging for future use. I believe the portfolio final exam to be helpful in many ways for students.

Four papers were required for my portfolio. I personally found the research paper to be the most interesting. This paper I am writing now is my research paper. I enjoy the research part because it is a learning experience—for more than one person. I collected information published by other researchers and used their findings as background information for creating my own study.

Then, in another required paper, I analyzed my findings in the context of a theoretical model; my synthesis of findings and theory became my persuasive paper for the portfolio exam. Each student in the class chose an article which pertained to his or her topic; we analyzed the theorist's thesis and wrote our own arguments. I chose an article that presented a model of assessing learner outcomes and tested this theory with students' reactions here at Anoka-Ramsey. I asked how portfolio assessment has affected their writing. While I was working with other students on my theory paper, I found we all shared a common problem—the challenge of trying to analyze the theorists' claims and the quality of their evidence. After reading the articles over and over again, we formed focus groups and discussed the readings. I found this group work to be very helpful when writing our papers. The readers' viewpoints gave me a whole new perspective from which to view my work.

After multiple drafts of our theory paper, our next paper was an in-class essay. This essay was about structural revision. I analyzed my own theory paper, describing specific areas of strength and weakness. I identified my audience and described the purpose of my paper, what type of voice I was using, and how my paper was organized. I analyzed each part of my paper in great detail. This was the whole purpose of the in-class essay—to draft a revision plan for this paper.

The last and most important paper was our cover letter written to our portfolio reader. We wrote a letter about how our portfolio demonstrated our writing competency. In my letter I explained the steps in completing my assignments and what I had learned overall about writing. I also included comments about how I planned to use my portfolio in the future.

Portfolios show our capabilities. They are our own work, our own time, knowledge, and effort spent in putting words on paper. This is my work; this is what I have done!

I believe college writing is more than just reciting information; writing has feeling, reflection and expression. Through my portfolio experience, I've learned I should set goals in my writing to express myself and to let my voice come through my words. I agree with the sixth-grader who said, "Other people may think they know me, but my portfolio shows the real me, who I really am."

Conclusion

Here we have described one case study of how portfolios are used as exit assessment. From the perspectives of both students and teachers who participated, the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. If you are interested in more information, including a sample portfolio cover, please contact us at Anoka Ramsey Community College, 11200 Mississippi Boulevard, Coon Rapids, MN 55433; 612/422-3559.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR the Portfolio Examination* in Composition I and II Anoka-Ramsey Community College

COURSE________SECTION________

INSTRUCTOR____________________

QUARTER____________________

WRITER'S NAME____________________

I.D.#____________________

LOCAL ADDRESS____________________

LOCAL PHONE____________________

What is the Portfolio Exam?

In order to pass Composition I and II, you must submit a portfolio containing samples of your writing to another instructor, an outside reader who will determine whether your work meets standards set by the ARCC English Division.

* Based on the portfolio model developed by David Smit and Roger Friedman at Kansas State University.

What Assignments Go Into the Portfolio?

(1) For Composition I

Your portfolio for English 111, Composition I, must include three papers:

___ a. **One paper** must be a factual essay organized by topics or ideas, not narrative, although it can contain narrative illustrations or examples. The essay may profile a person, place, or event; convey the results of your personal observations; or explain a phenomenon or process. It may be documented, but it does not have to be.

___ b. The **second paper** must be an in-class essay which has neither been retyped nor revised outside of class. The in-class essay must have the amount of time you were given to do the assignment in the upper left-hand corner of the first page.

___ c. Your portfolio must include **a letter** to the portfolio reader, presented in standard letter form. Using the list of outcomes in your course syllabus, explain to the reader how your portfolio demonstrates writing competency.

(2) For Composition II

Your portfolio for English 121, Composition II, must include four papers:

___ a. **One paper** must be a persuasive essay which appeals to an audience's intellect and emotion. This paper may be any of the following: an editorial; an evaluation; a review, interpretation, or critical analysis; or a proposal for a change. You may argue a claim of fact, value, or policy.

___ b. A **second paper** must be a research paper which uses outside sources of information, either from written materials or from interviews, and uses a correct form of documentation.

___ c. A **third paper** must be an in-class essay which has neither been retyped nor revised outside of class. The in-class essay must have the amount of time you were given to do the assignment in the upper left-hand corner of the first page.

___ d. Your portfolio must include **a letter** to the portfolio reader, presented in standard letter form. Using the list of outcomes in your course syllabus, explain to the reader how your portfolio demonstrates writing competency.

How Are the Portfolios Presented?

All portfolios must be presented in the following manner:

(1) Submit all papers to your instructor in this required standard file folder.

(2) Submit the revised papers written out of class typed on unlined 8 1/2 x 11" paper. These papers should contain no comments in the margins or at the end.

(3) Submit all papers, including the in-class writing, with copies of the assignment on which the writings are based or with a sheet of paper indicating the textbook and pages from which the assignments are taken.

(4) Attach each assignment's drafts with a paper clip to the copy of the assignment and final draft.

How Will Your Portfolios Be Evaluated?

Your portfolio will be graded either pass or fail.

At least one independent reader, usually another instructor in the program, will grade your portfolio either pass or fail.

Your portfolio reader will check to see that each paper in your portfolio is acceptable "college-level work" in each of the following areas:
(1) Each paper must have a clear purpose.
(2) Each paper must have a form of organization which is easy to follow.
(3) Each paper must be supported with sufficient detail or evidence for its purpose.
(4) Each paper must have a consistent tone appropriate to its purpose and audience.
(5) Each paper must be well edited and generally free of errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage.

Will the In-Class Theme Be Held to the Same Standards?

Your portfolio reader will expect your in-class paper to be less polished than a revised piece.

Your reader will be more tolerant of editing errors and insufficient detail. The primary purpose of the in-class piece is to see what you can do on your own. (Your instructor may allow you to plan the in-class paper in advance and bring notes or an outline with you to class when you write the paper. You may also consult a dictionary while you write this essay.) Your reader will check to make sure that this piece is consistent with the other writing in your portfolio. If your revised papers are substantially better, your reader will look at your previous drafts to make sure that your final drafts were clearly the result of the work you did revising earlier drafts. If the various drafts show sudden, unexplained leaps in progress and the initial drafts are just as undeveloped and rife with errors as the in-class writing, the reader may conclude that much of the writing is not your own and fail the portfolio.

When Does a Portfolio Fail?

There are several circumstances which may cause your portfolio to fail:

(1) If it does not contain the required papers and accompanying assignments, notes, and drafts.

(2) If after consulting copies of the assignments your reader can still not determine what you were trying to accomplish in any two given papers.

(3) If your papers contain too many serious editing errors which include:
- run-on sentences
- inappropriate fragments
- lack of agreement between nouns and verbs or nouns and pronouns with a common referent
- pronouns without clear antecedents
- faulty parallelism
- lack of consistency in tenses
- misspelled words
- punctuation errors that interfere with readability

PLEASE NOTE: The two most common reasons why papers fail the portfolio is a lack of focus, the inability to concentrate on a key point of theme, and a lack of detail, the inability to develop a key point or theme beyond trivial generalizations and a weak supporting statement or two.

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Making a Difference in Teaching Literature

by John E. Oster

Many years ago as a conscientious first-year teacher, I sometimes struggled with decisions regarding the best ways to teach language arts. The veteran teacher in the class next to mine, who was usually a pillar of support, would occasionally shrug off my concerns with the comment, "Twenty years from now who'll know the difference?" My initial reaction was to be annoyed that he should treat my honest endeavors to find the most effective methods of teaching English in such a cynical and cavalier fashion. However, as I got to know him better, I came to realize that in his typically flippant manner he was suggesting I focus my attention on things that really matter. Perhaps as English teachers we should pay more attention to the long range effects of our teaching. If we ask ourselves what we would really like our students to have retained twenty years from now from the classes we are currently teaching, the natural follow-up question is whether the approaches we are using are compatible with our desired results. For example, if we are hoping our students will become readers who respond sensitively and independently to literature, are we providing them the necessary background and relevant experiences? If we would like our students to love literature and become lifetime readers, are we making the development of positive attitudes a high priority in our classrooms?

We can't successfully grapple with questions of methodology, however, until we have sorted out our fundamental beliefs about the nature of literature and the literary experience. During the past couple of decades, literary theorists such as Louise Rosenblatt, Wolfgang Iser, and Robert Probst, have stressed that the "meaning" of literary works resides not solely in the text but in the interaction between the reader and the text. The poet Robert Currie expresses a similar view when he writes,

> My poems
> are slim bombs
> craving explosion
> Their fuses lie
> dark on the page
> awaiting your arrival with a light.

If we acknowledge that the meaning of literature is created in part through the dynamic interaction of readers and texts, then it follows that the essential aspects of literature cannot be transmitted as one might transmit the content of other subjects. The true essence of literature is in experiencing literature and responding to it personally and authentically.

Language arts teachers who adopt a response-oriented approach recognize that the goal of literary study is not just to know about literature. Among other things, students need to learn how to read with sensitivity and understanding, to explore human experience and values, to deepen their understanding of the nature of literature and of life. If they are to learn how to respond fully and gain confidence in working independently with literature, they need to have wide and varied experience with literary texts. Adopting a responsible response-oriented approach, however, means providing students opportunities to experience a full range of literary responses, including a judicious balance of personal and informed critical responses. Our programs should provide students enough knowledge about literary texts and techniques for them to function successfully at the university level. However, adequate preparation for further work in English demands much more than knowledge. Students who leave secondary schools with a positive attitude and lively curiosity, who can read sensitively and with understanding, and who are not afraid to express their own ideas and to explore the ideas of others are admirably prepared for university work. Those students who view literature as received wisdom from teachers and critics and who have limited confidence in their own ability to respond meaningfully to it are not.

Personal response and informed literary response should not be viewed as competing paradigms. After all, a literary critic is really just a sensitive, confident reader articulating his or her response to and interpretation of a literary work. In fact, informed literary criticism can often best be approached from a base of personal response. For example, students working in pairs to dramatize "Porphyria's Lover," Robert Browning's well-known dramatic monologue, will usually re-read the text many times in order to develop an understanding of the characters their relationship, and the details of the action they themselves are being asked to reenact. They will have to read carefully and make many interpretative judgements as they develop insights into the motivation of the speaker. In order to orally interpret the last line of the poem, "and yet God has not said a word," they will have to decide whether the speaker expects commendation, condemnation, or indifference from God. In making these decisions, students will be exploring issues that have caused raging controversies among critics. By letting students discover these issues for themselves, then possibly feeding conflicting articles by noted critics into the ensuing discussion, teachers provide students with an opportunity to see that they themselves are engaged in real literary criticism. They also learn, as Louise Rosenblatt suggests they should in The Reader, the Text, the Poem, that literary critics should be regarded merely as experienced co-readers, not surrogate readers.

An approach which places high value on students developing positive attitudes to literature and acquiring confidence in articulating their personal responses provides the type of background students need in order to develop informed literary responses. It is important, however, for students first to gain imaginative entry into a work of literature through personal response. Enjoyment of literature is obviously the key that can unlock all subsequent stages of literary development. But enjoyment, like a leprechaun, is seldom captured when pursued directly. It is more likely to appear in situations where individuals are totally engrossed in purposeful and satisfying work. The following ideas are intended to illustrate approaches that can both engage students and help them develop their abilities to respond fully and meaningfully to literature.

Dramatic approaches such as improvisation, role-playing, and readers' theatre can help students understand characters and situations and bring many literary works to life. They stimulate discussion about varied interpretations and help to integrate listening and speaking with literary study. Most importantly, perhaps, they can make students experience the affective as well as the intellectual aspects of many pieces of literature. They can also be used effectively to provide motivation for the future study of an extended literary work. One

approach I particularly like is to conspire with a few students or fellow teachers to prepare a readers' theatre or dramatic interpretation of a key scene to be presented to a class about a week before a novel or play is introduced. The presentation serves to motivate the students to want to hear, see, or read more about the coming attraction. It is generally surprisingly easy to recruit co-conspirators if one approaches the right combination of people with enthusiasm and an air of intrigue. Initially most students seem to enjoy the activity because they are doing something the rest of the class doesn't know about. Later, the social interaction, the active engagement with literature, and the thought of surprising their classmates serve to motivate them. While members of the audience sometimes groan about the suspect acting talent of their teachers and peers, this activity is generally successful in providing an imaginative entry into the text and is often referred to in subsequent discussions. I suppose twenty years from now the presentation may be remembered even if the rest of the book isn't.

Developing confidence in one's own literary response is an important factor in acquiring independence as a reader. Having an opportunity to respond personally to literature before being asked to make a public response is extremely important to developing confidence as a reader. Teachers can increase opportunity for the students' personal responses as well as the depth of class discussion by having students respond to poetry in pairs before engaging in general class discussion. Few of us would feel comfortable addressing an audience about our responses to a poem we had read only once or twice. We would certainly want to try out our ideas on one or two people before expressing them in public. Shy adolescents are particularly sensitive about exposing their ideas in a large forum of people whose opinions they especially value, their peers. If a teacher uses only large group discussions, some students will never volunteer their thoughts. Working in pairs provides assurance that all students have an opportunity to discover, explore, and express their responses to what they have read.

Group work and cooperative learning are indispensable in a response-oriented approach. The way the groups are structured and the nature of the assignments are crucial to the interest and consequently to the success of the endeavor. When using small groups for response activities, I frequently have each of the groups work on a separate task. Doing so makes the sharing period following group work much more meaningful as each group contributes something new to the class. Sometimes I use a jigsaw grouping procedure as a substitute for reconvening groups for general class discussion. This procedure involves regrouping so that one member from each of the original groups goes into each of the new groups. For example, home groups can generate questions, study groups can explore answers, and individuals can take the answers back to the home groups. The home groups thus have the benefit of the insights of all groups. Differences in study group responses can generate considerable discussion and further exploration of ideas in the home groups. This approach is valuable because it teaches the process of interrogating texts, gives students a chance to discover answers to their own questions, and gives every student opportunity and responsibility to talk about literature.

Sometimes when using thematic poetry units or when focusing on the work of an individual poet, I have each small group work on a separate poem. The members of the small groups can then present to the rest of the class the fresh insights their poem brings to the topic under consideration. This approach promotes a sense of ownership of literature and exposes the class to a larger number of poems than would a whole-class approach.

Few approaches generate as much thought about poetry in an atmosphere of enjoyment as does group-planned oral or choral reading of poetry. Please note that I am not referring to choral reading in which the teacher selects a poem, decides how it should be read, orchestrates the reading, and polishes it for public performance. What I am advocating is choral reading resulting from student-centered group planning sessions. In these sessions, the students invariably find themselves discovering meaning, deciding what effects they want to achieve, and experimenting with ways to achieve these effects by using the vocal resources of the individuals in the group. Frequently they will discover the impact of diction and metaphor, discuss matters of form and style, and interpret theme and mood without fully realizing that they are engaged in literary analysis. The teacher, of course, may use these group discussions as starting points for further explorations of literary aspects, but the students will not see these explorations as arcane and theoretical because, in effect, they initiated them.

Presentations of choral readings and readers' theatre can be both enjoyable and worthwhile. The excitement can be heightened by using props and costumes and by giving the event status within the school or classroom, perhaps by having it videotaped or presented to other classes or to parents. It is important, however, for the English teacher to keep in mind that the process of working with the poems is much more important than the product, the presentation.

Many response-oriented teachers find that having students adapt literary works to other media forms such as radio plays or films is a very effective way to develop response and to have students focus on sound and image. Many students today are not used to doing their own imaginative visualizing because film and television create images for them. Yet to become accomplished readers of literature, students must become very adept at creating mental images from words. Planning a film adaptation of a short story or a poem requires them to concentrate on visual aspects of the work such as imagery, characterization, details of setting, and point of view. As they attempt to transpose the work from one form to another, they become more aware of both literary and media techniques. Students may actually prepare a filmed version of the literary work (a fairly time consuming process) or just discuss the decisions that would have to be made in order to do so. Ironically, perhaps, the latter choice can be just as educationally and imaginatively effective as the former because students are not faced with technical and economic limitations. In their planned versions they can use the most sophisticated of film techniques and settings, employ Tom Cruise and Kim Bassinger as stars, and get Woody Allen as director. Both approaches encourage a surprising amount of close reading because students are driven back to the text time after time to clarify details and support interpretations. Sometimes they will even rewrite scenes to make the text amenable to the new medium.

An often neglected aspect in developing literary appreciation is having students experience literature from the writer's perspective. Although expository writing has become the privileged form in secondary schools, students can learn a great deal about literature, as well as about themselves, through writing in imaginative literary forms. Many literary concepts, such as point of view and foreshadowing, can be taught more convincingly through writing than through reading. A writer struggling to achieve a particular effect has an immediate need to learn a particular technique which may otherwise have little relevance to an adolescent reader. Writers' workshop approaches in classrooms encourage a much-needed change in perception of our field. They have helped teachers and students of English to start thinking of literature as one of the arts, not just as a content subject. Students of art, music, and drama may study masterpieces in their respective fields, but they certainly also draw, paint, sing, play instruments, and act. Why shouldn't students of literature write poetry and fiction?

Writing, however, need not be either transactional or poetic to be helpful in making literature more personally meaningful. Personal, expressive writing can be invaluable in exploring personal response to works of literature. It can also be extremely effective in setting a context for the initial encounter with a story or poem. For example, personal writing can establish a receptive mood or evoke related experiences that heighten the impact or make the work more personally relevant.

Many teachers have students use response journals to record their impressions, questions, and conjectures at designated stages as they read a short story, play, or novel. As well as providing the students with a vehicle to discover and record their responses, the journals give the teacher an opportunity to gain insights into students' reactions and levels of understanding. This information can be invaluable in helping the teacher discuss the work individually with students, lead interesting class discussions, design meaningful assignments, and select future readings. We should be aware, however, that some readers find it very annoying and disconcerting to interrupt their reading in order to write. As with any other approach, teachers need to be careful not to overuse response journals but to allow flexibility in their application.

All of these approaches can contribute to our students becoming better readers, but we can also help them develop insight into reading-response processes and confidence in their own ability to read literature meaningfully. Many

students lack confidence in their own ability to read literature because they compare their own faltering first readings with the carefully prepared literary analyses of teachers and critics. As teachers of literature we are used to sharing our interpretations, the products of our thinking, with our students. However, we too infrequently share our reading processes with them. As co-readers of works we are encountering for the first time, rather than as expert readers of texts we have studied and researched, we can show them how we read literature. For most of us that means showing them that an interpretation does not arrive full-blown in our minds. It comes about through questioning and conjecture, through connections with personal experiences and works previously read, through taking into account sounds and images, emotions and insights. It also means revealing that responding to literature can involve evoking memories, following false leads, getting confused by multiple meanings of language, being unable to account for some details, entertaining contradictory hypotheses, and having to reserve judgement. It means acknowledging that for various readers the literary work may be more or less accessible, have more or less impact, and be more or less appealing, depending upon the personal and vicarious experiences the readers bring to the work.

Students need to realize that it is not only all right but inevitable that individuals respond to and interpret literature in a variety of ways. They also need to learn that the joy of literature is in the experience of reading and responding. It is sharing ideas and feelings, playing with language, making imaginative leaps, and experiencing acts of discovery and acts of creation. It is an engaging and active experience. It is not passively acquiring accepted interpretations of authorized texts. If our fondest wish is that our students become and remain lovers of reading and literature, then the amount of knowledge they have acquired about specific literary works is not of the greatest fundamental importance–development of reading and responding skills and positive attitudes are. If twenty years from now our students are making use of the competence, confidence, and independence as readers they developed in our classrooms, we will have fulfilled our real jobs as teachers of literature. We will have made a difference.

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Presence of Absence

by
Neda Miranda Blazevic

Some personal thoughts on history, culture, and the role of writers and women in Communist and post-Communist Central Europe

"In a certain sense I can consider myself a typical Eastern European," writes the Polish-American writer Czeslaw Milosz in his autobiography Native Realm. He continues,

> It seems to be true that his differentia specifica can be boiled down to a lack of form—both inner and outer. [The Eastern European's] good qualities—intellectual avidity, fervor in discussion, a sense of irony, freshness of feeling, spatial (or geographical) fantasy—derive from a basic weakness: he always remains an adolescent, governed by a sudden ebb or flow of inner chaos. Form is achieved in stable societies. My own case is enough to verify how much of an effort it takes to absorb contradictory traditions, norms, and an overabundance of impressions, and to put them into some kind of order. Modern civilization, it is said, creates uniform boredom and destroys individuality. If so, then this is one sickness I had been spared. (67)

I've read this chapter many times and always found Milosz's characterization of "a typical Eastern European" unacceptable in a "certain sense." This paradoxical "certain sense" gives plenty of ambiguities if we are to understand anyone's cultural identity as typical. Milosz's fascinating figure challenges many other Eastern Europeans who also claim to be typical. It is not so easy to have such good qualities as "intellectual avidity, fervor in discussion, a sense of irony, freshness of feeling, spatial (or geographical) fantasy." Even what Milosz attributes to the darker side of the Eastern European character seems attractive. He speaks of one who "always remains an adolescent governed by sudden ebb or flow of inner chaos," and yet it sounds so psychologically attractive that this ambiguous life yields an irresistible, literary portrait.

One simply loves this typical Eastern European from the book. He sounds so complex. And yet Milosz, like the other famous Eastern European writers, including Kundera, Hrabal, Havel, Skvorecky, Michnick, Klima, and Konrad, writes from the male's point of view and for the male's point of view. Is it possible for "a typical Eastern European" to be a woman? What is the difference?

But first, let's take up some other questions. Where was Eastern Europe in the past, and where is it today? Are Eastern and Central Europe the same?

The expressions Eastern Europe, Mitteleuropa, Central Europe, and Mitropa suggest that there are a number of differently shaped patches of Europe that can be called central or eastern. Historians, geographers, politicians, and writers search for Central Europe in the frontier between Western and Eastern Europe, in the frontier between Germans and Latins, in the belt between the Baltic territories up north and the Balkans in the south of Europe. The Slav area with Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenians, Croatians, and Serbians; the Germanic area with Germans and Austrians; the Magyar-Finnish area with Hungarians, Finns, and Estonians; and finally the Jews who are widespread all over these areas—all of these create the traditional map of Central or Eastern Europe, even though one might question the term, for what is eastern and what is central in Europe? And does not the question of direction also become a question of politics, culture, or geography?

The ancient traces of a Central European area began with a Germanic colonization in a feudal time where a German-speaking aristocracy was dominant. A non-German-speaking middle class awoke in the 19th century through the waves of national movements, and German-Jewish-Slav-Hungarian, ethnically mixed nations formed a multinational, multilingual, multi-religious Central Europe.

The four main competitors for control in Central Europe were the Ottoman Turkish Empire from the 14th to the 18th centuries, the Hapsburg Empire until its fall in 1918, the German Imperial aspirations from Bismark in

the 1870s to Hitler, and the various Russian Empires of Czarism, Stalinism, and the Warsaw Pact after 1948.

The Austrian writer Robert Musil writes of the lack of values in the most powerful state in the beginning of the 20th century, the Austro-Hungarian Empire:

> The Austro-Hungarian Empire was a rich collection of particularisms which, with no doubt, could afford to the spirit useful traveling, but one should keep in his mind that this Empire had nothing to do with a synthesis of one state. This state hasn't had a clear concept, nor a creative will of one nation for it was not established as a free association of many nations which could build up its back-bone animating a matter of its blood. (273)

The frontiers of Central European states had been painfully reshaped after World War I and World War II. In 1918 the new state of Yugoslavia appeared in the Balkans. The South Slavs, Muslim Slavs, and many other ethnic groups became a little Central Europe after the Austro-Hungarian Empire disappeared. But Musil's definition of a "state without synthesis, a clear concept and a free association of many nations" found its confirmation and poor political prognosis in the case of Yugoslavia.

I was born in the early fifties in the town of Gracac, south Croatia, a republic of the former Yugoslavia. Soon after my birth, my parents moved with my older sister Olga and me, to the city of Bjelovar, where we lived ten years before we moved to Zagreb, the Croatian capital, where my father got a job as a bureaucrat in the Republic's Office of Internal Affairs.

My mother stopped her work as an accountant soon after I was born and took on the traditional role of a wife and mother who volunteered for the Red Cross. If I were to choose the most valuable gift I received from my parents, it would be their lesson that people should not be judged according to stereotypes.

In the early sixties, the time in which I formed a conscious understanding of life's more substantial values, the traces of World War II were still fresh and painful. Under communism we were reminded every day of our glorious victory over the Nazis and of how that victory had provided a mainstream for bringing together all nations and peoples in a country with so many languages, religions, nationalities, histories, and cultural origins. I was around ten years old when I read the book Across the Atlantic to the Partisans in which one chapter was dedicated to my grandfather, Emil Vrkljan, my mother's father. He had emigrated to Canada in the late twentieth century in the hope of earning some money and bringing his family to Canada or going back to Croatia to provide a better life for his wife and daughter. At home we had a few of his golden sepia-tone photographs; I especially liked the one that was taken just after he had joined a big orchestra, where he stood with a contrabass at the edge of the picture. He was young and joyful and in his early thirties. His shy smile covered the hard life he had lived. In 1943 he decided to join a group of about three hundred Croatians who were already Canadian citizens but who were sailing to Europe to join the Partisan Resistance Movement against the Nazis in Croatia. A German submarine torpedoed the ship, and my grandfather was not among those who survived. I had been taught to think with pride of how my grandfather gave his life for our freedom, but today I know that expressions of pride have many levels of unexpressed love.

My mother's loss seemed to be almost unbearable. Two of her uncles were killed in 1943 and 1945 by the Serbian nationalists—the Chetniks. She would always say, however, that the deaths of her beloved father and uncles did not mean that all Germans or Serbians were bad. Though I was not spared from the wounds of nationalism, I was spared from an upbringing of nationalistic hatred. In our neighborhood lived a Serbian couple, and I often played with their children. One day we were arguing about something and one of the boys yelled at me furiously, "You are a Croatian fascist bastard!"— as if to target the Croatian Ustasha of World War II. Later on, I gained good Serbian friends, but ever since Serbia attacked Croatia in July of 1991, I have heard nothing from any of them.

I was around fifteen years old when I started to travel in Europe with my sister Olga. The first time I experienced the magic embrace of nature and human imagination in architecture, art, and fashion was in the vivid streets of Venice, where I realized how slight had been my awareness of the similar historic beauty of the many Croatian cities that spread inland all along the Adriatic coast. Cities such as Dubrovnik, Split, Pula, Zadar, Osijek, and Vukovar have lost their Romanesque, Gothic, and Baroque radiance under a Communist government that didn't consider it important to take serious care to preserve what it called "old, decadent nests," even though the politicians had moved into beautiful villas after proclaiming their former owners the enemies of the people and the state. Since the early sixties, the new urban areas in all Eastern European countries were scenes of destruction brought on by the ugly, gigantic, concrete buildings with thousands of small cage-like apartments, dirty entrances, broken front doors, and trash spread all around the streets. To many people, a sense of communal property simply meant that someone else was responsible for its care. This was, in a certain way, a mirror image of the behavior of most of the politicians, who saw the state apparatus as their property but not their responsibility.

The socialist architecture served as a visualization for my resistance against communism forever. I have lived for years in one of these small, cage-like apartments, calling it Less than One, named after Joseph Brodsky's book Less than One. Actually I should have been happy having that Less than One, for there have been so many young people with Less than Zero. One who regards architecture as the sign of spiritual identity condemns the Communist era first for its total neglect of a historic code of the development of civilization. Communism behaved as if nothing had happened before it and nothing would happen after it. This exclusivity appears in every dictatorial society, and the lack of an environmental conscience is one of the first visible signs of what the philosopher Martin Heidegger calls the historical break between human existence and world, for man is part of the world, and his existence produces the quality of the world and vice versa.

Does it sound too paradoxical if I say that despite all of these circumstances and despite the heart ailment that I suffered from for years, in a certain sense I had a happy childhood and youth? Books, films, friendships, studies, loves, travels, writing, painting, and holidays on the Croatian part of the Adriatic Sea–all these particles slowly filled out a ground of form and self-awareness despite any repressive political power. This is the way people who live in dictatorial societies manage to turn skepticism into irony, rage into creativity, and chaos into hope.

In 1980 I got a job at Radio Zagreb's education program. At the time I had published three books and presented two art exhibits, so I expected to work on programs concerned with literature and art. I got a broadcast assignment on "How to bring Marxism closer to students," which was really more than I could have expected. I went with a tape recorder to one high school asking students what they thought about Marxist teachings. After the editor-in-chief heard the broadcast I almost lost the job. In a while I was politely asked to join the Communist Party, but I innocently said that I suffered from heart disease and Communists, who smoke so much while having long meetings, probably would suffocate me. It was the easiest way to mask myself with the irony of passive dissent. Many Croatian writers and journalists did the same. Those who were more courageous had been imprisoned.

A few reasons prompted me to get fresh air in the early 1980's in Berlin and Munich and later on in the United States: the feeling that life was somewhere else, the narrow scope of what was permissible in my job as a journalist, the notorious supervision by male leaders, chiefs, and ideologists, and the experience of witnessing helplessly while growing Serbian nationalism repressed the people in Kosovo. In the nineties, the Serbian repression and censorship that had been imposed on Kosovo's Albanian Muslim population in south Serbia during the 1980's spread all over Yugoslavia.

In the summer of 1991, I was in Berlin when Serbia attacked Croatia. I was hysterical on the telephone to my parents and my sister in Zagreb and watched as TV showed the first victims shot down by Serbian aircraft in the streets of the city of Borovo. The camera focused its eye on the dead women's bodies lying in the street, and I started to cry and call for help.

In all communist countries, men shaped the government into a mirror of their male culture's view of women that accentuated whatever was aggressive, possessive, and patriarchal.

Is that the first fact according to which I can consider myself a "Typical Eastern European" woman? During my marriage I was working at least five jobs. While I was making a living as a journalist, I kept our household by cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and shopping, without any help from my husband. In the evenings I was writing, and during holidays I was painting and reading. Finally, I had open-heart surgery and I divorced my husband. At the same time I divorced Communism too.

The famous male Eastern European writers whom I have named in the beginning of this article have used the novel to describe the absurdity and brutality of Communism, the absence of freedom of artistic expression, and—finally—women. The first two subjects have brilliantly conveyed the captive mind of totalitarianism, but the third subject—women—has appeared as the weakest, for women have been portrayed as weak, spoiled, and intellectually inferior characters. Even when these novelists write about love between men and women, they cannot avoid the chaotic confusion of their patriarchal-urban male superiority. The man, even when he bears certain negative characteristics, sustains the dignity of his gender in the narrator's eyed.

Here is an example of how Milan Kundera tries to transform his machoism into the "appreciation of the self" in his novels:

> As I was writing The Unbearable Lightness of Being, I realized that the code of this or that character is made up of certain words. For Tereza: body, soul, vertigo, weakness, idyll, Paradise. For Thomas: lightness, weight. . . . Her [Tereza's] entire life was a mere continuation of her mother's . . . and [she] suffers from it. She has small breasts with areolae that are very large, very dark circles around her nipples [as if they were] painted by a primitivist of poor-man's pornography. That information is indispensable because her body is another of Tereza's main themes. By

contrast, where Tomas, her husband, is concerned, I tell nothing about his childhood, nothing about his father, his mother, his family. And his body, as well as his face, remains completely unknown to us because the essence of his existential problem is rooted in other themes. (34;35)

But the conclusion suggests that Kundera's male characters are generally dealing with "existential problems" by "grasping the essence" from them, while his female characters are generally dealing with "existential problems" by "suffering from vertigo, which is the intoxication of the weak."

The image of woman as poor sexual target and victim finds its confirmation and its terrible shape in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The degradation of women and the male assertion of sexual power over women have been the principal tactics of the Serbian Orthodox fighters against Muslim women. The campaign of rape, torture, and killing has been a part of a total genocide and ethnic cleansing, which strive to make the ethnically clean Serbian areas in the Croatian and Bosnian regions that will be links to Serbia

The fact that the President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991, the prominent Serbian writer Dobrica Cosic, has been one of the intellectual architects of both the Greater Serbia and the genocide and ethnic cleansing plan in Bosnia and Herzegovina casts a terrible shadow over the conscience and profession of a writer. And what shall I say about the Serbian poet who is a leader of one of the most brutal Serbian nationalistic Chetnik groups, who said in an interview with the journalist William Pfaff that he wished "to bring about a new general war in Europe from which Serbia can emerge at last—a spiritually purified victor and great power"?

In its constant struggles, Central Europe has romanticized the Western European countries as potential liberators from Communist totalitarianism. But neither in politics nor in culture has Western Europe ever shown a real engagement in the Eastern European twilight zone. The dissident writers who emigrated to the West struggled with the unbearable problems of cultural adaptation and confronted the cynical smugness of the western democracies rather than their real concern and political support for the rebels against communism.

Though they emigrated, others stayed. Writers like Havel, Gotovac, and Kosik, who have been catalysts of the national conscience and resistance to totalitarianism, struggled for freedom and democracy in Central Europe from the inside, from prisons. Their political novels and essays made visible the invisible life of terror.

In 1988 Vaclav Havel wrote in prison a book of political essays that included "The Case of Totality." Here it is:

> A friend of mine, one hard asthmatic, had been sentenced as a political convict to many years in prison. He suffered terribly in there, for the other convicts in the cell smoked so much that he couldn't breathe. All his requests to be moved into a non-smoking cell failed. His health, and his life actually, had been seriously jeopardized. One American woman who heard about the case, and who wanted to help, gave a telephone call to her friend, the editor of one well known American newspaper, asking him to write about the case. The editor answered: "Call me back when the man dies." (247)

This is indeed one shocking example but from a certain point of view, a reasonable example: the newspaper needed "the story." Asthma isn't the story. "Only death can make the story," said Havel.

But I am not sure if that is even true. The United Nations issued a report in November 1992 on violations in Bosnia that spoke of "massive and systematic Serbian violation in Bosnia and Croatia, ethnic cleansing, shelling of civilian areas, extra-judicial detention, torture, and disappearances of detainees." For two years now the Western allies have searched for a political solution.

In 1993, Central Europe is once again at the cultural, political, and economic margin of Western Europe. But out of Communism and scattered in many new-old countries, this decentralized region seeks first of all for stability and form, which might be called the possibility of making political, cultural, and economic choices.

What kind of choices do women have in this still shaky Central Europe? Not too many. Although they are still divided among at least five jobs, they are far away from any political and cultural influence and power. Their needs and rights are still stored in plays, essays, and novels written by rare Eastern European women writers.

This is probably the only "certain sense" in which I can think of myself as "a typical Eastern European"—as a **woman**.

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Media, Culture, and Composition

by
Michael LaFleur

I
The Culture of Television

Let's say Ken Lewis is from Wyoming. He works at a small-market radio station in the middle of the state. The town where he works is in a valley with 13,000 foot mountains on all sides. Until 1978, there was no television at all in the town. With the exception of a bi-weekly newspaper, the sole outlet for advertising in the valley was the radio station.

In the fall of 1978, cable TV came to town. At first there were only thirteen stations, but in the course of five years, the available channels exploded to thirty-six. Suddenly there were several advertising options for local businesses–the newspaper, the radio station, the electronic bulletin board on the cable service, and a regional television station in Casper.

Now let's say, in the early '80's, Ken's boss is worried that the radio station's advertising revenues will drop because of the availability of television. So, he decides to send Ken off to a convention in Terre Haute, Indiana. At this convention, Ken is to find out how to deal with the sudden 100% increase in advertising outlets in rural areas. The convention lasts three days; this means that Ken is supposed to save the radio station with three days of information.

So let's say Ken flies from the tiny airport in his town to a bigger hub in Casper. From Casper he flies to Denver where he has a two-hour layover waiting for his connection to Chicago. He doesn't have time to do much except grab something to eat and read the paper. The state high school football playoffs are going on, and since he is the sports director as well as the music director at the station, he wants to find out how things are going.

Just a few years earlier, Ken wouldn't have had any way to find out about Wyoming high school sports outside of the state, even in a neighboring state, but a nationwide newspaper designed by Gannet Communications, Incorporated, USA Today, had been covering regional sports since its inception.

Ken goes up to a rack of newspaper vending machines. Most of the machines are rectangular, looking like little brightly colored front loading washers. There is one exception to the regularity of the machines' shapes – the USA Today machine. Rather than a rectangle, it is a box which rests on a pedestal. The newspaper is displayed off to one side of the box, about six inches from the center. Just to the right of the newspaper displayed in the door is a six-inch rectangle for the coin slot. Ken puts his money in the slot in the panel, which looks an awful lot like a control panel with a knob even, pulls open the door and grabs a paper.

If Ken would have had a sense for such things, he would have found it ironic that the machine from which he had just bought a newspaper looked surprisingly like a television set; after all he was headed to Terre Haute because his radio station needed to find a way to combat television's influence on the valley. Ostensibly, USA Today would have needed to do the same thing, but rather than fight television USA Today, as Neil Postman says, imitates it (17).

In reaction to the far reaching effects of television, both our fictitious music/sports director and the very real newspaper go to extremes to maintain some sort of hold on an audience. Though capricious and artificial, the influence of television is real.

In his 1984 keynote address at the Frankfurt Book Fair, Neil Postman describes the influence of television:

> As TV moves typography [and other media forms] to the edges of our culture and takes its place at the center, the television show becomes our most compelling model and metaphor of all communication. Newspapers have chosen to

imitate television, education becomes entertainment, ministers use show business style to preach. (16)

In Postman's vision, everything from acquisition of reading skills to selection of political leaders is based on images from the TV screen.

Postman's address was delivered, unknown to Postman or his audience, during the waning years of the Cold War. In the spirit of the war, the theme of the book fair was Orwell in the year 2000, but instead of solely invoking images of 1984 or Animal Farm, Postman describes the world as we approach the third millennium as a Huxleyan nightmare of people loving their oppression and adoring technology which undoes their capacity to think (14). Only five years after Postman's address the prison walls of Orwellian oppression begin to fall, and almost ten years after, the Huxleyan means of oppression is about to increase in scope to 500 channels.

In 1984, television was not nearly as huge as it was going to be soon, yet Postman said:

> Television is not merely an entertainment medium. It is a philosophy of discourse, every bit as capable of altering a culture as was the printing press. . . . Television disdains exposition, which is serious, sequential, rational, and complex. It offers instead a mode of discourse in which everything is accessible, simplistic, concrete, and above all entertaining. (18)

It is not merely our media which are shaped by television; nor is it merely our institutions, i.e. politics, education, the family; it is these and more. It is our culture.

II
Cultural Literacy

After four years away from a college campus, I went back to school in 1989. Having spent the previous two and a half years in Germany, I wasn't very attuned to the spirit of the times. So I was a bit confused when a reporter showed up on campus asking questions which seemed better fitted to "Trivial Pursuit" than academe. At the time I wasn't sure what the point was of printing in the newspaper the things that someone didn't know.

Being in Europe, I had no idea that there was a crisis in literacy going on. This crisis had been sensationalized by the media during the late 1980's as the media pointed to all the information they did not know. I say they because it was always someone else who had this literacy deficit; even the reporter supposedly knew the answers to the questions he was posing. With all the finger-pointing and decrying the state of literacy, it seemed there were few solutions offered. Little did this reporter, or I for that matter, know that two years earlier E.D. Hirsch had proposed the solution to the literacy crisis.

In his book Cultural Literacy, Hirsch tackled this problem which at the time was perceived by the general population to be the biggest crisis facing America, and he offered a simple solution to the problem; he even offered a handbook, The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, to help remedy the problem.

What he set out in his book was that there was a body of knowledge every American, English-speaking member of society needed in order to be literate. He argued that the teaching of reading devoid of this body of knowledge was the cause of the literacy crisis. This body of knowledge together with a mastery of a standardized English was what he meant by cultural literacy.

But there are some serious problems with what Hirsch presents as a solution. As Ray Browne and Arthur Neal point out in their article "The Many Tongues of Literacy":

> Being literate is clearly important for the individual and for his whole culture. But Hirsch's argument is seriously flawed because of the specific assumptions upon which it depends. These assumptions include the view that there is a center or core to modern culture which mature individuals must share if they are to communicate effectively with one another. (157)

Browne and Neal go on to point out that this core knowledge is identified by Hirsch and therefore carries with it his biases. They also point out, "that the essential knowledge is to be acquired primarily from the print medium" (157). These assumptions and others that Browne and Neal point out are not the answers to the supposed literacy crisis, for the assumptions ignore that the literacy most Americans strive for is not print based.

One of the premises that Hirsch is working from is that there is a body of knowledge which can be quantified by Hirsch and his cohorts Joseph Kett and James Trefil (146). But in amassing this body of knowledge these three are setting the standards of literacy using their emphasis. "This is an emphasis that has little relevance for the everyday lives of most Americans" (Browne and Neal 161).

Hirsch is correct in his assumption that there is a commonality involved in literacy, but that commonality cannot be imposed by someone above the fray. The unifying force already exists. "The major unifying force is of course, television" (Browne and Neal 161).

III
Accepting the Cultural Force

In 1988 the Westchester Library System of Elmsford, New York, created a series of Public Service Announcements imitating the style of current advertisements and MTV videos. The designers of the PSA spots thought the style would help generate interest in reading in the age of MTV:

> Each video [PSA] is short (30-40 seconds), depends heavily on music and is professional looking and stylish enough to be taken for a rock video or even a jeans commercial! Yet the end of each bears a message urging teens to "Check out the book" or [asks] "Want to know what happens next? Ask your public library's young adult librarian." Then the name and logo of the Westchester Library System Appears. (Courtney 183)

Instead of decrying the fate of literacy, the Westchester Library System used the bane of print to draw young adults to read. Surely telling young adults that their viewing habits were wrong would do nothing except increase those habits; that's the nature of teen rebellion. With this in mind the library system cleverly addressed the issue.

As purveyors of print literacy, the library could easily have fallen into the lamentation mode of Hirsch, but the library realized this would accomplish little except alienating potential readers when it was interested in engaging readers.

Notice too the detail to which the designers went to instill the PSA's with the feel of contemporary commercials and videos. Being aware of the adeptness with which the young viewers watch television, the designers were careful to produce a product of similar quality to the usual fare, recognizing that the potential readers were already attuned to the medium of television.

The concept holds true for us as English instructors. We are interested in engaged students, and our students are practiced TV viewers. That is not to say that all of them are good readers of television by any means. The motif in television does not lend itself to reading.

Barbara Morris is an English instructor who teaches using television. She recognizes that television does not invite active reading. She sees the need to prepare her students to watch TV. As she says:

> Consequently, I tell students that they have become accustomed to not questioning their responses to television, and because there is no public encouragement to engage in TV analysis, we need to practice three kinds of analysis in our classes: (1) individual detailed logs of text, (2) group dialogue about TV programming, and (3) researched essays documenting and interpreting details of television programs. (35)

In doing this Morris accomplishes several things which add to the engagement of the students. First she gives the students' experience and interest in television validity by making it a suitable medium for research. She also encourages them to do something they perhaps already engage in, which is talking about television. And thirdly, she encourages interpretation of programs.

I personally find the final objective the most interesting. It is this type of work that will generate a critical eye for television; it is this type of work that will transform students from passive consumers of television to critical readers of the dominant medium of our society.

IV
Helping Viewers Become Readers

One of the hazards I see in presenting fixes to the cultural problem of television is that the fixes usually ignore one crucial possibility–most Americans choose to watch television and most Americans choose to live the way they do. So presenting TV and the culture students derive from it as being a travesty to humankind is totally invalidating these students' lives. What can one truly expect to accomplish in an atmosphere based on a derision of student lives?

In a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 1990, Terry Mulcaire and Frank Grady lay out a course based on an assumption similar to that of the above-

mentioned library. In this experiment they attempted "to teach [their] course based on the assumption that culture was something that students did in fact possess, but that they tended to leave it at the door when they entered the . . . classroom" (2).

These two instructors entered into the classroom expecting the students to have already amassed a valuable set of experiences. Instead of immediately placing the students on the outside and relegating their experiences to the dung heap, ". . . this curriculum attempts to put before their eyes the fact that they have been inside culture, interpreting it, all along" (Mulcaire and Grady 3).

Mulcaire and Grady entered the classroom prepared to accept the experiences of the students. They felt the students already had developed ". . . a set of sophisticated skills for reading [popular culture texts—movies, television, music, et.al.] against and in terms of one another" (2). So they designed a syllabus which employed popular texts as part of the curriculum.

Someone of a traditional academic bent, a defender of the canon–including the new canon of diversity–would possibly question the validity of a course based on popular culture texts. But study of the popular was not the sole purpose of the Mulcaire and Grady course. The instructors included high culture texts as well in juxtaposition to the popular. They ". . . hoped that juxtaposing popular and elite texts would reveal their affiliations and similarities and produce critical insights into both that students would not be afraid to own" (5).

For Mulcaire and Grady, this ownership of insight has tremendous potential to bring students into the classroom in an active sense: They ". . . propose not a new way to engage students with what goes on in a composition classroom, but suggest rather that students are already engaged in cultural studies, and that composition classes ought to take full advantage of that engagement." (13) One of the keys of this type of engagement is the ownership principle—the students must be allowed to take ownership of their experiences, skills, and views.

IV
The Point

When I think of the debates over the demise of written discourse, I flash back to The Name of the Rose with the monks cloistered above the masses, throwing their refuse out a chute for the masses to pick through. The basic "plot" in this story was a select group's protection of a labyrinth of written works, all carefully hand copied from the originals. Did a brouhaha erupt when Guttenburg came along? I imagine it did. After all, Martin Luther presented the Gospel to the people, thereby tearing the clergy from their strongholds.

Did the storytellers or balladeers lament the decline of orality? Did the monks and scholars decry the bastardization of writing? I tend to think that they did. For awhile they were able to fight off the envelopment of the word by the populace by avoiding the use of the vernacular, but eventually the written word was accessible to the people.

Is this transition from orality to the printed word analogous to the current transition from the page to the screen? To some extent I think it is. No lamentations and decryings can reverse the technological momentum. But that is not to say that as a society we must sit passively by and watch the transition unfold before us.

One way that we can become involved in the transition is to become critical thinkers about the media. I switch to using the more general term media in place of television because it is already accepted that the other media are in the process of imitating television.

As the instructors I have mentioned in this paper have recognized, students have a set of experiences, habits, and previous education upon which they might base their actions, yet sometimes it seems they do not draw upon this base. They have not become critical readers of the culture. They have not considered the implications of the images presented to them.

In a description of a course in critical reading of advertisements, Joseph Harris describes the students' tendency to write criticisms from the perspective they believe they are supposed to hold. Students have a notion that there ". . . is some sort of party line to be either mimicked or resisted" (6). This reading of advertisements from the institution's/instructor's viewpoint is nowhere near the critical thinking we should strive for, yet I think there is a tendency by some instructors to imagine that these readings accomplish some sort of critical thinking.

Part of the problem of this mimicking comes from the way a cultural issue is presented. The instructor will present a societal issue and point out how awful or how wonderful it truly is. The opinion of the instructor is recognized by the students, and the students pressure themselves into concurring with the instructor, even if this is not the intention of the instructor. Students will see the side they are supposed to take and fall in line.

Even when teaching critical thinking, we in academe typically concentrate on political issues, i.e. the relationship between individuals and society; after all, this is one of the purposes of education: to provide students with the opportunity to find their niche in society. But often we concentrate on the wrong end of the relationship—society, and we are often overtly highly judgmental of it. I say wrong in that since society does not exist without individuals, it is senseless to concentrate on the goodness or evilness of it. The only way to have an effect on society is for the students to consider their own actions.

Perhaps the best way to teach cultural criticism is to give the students the opportunity to observe their culture in an atmosphere of acceptance. By doing so we can offer the students, as Harris says, ". . . a number of chances both to identify with and resist some of the voices and images in that culture—and thus to begin to define their own places in it" (7). After all, this is the only thing students are able to control—themselves.

Students can control their own actions. This is completely within the students' realm of efficacy. They can ensure they get the education they need. They can consider their treatment of others. They can judge what their place in society is. And they can make a difference in their own lives. And in doing so, they can have an impact on society.

But in order to accomplish this we must teach cultural criticism in a way which does not immediately alienate students. We must not approach their culture from an elitist standpoint that judges the place from which they have drawn their lives; this approach to teaching can do nothing except breed resentment and will accomplish nothing besides the reactions we associate with backlash.

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Strategies for Teaching Audience Awareness

by
F.C. Cronin

Audience analysis is a key writing skill, since a competent writer's analysis of the target audience guides his or her use of the other composing strategies. Research with skilled writers shows them drawing careful pictures of their target audiences in their heads from the very outset of their pre-writing. In the light of these audience pictures, mature writers then plan writing goals to reach specific target audiences. On the other hand, the research has shown novice writers writing into a void, with no sense of audience or purpose except to fill the requisite number of pages. However, when novice writers begin to see the responses of classmates to what they have written, "Engfish" begins to disappear fast. Hence the need for live, honest feedback from classmates and all other available audiences.

Another audience lesson that novice writers must learn if they are to be skilled at written communication is how to clearly distinguish between what is clear in their heads and what is clear on paper. Novice writers can be made more aware of this problem if we cover their papers with a blank sheet and then uncover them line by line, from the top while reading aloud. At half a page and then a page, we can stop and discuss the meaning and implications of what is explicit on the page—up to that point and how much their target audience has been clearly guided—or misled. At this point our students will often begin to realize that they are reading their own words in contexts that are only explicit in their own heads. Thus they are leading their readers in false directions they never intended. The "outsider" reader, unlike the teacher, cannot know or read their minds to know what is coming. Only live "outsider" readers, usually fellow students, can bring novice writers to see what they have written looks like on paper to the eyes of an "outsider." Students often don't fully believe what we English professionals tell them about their writing. But the honest responses of fellow students are stunningly effective.

The feedback from fellow students helps novice writers to see the gaps in their explanations and arguments, which they themselves are filling in from what they "see" in their own heads.

When they say, "But I explain that on a later page," we can explain the fact that only a subject teacher who does not need their written communication knows in advance the context, explanations, concrete examples, and distinctions a real audience needs to clearly understand their written communication line by line and page by page. Our novice writers must experience extensive, ongoing audience feedback, chiefly honest responses from their live audiences of classmates, family and friends. Letting students observe fellow students experiencing audience difficulties has proven to be powerfully effective pedagogy. By contrast, teacher homilies on audience analysis are virtually ineffective without our students' experiences with real audiences.

Another helpful strategy for teaching audience awareness is collecting the drafts on which students have been working and setting them aside for as long as possible. When students come back "cold" to their half-forgotten drafts, they become, in a sense, outside audiences for their own writing. This strategy is especially effective if students honestly share with one another their experiences of surprise with their old drafts. We can also have authors or classmates read those "cold" drafts aloud before discussing their responses with one another. They will be surprised at the hitherto unseen gaps in their written explanations. Thereby they will learn to grapple more effectively through their cycles and revisions with the slippery ambiguity of language.

In order to deflect resentful writer responses to criticism, we can remind them that skilled writers are very good at returning to their drafts with the critical eye of a disinterested and even hostile outsider. We can also remind them that "immature writers see their drafts as extensions of themselves and resent even constructive criticism, but mature writers seek out tough critics" (Our students will be much more open in these self-critical discussions if we have already shared with them our own draft revision experiences). Only after novice writers have been confronted with a real audience's bewilderment and requests for clarification while they are reading their expository and persuasive writing, will they begin to understand that learning to revise for specific target audiences is critical to effective, real world writing.

Feedback only from an English teacher can be easily dismissed on the assumption that we English teachers are too demanding. But when our students see classmates falling on their faces trying to communicate challenging material to a peer audience in writing, they have learned a lesson that they will never forget. Such experiences are invaluable if the teacher maintains the group spirit of mutual assistance, explains the meaning of the experience, and makes sure that no one gets hurt by harsh criticism. Student writers only gradually realize that what they think they have said clearly on paper is really only clear in their heads. Then we can begin to explain that the brain is blind—that it relies as much on what the reader already knows and unconsciously provides from long-term memory through the two switching stations between the fragmentary and evanescent impressions that the eyes receive and the brain itself.

The next step in teaching audience awareness is to ask students, in conference and in class, what audience goals they wish to achieve in each written communication, e.g. "What chief point do you want to make?" "How do you want to affect your target audience's emotions?" "What other responses do you wish to produce in them?" "Why would that audience be interested in hearing your insights and arguments?" "What common ground can you and your audience build upon?" "What key insight do you want them to remember afterwards?" "How do you plan to organize your arguments so as to grab their interest and hold it as you convince them?"

At this point, students realize that their rhetorical goals are really more complex than simply parading information and insights before an all-knowing teacher audience. They want to share their enthusiasm for their subject, respond to logical objections and questions about their conclusions, and share some of their unique insight into their writing subjects. As in everyday oral communication, rhetorical goals often turn out to be sophisticated, subtle, and complex once they become explicit in the course of discussion. Then, through brain-

storming, conferencing, or class discussion, we can analyze these goals with our students, reconsider the mind-sets of classmates or hypothetical audiences, and then analyze the various rhetorical options available to student writers to achieve their audience goals. After just a little coaching from us, they can practice these audience strategies in small groups and then try out the results with the whole class. After all, they are quite sophisticated in using analogous oral strategies. Through talking about writing, they can pleasantly tap those oral skills.

Through class discussion, students can analyze the frames of reference in which various classmates and other target audiences live and think. Subjects that are controversial among students provide the opportunity for lively discussion in which several points of view can be articulated and persuasive strategies discussed. Then the unspoken assumptions of other audiences and writers can be analyzed through letters to the editor, editorials, class discussion of controversial articles, etc. In exercises of this kind, teachers can also present hypothetical audiences typical of those whom students might be interested in reaching, e.g. prejudiced groups, target audiences with strong preconceptions, e.g. very conservative or very liberal groups. Public figures make good, hypothetical audiences. Also, real audiences, to whom students might wish to write are available in the community or nearby. Students and teacher together can then "psych out" or analyze the mind-set of these special target audiences, their convictions, expectations, and prejudices. This is an interesting game to play, and students have been playing it all their lives in their oral communication, often with high degrees of success. Now they discover, with relief and satisfaction, that they can translate their well-honed oral skills into writing skills.

After the piece of writing has been tried out on teachers, friends, family, and fellow students and then revised in the light of all the feedback, it can sometimes be sent to a real audience. Much of the time, however, fellow students and teachers will have to be called upon to play the roles of the special audiences. Even in this more limited rhetorical situation, students' experience of audience analysis and audience focusing produces rapid writing improvement. It can also be fun.

Even though our students are already confident of their skills in dealing with problem audiences in oral communication, they can profitably point out blind spots to one another. In audience analysis and writing projects of this kind, the student writer continues to build upon oral skills in writing for multiple audiences: fellow students, teachers, readers of the local paper and others, role-played by the teacher and fellow students. Thus, students learn to create pictures of their target audiences from the outset of their writing processes. They can learn to flesh out those pictures by filling in the contexts of their audiences' private and public universes, especially their strongest interests, concerns, and needs. They can then clarify through talk-write the goals and subgoals that they wish to achieve with each audience.

Throughout their working lives in the computerized information age, students will have to be skilled at writing for multiple audiences, e.g. reports to superiors in their companies, letters to potential customers, clients, school boards, boards of directors, and a whole range of other specialized audiences. Recent research has shown that successful businessmen are quite skilled in assuming several persona for several audiences: customers, managers, audiences, in the company of equal rank but unequal backgrounds, subordinates with varying levels of education, skill, and authority. Audiences who are not well educated must be clearly instructed but not offended by writing that seems condescending. Only through practice can students begin to realize that writing strategies change with each new audience, and each new rhetorical purpose.

Also, such goals and subgoals often shift as writers work their way through the thinking-writing process. Thus, researcher Carol Berkenkotter writes that an anthropologist, a research subject, starts out with the goals of simply explaining her specialty to an audience of high school students, and in the course of writing, decides to "interest these kids in anthropology" (Carol Berkenkotter, "Understanding a Writer's Awareness of Audience," College Composition and Communication 23 (1981: 391).

Audience analysis will also serve a heuristic function for our students as it does for the anthropologist. For example, as our students sketch out a picture

of a specific target audience, a growing list of specific questions will come to the surface, some of them key questions for which this target audience will demand answers if they are to be convinced. These questions can then be jotted down before they are forgotten, with the purpose of anticipating and answering them in the course of their writing. If, for example, image-conscious high school administrators, fearful of bad publicity, are to be convinced that they should not allow a rock concert at the school, that overriding concern would have to be addressed first. Otherwise, it would be a waste of time to address other problems involved in the project such as making a profit, securing a group that would appeal to students, etc. In other words, audience problems have to be dealt with in the writing process in the order of their importance to the target audience, not the writer.

Research has shown that for the skilled writer, audience concerns, in the order of their importance to their target audiences are key considerations in developing a hierarchy of writing goals and subgoals that will most effectively achieve the purposes of the writing. For example, sometimes convincing a particular audience that a problem actually exists is the primary goal to which all others are subordinate e.g., we really do need a teen center or another outdoor basketball court. The primary goal is unique to each specific audience situation; goals may be diverse as winning the reader's confidence, anticipating and answering difficult objections and questions, grabbing indifferent readers' attention so they won't stop reading, or convincing the reader of the relevance and importance of the subject to his or her life. These are basic audience problems that student writers almost never think about, but which are essential to success in real world writing.

After this kind of in-depth audience work, our students are prepared to learn many useful strategies from anthology selections that they read from editorials, and other "special pleading" articles. These selections can be analyzed and gleaned for new, usable audience strategies in tandem with the analysis of evolving student drafts. Audience goal and strategy analysis done by a whole class, a discussion group, or in a conference motivate individuals to try new strategies in their evolving papers—especially if they know that their experiments will be recognized and rewarded. On the other hand, if our students do not practice audience analysis and audience strategies, they probably will have serious difficulties with their transactional writing after the simple and unique communication contexts of ordinary school writing have disappeared forever.

REVIEWS

Theorizing the Complexities of Evaluation

by

Michael Kuhne

Rev. of Evaluating Teachers of Writing, ed. Christine A. Hult. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1994. 189 pages. Paper. $14.95; $12.95, members.

These thirteen essays address the complex act of evaluating instructors, an act further complicated when the instructors are teaching writing. As Hult notes in her introductory essay, three factors account for this complication: the composition instructors' politically marginalized position, the competing definitions of good teaching, and the competing motives for evaluation. In many respects, the articles in the rest of the collection address one or more of these factors. For example, Michael Vivion's essay explores what can be a difficult situation—when senior faculty members, usually trained as literary specialists, evaluate composition instructors. Rather than bemoaning any perceived power imbalance, Vivion calls for an exploration of "how the split between composition and literature can affect evaluations so that we can develop a process which allows for differences and which encourages faculty to improve teaching" (88). John Bean's essay analyzes the issues that arise when the teachers of writing are part of Writing-Across-the-Curriculum (WAC) programs; the first issue is the competing definitions of good teaching, which pit the instructor-as-repositor-of-knowledge against the more common student-centered classroom of the writing instructor. Bean goes as far as to question whether or not "being a good WAC teacher [is] a plus or a minus within the university's real reward structure" (147). His answer is yes, but only if institutions are willing to re-think their criteria for excellent teaching.

Jesse Jones's essay maintains that there are two motives for evaluating faculty members—for improving performance and for making personnel decisions. He goes on to describe two evaluation methods: for improving performance, formative evaluation; for personnel decisions, summative evaluation. He warns that "care needs to be taken to see that the purposes [of both evaluation methods] complement rather than conflict with one another" (33). In short, evaluators and instructors must clearly understand what the purpose and motive of the evaluation are. Otherwise confusion and misunderstandings are inevitable.

There are four areas that this collection addresses in a particular and helpful manner. First, many of the essays (Hult; Schwalm; Flanagan; Elbow; White) do an excellent job of discerning the differences between formative and summative methods of evaluation. The general theme is that early and frequent formative evaluations must occur in order to prepare both instructors and evaluators for summative evaluations.

Secondly, a number of the essays suggest the use of teaching portfolios in order to facilitate a more beneficial formative evaluation process (Bleich; Strenski; Elbow). Strenski, in fact, argues that a teaching portfolio is "not only a logistical convenience," but also "a gauge of the instructor's writing skill." Collected within a portfolio, these materials can constitute "the equivalent of a publication record" (58). Thirdly, many essays (Weiser; Baker and Kinkead; Strenski) promote constructive collaboration between evaluators and the instructor in the evaluation process. Finally, the collection does an excellent job of taking into account the special evaluation procedures appropriate for adjunct faculty members (Schwalm), teaching assistants (Weiser), WAC instructors (Bean), and instructors in computerized settings (Holdstein).

The one weakness of the collection is the unwillingness to problematize the institutional politics of evaluation. The "Theory and Background" section, where these issues might be explored most fully, is the shortest of the three sections, and even within this section, Jesse Jones's essay too quickly shifts the questions from "shall we evaluate and why?" to "how shall we evaluate?" The

exceptions to this criticism are the essays by Vivion, Bean, and Bleich. Bleich boldly states that "the premise that teaching requires evaluation itself is in need of discussion" (28). More attempts like this one to theorize the complexities surrounding evaluation would have been welcome additions to what is otherwise a timely contribution to scholarship about evaluating teaching, an activity to which the profession must pay closer attention in the years to come for the sake of doing well what we profess to do.

Engaging Children in the World of the Text

by

Eleni Roulis

Rev. of Inviting Children's Responses to Literature: Guides to 57 Notable Books, ed. Amy McClure and Janice V. Kristo. Urbana IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1994. 145 pages. Paper. $12.95; $9.95, members.

Exploring ways for children to respond more thoughtfully to books through using different modes in the language arts is at the heart of Inviting Children's Responses to Literature: Guides to 57 Notable Books edited by Amy A. McClure and Janice V. Kristo. This collection of practical guides steers students toward a course of discovery and adventure by providing opportunities to develop activities grounded in reader-response theory. McClure and Kristo advocate reading good books and then engaging readers in rich conversations as a way of creating fresh text interpretations and furthering children's growth in using language imaginatively. In keeping with Louise Rosenblatt's landmark work Literature As Exploration (1938), they believe it is crucial to start with a child's agenda for reading and then capitalize on his or her power to bring meaning to the text through initial personal response. As they state in their introduction, "We want children to not only learn how to read, but also to become readers. We consider children's enjoyment and interpretation of literature to be our foremost concern."

In their book are practical guides for teachers and children (preschool through middle school readers) to create more authentic conversations and curiosities about reading and books. Each response guide consists of suggested grade levels, a plot summary, teaching suggestions, and a list of related books. These guides, written by members of the Notable Children's Trade Books in the Language Arts Committee, are resources for many outstanding children's books. An accompanying bibliography ends each section.

For example, in Gary Paulson's The Winter Room, a plot summary highlights a Minnesota family's farm life through the seasons of the year in a

succinct portrayal; the plot summary is itself a model of outstanding writing through one reader's interpretation of the text. Then the four teaching suggestions allow for a range of responses and activities for readers in grades 4-8. Lastly, there is a list of books to explore farm life for either an individual's extended reading list or a more developed class unit on the topic.

In Tar Beach by Faith Ringgold, Cassie Louise Lightfoot, the heroine, embodies the concerns and experiences of a black woman in America struggling to "fly free" and find bold, creative ways to accomplish new visions for herself and her family. The teaching suggestions for this book summon multiple experiences to stimulate critical thinking for readers in grades 2-5. At the end of the book is an additional list of over 100 notable books for teachers and readers to extend ideas and themes for further inquiry.

Inviting Children's Responses to Literature is a well crafted book that provides readers with genuine experiences to engage successfully with the world of the text.

Spectrum of Attitudes
by
Joan Kuzma Costello

Rev. of Global Voices: Culture and Identity in the Teaching of English, ed. Joseph O. Milner, and Carol A. Pope., Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1994.

Global Voices: Culture and Identity in the Teaching of English is the multifaceted record of the 1990 International Federation for the Teaching of English Conference held in Auckland, New Zealand. In this collection of essays, the editors try to "reconstruct the conference in a text that reflects the dialogue, the spirit of conversation that was established in Auckland" and that has continued in "stimulating exchanges . . . across and within continents since that time" (ix). They also work hard to convey the immediacy of the Maori culture which threaded its way through the conference, linking New Zealand's native and English cultures and languages. They do this by titling sections of the book in Maori and by highlighting New Zealand's bi-cultural curriculum reform.

The book is divided into four sections. The first section, "Powhiri" (A Call), is devoted to establishing the context and the overall attitude toward English language education that dominated the conference. The "position of principle" is articulated by Gerald Grace:

> So we are not saying displace Standard English with different voices, we are saying bring them into a partnership relation. We are saying we want to express the world comprehensively. We have recognized that Standard English has important social, political, and cultural functions. It cannot be denied. But at the same time we have recognized the power of other Englishes and of a whole range of other, different voices. (59)

The second and third sections contain the most stimulating material. The second section, "Hui" (General Meeting), features papers by the main speakers of the conference, each responded to by one of the delegates. Katharine Perera writes about the movement away from the universal use of Standard English. While such divergence has its advantages, Perera also acknowledges its disadvantages and the concomitant need for convergence. In his paper, Gerald Grace attacks the traditional voice of the classroom teacher, "a pedagogical dominant voice," which has had as "one of its functions, historically, . . . constrain[ing], rather than . . . facilitat[ing], the existence of different voices within the classroom" (50). Grace argues that teachers of English need to empower the divergent voices not only within the classroom but also by finding allies throughout the community. Following Grace, Patricia Gillard takes a new look at television viewing. Her conclusion is that teachers are not likely to change the context of viewing so they need to work with the reality of viewing patterns. Finally, Mary K. Healy's paper describes her experience team-teaching, her participation in the Bay Area Writing Project, and her work in a California Community College project, the Puentes project, which through a program of writing, counseling, and mentoring sought to empower Mexican American or Latino students. Healy's conclusion from her experiences is that

> we encourage change in schools when teachers, working both collaboratively and alone, have extensive and sustained time to reflect on their work, to ask questions, to explore new strategies and approaches, to make new partnerships, and to be supported steadily in these endeavors (100).

While the second section of the book addresses theory, the third section, "Waita" (Song), primarily shows teachers at work in the classroom. Structured as a dialogue between presenters and participants, this section ranges from specific classroom activities to less immediately applicable research on teaching problems. Here I found several ideas for my community college classroom, among them William Boswell's writing assignments designed to let students write meaningful essays from a position of expertise.

The final section, "Poroporoaki" (Farewell), actually moves the work of the conference into the future and outlines the 1995 IFTE Conference in New York.

While the first and last sections of the text, as well as the paper and response format, give the reader a feel for the atmosphere and dialogue of the conference, they are not without their disadvantages. First, since I am generally pressed for time, reading material which is mainly poetic reaction and personal description of bonding is a luxury. Furthermore, the comment and response sections are often redundant. And, although the editors indicate that the comments in the "Waito" section follow a pattern, the responses often do not. This, among other things, makes the quality of these pieces inconsistent. Certainly the text witnesses to a sense of community among those who attended the conference, but while reading I often felt I was watching an intimate group from the outside.

Overall, the book opened my eyes to a spectrum of attitudes toward teaching the English language. I admit that I met some of these viewpoints with resistance. For example, Edward W. Milner concludes,

> Colonialism has foisted its language and values on the colonized. Sadly, many languages have been destroyed or lost. The least we can do is become bilingual. In the USA this is most difficult. Do we start with Ashati or Swahili, Cherokee or Zuni?

While I appreciate that this proposal is well-meaning, the assumption on which it is based seems to subtly propagate the abuse of different voices. The case of Maori culture and the English language in New Zealand is not parallel to Native American culture and English in the United States. To advocate for Native American languages in such a way is to ignore the complexity of American voices and culture.

Despite my resistance, or perhaps because of it, I do recommend the book, most specifically for teachers of sixth grade through college. If you have the luxury of time, the full text is interesting. On the other hand, if you are

looking for an overview of contemporary theory and classroom ideas, I recommend the second and third sections. Whether you choose to read the text as a whole or you selectively read to meet your immediate classroom needs, you will be challenged by new perspectives and encouraged in your own innovative teaching.

BEST BRIEF STRATEGIES

"On Wednesdays"

by
Ilene Alexander

I like to send student writers out into the communities where they live so that they will become better versed in both the dynamics of the community and in the writing process. Once a week in a class that meets four day per week, or once every two weeks in a class that meets three days per week, or one hour every two weeks in a class that meets twice weekly for periods of more than 50 minutes, students move their writing skills, interests, and questions out into the community in which they live.

I do set out weekly writing goals, sometimes in the form of requirements, sometimes as invitations to be considered. For example, I might require two interviews and a review of literature published about/by the community group being studied; I might also require that this week's write-up be composed of only simple sentences or as one long sentence; and sometimes I require students to swap places for a week and write about their perceptions of a place/group they'd previously experienced only in a classmate's writing. In the middle of this project, I require students to draft an essay, the shape of which we discuss in conferences. Some time past midterm, each student will turn from weekly site observations to weekly peer-writing and editing groups. At the end of the project, students turn in a polished essay – the purpose, audience, organization, and rhetorical character of the paper developed via peer group discussions and student-teacher conferences. While students are out for "On Wednesdays" assignments, I'm in my office – just a phone call away for a student who wants to try out an interview question, and an open door for students who want to stop by to brainstorm ideas.

"On Wednesdays" is the most basic of three such assignment series I've developed over the past three years; spread over an entire term in an introductory writing class, the project challenges students to sharpen observation skills, to develop appropriate questions for interviews with a variety of persons, to consider the character both of the place being observed and of the audience the writers address, and to assess the contributions of this place to the community in which it is located. For advanced composition courses I will require more – research, interviews, analysis – and I require that the piece be written for a non-classroom audience.

I include here the first memo students receive for this assignment:

On Wednesdays

On Wednesdays we won't meet as a class; rather, each of you will use this hour of time in pursuit of ideas for an essay about place. More on the essay itself as we draw closer to the midterm days. For now, I want to set out some basic guidelines for the use of this found hour:

Select a specific place, a kind of place, a well-known place, a place with sights, sounds, people, and atmosphere that are of interest to you—perhaps a place which you know only second or third hand. Carefully consider your options and interests, for you'll be spending one hour a week here until at least the midterm – you'll need to sustain an interest in the place and in the group of people you find at this place.

Go to this place for one hour each week – it might be the same time from week to week, or you may want to vary the times you observe/participate in this place. I'll offer you some ideas for focusing weekly writing assignments. I'll set up times for you to meet with a peer group and in conference with me; during these meetings we'll focus on developing an essay from these weekly writings.

From week to week, while you are at this place you will sometimes sit back and observe, only to write after you have moved away from the subject of your writing; you will sometimes write while you overhear, move about to observe, and enjoin others in conversation. During some weeks of your writing process, I'll give you specific writing tasks or prompts; most often I'll suggest things that you may consider, or not. Along the way I will often ask you to consider whether you are focusing on the place, on the people you find there, on the work being done at this place, or on some combination of these things.

Every Thursday you will bring an exploratory piece of writing to class; sometimes we'll draw the material into class activities, and sometimes we'll hold the piece of writing until the next week. Still and always the weekly freewriting about place will be due in class on Thursday.

This week, for the first assignment, I want you to shop around for a place to write while you are at the places you're considering as your site for this assignment. Write what enters your mind, what will come from your pen(cil). Look, observe, overhear, and in between, write. Consider what interests, questions, information, description, analysis you could pursue in a paper about this place and the people you find there. Re-read your freewriting and come to class prepared to discuss/select the place you will observe for this assignment and the reasons you've selected this (type of) place, as well as additional ideas and observations that you might come back to in future writings.

Some ideas: you might select a kind of place – say the several family-owned drug stores in town – and visit several of them in order to write about ambiance and characters you find there. Or perhaps you'll observe the daily cycle of a local mall, mega-mall, antique mall or a coffee hang out – and the people who use or inhabit these places. Maybe you notice that the public library is a lively place that's always looking for volunteers – and you've wanted to be one of those volunteers; become one and write about that.

Maybe you want to know more about a particular public service agency, and you find out on a first visit that this agency will welcome your attentions. How about the local HIV/AIDS coalition, meals on wheels, emergency food and housing services, a free medical clinic, the parent-training program, or a women's center. Please enter such places respectfully and honestly: tell people you intend to write about the place for our class and that I will be happy to work

with them and with you to set out boundaries for this project. Again, if you have been considering becoming a volunteer, that may shape your project and weekly writings.

You might venture to a specific public place and observe it at several times of the day or night: hear conversations, watch for regular customers and visitors, and change your point of observation —from inside to outside, from a remote table to a front window. The possibilities are countless.

Off limits places include your personal living space, dorm cafeterias, your sport team or Greek house, daily family dwellings and places that offer primarily confidential services unless they also engage in public outreach/education and you secure permissions that are appended to your first or second entry. While there is much to be seen in the places we know well, or that seem particularly hidden from us, that is a task for a later writing.

To Air is Human

Here are humorous or thought-provoking examples of misspellings or unexpected language use from student and faculty papers:

- from an article written for novice social workers: The transgression from college to the working arena of sociology can be somewhat rocky. (Not only rocky, but downright sinful.)

- from an interview with a history professor: Yet, Professor X warns students not to become over reliant on word processors. His says that while they do provide many useful editing tools, they cannot detect every error. (It is a wise word processor that knows its own limitations.)

—contributed by Eleanor Hoffman, Duluth

* * *

- It was not a good day at my field site because of the actions of some of the people there. They were walking around using all kinds of profound language. I was bothered by it, and so were the other people, who didn't like listening to all of the fowl talk.

- The right side of the restaurant was very comfortable, with red and orange booths, and the left side was smoking.

— contributed by Suzanne Hendricks,
Department of Family, Consumer, and Nutritional Sciences,
College of St. Catherine, St. Paul

* * *

- The death penalty for a person doing wrong is an issue that is morally and spiritually griping.

- In Revelation, Room is conceived as a tool of Satin. The images are symbolic, and the pitcher of Jesus is symbolic too.

—contributed by Neil Elliott,
Department of Theology,
College of St. Catherine, St. Paul

In Praise of Mispelling

by
Alan Powers

Although English teachers customarily complain of their students' mispellings, I find many papers where the unintended pun provides a certain felicity, and even, occasionally, insight. At those times I have to restrain myself from commenting "well put" in the margins of obviously mistaken phrases, such as "Lady Chatterley listens to her unconscience."

Students love the word "realism" to describe approvingly what novelists or television writers are doing. This slippery word "reality" has never been better abused than by one student writing on Jane Eyre: "In Jane's walks, the author is describing the realty of Thornfield Hall." Or the hazards of real estate purchase without a registered broker? (There might be a resident mad relative upstairs, permanently ensconced.)

Even G. B. Shaw might approve the following assessment of disguises in Pygmalion: "Eliza Doolittle goes to the garden party disgusting as a duchess." She does—there's no denying it. Also, in the same play: "Shaw satirizes the boordom of small talk about the weather." We are all well familiar with that boordom that appears extensive as a kingdom.

Many other neologisms greet the novice teacher's eye, words that he or she has never seen before but that gain a particular meaning almost independent of the words they stand in place of. For instance, many entering freshmen describe themselves as "confussed," while others are either merely confused or nonplused. I hold "confussed" to be an admirable addition to the language, one whose meanings shade from "stymied" to distracted" to the more plain "confused." Let us define it thus:

con-fussed (rhymes with rust). *adj.* 1. a state of being distracted, especially about spelling double consonants after short vowels.

The young teacher can find himself or herself exasperated that writing students cannot spell the subject they are studying. Insight may replace exasperation, however, when such students describe the difficulty, for them, of "wrighting." This spelling, too, seems to gain an admirable new application in this context: "wrighting" should be the preferred spelling, for it connotes craft, skill, and hard work.

Of course, most commonly and depressingly, students mispell "writing" *writting* This one is hard to defend. In fact, it's depressing because the doubled consonant after the short vowel is one of the few dependable aspects of English orthography. However, even this mispelling has enlightening applications. For instance, an instructor aware of the oral tradition that Shakespeare may have spent the three years just before 1591 as a law clerk or scrivener (witness his handwriting) will appreciate the following student biography of Shakespeare: "Sometime before 1591 Shakespeare must have begun writting." But then he stopped writting and began writing?

Such spellings can, then, provide a moment of light in cumbersome student prose; or, they can easily be overlooked, as I hope the reader has overlooked my mispelling, throughout, of *misspell.*

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Meals	$72.00
2-nights Lodging	70.00
Non refundable Registration Fee	50.00
	$192.00

PARTICIPATING WRITERS and WORKSHOPS

Robert Treuer: Workshop Topic - "Trees and Windows: The Purposes of Storytelling and Memoir Writing"

Helen Bonner: Workshop Topic - "When and How to Quit Teaching: The Art of Short Story"

William Borden: Workshop Topic - "'I Can Write a Better Movie Than That!' Writing for Film and Television"

Susan Carol Hauser: Workshop Topic - " A True Story: Writing Creative Nonfiction"

CarolAnn Russell: Workshop Topic - "Roots in Common: Telling Poems from the Ground Up"

NORTH WOODS WRITERS' RETREAT

M.C.T.E FALL CONFERENCE

September 16, 17, 18, 1994 at Ruttgers Birchmont Lodge;
530 Birchmont Beach Rd. NE; Bemidji, MN 56601
(Phone 218-751-1630 or 1-800-726-3866); ask for Jon, Manager)

_____ Single _____ Double

Name of Roommate: ____________________

_____ Multiple Cabin Occupancy (Single Sex Assignment)

Names of Roommates: ____________________

Enclosed Advance Deposit of $75.00 payable to Ruttgers Birchmont Lodge - DUE SEPT. 1.

Name: ____________________

Address: ____________________

____

School Affiliation: ____________________

Phone: (home) ____________ (work) ____________

Meals: Friday Dinner _______ Saturday Breakfast _______

Saturday Lunch _______ Saturday Dinner _______

1 night lodging _______ 2 night lodging _______

M.C.T.E. Fall Conference Registration
c/o Paul Carney, M.C.T.E. Board Member
421 North Broadway
Fergus Falls, MN 56537

LIST WORKSHOPS IN ORDER OF PREFERENCE

1. ____________________
2. ____________________
3. ____________________
4. ____________________
5. ____________________

ENCLOSE NON-REFUNDABLE REGISTRATION FEE:
$50.00 payable to M.C.T.E. due September 1.

Name: ____________________

Address: ____________________

____

School Affiliation: ____________________

Phone: (home) ____________ (work) ____________

NCTE 84TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN ORLANDO NOVEMBER 16-21

Nearly 5,000 teachers of English and language arts at all levels of education will meet in Orlando, Florida, November 18-21, to attend NCTE's 84th Annual Convention. This year's event will provide an opportunity for English language arts teachers to focus their attention on the primacy of language arts and literacy in world events and to assess the impact of these events on the process of education.

"Defining Ourselves and Our Work in a Changing World," the theme for the convention, is a "global refrain as people in many different situations and geographical locations move toward re-definition, re-orientation, and renewal," said NCTE president-elect Miriam T. Chaplin. The theme was chosen by Chaplin, who heads the convention planning committee. "The global movement is spurred by the phenomenal changes that have occurred in the economic, political, and social landscape of the world in the past ten years," Chaplin continued.

In announcing the theme and asking for proposals, Chaplin encouraged programs that "foster strategic- and future-oriented action that will challenge the potential of teachers and students to cope with change."

For registration materials write to NCTE Public Information Assistant **Lori Bianchini,** 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana IL 61801-1096.

REVIEWERS WANTED

The fall issue of the *Minnesota English Journal* needs reviewers for

- ***Guide to Home Language Repair*** (Dennis Baron), an examination of Americans' obsession with grammar and usage and how the flexibility and fluidity of the English language affect our notions about what is and is not correct, by the author of *Declining Grammar and other Essays on the English Vocabulary*.

- ***Two-Year College English: Essays for a New Century*** (ed. Mark Reynolds), an overview of the students who bring a wide range of needs and learning styles to the two-year college, the English courses and programs designed to meet their needs, and the faculty that rise to meet the many challenges of two-year college teaching.

- ***Colors of a Different Horse: Rethinking Creative Writing Theory and Pedagogy*** (ed. Wendy Bishop and Hans Ostrom), an examination of what takes place in the creative writing classroom and why.

If you are willing to write a 500-word review of one of these books or any other, notify the editor. You'll receive a copy of the book and the thanks of your readers. Write or call Gayle Gaskill, #4139 College of St. Catherine, 2004 Randolph, St. Paul MN 55105. Tel. (612) 690-6857.

Notes on Contributors

Ilene Alexander will be finishing a dissertation—focused on a history of anti-racist feminist pedagogy—this summer; she is glad to be back in Minnesota, where she learned to teach from an English department at Mankato State University that also gave her the confidence to pursue a Ph.D. She is glad to be able to say "Thank you" in public and in print.

Michelle Anderson is majoring in business administration at Anoka-Ramsey Community College, where **Elizabeth Nist** teaches composition and literature. Ms. Nist is the current president of the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English.

Neda Miranda Blazevic in 1994 was named national writer of Croatia. She is the author of *The Zebra Crosses Hand Street*, *The Garden of Good Hope*, *Infinitude*, *Janus*, *Postcard*, *Chagall's Birthday*, *American Prelude*, *Dancing on Ashes*, *The King*, *Take Off*, and *Come On, Alice*. She is a Croatian poet, fiction writer, playwright, translator and artist. She has published 11 books and has shown her visual art in galleries abroad and in the United States. In 1980 she won the Yugoslav National Award for Best Book of Short Stories. She teaches at the University of Minnesota and the College of St. Catherine. Her article is drawn from the keynote address and public forum "Development and Developments in Eastern Europe: A Writer's Personal Perspective," which she presented in March 1993 at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Joan Kuzma Costello earned the B. A. from the College of St. Catherine, the M. A. from the University of Chicago, and the Ph.D. from St. Louis University. She has taught for universities in the midwest and in Europe. Currently, she is on the faculty at Inver Hills Community College, where she is one of the instructors in a year-long learning community for ESL students.

Frank Cronin is a professor of English at Ohio University and a past-president of the Southeastern Ohio Council of Teachers of English.

Michael Kuhne is a candidate for the Ph.D. in the Department of English at the University of Minnesota, where his studies focus on composition and literacy issues and in particular on interpretations of Paulo Freire's liberation pedagogy in writing classrooms. Currently, he is a research fellow at the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing.

Michael LaFleur currently teaches composition at St. Cloud State University, where he is pursuing an M. A. in rhetoric.

Anne O'Meara is an associate professor in the English department at Mankato State University in Mankato, Minnesota.

John E. Oster is a professor of secondary education at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada. Prior to teaching at the university level he taught junior and senior high school language arts. He is co-editor of *Literary Experiences*, a series of high school literature texts widely used in several Canadian provinces.

Alan Powers studied at Amherst College and the University of Minnesota. A professor at Bristol Community College in Massachusetts, he has published his opinions in the *NYT Magazine* and *NYT Education Week* and his scholarship in *Acting Funny in Shakespeare* (Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1994).

Eleni Roulis is Program Director of Graduate Education/Curriculun and Instruction at the University of St. Thomas, where in addition to teaching Curriculum Instruction for Secondary/English Education, she also teaches Culture and Literacy Perspectives and Gender, Power, and Pedagogy.

MINNESOTA COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

Membership Enrollment Form

Name______________________________

Address____________________________

City____________**State**______**Zip**______

Telephone (_____)____________________

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Type of School:
- ☐ Elementary
- ☐ Secondary
- ☐ College/University
- ☐ Community College
- ☐ Jr. High/Middle School

Position:
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Administrator
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Supervisor

☐ I would be interested in serving on the MCTE: Advisory Board, Spring Conference, Fall Conference, Regional Conference Committee (circle one)

Dues: $25.00 **Student Dues:** $10.00
Elementary Members of MRA: $10.00
Retired MCTE Members: $10.00

Membership includes subscription to *Minnesota English Journal* and *MCTE News*. Membership year is April - April or October - October.

Make Checks payable to MCTE and mail to:
Chris Gordon, Riverview 109, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN 56301.